



A THEMATIC STUDY OF SEAN O'CASEY'S DUBLIN TRILOGY

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
Master of Philosophy
IN
ENGLISH

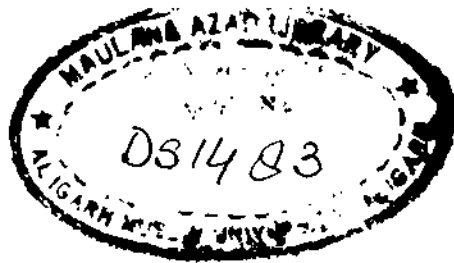
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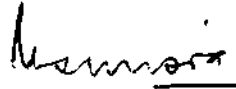
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Certified that Mr. Asghar Ali Ansari has completed his dissertation ("A Thematic Study of O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy") under my supervision. To the best of my knowledge this is his own work and is suitable for submission for the award of M.Phil degree in English.



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P R E F A C E

Sean O'Casey has been approached differently by different critics. Some of them, like David Krause and Saros Cowasjee, have approached him biographically, trying to portray the personality and convictions of the dramatist in his plays. Others, like A.E. Malone and Una Ellis-Fermor, have approached him as a typical product of the Abbey Theatre movement. By and large he has been branded as a photographic realist, and Raymond Williams even goes to the extent of declaring that he was a mere footnote to J.M. Synge.

The present study aims at a thematic analysis of O'Casey's Trilogy to show that the themes of the plays are universal though they remain firmly rooted in the contemporary reality of life.

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I (Introduction) describes O'Casey's childhood, milieu and the formative influence on him. Chapters II - IV contain a detailed analysis of the three plays, popularly known as the Dublin Trilogy. Chapter V is in the nature of a recapitulation of the general points emerging from our analysis of the plays. Finally a selected bibliography has been given.

I am grateful to my supervisor Professor K.S. Misra for his guidance of the study. These words are the barest acknowledgement of the gratitude I owe to him. I wish to thank Professor S.M. Jafar Zaki, Chairman, Department of English and other teachers in the Department for their help and encouragement in the preparation of the thesis.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Perhaps controversy about a writer's intentions is invariably concomitant with his wide spread popularity. Such was the case with Sean O'Casey (1880-1964). O'Casey, like any great artist has been studied from different view-points. Critics, like Saros Cowasjee and David Krause, have concentrated on the portrait of the artist, drawing inferences from textual as well as extraneous sources. Others, like A.E. Malone and Una Ellis Fermor, have approached him as a photographic realist, presenting contemporary urban life, especially that of the slum-dwellers in Dublin. Many a scholar, relying upon the contemporary political and economic struggle, have projected his image as that of a revolutionary iconoclast and a reformer -- a "belated Ibsenite." Eamonn Hughes has in a recent review rightly remarked thus: "... much criticism on O'Casey's work has no interest in attacking the writer on the basis of his vigorous personality, his fervent socialism and his forthright expression of both...."¹ He was both hailed and debunked as a 'realist', following the foot steps of J.M. Synge.² He was considered by many a critic as a confounder of the genres, without a firm adherence to technique -- a dabbling experimentalist. All these approaches emphasise the narrowness of O'Casey's canvas

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1. Eamonn Hughes, "Engaging Life Story," review of Michael Kerneally, Portraying the Self: Sean O'Casey and the Art of Autobiography (Colin Smyth, London, 1988), in The Times Higher Educational Supplement, 21 October, 1988, p.20.
 2. Raymond Williams, Drama From Ibsen to Brecht (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1968 edn.), p.161.

of life and damn him as a mere foot-note to Synge, dealing with a small section of Irish population, living in the Dublin slums. Likewise his technical innovations, too, have been misjudged by a number of critics. Thus the conclusion has been that he is a second rate dramatist with topical and temporal relevance and validity. But the history of drama since the Dublin Trilogy had appeared, has refuted this impression, and our own analysis of his Trilogy in the following chapters will confirm his universality and greatness, without our being idolatrous in any way.

It is a fact that O'Casey was a product of the Abbey Theatre Movement. And a number of studies have been carried out on evaluating O'Casey in the context of the establishment and professed aims of the Irish Dramatic Movement. But such an approach should not be taken to mean that O'Casey was in any sense confined to a narrow dramatic or theatrical convention and hence not deserving of international recognition. Any discussion of O'Casey should, in fact, begin with his relationship with the Irish Dramatic Movement.

The history of Irish drama is a long and continuous one. Curiously enough, the emergence of national drama in Ireland is rather late. "Until the end of the 19th century Ireland had been without any national drama in either the Irish or the English language."³ The rich potential for emergence of

3. A.E. Malone, The Irish Drama (Benjamin Blom, New York, 1965 edn.), p. 1.

See also A.C. Ward, Twentieth-century English Drama (Methuen, London, 1964), p. 110.

national drama in Ireland was not exploited, perhaps because of the idiosyncratic nature of the Irish ethos. N. Sahal has aptly remarked that "Irish life itself was so exciting and eventful that there was hardly any desire left for drama on the stage."⁴ It was W.B. Yeats who, with the help of Edward Martyn, George Moore, and Lady Gregory founded the Irish Literary Theatre on January 16, 1899. The efforts of the founders of the Irish Literary Theatre eventually led to the establishment of a national theatre in Dublin. In 1903 the Abbey Theatre was established with the munificent aid of Miss Horniman, a rich English lady, which was intended to bring Ireland in the main stream of drama in the West.⁵ However, the passage of development and consolidation of the Abbey was far from being smooth. We will take up this point for elaboration later.

In absence of any established tradition of worthwhile theatrical activities in Ireland, it was naturally difficult to attract talents — actors or playwrights — towards this profession. Commenting on this point Joseph Wood Krutch has remarked as follows:

The Irish National Theatre, as it was first called, was founded by Lady Gregory and William Butler Yeats, two leaders of the Irish Renaissance. Having themselves tried unsuccessfully to write the kind of plays they had in mind, they undertook a systematic and somewhat comic search for

4. Sixty Years of Realistic Irish Drama (Macailan, India, Bombay, 1971), p. 2.

5. Ibid., p. 6.

wandering Irish men of talent whom they might convert to new cause and bring back home to Ireland.⁶

It is worth-mentioning that the Irish Literary Movement in general and the Irish Dramatic Movement in particular was an offshoot of the already ongoing National Movement for Freedom from the British rule. Whenever a national movement of this type begins, in order to nourish and promote patriotism, arousing interest in native culture is given the first place. Because of the prolonged subjugation of Ireland by the British, its own cultural ethos had almost ceased to find expression in any worthwhile native literature. The English language had inundated the Irish linguistic milieu to such an extent that Gaelic, the traditional language of Ireland, was relegated to the status of the rustics' medium of social interaction. The Irish Literary Movement was thus faced with a two-fold problem: One was the choice of material which, as a logical corollary to the National Movement, had to be Irish. The second was the choice of language, and here the verdict of the pioneers was in favour of English which was widely used by educated masses and also because the pioneer of the Movement, W.B. Yeats himself did not have any Gaelic. The emphasis in regard to the first was on Irish legend, history and folklore. W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory wanted that a play should be national in the choice of themes, and the language should be Anglo-Irish. Exclusive concentration on Irish subject-matter—legendary or contemporary — occupied a prominent place in the

6. "Modernism" in Modern Drama — A Definition and Estimate
(Russell & Russell, Inc., New York, 1962), pp.93-4.

manifesto of the Movement. This aspect of the Movement has been succinctly summed up by T.R. Henn like this: "a high degree of patriotism and nationalist feeling, fostered in the popular poetry of the preceding century, was to be given expression through the Irish Literary Movement."⁷ W.B. Yeats himself has stated the professed aim of the Movement in one of his "Last Poems":

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
All that we did, all that we said or sang
Must come from contact with the soil, from that
Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.
We three alone in modern times had brought
Everything down to that sole test again,
Dream of the noble and the beggar-man.⁸

As it has been usual with a host of critics, such statements, as the above, have been misconstrued as photographic realism. In fact, the process of the Irish Dramatic Movement, unlike its political counterpart, was less propagandist and more literary. This is clear from J.M. Synge's statement about the dramatic creed the pioneers were keen to formulate. While rejecting Ibsenian and Zolaesque naturalism and the entire vogue of problem plays, Synge asserts:

The drama like the symphony, does not teach or prove anything. Analysts with their problems, and teachers with their systems, are soon as old-fashioned as the pharmacopoeia of Galen.— look

7. The Harvest of Tragedy (Methuen, London, 1965), p.197.

8. "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," in Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach, eds., The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats (Mecmillan, New York, 1956), p.603.

at Ibsen and the Germans — but the best plays of Ben Jonson and Moliér can no more go out of fashion than the blackberries on the hedges.⁹

For Synge 'reality' is at the base of dramatic composition. What he is opposed to is the Zola-and-Ibsen-type naturalism which brings intellectual titillation rather than true experience of theatrical performance. He found the milieu of the Irish peasantry a suitable reservoir upon which he drew for his dramatic material. His own statement in this matter deserves quoting:

... for in countries where the imagination of the people, and the language they use, is rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same-time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form.... In Ireland, for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery, and magnificent, and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the springtime of the local life has been forgotten, and harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks.¹⁰

W.B. Yeats, too, wrote plays which dealt with the deeper reality of life. Excepting his two plays — Countess Cathleen and Cathleen ni Houlihan — his entire dramatic output is not connected with the current propagandist intentions of the pioneers

9. Preface, The Tinker's Wedding in Micheal Mac Liamm'Oir, ed., J.M. Synge's Plays, Poems and Prose (J.M. Dent, London, 1958), p.33.

10. Preface, The Playboy of the Western World in J.M. Synge's Plays, Poems, and Prose, pp. 107-8.

of the National Movement. Lady Gregory drew largely upon the Irish folklore resources for her plays. Thus, though the Irish Dramatic Movement was a part of the general National Movement, it differed from its source in regard to the propagandist part which was either considerably played down or totally absent. It is evinced in Yeats' assessment of J.M. Synge which encompasses his own position as well: "J.M. Synge was incapable of political thought." Yeats and Synge were not prepared to compromise literature with politics. But the establishment of the Abbey Theatre needed financial backing which could come only if stage performances were well attended. That would mean that only such plays should be written which should appeal to the contemporary Irish audience and be in keeping with their national and patriotic aspirations.

In the beginning of the Abbey the audience attendance was very thin in the theatre. People were more interested in oratory, poetry and folklore than in drama. The initial difficulties of providing a habitat for the proposed National Irish Theatre was, however, overcome by the benevolent contribution of Miss Horniman. The next problem was of writing plays for the theatre where W.B. Yeats' and Lady Gregory's earlier plays, based on Irish legendary and folklore materials, were well received. To gratify the patriotic aspirations of the Irish audience, the advent of J.M. Synge on the Irish theatrical scene was significant. He wrote plays on the life of Irish peasantry in a medium re-created out of the Anglo-Irish language which was dramatic as well as poetic.

The discovery of J.M. Synge was W.B. Yeats' singular contribution to the Abbey. It was he who advised Synge, when he met him in Paris, to return to Ireland and contribute to the fulfilment of its national aspirations.

As we have averred to above there was no established and acceptable Irish tradition of native actors and theatre companies. Whatever plays were put up on stage were imported from across St. George's Channel and were naturally acted by amateurs and professionals from London. The rather precarious financial condition of the Abbey towards the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century was saved when the famous Fay Brothers joined hands with the Abbey Theatre dramatists and managers. Frank and William Fay, the two brothers, were the first Irish actors who acted in an Irish play. They acted first of all in two plays, George W. Russell's Deirdre, and W.B. Yeats' Cathleen ni Houlihan. The performance of these plays on 2 April, 1902, marked the real beginning of the Irish National Theatre. For the first time the ideals, aimed at by the pioneers of the Dramatic Movement, were fully realised when the plays were written by Irish playwrights, acted by an Irish company, and staged by an Irish producer. A.E. Malone has gratefully acknowledged the contribution of the Fay Brothers to the cause of establishing a national Irish Theatre thus: "The movement so hopefully started in 1899 might have died in 1901 had the

brothers William and Frank Fay not been ready to fill the gap."¹¹

The history of the Abbey has never been smooth. It had a tendency of encountering fresh difficulties before the old ones were solved. Besides the financial crises, which recurred very often, there were squirmishes among the dramatists themselves. All of them were not exactly like-minded and some of them — like Synge and the domineering Yeats — were more often than not uncompromising. There were clearly two groups of dramatists at that time. One group, which was led by W.B. Yeats, pleaded for dramas of Irish legend and classical history, while the other group led by Fiona Mac Leod and Standish O'Grady, supported the dramas of ideas with intellectual content. Earnest Boyd has remarked, "on the one side was the theatre of beauty, on the other the theatre of ideas, concerned, respectively, for the importance of rhythm and diction and for the importance of the printed play."¹² But both the groups were against the commercial theatre, which was dominated by stage-managers. Joseph Wood Krutch says "...the Abbey Theatre was founded as an anti-modernist movement and that in Synge it found a playwright who successfully detached himself from what was called the 'modern drama'."¹³

J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey occupy a significant place in the establishment and sustenance of the Abbey. The Irish audience, towards the close of the 19th century, was keen to see

11. "The History of the Abbey Theatre" in L. Robinson, ed., The Irish Theatre (Macmillan, London, 1939), p.18.

12. The contemporary Drama of Ireland (The Talbot Press, Dublin, 1918), p.11.

13. "Modernism" in Modern Drama — A Definition and an Estimate, p.97.

its own past and present represented on the stage. While W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory gave them a picture of their cultural past, Synge and O'Casey presented before them their contemporary life. Synge appeared on the scene of the Abbey at a time when the dramatic reservoir of the Abbey was depleting fast and there was a lack of plays which could appeal to the audience's ethos immediately. Synge's presentation of Ireland's contemporary ethos almost overwhelmed the audience and thus the Abbey had a new lease of life provided by his plays. But unfortunately Synge died young and his dramatic output remained scanty. But he carved and, in a way, determined the direction in which the Irish drama was to move and shape itself. His imaginative, realistic tradition was followed by a group of dramatists from outside Dublin who are known as the 'Cork Realists'. But these playwrights concentrated more on the surface reality of life and could not reach the depth of human psyche which was so brilliantly fathomed by J.M. Synge. Hence, naturally the Abbey felt a second-time ebb in its progress of establishing itself as a financially sufficient entity.

It was at this second-time crisis in the history of the Abbey that Sean O'Casey was inducted into the affairs of the Abbey by the almost indulgent encouragement of Lady Gregory. His first play, The Shadow of a Gunman, drew enthusiastic applause from the audience and encouraged him to write more plays about the immediate history of the actual life of the Dubliners.

His Trilogy — The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars — brought thundering success to the Abbey and ensured its smooth progress in the direction of its consolidation in future. The plays written between 1923 and 1926 went outside the Irish theatrical boundaries and captured international attention. They brought immediate and widespread fame to O'Casey which no Irish dramatist had the luck to have.

It will be useful to briefly consider O'Casey's life and the factors which influenced and shaped his genius as well as the contemporary conditions which influenced his plays. Sean O'Casey was born in a poor working-class family of Dublin tenements on 30 March, 1880. When O'Casey was only six, his father died and his family was forced to the poverty and hardship of tenement life. "And for the youngest child, who was six years old when his father died, the squalor of the tenements was to become the crucial experience of his life."¹⁴ His early years were spent in destitution. After his father's death, he was brought up by his heroic mother "in most unhealthy and unpromising circumstances."¹⁵ His childhood was spent in such great poverty that he and his mother had hardly even dry bread to eat. "They actually half-starved for nine years."¹⁶ O'Casey was compelled to work as a casual labourer for his livelihood.

14. David Karause, Sean O'Casey: Man and His Work (Collier Books, New York, 1962), p.17.

15. N. Sahal, Sixty years of Realistic Irish Drama, p.90.

16. Ibid.

The life of the Dublin slum-dwellers in general was of great hardship. They lived in dirty tenements, giving out foul smell. There were poverty, hunger, even starvation and disease in the tenements. The death rate was very high due to fatal diseases in the tenements.¹⁷ The tenements were overcrowded. There lived seven or eight families in a single tenement. The condition had become almost inhuman by the early twentieth century. Walter Starkie has observed that "In a great ballroom that must have resounded with joyful laughter when ladies in powdered wigs danced with their cavaliers, today, we find eight families living together."¹⁸

The inhuman condition of the tenements is confirmed by the report of the Government Housing Commission which was established to enquire into the housing condition of the working class in the city of Dublin. The report says:

Having visited a large number of these houses in all parts of the city, we have no hesitation in saying that it is no uncommon thing to find halls and landings, yards and closets of the houses in a filthy condition, and in nearly every case human excreta is to be found scattered about the yards and on the floors of the closets and in some cases even in the passages of the house itself.¹⁹

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17. For more details see David Krause, Sean O'Casey: Man and His Work, p.17.
18. "Sean O'Casey", in L. Robinson, ed., The Irish Theatre, p.153.
19. Dublin Housing Inquiry, in Parliamentary Papers, ed., 7273, Vol. XIX, p.5. quoted by David Krause in Sean O'Casey: Man and His Work, p.21.

O'Casey himself has recorded the life in the tenements of as follows;

Then, where we lived, with thousands of others, the garbage of the ashpit with the filth from the jakes was tumbled into big wicker baskets that were carried on the backs of men whose clothing had been soaked in the filth from a hundred homes; carried out from the tiny back yards, through the kitchen living-room, out by the hall, dumped in a horrid heap on the street outside, and left there, streaming out stench and venom, for a day, for two days, may be for three, till open carts, sodden as the men who led the sodden horses, came to take the steaming mass away, leaving an odour in the narrow street that lingered till the wind and the rain carried trace and memory far into outer space or into the heaving sea. Hardly a one is left living now to remember how this was done, or the work remaining behind for the women to purify hall and kitchen so that the feet felt no crunching of the filth beneath them, and the sour and suffocating smell no longer blenched the nostrils.²⁰

In spite of poverty, suffering and precariousness of life in the strife-torn condition of Dublin, the tenement dwellers endeavoured to keep up their spirit and practise resignation and acceptance. They did not always take misery seriously. They were light-hearted people. Their life-style was a juxtaposition of farce and tragedy. N. Sahal says, "The slum-people cannot afford to be always gloomy and downcast. Since death may visit them any moment in such troubled times, it is not half so tragic for them as it might appear to us. To some of them, death might even be a relief. Singing, carousing, quarreling, and joking are their 'trades' in which they freely indulge."²¹

20. Sean O'Casey, The Green Grow (Braziller, New York, 1956), p. 239.

21. Sixty Years of Realistic Irish Drama, p. 92.

O'Casey himself has said:

... the people of the slums and the tenements are significantly poor, the life there a tournament of poverty, flaunting and fearless, before the rest of life, a testing place for body as for soul; highly coloured by sighs, shouts, a song, and by silence when the confined old or young come out to the waiting hearse, sombre-gay in its black carvings, stately with plumed horses nodding a head or stamping a hoof on a flinty pavement: a life always lively, even when death was there, at times uproarious.²²

The slum-dwellers were not staunch followers of religion. They drank alcoholic drinks and sometimes did things which were prohibited by religion.²³ These people were not interested in politics. By nature, these people seemed to be selfish and self-centred, which were a bane of their poverty. They were a curious lot with doses of superstitions to nourish their minds. People living in such unhygienic, disease-ridden, congested, and reduced circumstances are expected to have a negative view of life. But the strong undercurrent of hilarity and recurrent frenzies for the pleasures of life, make their life truly complex. They grumbled against their milieu but accepted it with stoic

22. Sean O'Casey, The Green Crow, p.223.

It is interesting to note a similar attitude of fused contraries in the Irish peasantry in Synge's plays and in the Aran Islands.

23. This has been most effectively and satirically presented by Synge in his The Tinker's Wedding.

apathy to the resultant suffering. They had contradictory traits of nature which give a colourful vision of their existence. There were traits of heroism and cowardice, selfishness and readiness for sacrifice, spells of moments of depression side by side with hilarious bouts and carousing, despicable lethargy and arresting philosophising, almost revolutionary protest and selfish withdrawal and acceptance, Christian invocation to the mercy of God and pagan dependence upon the malignity and benevolence of nature, etc. In fact, the variety and contraries in their nature show that there was God's plenty in their ethos which an appreciative writer can draw on. Such were the people and as described above, "this was O'Casey's Dublin. This was the inferno of his discontent...."²⁴ The Dublin milieu became truly complicated because of the then political struggle for independence, which exposed to O'Casey the Irish men's selfishness, hypocrisy, cruelty and even bestiality in the name of patriotism. "These conditions left deep scars on the body and mind of the young O'Casey which he was never to forget."²⁵ The advantage of O'Casey was that he himself had lived this life and hence his experiences, represented in his plays, are not merely observed but lived. O'Casey himself at one stage was involved in the political struggle and played active roles. But later on he felt disgusted with politics because of the selfishness and mutual distrust of the political leaders. In 1914

24. David Krause, Sean O'Casey: Man and His Work, p.23.

25. Ibid.

O'Casey resigned the post of the Secretary of the Citizen Army, and became alienated from his countrymen because of ideological differences.

O'Casey's mother had a great influence on Sean O'Casey. She taught him to face the difficulties of the world boldly. She herself was a bold and courageous lady. "Her death (in 1918) was a severe blow to her favourite son. He owed his life and what remained of his poor eyesight to her tireless energy and gentle heart. From her he had received his spiritual as well as physical strength and his deep compassion — qualities which combined with and tempered the stubborn pride and fierce courage he had inherited from his father."²⁶ During his early years of life, O'Casey amply demonstrated that he had versatile talents. He might have become a scholar, musician, actor or painter. He learnt the Irish language, and not only he spoke, read and wrote it but also taught it. He also learnt to play the Celtic harp, wrote satiric songs which he sang at St. Lawrence O'Toole Club, and "was an expert mime and comedian and acted in plays at the club; he took up painting and drew city scenes and character sketches of his friends, although his poor eyesight forced him to abandon the paintbrush for pen and ink."²⁷ He became interested in literature and took up writing as his profession.

26. Ibid., p.54.

27. Ibid., p.39.

O'Casey was a great admirer of Shakespeare and Dion Boucicault. As a boy he had discovered the new world of drama in their plays. When he was ten years old he acted in some of Shakespeare's plays and memorized some lines from Shakespeare and Boucicault. But later on, "he became disillusioned with acting and left the Townsend players because the petty jealousies and vanities of the actors too often led to quarrels over parts and performances."²⁸ In her recent book, Nesta Jones has emphasized Shakespeare's and Boucicault's influences on O'Casey as a decisive factor which contributed to his dramatic technique of 'non-naturalism'.²⁹ O'Casey himself has confessed his great admiration for Shakespeare and this, I feel, greatly contributed to the element of universality of his plays where apparently topical themes have been taken as, what Eliot has called, 'the outer drama'.³⁰ His technical experiment in the direction of Symbolism and Expressionism points to his being influenced by the continental dramatists, particularly the German Expressionists. O'Casey's growing concern with his probing into the deeper human psyche has, perhaps, necessitated his use of Expressionism right from the beginning of his dramatic career. This is evinced in his admiration for Strinburg, Toller and O'Neill.³¹

28. Ibid. . . .

29. O'Casey's Expressionism (Chadwyck-Healey, Cambridge, 1988), p.121.

30. See T.S. Eliot, "Need for Poetic Drama," The Listener, 25 Nov., (1936), p.994.

31. Nesta Jones, O'Casey and Expressionism, p.121.

Of course O'Casey disclaims to have been influenced by any of the expressionist practitioners; "I never consciously adopted 'expressionism', which I do not understand or never did. To me there are no 'impressionistic', 'expressionistic', 'realist' (social or otherwise) plays: there are only good plays and bad plays."³²

It will not be a far-fetched and forced conclusion to state that the bitterness and satire we notice in his plays are, to a great extent, attributable to not only his inhospitable environment, but also to the unkindness of nature to him. He had a very poor health in his childhood. His eyes had become ulcerous due to a fatal fall from the staircase when trying to take out a book from the shelf. He was looked after by his mother who "made his home, nursed and cheered him for almost forty years."³³ His poor health and bad vision remained his companion almost all his life.

One important feature we notice in his plays is lack of erudition. As we know O'Casey was not interested in formal education; his poverty and ulcerous condition of the eyes would not have allowed that, any way. But he had great flair for reading. In this regard Joseph Wood Krutch says, "his formal education was confined to a few weeks in a Catholic School, and

32. Letter to Ronald Gene Rollins (24 March, 1960) in Ronald Gene Rollins, Sean O'Casey's Drama (The university of Alabama Press, 1979), p.118.

33. Herbert Coston, "Prelude to Playwright(1960)" in Ronald Ayling, ed., Sean O'Casey— Selection of Critical Essays (Macmillan, London, 1969), p.48.

from boyhood he worked at hard trades, nursing a fierce resentment and scraping together a few shillings to buy the books from which he educated himself.³⁴ O'Casey had inherited the love for learning from his father who was a great lover of books and also had a personal library of his own. In spite of his poverty he snatched time for reading and within a short period of time he read almost all great authors, like Shakespeare, Ruskin, Dickens, Tennyson, Webster, Ford, Massinger, Ibsen, Oscar Wilde, and the Bible and continued to be "a life-long student:" "I am a student still," he said when over eighty.³⁵

O'Casey's first literary effort was as a journalist. He was associated with The Irish Times. He contributed many articles to it. The articles appearing in the journals of his time give a clear picture of O'Casey's predilection for the cause of the have-nots and the exploited. His views were strongly expressed in categorical and uncompromising terms which tell us about his strong nature which entertained only convictions and refused to harbour any hesitation or uncertainty. Even though his journalistic publications were professedly factual, his talent as a dramatist is discernible even there in his narration of episodes and description of characters he knew so well.³⁶ In his early writings we have sure seminal signs of a promising dramatic genius in his mixing of the historical stories and humorous

34. "Modernism" in Modern Drama — A Definition and Estimate, p.100.

35. Quoted, J.C. Trewin, ed., Sean Eileen O'Casey (Macmillan, London, 1971), p.15.

36. David Krause, Sean O'Casey: Man and His Work, p.51.

songs and "expressions of his laughter and passion."³⁷ His earlier efforts at writing short plays had failed to fulfil his ambition of appearing as a playwright on the Abbey scene. These plays were The Frost in the Flower, The Harvest Festival, and The Crimson and the Tricolour. Lady Gregory has been encouraging even in her rejection of his plays mentioned above. Her letter to O'Casey, saying "I believe there is something in you and your strong point is characterization,"³⁸ must have encouraged O'Casey to endeavour in the direction of writing plays which must have given the hope that they would some day be performed on the Abbey Stage. Yeats and Lady Gregory knew that O'Casey was intimately involved in the problems and life-style of the Dublin slum-dwellers. Hence they advised him to do what he himself has been ardently desiring, i.e. present the life of the Dublin slum-dwellers, the ethos of which flowed in his own veins. Before his first major play appeared in 1923, O'Casey has already written a number of one Act plays which did not have the luck of being performed at the Abbey then.

O'Casey's shaping into a dramatist of some worth was faced with a two-fold problem. The first was the shaping of a suitable medium for his plays. By nature and inclination he was not suited to the path traversed by W.B. Yeats, i.e. the poetic or verse medium. His choice, therefore, was to remould the actual

37. Ibid., p.54.

38. Lady Gregory's Journals, 1916-30, . . . Lennox Robinson, ed. (Macmillan, New York, 1947), p.72.
quoted by David Krause in Sean O'Casey: Man and His Work, p.55.

Anglo-Irish dialect of the slum-dwellers into an effective medium of dramatic composition. The second problem, the choice of material, was easily solved. He considered it, as it were, his holy duty to present the life of the people, which he himself had lived. The third problem can be said to be the choice of the dramatic convention. Yeats himself was faced with this problem and experimented with dramatic technique throughout his dramatic career. As Yeats' dramatic world was inhabited by characters drawn from the remote past, it was easy for him to use the conventions of poetic drama where symbolism could be resorted to aid dramatic representation of themes. But as O'Casey was ostensibly presenting the world of immediate reality with its defined locale and time, conventions of realism were a logical choice. It is because of his choice of the subject matter, the medium, and the dramatic conventions that he offers a striking parallelism with J.M. Synge. But as our analysis in the following chapters will show he was not, as many a critic have thought, a mere foot-note to Synge, but a dramatist in his own right.

CHAPTER II

THE SHADOW OF A GUNMAN

O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy deals with a series of personal crises against the background of a larger disorder. This disorder, which O'Casey has described as a "state of chassis" in his Juno and the Paycock, has been presented in his Trilogy at an ascending scale of expansiveness. In his first play, The Shadow of a Gunman (1923), the crisis is at the level of the individual; in Juno and the Paycock (1925), it is expanded into one which encompasses a family, while the third play, The Plough and the Stars (1926), extends to a whole city. David Krause has summed up this point like this: "The action in each succeeding play is built around an ever-expanding radius of involvement."¹ We will describe this 'involvement' during our analyses of the plays.

As the canvas expands gradually from the first through the second to the last play of the Trilogy, there is a corresponding increase in the poignancy of human suffering and in the ironic vision of O'Casey. This happens to the extent that the human crises are sometimes overshadowed by the chaos outside the individuals. This is not to say that O'Casey's concern is increasingly with the social or political predicament of a nation and in an inverse proportion with human predicament. Ronald G. Rollins gives an impression of this type when he says "each play resembles, then,

1. David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work,
(Collier Books, New York, 1962), pp.94-5.

a human spectrum, with each character serving as a special filter, and giving his own personal coloration to the central situation that is revealed through him."² In fact the central situation of the play is not the chaotic background but human suffering. Human suffering and predicament as well as the chaos in the outside world draw sustenance from each other and mutually contribute to each other's significance. O'Casey has very carefully manipulated this relationship by drawing upon what Professor Rollins has termed "psychic ambivalence." This ambivalence characterizes the Irish national temperament where the earthy Dubliners "are forever gazing towards Byzantium" - and which is a combination of Swift's realism and Berkely's mysticism."³

David Krause does not agree with Professor Rollins' point of view,⁴ which has been Ronald Peacock's assessment of O'Casey in the 40s:

The individual is overshadowed by the conflict of impersonal forces, of which he is more and more the victim and less and less even so much as the agent.... A private crisis has little significance for a public eye dazzled by revolutionary and international vicissitudes.... The tragic plays of O'Casey are symptomatic of this situation. His characters, vivid as some of them are, are not as important as the larger political

2. "Form and Content in Sean O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy," in Modern Drama, Vol. 8, No.4, February (1966), p.422.

3. See Errol Derbach's Review of R.G. Rollins', Sean O'Casey's Drama: Verisimilitude and Vision (University Press, Alabama, 1979), in Modern Drama, Vol. XXIV, No.2, (1981), pp.234-36.

4. See Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work, pp.86-7.

tragedy of which they are fortuitous victims.⁵

Joseph Wood Krutch reacts to O'Casey's Trilogy adversely. He discovers in these plays emphasis on ideas and has disapprovingly looked at these plays as lacking in structure and conscious design.⁶ Wood Krutch's reaction is understandable because O'Casey, like Anton Chekhov, has presented life in a natural and relaxed structure which may give an impression of carelessness. But like Chekhov, O'Casey has achieved extraordinary artistry in his Trilogy a well modulated and systematically punctuated rhythm of life which imperceptively alternates between comedy and tragedy, tragedy and farce, farce and melodrama, so on and so forth. In a natural life this rhythmic variation passes unnoticed; so it happens in Chekhov's plays and in O'Casey Trilogy. Again, like Chekhov, O'Casey relies more on verbal artifice and occasional inarticulacy of his characters where sometimes silence conveys more than events. As our analysis of the plays below will establish, the thematic burden is more often conveyed through dialogue than through action. However, O'Casey makes a highly selective use of events which reinforce the verbal communication.

Though The Shadow of a Gunman is the first major attempt of Sean O'Casey, it amply demonstrates the dramatist's grasp of the issues and problems of human existence. The story on its surface

5. The Poet in the Theatre (Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1946) pp.8-9.

6. "Drama Poet Laureate," in The Nation, CXXV, 21, Dec. (1927) p.718.

is realistic and has got naturalistic framework, but the soul of the play and its thematic thrust have larger human reference. Apparently the canvas is rather narrow but within this the variety of characters, with their distinctive individuality, contradictions and complexities, have been artistically presented. The artistry of O'Casey in this respect reminds one of the filigree on a square inch of ivory by Jane Austen.

The background of The Shadow of a Gunman is the Irish war of Independence in 1920, between the patriotic Irish Republicans and the British military who were very cruel and ruthless in crushing the revolution. Chaos and disorder prevailed everywhere in Ireland at that time. The Irish revolutionaries indulged in guerilla warfare, hiding themselves, running her and there, attacking on the British forces. The whole country was in a state of anarchy and confusion. There was no security to life at all. The fear of death was spread all over the country. There were blasts of bombs and sounds of bullets and cry of fear everywhere in Ireland. Walter Starkie, an eye-witness, has described the horror-stricken situation of Ireland during the war period in a detailed manner:

Many of us have lived through that period when the city resounded with the sound of bombs and revolver shots. Late at night we used to be wakened by a loud knock at the door. Then we could hear the throbbing of a motor engine and a loud whistle: men would rush up, brandishing 'automatics' and crying 'Hands up!' or else there were nights lit up by the flashlights of the lorries as they moved through the silent city after 'curfew time'. Furtive

figures in the trench-coats might occasionally be seen darting here and there to avoid the penetrating rays.⁷

The dreadful situation of Dublin summed up by Starkie above has been dramatised in The Shadow of a Gunman, not in a coherent manner but as a menacing presence throughout the play through the off-stage sounds and lights. The thud of soldiers' marching, occasional shots of guns, throbbing of military vehicles, knocks at the doors, mysterious tapping and shouts of newspaper hawkers' shouting of ambushes, raids, deaths, etc., are artistically interwoven into the verbal texture of the play. Conversations are interrupted and sometimes left incomplete by these off-stage manoeuvres. This, besides contributing to the existing confusion in the life of the people as well as the society in which they are living, underscores the dramatic intention of O'Casey, which is to present the predicament of the individual compulsively caught in a tragic trap from which, like Chekhov's characters, neither they have the ability and courage to come out nor is there any possibility of their redemption.

O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy has commonly been approached as a documentation of the contemporary social and political conditions of Ireland. Saros Cowasjee, for example, has said, "his aim is to give an honest and unflinching portrayal of his countrymen and times."⁸ O'Casey's Trilogy has been analysed with

7. "Sean O'Casey" in L. Robinson, ed., The Irish Theatre (Macmillan, London, 1939), p.152.

See also N. Sahal, Sixty Years of Realistic Irish Drama (Macmillan, India, Bombay, 1971), pp.93-4.

8. Sean O'Casey (Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh and London, 1966), p.16.

reference to what Synge had professed to achieve, "The artistic value of any work of art is measured by its uniqueness. The human value is given largely by its intensity and its richness.... No personal originality is enough to make a rich work unique, unless it has also the characteristic of a particular (time) and locality and the life that is in it,"⁹ or what W.B. Yeats had declared to be the aim of the Irish theatre: "National literature... is the work of writers who are moulded by influences that are moulding their country, and who write out of so deep a life that they are accepted there in the end."¹⁰

The Shadow of a Gunman ostensibly deals with the miserable life of working slum-dwellers of the Dublin tenements against the background of war of liberation of Ireland from the British. These poor slum-dwellers of Dublin tenements are unwillingly caught in the war. The play "deals with it (war), not as it was seen and felt by those who were taking part in it, but as it appeared to those who most suffered from it, that is to say, the mass of the common people."¹¹ Thus we see that O'Casey in this play views the war from the stand-point of the slum-dwellers. Here he shows us the reaction of the slum-dwellers during the war and its effect on

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9. J.M. Synge: From a Notebook (1908) quoted by Ronald Ayling in Sean O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy in Thomas Kelroy (ed), Sean O'Casey-A Collection of Critical Essays. (Englewood Cliff, New Jersey), p.77.
 10. Samhain (1904) quoted by Ronald Ayling in Sean O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy in Thomas Kilroy (ed), Sean O'Casey-A Collection of Critical Essays, p.77.
 11. P.S. O'Hegarty, "A Dramatist of New-born Ireland (1927)," in Ronald Ayling, (ed), Modern Judgement: Selection of Critical Essays - Sean O'Casey, (Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1969) p.62.

them, which assumes a larger application.

Of the three plays the story of The Shadow of a Gunman is the scantiest. It deals with the cowardice, hypocrisy and pretence of an idealistic, self-deceived romantic poet and his equally lazy, cynical room-partner who is a pedlar. A young girl, with considerable beauty and youth and foolish nationalistic idealism is attracted towards the poet; she dies foolishly for a cause which in reality does not exist. Thus baldly narrated the story does not promise much action.

The play opens in "A Return Room in a tenement house in Hilljoy Square.... The period of the play's action is May, 1920." The locale and time of the proposed action of the play are firmly declared to be realistic or even factual. This leads to a naturalistic representation of the details of the inhabitants in the "Return Room." The place is congested, untidy, and chaotic. It portrays vividly the poverty of the tenement-dwellers. The props in the room are very few and leave no room for doubt about the reduced circumstances in which people live there. A single room is used for almost all the activities and concerns of life. For example, there are "a cupboard," "collars and ties," "a stretcher bed," "the fire place," "a statue of the Virgin," "a statue of the Sacred Heart," "a crucifix," "a few common cooking utensils," "a table," "a typewriter," "a candle and candlestick," "a bunch of wild flowers in a vase," "writing materials and a number of books," "two chairs," etc. In her recent study on the

theatrical performances of O'Casey's plays Nesta Jones has drawn attention to Michael Bogdanov's theatrical rendering of the play where the small room setting— with its rooms opening in the streets — produced a tremendous theatrical experience through a conjunction of "the atmospheric lighting and off-stage sound" to such an extent that the "audience became the part of the action."¹² There is no privacy in the tenement. The door opens into another room. The room of one tenant is a sort of thoroughfare for other tenants. These assorted props in the room, as the unfolding of the action will show, can be divided into two lists concerning the two characters separately. The religious props - the statue, etc.- are associated with Seumas, and the typewriter, table and books etc. are associated with Davoren. The initial impression conveyed by the visually reinforced props somehow is only ironically ridiculed as the action develops. Neither Seumas is religious nor is Davoren a studious scholar or a worthwhile poet.

The opening stage direction introduces Seumas Shields and Donal Davoren as a lazy and lousy lot. Davoren is a youngman of "about thirty." He calls himself a poet and lives in the world of imagination. In him there is a tendency for abstraction and otherworldly interest. This is perhaps an escape from the world

12. Nesta Jones on the Ryol Shakespeare Company Performance of The Shadow of a Gunman at Startford-upon-Avon, 1980, Directed by Michael Bogdanov in O'Casey and Expressionism (Chadwyck-Healey, Cambridge, 1988), p. 75.

of activity and labour. This shows his laziness but he tries to justify it by philosophic or higher aesthetic concerns: "the might of design, the mystery of colour, and the belief in the redemption of all things by beauty everlasting," etc.¹³ Seumas Shields, the pedlar, is "a man of thirty five." Unlike Davorn, he has a primitive sensibility. Here sensibility-wise the two characters are contrasted. One is sophisticated, the other is not; but both of them are lousy and lazy. There is nothing common in the two room-partners except the sharing of the room. There does not seem to exist any meaningful human bond or idealistic sharing of views or communication. One is an ideal poet who wants to escape from the realities of life into his poems and the other a pedlar who understands the harsh conditions of life in the context of his revolution-torn country. The action of the play begins at nine O'clock in the morning. Davoren is trying to compose a poem and hence he needs peace. But his peace is disturbed by Seumas' waking up, because, as it were to start a phatic communion, Seumas engages him in conversation about things he is not interested in. The disturbance to Davoren from Seumas' conversation is contrapunctal with the loud voice outside the room of a woman shouting at Seumas to wake him up. Comically Seumas claims superiority over everybody else. To assert his own cultural

13. The Shadow of a Gunman in Sean O'Casey: Collected Plays, Vol. I (Macmillan, London, 1949), p. 93.

All subsequent textual references are to this edition.

sophistication he calls all the Irish people barbaric because they do not have the sense of propriety. Davoren's "lilting an air" is sarcastically responded to by Seumas: "The land of Saints and Scholars 'ill shortly be a land of bloody poets." Davoren's lines indicate his excessively romantic bent of mind. But in the context of the noise outside and hostility to poetry inside the room, the romantic sentiments of the lines sound incongruous. This incongruity is also discernible in the juxtaposition between Seumas' worldliness and cynicism on the one hand and Davoren's dreamy romanticism on the other. Seumas voices a detached involvement in the predicament of Ireland. His "Oh, Kathleen ni Houlihan, your way's a thorny way," chimes in with Davoren's "Ah me! alas, pain, pain ever, for ever!..." As we will see later both the sentiments — Seumas' patriotism and Davoren's romanticism — are shallow and seem to produce the effect of ridicule.¹⁴ The refrain from Shelley's Prometheus Unbound underscores an ironic undercutting of Seumas' inflated patriotism. Prometheus was a rebel against God for the welfare of humanity. At the lower level Irish men, too, are rebels against the British rule for the emancipation of their motherland. The serious implication of the Prometheus motif is cynically undermined by Seumas' "Shelley is doing a jazz dance down below." Davoren's vision of Shelley as "the sensitive, high-minded, noble-hearted (person),... suffering the tortures of the damned," is as empty rhetoric as

14. David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work, p.95.

Seumas' claim that he "rejoices in the vindication of the Church and Truth." Davoren and Seumas expose each other's emptiness which is developed as the action proceeds. Davoren sums up Seumas' religiosity, which is not without O'Casey's satiric slant:

you know as little about truth as anybody else, and you care as little about the Church as the least of those that profess her faith; your religion is simply the state of being afraid that God will torture your soul in the next world as you are afraid the Black and Tans will torture your body in this.¹⁵

The altercation between the two occupants of the room does not have any acrimonious sting and is presented in such a casual and relaxed manner that its Chekhovian impact of naturalness is immediately felt. Interwoven in the altercation are other details of household activities and an important event (Maguire's leaving the bag in the room) which precipitates the climax later.

In the opening situation of the play the dramatist focuses more on the exposition of Seumas' character and Davoren is relatively silhouetted. The initial sham of Seumas' critique of Irish Republicanism is given some credence, when he supports his rhetorical criticism of conditions in contemporary with his past experience as an active participant in the national struggle. There is a good deal of criticism of Irish ethos which gives us an impression as if Seumas initially works as the mouthpiece of

15. The Shadow of a Gunman, p.97.

the dramatist:

That's the Irish People all over — they treat a joke as a serious thing and a serious thing as a joke. Upon me soul, I'm beginning to believe that the Irish People aren't, never were, an, never will be fit for self-government. They've made Balor of the Evil Eye King of Ireland, so signs on it there's neither conscience nor honesty from one end of the country to the other.¹⁶

The technique of mild altercation reminds one of Shaw's favourite method of debate for exposition and creation of mood and atmosphere of the play. The characteristic mood of ambivalence which O'Casey's Trilogy creates is well established in the present play in the opening situation. Here there is not much action yet. The dramatic intention seems to be to create and strengthen ambivalence in our attitude to the two major characters of the play. We are as much uncertain about the romantic authenticity of Davoren as of Seumas' honesty in his national concerns. Having thus initially established the channel through which the audience response is to be guided, one of the major themes — the theme of interruptions — begins.¹⁷ In fact this is the broad theme of the play within which other themes are embedded like a Chinese box. But this embedding, like that of the Chinese box, is not mechanical but chemical.

The interruptions are built up on a dramatic crescendo. The first interruption is the Landlord who has come to collect long-standing arrears of rent for the apartment. Seumas engages him in an

16. Ibid., p.100.

17. See James Simmons, Sean O'Casey, (Macmillan, London, first published, 1983, Reprinted, 1988), p.35, for an elaboration of this aspect.

offensive altercation while Davoren groans under the impact of harsh words being used by the two disputants for each other. Seumas' journalistic interest in writing against the exploiting landlords, who criminally neglect to provide facilities to the tenements, on the one hand presents a picture of the then prevalent conditions of the life of the tenement dwellers, and on the other adds to the dimension of Seumas' character. The noisy quarrel between the Landlord and Seumas naturally brings a nervous irritation in Davoren, who had only recently come to the place to live as a sub-tenant. Seumas represents that class of people who can thrive well on the noises and inconveniences of the place. He tells Davoren, "It's nothing when you're used to it; you're too thin-skinned altogether." Seumas' affrontery is convincingly combined with his socialism, nationalistic fervour and a pseudo-idealistic point of view. These qualities presented so far, have made him so lively, interesting and multifaceted that Davoren, inspite of his loud romanticism, trails off into a shadow.

After the Landlord has left and the prospect of Davoren's getting a respite brightens, Seumas hints at another strand of the action in such a casual manner, by way of concluding his argument with the Landlord, that the whole thing looks convincingly uncontrived. Seumas; without seemingly attaching much importance to what he divulges to Davoren, says, "sure they all think you're on the run. Mrs. Henderson thinks it, Tommey Owens thinks it, Mrs. an' Mr. Grigson think it, an' Minnie Powell thinks it too."¹⁸

18. The Shadow of a Gunman, p.104.

The danger of eviction consequent upon The Landlord's quit -notice is brushed aside by Seumas' putting it behind "one of the Statues on the mantelpiece." This trivial action of Seumas is likely to escape the attention of an unwary reader. But if we connect it with what Davoren had told him earlier, it is Seumas' naive belief to take shelter in religion in the time of need and danger. Before another interruption is brought in, Seumas and Davoren again repeat their pseudo-patriotic and inflated romantic groaning respectively. This has an overt comic effect.

At the sound of "a gentle knock at the door," Davoren in exasperation, as it were, exclaims, "another Fury come to plague me now!" "The Fury" reminds us of its ancient Greek connotation where she pursues a sinner leading to his punishment or redemption. The full significance of "the Fury" — which in the present situation is Minnie Powell, a young beautiful girl, "a Helen of Troy come to the tenement" — is gradually worked out specially in the direction of Davoren's self discovery in the last situation of the play. The discussion of this point will be taken up later in the analysis of the play.

Minnie Powell is the example of all those Irish slum-dwellers who become self-reliant, egotistical with considerable self-confidence, not because of education and training but because of economic circumstances. These circumstances have shaped Minnie into a woman who is as tender as she is ruthlessly defiant and doggedly self-confident. Her entry into Davoren's room, on the pretext of taking some milk for tea, offers a contrast

to Davoren's character which is that of a dreamy, cowardly and self-deluded person. The Minnie-Davoren conversation gradually develops into a situation of idyllic charms. Minnie is attracted to Davoren's romantic poetry as well as his being an I.R.A. gunman on the run, fighting for the freedom of his motherland. Minnie is a nationalist herself and wishes that poeticising should give way to activities connected with the redemption of Ireland. But contrary to her conviction, she feels delighted by Davoren's recitation of some of the lines of amorous import. Minnie would admire and worship anyone fighting against the British for the freedom of Ireland. But she, too, feels that the struggle, engulfing the innocent victims of indiscriminate British killing should come to an end: "I wish it was all over, all the same." As in the other characters, in Minnie, too, we notice a sort of ambivalence. She is in favour of the struggle but wishes that it was over. Her innocence, sincerity and well-meaning utterances offer a satirical contrast with Davoren's hypocrisy, lies and misleading Minnie, by throwing a sort of trap because of his physical attraction for her. At this stage while Minnie's attraction to Davoren is sincere, Davoren's infatuation for Minnie seems to be motivated by his lower instincts. But even in an amorous situation based on lies on Davoren's part, he is timid whereas Minnie is bold. To Davoren's apprehension of the possible scandal about his intimate exchanges with Minnie she opposes her fearless defiance:

An' do you think Minnie Powell cares whether they'll talk or no? She's had to push her way through life up to this without

help from any one, an' she's not goin' to ask their leave, now, to do what she wants to do.¹⁹

Davoren's pretence to nationalism and bravery wins Minnie's amorous favour to him, as Othello's narration of his bravery had won Desdemona's heart and Christy's narration of his paricidal venture had attracted Pagen's interest in him.²⁰ Besides this amorous trick being of an archetypal import, the parallelisms mentioned above make one striking point ominously clear that both Othello and Christy affairs had ended tragically. Though this point has not been explicitly brought out at this stage in the development of the action, the fact that Davoren's present stunts founded on lies, hypocrisy and incompetence can be dangerously explosive, cannot be ruled out.

Davoren-Minnie's idyllic, amorous exchange is interrupted at a crucial point of development — when "he is stooping to kiss her" — by the entry of Tommy. Tommy is a hero-worshipper, a lover of alcoholic drinks, a pretender to nationalism and socialistic reforms — a pretender, because he never shows any inclination to translate his patriotic fervour into action. Tommy's entry has a two-fold interruption: One the amorous goings on between Davoren and Minnie are stopped and secondly, Tommy, in a loud-mouthed manner, praises Davoren as a gunman on the run. This makes Davoren apprehensive of a possible British soldiers' hunt for him, in the fear of

19. Ibid., p.111.

20. Raymond Williams, too, has mentioned this parallelism but to prove that O'Casey's The Shadow is a bitter postscript to Synge's The Playboy: Drama From Ibsen to Brecht, p.147.

which his amorous excitations, for the time being, completely vanish from his mind. Tommy's blather, combined with his patriotic song, glorifying heroes and martyrdom,, seems to have the authorial slant of satire. In a carefully orchestrated dialogue Minnie comments in passing that Tommy, once he succumbs to alcoholic stupor, cannot hear the call of any body, though he offers to Davoren that he will stand by the latter in the time of need even at the slightest whisper for help.

Before Tommy's noisy presence in Davoren's room shows any sign of an end, Mrs. Henderson, followed by Mr. Gallogher intrude upon Davoren's privacy which he has been longing to have from the very beginning of the play. Mrs. Henderson's massive build and "massive voice and massive amount of self-confidence," contrasted with Mr. Gallogher's physique "of a spare little man" and his shyness, are comical. Soon after entering into Davoren's room Mrs. Henderson talks emphatically about her socialism and larger national interests. But her talks are as empty as Tommy's. She is vain, ostentatious and verbose. She has all the comical linguistic features of Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop. Her deliberate and artificial twisting and repetative mannerism of speech produce a comic effect which is tinged with satire. She belongs to the clan of Paycocks — vain, lazy, incompetent and selfish to the extent of being despicable. The rancour that she bears against her neighbour is ironically contrasted with her talk of brotherly living and neighbourly harmony and her effusive piety. Mr. Gallogher is a caricature. The parade of his legal terminology in drafting representations is in the nature of an appendix to Mrs. Henderson's elaborate oral

complaint against her neighbour. The old couple have come to Davoren for the redressal of their grievances, not against their British ruler but against their Irish neighbours. The topical references here is unmistakable. The I.R.A had established its own little court to dispose of cases of petty quarrels and claims among Irishmen so that a greater unity is forged among them to enable them to put up an effective fight against the British.²¹

Davoren feels flattered by the three interruptions by Minnie, Tommy, and Mr. and Mrs. Henderson. All these people are hero-worshippers and Davoren enjoys being worshipped as a hero by them. Before the first Act ends there is another interruption but this interruption is not palatable to Davoren as the other three were. It is the news of Maguire's being ambushed and killed. Davoren is on the verge of deflation, not because of any humane shock but because of the fear of an imminent danger to his own security. We know that Maguire has been associated with the room which Davoren has been sharing with Seumas. Somehow, Davoren's anxiety is left unconcluded and the theme of the amorous relationship between Minnie and Davoren is allowed to reach a definite stage of development -- Davoren, with Minnie's willingness, kisses her. The first Act ends with Davoren selfishly gloating over his amorous triumph over Minnie. The suspense is intensified, specially in

21. . . . For details of the organisation and function of such courts see James Simmons, Sean O'Casey, p.42.

view of Maguire's ambush and a proper publicity of Davoren as a gunman on the run. The impetus for an accelerated movement of the action is contained in Davoren's last speech:

Minnie, Donal; Donal, Minnie. Very pretty, but very ignorant. A gunman on the run! Be careful, be careful, Donal Davoren. But Minnie is attracted to the idea, and I am attracted to Minnie. And what danger can there be in being the Shadow of a gunman?²²

The note of quietude reached after a series of interruptions towards the end of Act I, continues in the opening of Act. II. The time of the action — night — corresponds with Davoren's romantic poetical mood. It appears that he has at last got the peace which he needed so badly for poeticising. The lines he recites are indicative of his romantic attitude towards nature and his nostalgic regret for the loss of beauty and happiness. In fact the poetic lines in the beginning of Act II are O'Casey's own beautiful lines which he has strangely put in the mouth of one of his useless characters. It appears that O'Casey wanted to create a truly dreamy character, completely unsuited for the practical reality of the world. Hence putting some of his truly poetic lines in the mouth of such a character, is in the fitness of his dramatic requirement of a character who by temperament and attitude must be incapable of any worthwhile action.

Seumas and Davoren, in order to fill the gap of the time, start chatting. It is a matter of chance that Seumas starts going over the issue of Maguire's visit to Knocksedan. Davoren maintains

22. The Shadow of a Gunman, p.124.

his indifference to anything outside of himself and thus confirms his selfishness. But Seumas' attitude to Maguire does not only show his narrow self-centredness, but his deriding of Maguire's nationalistic activities and dissociating himself completely from his fate make him look despicable. The calm, which seemed to be of a continuing nature, is a bit ruffled by Seumas' cynicism. Then another bit of a disturbing nature is hinted at in Davoren's apprehension, "I hope there's nothing else in the bag, besides thread and hairpins," when he suddenly sees the bag left in the room by Maguire. The fresh tension in the tenement life is gradually built up by the presence of curfew and the possibility of a raid any moment. Seumas' complaint against the prevailing situation in the country, besides being realistic, gives an impression of humanity being trapped in a narrow and fragile shelter because of the conditions of war prevailing outside the tenements. In the context of this constricting predicament of life, Davoren's interest in composing romantic poetic lines is rightly considered by Seumas and so by us as odd and irresponsible. The whole dialectic in this context needs to be quoted in some detail:

Seumas. I can't sleep properly ever since they put on this damned curfew. A minute ago I thought I heard some of the oul' ones standin' at the door; they won't be satisfied till they bring a raid on the house; an' they never begin to stand at the door till after curfew.... Are you gone to bed, Donal?

Davoren.No; I'm trying to finish this poem.

Seumas. (Sitting up in bed). If I was you I'd give that game up; it doesn't pay a working-man to write poetry. I don't profess to know much about poetry --- about

poetry — I don't know much about the pearly glint of the morning dew, or the damask sweetness of the rare wild rose, or the subtle greenness of the serpent's eye — but I think a poet's claim to greatness depends upon his power to put passion in the common people.

Dovern. Ay! passion to howl for his destruction. The people! Damn the people! They live in the abyss, the poet lives on the mountain-top; to the people there is no mystery of colour: it is simply the scarlet coat of the soldier; the purple vestments of a priest; the green banner of a party; the brown or blue overalls of industry. To them the night of design is a three-roomed house or a capacious bed. To them beauty is for sale in a butcher's shop. To the people the end of life is the life created for them; to the poet the end of life is the life that he creates for himself; life has stifling grip upon the people's throat — it is the poet's musician. The poet ever strives to save the people; the people ever strive to destroy the poet. The people view life through creeds, through customs, and through necessities; the poet views creeds, customs and necessities through life.²³

Some critics have tried to connect the above dialectic with O'Casey's own poetic creed. It will be relevant here to mention that the dialectic should be viewed in terms of the dramatic structure of the play. The talk about Maguire, the Republicans, the need to give priority to the daily chore of life over imaginative extravaganza about the mystery of colour and poet's lofty position, and passion in poetry to move the common people etc. are meant to create a mood of casual conversation and natural existence which were interrupted for some time and are threatened by the goings on

23. Ibid., pp.126-27.

outside the tenements. This lends meaning to the forthcoming violence to the quietude which Davoren has been anxious to have.

Seumas "with a note of anxiety in his voice" expresses concern at the "tappin' again," which is not heard by Davoren. Seumas elaborates the ominous foreboding of the tapping in terms of a private, personal psychological symbol. "It's a sure sign of death when nobody hears it," except Seumas, which has always brought unexpected deaths in his family. The transition from the conversation of a pragmatic nature to something with supernatural dimension is significant. As the course of the action will show Seumas' superstitious auditory hallucinations is realized in real events. To escape this he can bank upon religion only, because as we have seen earlier it is a recurrent pattern in his case to take the cover of religion whenever any danger or fear of danger besets him. The atmosphere of inexplicable fear is made more bizarre when the "visibility (in the room) is maintained from the light of the moon" coming through the window, because the bulb has been put out.

In this bizarre atmosphere, suffused with supernatural fear, Seumas continues his conversation with Davoren about things, personal as well as of larger import. He is as critical of Minnie's proneness to hero-worship as of Davoren's secret wish to be hero-worshipped:

You think a lot about her simply because she thinks a lot about you, an' she thinks a lot about you because she looks upon you as a hero — a kind o' Paris....²⁴

24. Ibid., p.130.

From his talk about Minnie Seumas goes on to the larger issues of the whole heroic concept of the Irish freedom struggle, the suffering of the innocent on account of the misguided nationalist zealots and to the whole issue of human nature at large. With considerable force of argument Seumas expresses his political philosophy as follows:

I believe in the freedom of Ireland, an' that England has no right to be here, but I draw the line when I hear the gunman blowin' about dyin' for the people, when it's the people that are dyin' for the gunmen! With all due respect to the gunmen, I don't want them to die for me.²⁵

You're not goin' — you're not goin' to beat the British Empire — the British Empire, by shootin' an occasional Tommy at the corner of an occasional street. Besides, when the Tommies have the wind up — when the Tommies have the wind up they let bang at everything they see — they don't give a God's curse who they plug.²⁶

Seumas' analysis of human nature where martyrdom and suffering, resulting from national struggle, are soon forgotten, is as caustic as it is true. Seumas predicts that Minnie's 'ecstasy' at the possible martyrdom of Davoren would be drowned in the din of her daily chore and her struggle to survive. Seumas' litany over the sorry state of affairs in the country, continues with the same vigour and sense of disillusionment:

Seumas. 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

25. Ibid., p.132.

26. Ibid.

of machine-guns; petrol is their holy water; their Mass is burnin' buildin'; their De Profundis is "The Soldiers' Song," an' their creed is I believe in the gun almighty, maker of heaven an' earth — an' it's all for "the glory O' God an' the honour O' Ireland."

Davern. I remember the time when you yourself believed in nothing but the gun.

Seumas. Ay, when there wasn't a gun in the country; I've a different opinion now when there's nothing but guns in the country.... An' you daren't open your mouth, for Kathleen ni Houlihan is very different now to the woman who used to play the harp an' sing "Weep on, your hour is past," for she's a ragin' divil now, an' if you only look crooked at her you're sure of a punch in th' eye. But this is the way I look at it.²⁷

Seumas continues his argument against the entire mad activities of the nationalist movement in the context of his personal security and well being. As he is engulfed in the trouble of fighting, shooting and the resultant sufferings, he, of necessity, takes recourse to religion which in such a time of chaos brings "great comfort... and makes a man strong in time of trouble an' brave in time of danger." To Seumas' realistic attitude to the whole issue of national struggle and its concomitant sufferings, Davoren opposes his "philosophy that makes the coward brave; the sufferer defiant; the weak strong..." Like his poeticising, Davoren's philosophy also is unrealistic, false and at most an

27. Ibid., pp.131-32.

exercise in nourishing illusion. The rather detailed conversation between Seumas and Davoren, briefly summarised above, is intended to further elaborate the two characters and throw light on the political issues which form the background of the drama. It also brings home to us that O'Casey's characters in the play — of course Minnie Powell is an exception — are great talkers and as the following course of the action shows they are incompetent and incapable of action.

The satiric slant of O'Casey is discernible in his stage direction soon after Davoren tries to bloat into false philosophy of heroism after his friend's (Seumas') elaborate rhetoric about the futility of the entire national struggle. "A volley of shots is heard in a lane that runs parallel with the wall of the back-yard. Religion and philosophy are forgotten in the violent fear of a nervous equality."²⁸ The fragility of the protective cover of philosophy and religion is amply clear from the reaction of Davoren and Seumas to the volley of shots. Their earlier apprehension of insecurity appears now as a palpable reality: "It's dangerous to be in and it's equally dangerous to be out" is the summary of the tenement-dwellers' predicament of being trapped. The instinct for survival now seizes the minds of the two tenement occupants. Their concern for personal security to the exclusion of others is as selfish as it is convincing.

The progress of the plot from a quiet, uneventful start to the above mentioned nervous anxiety of Davoren and Seumas marks the

28. Ibid., p.133.

completion of one movement in the action. The theme of interruption which was suspended for sometime is taken up again, which propels the plot to move now with accelerated motion to a conclusion. Mrs. Grigson, an occupant of "a tenement kitchen," arrives at this late hour of the night. She is as talkative and fond of hearing her own words as Mrs. Henderson who had appeared in the first Act. She has come to Seumas' room complaining against her husband, a great drunkard, who has not returned home yet. Mrs. Grigson is anxious about the security of her husband who is loafing about in the night and might well be shot. Her anxiety is not because of her love for her husband but because of her economic dependence on him. She is worried if "the insurance companies pay if a man is shot after curfew?" Seumas and Davoren who are at the moment preoccupied with their own selfish concerns for individual security, naturally feel disinterested in Mrs. Grigson's problems. Their uneasiness on account of Mrs. Grigson's garrulous bombardment on their ears is accentuated when Mr. Grigson also arrives on the scene and joins his wife in his drunken rhetoric about his nationalism and his authority as a husband, invested in him by the decree of the Holy Scripture, which he quotes like this: "The woman shall be subject to her husband," etc.

The Grigsons' intrusion upon the scene temporarily relieves the tension in which Davoren and Seumas had eventually found themselves. Thus this interruption is of a different nature because it lightens the heaviness of the mood of nervousness and anxiety which the volley of shots had created in the minds of

Seumas and Davoren. Besides, it produces a comic effect through Grigsons' pretence to religious knowledge, manly courage and patriotism.

The ebb in Davoren's and Seumas' tension, thus achieved through the comic intrusion of the Grigsons is not allowed to settle down to any appreciable state of quietude. "While Grigson has been singing, the sound of a rapidly moving motor is heard, faintly at first, but growing rapidly louder, till it apparently stops suddenly somewhere very near the house, bringing Grigson's song to an abrupt conclusion,"²⁹. Naturally "the throbbing of the engines" has produced nervous throbbing of fear in the minds of Seumas, Davoren and Grigson. Grigson's rhetoric stops and his lyricism, conduced by alcohol, disappears. Seumas' and Davoren's earlier nervousness becomes intenser. Obviously a raid is imminent. Grigson confirms the fear by refering to Tommy Owen's irresponsible blathering in the public about Davoren: that he is a general in the I.R.A. Davoren feels that there is no way out now of the present danger. He suddenly remembers that his connection with the I.R.A. will be established by the letter which the Hendersons had given him. He can't locate the letter. Thus the action registers a crescendo which is soon brought down when the letter is eventually found out. Once again the ebb in action is likely to be achieved. But this time the sudden flow of action with terrible potential for danger is registered when the bag left by Maguire is discovered to be full of bombs. "The pickle" in which Davoren and Seumas find themselves seems to be irredeemable. Seumas retreats into his usual

29. Ibid., p.141.

shelter of religion and blames supernatural agencies for human catastrophes: "Mother o' God, grant there'll be no raid tonight. I knew things ud go wrong when I missed Mass this mornin'."³⁰ Finding themselves unable to find any way out they indulge in a nervous altercation of a futile nature.

The nervous tension built up so far is, again, temporarily relieved by the entry of Minnie Powell. The relative predicament of Davoren and Seumas is explained with reference to Minnie's: Davoren reclines almost fainting on the bed; Seumas sits up in an attitude of agonized prayerfulness; Minnie alone retains her presence of mind.³¹ The panic-stricken pair become more nervous and are on the verge of collapse when they heard at street door a violent and continuous knocking, followed by the crash of glass and the beating of the door with rifle butts.³² Davoren's poetry has completely disappeared and is replaced by monosyllables he utters in his delirious fear: "Bombs, bombs, bombs; God! in the bag on the table there; we're done, we're done!"³³ Seumas' condition is no better.

Minnie's presence of mind and willingness to act save the situation from its explosive conclusion. She takes an immediate decision, unthinkingly, banking upon (though foolishly) that she,

30. Ibid., pp. 144-45.

31. Ibid., p. 146.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

being a girl, will escape the attention of the Tommies. She says:

I'll take them to my room; maybe they won't search it: if they do aself, they won't harm a girl. Good-bye... Donal.³⁴

She leaves the room with the bag full of bombs "enough to blow up the whole street." The trouble of Seumas and Davoren, however, does not end here. Activities of soldiers in the street are heard and eventually an Auxiliary puts in his appearance. The two inmates of the room answer the Auxiliary's interrogation in a fully deflated, cowed down and humble manner. The Auxiliary is rude and deliberately humiliating.³⁵

The action of the play gathers further momentum when "Mrs. Grigson enters, dressed disorderly and her hair awry." She is frantic and complains against the Tommies' searching her kitchen tenement and gulping the whisky of her husband. The Tommies' interest in Mr. Grigson's whisky, while searching his room, is comic. But it becomes farcical when the Auxiliary in Seumas' room, hearing that his comrade is more lucky in raiding a house and drinking whisky, rushes out to have his share of the alcoholic booty. The raids in other places in the tenements are a matter of great anxiety for Seumas because they may include a raid on Minnie Powell's room as well. The bombs may be discovered and his name

34. Ibid.

35. Maik Hamburger, ... has remarked thus in this context: "With the Black and Tans in the house, Republicanism is no longer a game but a matter of life and death."

"Anti-Illusionism and the Use of Song in the Early Plays of Sean O'Casey," in Robert Lowery, ed., O'Casey Annual No. 2, (Macmillan, London, 1983), p.11.

may be mentioned by Minnie in this connection. While Mrs. Grigson continues her tirade of complaints against the behaviour of the Tommies, Seumas intermittently keeps on asking whether the Tommies are likely to raid Minnie Powell's room as well. In their mutual concern for self interest, Seumas is as unconcerned with Grigson's suffering as Mrs. Grigson is deaf to Seumas' enquiry. In the midst of panic, nervousness, and dangerously explosive situation, Mrs. Grigson's complaining against her neighbours' lack of any attention to her present predicament becomes a kind of monologue. Similarly, Seumas' anxious enquiry about the possibility of a raid on Minnie Powell's room becomes a sort of 'catechism'. In the midst of Seumas' 'catechism' and Mrs. Grigson's monologue, Davoren's equivocal concern and questionable piety, only contribute to the comicality of the situation. But the comic mood here is not without O'Casey's satiric insinuations at Davoren's and Seumas' hollow concern without any inclination to action, which projects them as somewhat despicable. Davoren's comment on Grigson's discomfiture at being harassed by the Tommies, producing a comic relief in the tense situation, sounds rather unpalatable: "He's moaning for the loss of his whisky," is his response to Mrs. Grigson's hearing her husband moan in the kitchen.

The action now moves on to its final stage through the situation of confusion, nervousness and undulated panic. Minnie's room has been raided. The bombs have been recovered and she has been arrested and put into a lorry where both her defiance and patriotism are unabated in her shouting at the top of her voice.

"Up the Republic." While Mrs. Grigson is surprised at the simple, innocent and uncomplicated Minnie indulging in the activities of National Movement, Seumas continues the strains of his nervous anxiety whether "She'll keep her mouth shut." Davoren seems to react differently: "We'll never again be able to lift up our heads if anything happens to Minnie," he feels. While the two able-bodied males (Seumas and Davoren) can only feel, talk, and at most regret, Mrs. Henderson is reported "fightin' with soldiers... nearly knockin' one of them down, and they're puttin' her into the lorry too." At this moment of the action the situation is seen through Mrs. Grigson's eyes which lends objectivity to the image of destruction, selfishness, cowardice, self-sacrifice, bravery and nationalism.

Before the catastrophic conclusion is reached, Mr. Grigson puts in his appearance a second time. His vaunt of his defiance of the Tommies and his assertion of his individualism and rights of a citizen are contrary to the report of his slavish cowering down before the Tommies. The effect is farcical and is intended to punctuate the tension which has been continuing since the fresh series of interruptions began in the second Act. Minnie's lorry is ambushed by the Republicans. In her attempt to escape by jumping off the lorry, she is shot dead. The news of Minnie's death brings a sifting effect upon the mind and soul of Davoren while it confirms Seumas' consistent selfishness and apathy to others' sufferings.

Mrs. Grigson's final utterance underscores the pathos of Minnie Powell's death:

Oh, Mr. Davoren, isn't it terrible, isn't it terrible! Minnie Powell, poor little Minnie Powell's been shot dead! Oh it was horrible to see the blood pourin' out, an' Minnie moanin'. They found some paper in her breast, with "Minnie" written on it, an' some other name they could not make out with the blood;.... Poor little Minnie, poor little Minnie Powell, to think of you full of life a few minute ago, an' now she's dead!³⁶

Davoren's conscience had already been pricked. Mrs. Grigson's elaborate description of the way Minnie's life ended only elicits Davoren's confession of the truth about himself which is honest self-denigration:

Ah me, alas! Pain, pain, pain ever, for ever! It's terrible to think that little Minnie is dead, but it's still more terrible to think that Davoren and Shields are alive! Oh Donal Davoren, shame is your portion now till the silver cord is loosened and the golden bowl be broken. Oh, Davoren, Donal Davoren, poet and paltroon, paltroon and poet!³⁷

Davoren's recital of his favourite refrain from Shelley — "Ah me alas..." etc. — is now a truly felt experience and not merely, as it has been earlier, a facade of his romantic poeticising. The last line of the play uttered by Seumas — "I knew something ud come of the tappin' on the wall!" — while intended to relieve the painful conclusion of the Minnie-episode through its comical

36. The Shadow of a Gunman, p.156.

37. Ibid.

touches, in fact, extends the dimension of the action of the play by its symbolic supernaturalism. Thus the play remains primarily the story of the catastrophe of an individual because of her (Minnie's) foolish idealism. But Minnie Powell becomes a representative of all innocent victims of war waged for whatever cause. The other two characters — Seumas and Davoren — chiefly serve to work out the innocence, simplicity, bravery and self-sacrifice of Minnie. They also represent the human characteristics which are contrasted with those of Minnie, and serve as a target for O'Casey's satire. The other minor characters — not directly involved in the main action of the play—are used to complete the spectrum of life that the play aims at portraying.

C H A P T E R I I I

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK

Juno and the Paycock, internationally acclaimed as O'Casey's masterpiece, apparently deals with temporal and topical themes. The background of the play is the civil war in 1922 between the Irishmen, who supported the Free State settlement, and the Die-hard Irish Republicans, who were against the treaty of partition. With the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, the Irish Republican Army was divided into two groups of pro-and anti-Treaty factions and then there started a civil war in which the two factions of the Republicans developed mutual animosity and hatred. There were chaos, anarchy and disorder everywhere in Ireland. Even father and son were divided on the issue of the Treaty, and those who were unconcerned with this infighting could not escape its disastrous consequences. Saros Cowasjee has rightly remarked about the brutality and disastrous consequences of civil war in these words: "So much has been made of the brutalities committed by the English in the Easter Rising and the Anglo-Irish wars, both of which preceded the Civil War, that the atrocious killing of Irishmen by Irishmen is sometimes forgotten."¹

Thus from the point of view of temporal relevance Juno is a continuation of The Shadow. The story of the play is about the disaster of an already impoverished family. The disaster is because of the laziness of the head of the family, the crippled condition and eventual death of the only son because of the civil war, the undoing of the only daughter by the meanness, selfishness

1. Sean O'Casey (Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh and London, 1966), p. 22.

and betrayal by a man outside the family and her eventual disgrace and departure from the milieu of her birth and bringing up. The family eventually gets totally disintegrated, corresponding with the collapse of civil life in general in the town.

Even this bare narration of the outline of the story demonstrates that O'Casey's canvas for the portrayal of life has widened here. As contrasted with the catastrophe of a single individual in the earlier play, here is the catastrophe engulfing a whole family. The contradictions, despicable human lapses, cruelty and meanness, which we noticed in The Shadow, have been brought out with greater starkness and into a bolder relief.

The main themes of the play are man's self-centredness, and the brutality and futility of war which have a dehumanising effect on man and society. Besides, a number of small themes relating to idealism and pragmatism, misdirected nationalism etc. have been interwoven into the structure of the play.

The play opens in "The living-room of a two-room tenancy occupied by the Boyle family in a tenement house in Dublin." The props in the room are: "a dresser," "a picture of the Virgin," "a crimson bowl in which a floating votive light is burning," "a small bed," "a fire place," beside which "is a box containing coal and (there is an) alarm clock lying on its face on the mantelshelf," "a galvanized bath," "a teapot," "fryin pan," "few books on the dresser," "a long-handled shovel," etc. The opening stage direction gives us a glimpse of a life in reduced circumstances, belonging to the labour class with aspirations for intellectual sophistication (a few books on the dresser). As we will see later, this gap

between the real condition of existence and the unattainable aspirations becomes one of the sources of much frustration among the members of the family. The votive light symbolises a clinging to some insubstantial support to an impoverished and catastrophe-threatened life that the family has been living.

As it is characteristic with O'Casey, he gives in his stage directions sufficient hint to enable the reader to respond to his characters, Mary Boyle, a beautiful "girl of twenty-two," is the first character introduced to us. "Two forces are working in her mind -- one, through the circumstances of her life, pulling her back; the other, through the influence of books she has read, pushing her forward. The opposing forces are apparent in her speech and her manners, both of which are degraded by her environment, and improved by her acquaintance -- slight though it be -- with literature."² The above characteristics of Mary are worked out through the play and her attitudes and train of thought are brought initially in her interaction with her mother, Juno, who is the most important character in the play.

The play begins with Mary reading out a piece of news. In itself this item of news creates suspense and pertains to events of suffering during the course of the action. The elaboration of the news item is abandoned in Juno's inquiry about the return of Captain Boyle. The opening conversation between the mother and

2. Juno and the Paycock in Sean O'Casey, Collected Plays, Vol. I (Macmillan, London, 1949), p.3.

All subsequent textual references are to this edition.

daughter unfolds a number of points which will be developed as the play proceeds. The first item in this connection is Captain Boyle's "struttin' about the town like a paycock with Joxer," and the second one is "about Mrs. Tancered's son," the news of whose death has appeared in the morning newspaper to which Mary has alluded above. The implication of Johnny in the Tancred's son's affairs, which becomes clear only towards the end of the play, is also hinted at in the opening situation in Johnny's nervousness at the news; and his angry disapprobation of Mary's discussing the news-items. Mary is puzzled at Johnny's "gettin' very sensitive, all of a sudden" but Juno dispels any apprehension on account of any consequence on the family because of Tancred's son being killed. She says, "Everybody's sayin' that he was a Die-hard — thanks be to God that Johnny had nothin' to do with him this long time...."³ The forebodings contained in the news and Johnny's nervous discomfiture, are overshadowed by Juno's elaboration of the irresponsibility, laziness and lack of the sense of decorum and proportion in Captain Boyle. Captain Boyle is in the habit of coming home with his equally useless companion, Joxer, only when Juno is not in:

"Ay, that's what he'd like, an' that's what he's waitin' for— till he thinks I'm gone to work, an' then sail in with the boult Joxer, to burn all the coal an' dhrink all the tea in the place, to show them what a good Samaritan he is!"⁴

3. Ibid., p.5.

4. Ibid.

Juno's complaint against her husband, in fact, sums up his character and attitude: "you'd think he was bringin' twenty poun's a week into the house the way he's going on. He wore out the Health Insurence long ago, he's after wearin' out the unemployment dole, an' now, he's thryin' to wear out me! An' constantly singin', no less, when he ought always to be on his knees offerin' up a Novena for job."⁵ In the middle of Juno's grumbling against Captain Boyle's attitude to work and life, Mary shows her concern with the choice of a ribbon to suit her head. We learn that Mary is on strike against her employers. She talks of trade unionism and standing firm on the principle of opposing economic victimisation of the workers by the employers. Mary's argument about the principle involved in going on strike to defend the right of one worker is opposed by her mother's practical wisdom, based on the principle of survival: "Wan victim wasn't enough. When the employers sacrifice wan victim, the Trades Unions go wan better be sacrificin' a hundred."⁶ Juno's point of view should not be taken to mean that "she is against trade unions but that she is for the workers earning their daily bread"⁷ as their first concern. Juno's tacit suggestion is that the talk and fight for principle is a matter of whether one can afford it:

'yis; an' when I go into oul' Murphy's to-morrow, an' he gets to know that, instead o' payin' all, I'm goin' to borry more, what'll he say when I tell him a principle's a principle? What'll we do if he refuses to give us any more on tick? ⁸

5. Ibid., pp.5-6.

6. Ibid., p.6.

7. Saros Cowasjee, Sean O'Casey, p.26.

8. Juno and the Paycock, pp.6-7.

The whole conversation between the mother and daughter brings out the immaturity of the daughter in contrast with the mother's practical wisdom gained through the experience of survival.

The dramatist's camera swiftly moves to another strain of the Juno family, i.e. Johnny. Johnny has been off his mental tangent ever since he has been rendered invalid by his participation in the fight between the Die-hard Republicans and the Free Staters: "The bullet he got in the hip in Easter Week was bad enough, but the bomb that shatthered his arm in the fight in O'Connell Street put the finishin' touch on him. I knew he was makin' a fool of himself. God knows I went down on me bended knees to him not to go agen the Free State."⁹ Mary defends her brother because he, like her, believed in "a principle's a principle."

The initial conversation among the mother, daughter and son is so casual and uncontrived that the sign of any story to take shape is not within sight immediately. But the technique of the dramatist of kaleidoscopic reflection of different aspects of the theme is abundantly clear. Even though the other important character — Captain Boyle — has not yet appeared but a fairly comprehensive view of his personality has been presented. Here is a family where the husband is a wastrel and not interested in a job. The daughter is on strike without giving a moment's thought how the food of the family is going to be arranged. The son is a virtual invalid not needing merely food for survival but also a continuous presence of someone near him to provide him protection

9. Ibid., p.7.

against his nervousness and some vague fear. The exclusive responsibility, thus, of running the family falls upon the mother who has already incurred enough debts to buy food for the family, and is still anxiously struggling to make provision for the family on a daily basis.

However, Jerry Devine, a unionist and lover of Mary brings in the news that he has arranged a job for Boyle in Rathmines through the good offices of Father Farrell. Father Farrell has been interested in helping the family out of its present poverty because he has been sympathetic to Johnny who has got disabled fighting for Ireland. Captain Boyle is to be contacted immediately to take up the job, and the only place where Juno thinks him to be is one of the cheap pubs nearby -- Ryan's or Foley's. The Captain, after he has been properly introduced to us, appears in a spirit of cheerfulness and complete relaxation chattering with his parasitical companion, Joxer. Boyle and Joxer, thinking that Juno is not in, talk freely about jobs and the tyranny of Juno which is, they declare, calculated to restrict their freedom and pleasure: "'Tis n't Juno should be her pet name at all, but Deirdre of the Sorras, for she's always grousin'," opines Boyle. To this Joxer adds his rejoinder: "It's a terrible thing to be tied to a woman that's always grousin'. I don't know how you stick it --it ud put years on me. It's a good job she has to be so often away, for (with a shrug) when the cat's away, the mice can play!"¹⁰ While Boyle and his buddy get ready to make a cup of tea to relax themselves and continue chattering, comically "Joxer's rhapsody is

10. Ibid., p.10.

cut short by the sight of Juno coming forward and confronting the two cronies. Both are stupefied." The seriousness of getting a job for Boyle changes into a near farcical situation when Boyle tries to change the topic of conversation to something which may immediately please her. Boyle informs Juno, to save his and Joxer's face, that his buddy has got influence with a foreman at Killesther who would soon get him a job. First Joxer, being not prepared for this lie, feels puzzled. But soon he gets the clue from Boyle and starts elaborating about the prospect of getting a job for Boyle which will improve the financial condition of the family. Boyle, too, declares that now he feels physically fit to undertake any exacting job because he is sincerely interested in working. Ironically enough, he does not know that a job is around the corner, already arranged for him by Jerry, which he would not take up because of the sudden twitch in his right leg. Juno can see through her husband's pretence, lies and laziness: "you think you're able to come it over me with them fairy tales, you're in the wrong shop." Juno knows him only too well. Her analysis of Boyle is comedy mixed with pathos:

you'd do far more work with a knife an' fork than ever you'll do with a shovel! If there was e'er a genuine job goin' you'd be dh'other way about—not able to lift your arms with the pains in your legs! your poor wife slavin' to keep the bit in your mouth an' you gallivantin' about all the day like paycock! ¹¹

She exposes his hypocrisy to him in passing for "a Captain":

"Everybody callin' you 'Captain', an' you only wanst on the wather,

11. Ibid., p.14.

in an oul' collièr from here to Liverpool, when anybody, to listen or look at you, ud take you for a second Charisto For Columbus!"¹²

Boyle's lying and laziness appear despicable but Mrs. Boyle's attitude to him remains one of anxiety and care for him: She has been waiting for him to serve breakfast before going out on her job. When Jerry Devine's news of job coming to him is communicated to Boyle, he feels the usual twitch in his leg and tries to come out of the immediate tight corner by pretending to brandish his male vanity: "you needn't ha' waited, for I'll take no breakfast -- I've a little spirit left in me still!" When he is exposed, he does not feel repentant or ashamed. On the contrary he has the affrontery to accuse Jerry and his own wife of unjustifiably interfering in his freedom and movement:

What do you want to be gallopin' about afther me for? Is a man not to be allowed to leave his house for a minute without havin' a pack o' spies, pimps an' informers cantherin' at his heels?¹³

The prospect of Boyle's taking up a job is rejected by him.

For a brief moment a situation is presented when Mary-Jerry relationship has been brought out. They have been in love in the past but now Mary is not inclined to entertain Jerry's suit any longer because she seems to "have clicked with some one else," who, as we will see soon is the smart, well mannered, sugar-tongued Bentham. As soon as Juno goes out of the house the pain in Boyle's leg

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., p.16.

disappears and he regains his mood of romantic cheerfulness. His song about the "robin's nest" and "bonny blue-eyed lad" floats in the air. This floating song is satirically juxtaposed by a hawker shouting outside to sell a sewing machine. The struggle of the bearded hawker to earn his livelihood by doing some work is a scathing commentary on the despicable laziness of Boyle and his hatefully parasitical dependence upon his wife. There is a contrapuntal infusion into the Boyle and Joxer's conversation of irresponsibility and laziness through a careful manipulation of bringing in Johnny's nervousness about some apprehended disaster on him and the hawkers' selling their goods. The apprehension of Johnny does not seem to be mere claustrophobia but of some guilt-ridden fear of some approaching danger which he keeps to himself. He shrieks with terror and tries to take shelter in a religious superstition (the votive light) at the mention by Boyle of "a fella in a thrench coat." Johnny's nervous discomfiture is completely ignored by Boyle and his buddy who resume their earlier talk of the domination of husbands by wives, the sinister grabbing of power by the clergy, the general "state o' chassis" in which the entire Irish society is caught, the struggle of the working class for better living, the propriety of reading by young girls "advanced" books by "revolutionary" writers like Ibsen: "The Doll's House, Ghosts an' The Wild Duck — buks only fit for chiselurs!" etc. The high talks of big things by these two dullards give a taste of savage humour. As the 'arguefication' of the two wastrels reaches a climactic point —

Boyle. Today, Joxer, there's goin' to be issued a proclamation be me, establishin' an independent Republic, an' Juno'll have to take an oath of allegiance.

Joxer. Be firm, be firm, Captain; the first few minutes'll be the worst: — if you gently touch a nettle it'll sting you for your pains; grasp it like a lad of mettle, an' as soft as silk remains!¹⁴

Juno's, voice is heard outside. Joxer "flies out of the window" and Boyle "swears on all t'ie holy prayer-books" that he "hasn't seen Joxer since I seen him before."

Juno is so "flurried and excited" that she is not interested now in exposing Boyle's lies to him. She has cut short her stay outside on work to be able to come back and tell Boyle that "there's s visitor comin' with Mary in a minute, an' he has great news for you." Boyle is advised to go into Johnny's room to change to look presentable to the visitor. Boyle renders the room into a mess in looking for his "moleskin trousers" and braces. Finally, he appears into the room where Bentham is comfortably seated with all the verbal courtesy of Juno. Johnny also is asked to join the company to hear the "great news" to be announced soon by Bentham. However, as preparatory to the coming of something big to the family Mrs. Boyle tries to praise her son Johnny for "having done his bit for Ireland," which eventually ends with her satiric commentary on the hollowness and futility of ideology in the context of practical existence: "Ay, you lost your best principle,

14. Ibid., p.27.

me boy, when you lost your arm; them's the only sort o' principles that's any good to a workin' man."¹⁵ Comically Boyle feels that the "great news" is perhaps related to some job that his wife has arranged for him. Hence he prefaces his arrival with a complaint about a "terrible pain" in his leg. However, the pains are forgotten when the "great news" broken to him is about a substantial legacy left to him by a distant relative of his. The will was prepared by Bentham and hence its veracity is unquestionable. At the prospect of "a fortune," forthcoming to the family, the entire family is excited and jubilant. Boyle's attitude undergoes an instant transformation which is indicated by his Hamlet-like brooding over the mortality of man and by his sneering rejection of Joxer who will not fit in with him in his new situation of economic elevation. The first Act ends with a mock apotheosis of Boyle: "I'm a new man from this out..."

As the second Act opens, we see that the legacy announced in the last Act has considerably changed the appearance of Boyles' tenement. "The furniture is more plentiful" and "every available spot is ornamented with huge vases filled with artificial flowers." The room has other props, like a table lamp, symbolical of economic status. The changed style of living is most noticeable in Boyle's attitude to different people and ideologies. He now patronizes his old buddy from a superior position. "As a man o' money" he pretends to have become "responsible." Charity seems to be a natural outcome of the new affluence which is yet to come; he gives

15. Ibid., p.31.

"five bob" to Joxer as a tip for doing nothing and promises him more generous bounty in the future. The rumour of Boyle's legacy has changed the attitude of society towards him. The clergies and the feudals alike now pay him respect in recognition of his social standing. To reciprocate their respects to him, Boyle also changes his attitude of disdain at the clerics and the nationalists: he says, "I don't like any one to talk disrespectful of Father Farrell." It is the same Father Farrell who was portrayed by Boyle in the last Act as a deceitful and conspiring exploiter. Boyle's high-flown talk of nationalism and respect for religion sounds comically hollow because of his own ignorance about the general state of affairs in Ireland, for which he has always had only one cliché expression — Ireland is in a state of "chassis." Boyle can now have "a quiet jar" instead of stealthily slipping into cheap pubs. Boyle's room now is cluttered up with furniture in vulgar taste and festoons in loud colours. To add to all this, a gramophone has just been brought in by Juno so that Boyle, "the master of the house" may have moments of relaxation and entertain people in a more congenial environment.

The initial situation of Act II is that of a celebration party where Bentham is going to be the chief guest. Boyle, in recognition of Bentham's gratitude, would welcome him in a real ceremonial manner: he says "it's a pity there's not a brass band to play him in." Eventually Bentham arrives amid applause of welcome from the Boyles. To conform to the traditional social convention of etiquette and gossip, people claiming higher social status, must talk of things of larger interest or abstract

philosophical ideas. Boyle, without any awareness of his ignorance, talks of inflation, the role of religion in the betterment of people's lot, etc. Contrasted with Boyle's ill-digested ideas is Bentham's theosophic elaboration of the values of life and the philosophy of the "Life-Breath" in a language which confirms his intellectual and linguistic sophistry. While these conversations are going on, Johnny feels terribly uneasy at the mention by Bentham of killing a person in the context of a discussion about the existence of ghosts. Johnny's conscience is shockingly jolted and he rushes into his room only to see there, to his breath-taking terror, the ghost of Tancred with "wouns bleedin' in his breast.... Oh, why did he look at me like that?" The company assembled there try to dismiss Johnny's vision as a figment of "an over-wrought imagination" but Johnny alone knows the truth of the questioning stare at him by Tancred's ghost. The only shelter for him is the votive light near the statue.

Before we proceed to summarise the rest of the Act, it is relevant to comment upon some of the points which have emerged from the above analysis of the situation. Boyle's talk of charity, nationalism and the high place which religion should be accorded, is in fact O'Casey's satirical commentary on something which is not only Irish in its relevance but has a wider application. That is that high-flown talk of ideals is the prerogative of people who are rich and have not to struggle for livelihood. Juno, who never talked in the first Act about anything except how to keep her family going, is now a participant in discussion about theosophy, "Yoga," and the principle of "Prawna." Even the penniless Joxer can now

chime in with the views of the new-rich. The second point is Bentham's sophistry, accomplishment and apparent good and moral nature. As we will see later, Bentham proves to be a cheat and immoral intruder upon innocent life. O'Casey has deliberately elaborated upon the superficial brilliance of Bentham in this Act so that his later deceitful behaviour appears truly despicable. In fact, "Bentham can be seen as the representative of those ills which afflict the Boyles, and Tancreds and all other in the tenement."¹⁶

While the conversation, commented upon above, is in full swing, only interrupted temporarily by Johnny's terrible vision, as if to complete his portrait gallery, O'Casey arranges the appearance of Mrs. Madigan, "a woman who, in manner at least, can mourn with them that mourn, and rejoice with them that do rejoice. She is ignorant, vulgar and forward, but her heart is generous withal. For instance, she would help a neighbour's sick child; she would probably kill the child, but her intention would be to cure it." Mrs. Madigan has come to share the pleasures of the celebration to mark the occasion of the legacy forthcoming to the Boyle family. She is talkative even to the extent of overdoing it and is full of spirits. In her congratulations to the family on the newly arrived happiness she talks nostalgically more about her own past than about the happy situation of her hosts. The party further warms up after

16. Seumas Deane, "Irish Politics and O'Casey's Theatre," in Thomas Kilroy, ed., Sean O'Casey: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1975), p.151.

the company have taken a few drops of alcoholic drinks. Mrs. Madigan, Joxer, Juno and Mary sing romantic songs to enliven the atmosphere which was somewhat overcast with Johnny's nervous terror at the sight of Tancred's ghost. Before the finale of the frenzied merry-making is reached, there is an interposition of sadness brought to our view by the funeral procession of Mrs. Tancred's son's dead body.

How prosperity can blunt human sympathies is discernible in Juno's completely forgetting about the procession, and the bringing of Tancred's dead body to the church that night. As the procession is being prepared, the company assembled at the Boyles look at the sight, as it were from a vantage point, through the window. The conversation between the neighbour and the bereaved mother can clearly be heard by the company assembled for the carousing. Mrs. Tancred's mourning is a bitter satire on the pride of nationalism:

FIRST NEIGHBOUR. It's a sad journey we're goin' on, but God's good, an' the Republicans won't be always down.

Mrs. TANCREDE. Ah, what good is that to me now? Whether they're up or down — it won't bring me darlin' boy from the grave.

FIRST NEIGHBOUR. Still an' all, he died a noble death, an' we'll bury him like a king.

Mrs. TANCREDE. An' I'll go on livin' like a pauper. Ah, what's the pains I suffered bringin' him into the world to carry him to his cradle, to the pains I'm sufferin' now, carryin' him out o' the world to bring him to his grave.¹⁷

17. Juno and the Paycock, pp. 53-54.

Mrs. Tancred's threnody is both moving and a satirical whip on cruelty and selfishness:

Me home is gone now; he was me only child, an' to think that he was lyin' for a whole night stretched out on the side of a lonely counthry lane, with his head, his darlin' head, that I often kissed an' fondled, half hidden in the wather of a runnin' brook. An' I'm told he was the leadher of the ambush where me nex' door neighbour, Mrs. Mannin', lost her Free State soldier son. An' now here's the two of us oul' women, standin' one on each side of a scales o' sorra, balanced be the bodies of our two dead darlin' sons. (Mrs. Madigan returns, and wraps a shawl around her.) Mother o' God, Mother o' God have pity on the pair of us!... O Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets. When me darlin' son was riddled with bullets!... Sacred Heart of the Crucified Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone... an' give us hearts o' flesh!... Take away this murdherin' hate... an' give us Thine own eternal love!¹⁸

Juno's evaluation of the sad situation and Boyle's unfeeling commentary on the occasion, point to the dehumanising effect which a little affluence can bring on the people:

Mrs. BOYLE. In wan way, she deserves all she got; for lately, she let th' Die-hards make an open house of the place; an' for the last couple of months, either when th' sun was risin' or when th' sun was settin', you had C.I.D. men burstin' into your room, assin' you where were you born, where were you christened, where were you married, an' where would you be buried!

BOYLE. We've nothin' to do with these things, one way or t' other. That's the Government's business, an' let them do what we're paying them for doin'.¹⁹

18. Ibid., pp. 54-55.

19. Ibid., pp. 55-56.

Juno's dismissing the whole sad event as something quite normal and logical, not in philosophic terms but in the context of the current political situation, appears inhuman and is calculated to intensify her own grief later in a similar situation. Her words in this context are as follows:

I'd like to know how a body's not to mind these things; look at the way they're after leavin' the people in this very house. Hasn't the whole house, nearly, been massacred? There's young Dougherty's husband with his leg off; Mrs. Travers that had her son blew up be a mine in Inchegeela, in Co. Cork; Mrs. Mannin' that lost wan of her sons in ambush a few weeks ago, an' now, poor Mrs. Tancred's only child gone west with his body made a collander of. Sure, if it's not our business, I don't know whose business it is.²⁰

The poignant situation, being somewhat casually dismissed, the company resume their singing and drinking. The singing significantly ends with Boyle's own song written by him which does not have much meaning and is hardly conducive to any rhythmic sense. Joxer's and Mrs. Madigan's praise of the song is in the strain of the general comic impact of the whole situation. Finally, as the newly-bought gramophone is pressed into operation to play a popular tune, the dirge on Tancred's death is heard at a distance. Nugent intervenes in the midst of rejoicing and tries to put the company to shame for their unfeeling attitude to the funeral:

Are yous goin' to have that thing bawlin' an' the funeral of Mrs. Tancred's son passin' the house? Have none of yous any respect for the Irish people's National regard for the dead?²¹

20. Ibid., p.56.

21. Ibid., p.58.

But Nugent's own hollowness of idealism is ruthlessly exposed by Mrs. Madigan:

We don't want you, Mr. Nugent, to teach us what we learned at our mother's knee. You don't look yourself as if you were dyin' of grief; if y'ass Maisie Madigan anything, I'd call you a real throe Die-hard an' live-soft Republican, attendin' Republican funerals in the day, an' stoppin' up half the night makin' suit for the Civic Guards!²²

The company again hussle their faces through the window to have a glimpse of the funeral procession, the attitude towards which is most effectively brought out with savage humour in Joxer's last utterance in the Act: "Oh, it's a darlin' funeral, a darlin' funeral!" Mrs. Madigan's reaction, which also includes the reaction of Boyle, is one of entertainment rather than of sharing neighbourly grief: "W'd have a betther view from the street" — as if the whole thing for them is a source of visual entertainment.

As if to work out a nemesis without delay on Boyles' culpable attitude to the Tancred affair, O'Casey ends the Act by bringing in the Mobilizer who commands Johnny to attend a meeting to face an inquest on the betrayal of Commandant Tancred in the ambush which took his life. Johnny knows his fate and shrieks in terror:

I won't go! Haven't I done enough for Ireland! I've lost me arm, an' me hip's destroyed so that I'll never be able to walk right agen! Good God, haven't I done enough for Ireland?²³

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., p.60.

To this the Mobilizer opposes his ominously threatening reply: "Boyle, no man can do enough for Ireland!" Significantly the dirge can be heard towards the end of the Act which is both ominous — foretelling of a similar fate to Johnny — and satirical on the present snugness of Juno and Boyle.

Two months have elapsed between Acts II and III. Bentham is reported to have gone away to England and nothing has been heard from him since we met him in the celebration party in the preceding Act. Mary continues protesting the sincerity of her love for him and suspects that Bentham's unaccountable withdrawal is perhaps because he did not like the Boyles' informality and connections with lower class people, like Joxer and Mrs. Madigan, who did not show any sophisticated behaviour in the carousing party. Juno blames her husband for encouraging such a company. The action now moves at a faster speed until the final catastrophe. Mary feels a little pulled down and the mother decides to get her checked by a doctor. As the shopping spree of the family has been going on without the legacy having actually arrived, they are in great debts. Juno, in her complacent attitude to her situation, did not think it proper to have a check on her husband's free spending on items of luxury and drinks. On the contrary, she quite relished it as an insignia of social respectability and uppishness.

It is discovered that Mary is expecting a baby which has been immorally fathered by Bentham. Before this news is brought home a lot of troubled water has already flown under the bridge. The rumour that the legacy is not coming at all has been confirmed

among the people as a fact. Creditors, therefore, have started coming to the Boyles to realize their dues. Nugent, the tailor, takes away the unpaid-for suit that he had made for Boyle for formal wearing. Joxer, the Captain's buddy, derives malicious pleasure out of Boyle's embarrassment and loss of face. Though a devil himself, Joxer preaches Boyle, "Ah, him that goes a borrowin' goes a sorrowin'!" Joxer's attitude to the tree (Boyle) on which he acted as a parasite is positively cruel and sadistic, and his laboured comicality only intensifies his despicable character. Similarly, Mrs. Madigan, too, appears unsympathetic to Boyle once she finds him in an economic soup. She takes away the unpaid-for gramophone in lieu of the money she had lent Boyle to spend on drinks and the entertainment for himself and his neighbours, like her, when the news of legacy had become public. As Mrs. Madigan goes off with the gramophone she expresses malicious satisfaction at the imminent ruin of the Boyles:

You're not goin' to be swankin' it like a paycock with Maisie Madigan's money — I'll pull some o' th' gorgeous feathers out o' your tail.²⁴

Madigan's inhumanity to Boyle's pathetic predicament is explainable only with the reference to her being essentially a selfish woman.

After the humiliation mentioned above, Boyle is going to have a heavier dose of shock when Juno tells that Mary is betrayed by Bentham in the most beastly manner. Boyle's initial reaction to

24. Ibid., p.71.

Mary's undoing is father-like and human. He declares that he would bring Bentham back from England and make him do justice to Mary by marrying her. But immediately he changes his stand and disowns Mary and abandons her to whatever lot she decides to take up. Johnny, too, forgetting his own immorality takes Mary to task: "She should be dhruven out o' th' house she's brought disgrace on!" There is only one faint hope which sustains the much wrecked-down Juno: the money of the legacy may enable her to migrate to some other place where Mary's disgrace will not be a matter of public scandal. But Juno's troubles are not going to be over that easily. Boyle declares that he knew it quite some time ago that the will was "a wash-out" and "the boyo that's afther doin' it to Mary done it to me as well." Boyle's irresponsibility, combined with his inhumanity to Mary, makes his character appear truly repulsive. Even though he had known earlier about the reality of the legacy, he continued borrowing for boosing. Such a person talking of moral lapse in Mary and a general lack of morality in the society — "is there not even a middlin' honest man left in the' world?" — is O'Casey's direct target of satirical lashing.

The remaining action of the play works out Mrs. Boyle's pathetic exclamation, "is me throubles never goin' to be over?" Juno has all her life been struggling in keeping her home together. Then one trouble after the other started coming. And the heaviest stroke so far has been the legacy which was their economic undoing and the undoing of Mary. Before the final catastrophe is brought in, O'Casey brings in a situation which tantalizes the family into

some new hope. Jerry Devine, thinking that because of the economic ruin Mary has been abandoned by Bentham, comes forward to accept Mary's hand as a continuation of his earlier love for her. But his "humanity is just as narrow as the humanity of the others." He withdraws his offer when he learns that Mary "has fallen as low as that." Mary exposes Jerry by reciting the lines which Jerry had once done while lecturing on "Humanity's Strif with Nature." But the words of the verses fall flat on his ears and he goes away.

While the rest of the furniture is being removed for non-payment, "The votive light flickers for a moment, and goes out." The ominous symbolism of the votive light's going out is casually explained by the furniture dealer's men, "The oil's all gone, that's all." It appears as if the visitation of some unknown force of nemesis has taken place where the redeeming divine grace has been withdrawn. Johnny 'agonisingly cries' with "feelin' a pain in his breast, like the tearin' by of a bullet." It appears that the paraphernalia of complete ruin has been finalized and only the final doom is to be pronounced. There is complete destitution — economic, human and divine. Against this background "Two Irregulars enter swiftly" and carry Johnny to the altar of namesis for his betrayal of his own companion and friend, Mr. Tancred. His pathetic supplication to the Irregulars for sparing his life in recognition of the past services he rendered to Ireland is drowned in the Irregulars' accusation against him of betrayal. It appears as if the fate of Johnny, Mary and the utter inhuman irresponsibility of Boyle are the strokes calculated to demolish Juno, like

DS 14.23

a heroic figure, rises to the occasion to face the final debacle in her life with courage and balance of mind. Mrs. Madigan's hesitation in breaking the news of Johnny's death draws Mrs. Boyle's assertion like this:

Don't keep me waitin' Mrs. Madigan; I've gone through so much lately that I feel able for anything.²⁵

Juno now realizes the pang of loss of a son which she tried to explain away when Mrs. Tancred was mournfully following the procession of her son. She repeats the lines of Mrs. Tancred in a truly repentant vein:

May be I didn't feel sorry enough for Mrs. Tancred when her poor son was found as Johnny's been found now — because he was a Die-hard! Ah, why didn't I remember that then he wasn't a Die-hard or a Stater, but only a poor dead son! It's well I remember all that she said — an' it's my turn to say it now: What was the pain I suffered, Johnny, bringin' you into the world to carry you to your cradle, to the pains I'll suffer carryin' you out o' the world to bring you to your grave! Mother o' God, Mother o' God, have pity on us all! Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets? Sacred Heart o' Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone, and give us hearts o' flesh! Take away this murdherin' hate, an' give us Thine own eternal love!²⁶

All props of Juno have been removed but she is determined to live for the sake of the new life that is going to come into existence in the form of Mary's baby. The baby will regretably have no

25. Ibid., p.85.

26. Ibid., p.87.

father but Juno declares, "it'll have what's far better — it'll have two mothers." After the final and complete destruction of the family has taken place, Juno goes on a journey for a new life in a better world, treading on the debris of her ruin. The play ends with the return of Joxer and Boyle fully drunk, staggering on an empty stage and muttering incoherently about the "terrible state o' Chassis." "The empty room is a result of the realistic action of the play, but it also serves as a visual symbol of the effect of political and social chaos on the family and the wider community."²⁷ But as our analysis of the play above has demonstrated the Juno and the Paycock is a tale of suffering more on account of "human stupidity," cruelty and even bestiality, than on account of anything else. The war background of the play only contributes to the gloom and grimness in human life on account of lack of human sympathies among themselves and not as a direct cause of human miseries.

27. Nesta Jones, Sean O'Casey and Expressionism, (Chadwyck-Healey, Cambridge, 1988), p.18.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS

Thematically The Plough and the Stars is connected with the other two plays, The Shadow of a Gunman and Juno and the Paycock, we have analysed in the preceding chapters. All the three Dublin plays are "pacifist plays in which the main characters are not the National heroes actually engaged in the fighting but the non-combatants in a city under military siege..."¹ and all of them have a war background.

The canvas of The Plough and the Stars is further widened. Here it is not the catastrophe of an individual, or sufferings of a whole family, but the destructive grip of war upon a whole city which is the subject-matter. The city can very well be taken as representative of a macrocosmic chaos resulting not so much from war or the indifference of God but from what Mrs. Tancred and Juno had said "the stupidity of men." The background of the play is the Easter Rising of 1916 when the Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers were united against the British Government. There was a bloody fight in the streets and houses. The rebels were being executed. As in the other two preceding plays, in this play, too, O'Casey shows us the impact of war on the life of the civilians who actually did not take part in the war.²

As the title of the play suggests, it may appear to lead one to think that it is about political ideas, but, as our analysis

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1. David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work (Collier Books, New York, 1962), p.94.
 2. The attitude of the common Dubliner to war has been discussed by C. Desmond Greaves, Sean O'Casey: Politics and Art (Lawrence and Wishort, London, 1979), p.120.

below will demonstrate, the play deals with human emotions and feelings which are crossed by extrinsic idealogy. The preceding play (Juno and the Paycock) deals with the catastrophe of a family. The present play deals with the catastrophe of a whole society, or nation represented by Dublin. The participants in the action of the play, like those in the other two plays, are working-class people — brick-layer, labourer, fitter, charwoman, carpenter, etc. The main story of the play is rather scanty, though the play runs into four acts. The main events centre round the Clitheroe family, and there, too, Nora, the young wife of Jack Clitheroe. The ruin of Nora's life is the central strain of the plot. Jack Clitheroe's rejoining the Irish Citizen Army for his undigested nationalistic idealism and for the satisfaction of his ego to show off, is the chief cause of suffering in the play. Though the portrayal of characters is neat and distinctly marked, the main dramatic focus is on the general state of affairs in the city of Dublin which is torn into pieces by the impact of the war of independence. As it is clear in all the plays of O'Casey the terror and destruction brought about by war, for whatever cause, meets with satiric disapproval by the dramatist.

Unlike the other two plays, the locale of the action in The Plough and the Stars, in order to meet the demands of an expanded canvas, is not one single place but is spread over the four acts in four different places. Since in this play O'Casey's chief concern is presentation of life on a larger canvas, not much action takes place in the first and second Acts. The only significant "event"

is Jack Clitheroe's rejoining the Irish Citizen Army. The rest of the dramatic space is taken up by presentation of different characters through verbal medium of discussion, altercation, songs etc. The play opens in "the house of the Clitheroes in a Dublin tenement." The look of "the livingroom of the Clitheroe flat" gives an impression of a workingclass family trying to acquire some sophistication and gentility of middle class living. "The room is furnished in a way that suggests an attempt towards a finer expression of domestic life with candle sticks of dark carved wood on the mantelshelf," "small clock," "a calender displaying a picture of the sleeping Venus," "a picture of Robert Emmet," "a green bowl filled with scarlet," "a huge cavalry sword lying on top of the table," etc. A new lock is being fitted by the carpenter, Fluther Good, to enable Nora to have some privacy in the noisy tenement.

The opening conversation between Fluther and Mrs. Gogan (a charwoman from the neighbourhood), brings out the significance of Nora's attempt to live in a style different from that of her neighbours. Mrs. Gogan's commentary on Nora's "notions of uppurity," because of her style of dress and interior decoration of her living room, appears to smack of jealousy and is a reaction to Nora's disdain of tenement life Mrs. Gogan in her unrestrained garrulity gives us a full description of the Nora household. Nora's uncle, Peter Flynn, and her husband's cousin, the young Covey, live in the same apartment. We also learn that Peter "an' th' Covey can't abide each other; the pair o' them is always at it, thryin' to beat each other. There'll be blood dhrrawn one o' these days."

A portrayal of Jack Clitheroe is also given with sufficient satiric salt. Clitheroe has now left the Citizen Army where he was always proud of his association with it: "A couple o' months ago, an' you'd hardly ever see him without his gun, and' Red Hand o' Liberty Hall in his hat." The reason for his giving up the Citizen Army is given by Mrs. Gogan:

Just because he wasn't made a Captain of. He wasn't goin' to be in any thing where he couldn't be conspishuous. He was so cocksure o' being made one that he bought a Sam Browne belt, an' was always puttin' it on an' standin' at th' door showing it off, till th' man came an' put out th' street lamps on him. God, I think he used to bring it to bed with him!³

But as we will see later he used his frustration as a pretext to convince Nora that it was because of his love for her that he left the Citizen Army.

The first reference to the main dramatic concern comes from Fluther's comment on Peter's fidgety movements in the room next to the living room:

He's adornin' himself for th' meeting to-night. (pulling a handbill from his pocket and reading) 'Great Demonstration an' torchlight procession around places in th' city sacred to th' memory of Irish patriots, to be concluded be a meetin', at which will be taken an oath of fealty to th' Irish Republic. Formation in Parnell Square at eight o' clock."⁴

3. Sean O'Casey, The Plough and the Stars, p.166.

4. Ibid., pp.165-6.

Mrs. Gogan's conversation with Fluther is not all dramatically relevant. It can be justified only to prove that she is unnecessarily talkative and belongs to the class of characters who bother more about others' affairs than about their own. Her elaboration, for example, of her love of sad spectacles is not well integrated with the opening situation of the play which is in the nature of a conventional exposition. However, Gogan, who occupies considerable space in the initial situation of the play, has a choric function. But her choric introductions and commentaries tend to be undramatically verbose. In this context it is relevant to recall that O'Casey's claim that "The Plough is his best play" refers not to its structural precision but to his grasp of human vision.⁵

A theatrical pretext is provided by the sound of the "clang of tools" on the street which brings the sudden exit of the inquisitive Mrs. Gogan and gives the dramatist an opportunity to proceed to work out some of the details of Mrs. Gogan's choric commentaries into action:

There is heard a cheer from the men working outside on the street, followed by the clang of tools being thrown down, then silence. The glare of the gasoline light diminishes and finally goes out.⁶

Mrs. Gogan gets ready to go out to satisfy her curiosity about what was happening outside. The Covey enters soon after. "He is a tall,

5. An Interview with Saros Cowasjee published in The Illustrated Weekly of India, May 17, 1959.

6. The Plough and the Stars, p.169.

thin man with lines on his face that form perpetual protest against life as he conceives it to be." The Covey explains to Mrs. Gogan what is going to happen in the city, which throws light on his attitude to the political activities as well as on the future course of events:

THE COVEY (with contempt). Th' job's stopped. They've been mobilized to march in th' demonstration to-night undher th' Plough an' th' Stars. Didn't you hear them cheerin', th' mugs! They have to renew their political baptismal vows to be faithful in seculo seculorum.⁷

Fluther taking the Covey too literally and missing the metaphoric implication of his expression, objects to his statement:

There's no reason to bring religion into it. I think we ought to have as great a regard for religion as we can, so as to keep it out of as many things as possible.⁸

Fluther's faith in and allegiance to religion is as superficial and even hypocritical as was the case with Seumas in The Shadow of a Gunman. He feels morally shocked at the sight of the picture of "The Sleeping Venus" in Nora's room, but as we see later he does not hesitate in entertaining a prostitute. The Fluther-Covey conversation about the forthcoming procession of the Irish Citizen Army and its supporters turns out to be a bitter altercation when the Covey tries to expose Fluther's ignorance of higher things like Marxism, the symbolism of the flag and the Stars. The relationship between the Covey and Peter is next taken up for dramatic presentation.

7. Ibid., p.170.

8. Ibid.

The two get so crossed to each other that Peter draws a sword "an' makes for the Covey, who dodges him around the table." The chaos created by the Covey's and Peter's quarrel is checked at its explosive point by the sudden appearance of Nora on the scene. She reprimands both for their uncivilized behaviour in a house to which Nora has been trying to bring some respectability. The Covey-Peter animosity which continues from beginning to the end is in a farcical vein. Peter feels insulted and gets annoyed at the slightest verbal insinuation by the Covey.

The process of dramatic exposition continues as three more important characters in the play are introduced. As the disturbance, created by Peter and the Covey, is controlled by Nora, Bessie Burgess, a fruit-vendor and a neighbour, forces her entry into Nora's room. She is drunk and determined to fight with Nora without any provocation. As Bessie engages Nora in a physical scuffle and Nora is frightened to death, her husband, Jack Clitheroe arrives. He pushes Bessie out of his room. Bessie Burgess is a woman who is a strong believer in religion and thinks that the only worthwhile battle to be fought is the one for religion.

Before the action of the play is made to move in a serious direction Peter appears fully dressed up for the proposed Citizen Army meeting. The externals of Peter are calculated to bring a comic effect:

He is in full dress of the Foresters: green coat, gold braided; white breeches, top boots, filled shirt. He carries the slouch hat, with the white ostrich plume, and the sword in his hands.⁹

9. Ibid., p.180.

As Peter goes out and the Covey also leaves the living-room, Nora and Clitheroe get some privacy. It is Nora's birthday and the couple settle down to a stock-taking of the few months of their married life. Clitheroe keeps protesting his love for Nora because of which he has left the Citizen Army. But Nora knows that it was his frustration at not being made a captain that he left the Citizen Army. However, Clitheroe declares that he is all for Nora and would not be interested any longer in any political ambition. An idyllic scene of courtship ensues when Clitheroe sings to Nora a love song and the couple seem to be completely cut off from the world of toil, strife and struggle. It is at this climactic moment of their conjugal happiness that "a knock is heard at the door" and Captain Brennan of the Irish Citizen Army appears on the scene. A letter of appointment as the Commandant of the I.C.A. had already been delivered at Clitheroe's place about a fortnight ago. But Nora, knowing her husband's egotistical nature and his ambition of public recognition, had burnt the letter. Now Captain Brennan has brought the duty schedule, "a dispatch from General Connolly" which immediately transforms the Clitheroe of a few moments ago. He chides his wife for her trying to hold him from his patriotic ambitions, and rejecting her supplicating caresses, gets ready to go out immediately. The San Brown Belt, which has been waiting for quite some time, is picked up quickly and in the sudden fulfilment of his egotistical dream Nora's emotional arguments for the claim of family life is ruthlessly ignored:

Is General Connolly an' th' Citizen Army goin' to be your only care? Is your home goin' to be only a place to rest in? Am I

goin' to be only somethin' to provide merry-makin' at night for you? Your vanity'll be th' ruin of you an' me yet That's what's movin' you: because they've made an officer of you, you'll make a glorious cause of what you're doin', while your little red-lipp'd Nora can go on sittin' here, makin' a companion of th' loneliness of th' night!¹⁰

Thus the action is given a solid movement, and by the end of the Act, the exposition, by way of introducing all the characters, is completed by the appearance of Mollser, the consumptive child of Mrs. Gogan. She has come to Nora to take a shelter in her room against the dread of loneliness and her fear that she might "die sometime when I'm be meself." As Nora is sitting in a sad, contemplative mood after her husband has gone away from home, the nostalgic soldier's song of home coming is heard outside in the street, which underscores, in a satirical manner, the futility of war in general:

It's a long way to Tipperary, it's a long way to go;
It's a long way to Tipperary, to the sweetest girl I know!
Goodbye Piccadilly, farewell Leicester Square.
It's a long, long way to Tipprary, but my heart's right there!¹¹

The drunken commentary on the scene outside the tenement comes from Bessie Burgess:

There's th' men marchin' out into th' dhread dimness o' danger while th' lice is crawlin' about feedin' on th' fatness o' the land! But yous'll not escape from th' arrow that flieth be night, or th' sickness that wasteth be day.... An' ladyship an' all, as some o' them may be, they'll be scattered abroad, like th' dust in the darkness!¹²

10. Ibid., p.189.

11. Ibid., p.191.

12. Ibid.

The Act ends with a bitter satiric summary of the situation in Mollser's casual and innocent query: "Is there anybody goin', Mrs. Clitheroe, with a tither o' sense?"

The locale of Act II is "a commodious public-house at the corner of the street in which the meeting is being addressed from Platform No.1." In the pub there, Rosie, a prostitute, and the Barman are conversing about poeple's mad attraction to the meeting and their excitement at the heroic exhortations of the speaker who is seen only in a silhouette. Rosie is grumbling about people's stupidity in neglecting the natural pleasures of life in favour of their foolish nationalistic enthusiasm. This is because her clientage that evening is affected by a change in people's mood:

There isn't much notice taken of a pretty petticoat of a night like this.... They're all in a holy mood. Th' solemn-lookin' dials on the whole o' them an' they, marchin' to th' meetin'. You'd think they were the' glorious company of th' saints, an' th' noble army of martyrs thrampin' through the sthreets of paradise. They're all thinkin' of higher things than a girl's garters.¹³

Rosie's choice of the 'immoral profession' is the result of economic compulsion. But ironically her complaint of economic hardship is cut short by the rhetoric of the speaker outside the pub:

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

13. Ibid., p.193.

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!¹⁴

In a very effective manner O'Casey presents two situations simultaneously. The one situation is of Rosie wailing for a client to earn her day's living—a harsh truth of life. The other situation is the high-sounding words of the speaker which give out only abstract promises. The irony is that these words have an electrifying effect upon the hearers who are all from the poverty-stricken working-class and need to concern themselves more with earning their livelihood than listening to the platitudes of a public speaker. The following stage direction is a satiric commentary upon the frenzying effect of nationalism or any such idealism:

Peter and Fluther enter tumultuously. They are hot, and full and hasty with the things they have seen and heard. Emotion is bubbling up in them, so that when they drink, and when they speak, they drink and speak with the fullness of emotional passion .¹⁵

Peter-Fluther conversation, while they are drinking, is full of heat and excitement. So long as Fluther keeps on getting replenishment to his glass of drink, he echoes Peter's enthusiasm for martyrdom for Ireland. The enthusiasm of these people is generated more by the heat of the spirits than by any strongly-felt conviction.¹⁶

14. Ibid., pp.193-4.

15. Ibid., p.194.

16. Ibid., pp.194-5.

As if to confirm the comic hollowness of their patriotic assertion the resounding voice of the silhouetted speaker is heard a second time:

Comrade soldiers of the Irish Volunteers and the Citizen Army, we rejoice in this terrible war. The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battle fields Such august homage was never offered to God as this: the homage of millions of lives given gladly for love of country. And we must be ready to pour out the same red wine in the same glorious sacrifice, for without shedding of blood there is no redemption!¹⁷

The call for sacrifice is too tempting to be ignored. "This is too good to be missed," says Fluther and goes out to have a glimpse of the whole show.

The Covey, who is the mouthpiece of the author expresses the opposite reaction to the political struggle. His response to the meeting as contrasted to that of Fluther and Peter is one of indignation and disgust:

Give us a glass o' malt, for God's sake, till I stimulate meself from th' shock o' seein' th' sight that's afther goin' out!¹⁸

He wants to discuss his point of view with someone who could share his perceptions of the reality of the whole movement for national struggle for the independence of Ireland:

What's th' use o' freedom, if it's not economic freedom?.... There's only one freedom for th' workin' man: Conthrol o' th' means o' production, rates of exchange, an' th' means of distribution.¹⁹

17. Ibid., pp.195-6.

18. Ibid., p. 196.

19. Ibid., p. 197.

Unfortunately the participant in his discussion happens to be Rosie, looking for a client in her bleak evening. On being offered free drinks Rosie does chime in with the Covey for a brief moment. But soon she advises the Covey to be more realistic and practical about the affairs of life:

If y'ass Rosie, it's heartbreakin' to see a young fella thinkin' of anything, or admirin' anything, but silk thransparent stockin's showin' off the shape of a little lassie's legs!²⁰

The Covey, who, "never held a mot's hand, and wouldn't know how to tittle a little Judy," naturally feels frightened and moves away from her. Rosie's frustration with the Covey and other people's indifference to her, elicits her angry commentary on the general state of affairs in the Catholic Puritanical Ireland:

Jasus, it's in a monasthery some of us ought to be, spendin' our holidays kneelin' on our adorers, tellin' our beads, an' knockin' hell out of our buzzums!²¹

Before the voice of the speaker is heard again, O'Casey brings the people who inhabit his dramatic world into the pub where another type of drama of fighting and struggle, at the lower level of life, is prepared. The snake-and-mangoose relationship of the Covey and Peter was already shown in the last Act. As soon as they encounter each other in the pub the Covey tries to tease Peter who, being deliberately "twarted" by the Covey, starts fuming with anger and remorse. Fluther, who has already had a few drinks at Peter's expense, tries to intervene in the quarrel. But Peter's childish

20. Ibid., p.198.

21. Ibid.

bravado puts even Fluther off. Peter feels that the more one visits places where nationalist martyr's are buried the more patriotic one will be taken to be. As if to add momentum and heat to the ongoing quarrel, Bessie Burgess puts in her entry into the pub. Bessie's problem is that she wants a fight to be concerned with the Catholic religion and so far as the British presence in Ireland is concerned she is perfectly at peace with it. She says, "I can't for th' life o' me undherstand how they can call themselves Catholics, when they won't lift a finger to help poor little Catholic Belgium." Mrs. Gogan insinuates at her for her apathy and unpatriotic attitude to Ireland. Bessie and Mrs. Gogan altercate for sometime till they start mud-slinging at each other at the personal level. The climax of their altercation reaches at their menancingly getting ready to physically fight with each other. In the midst of this chaos at a lower level, the voice of the speaker, eulogizing war and heroism, is heard at a pitch higher than that reached by the two women's shouting at each other. The confusion created by this pandemonium is completed by the Covey's discordant note:

Dope, dope. There's only one war worth havin': th' war for th' economic emancipation of th' proletariat.²²

Peter seems to be caught in the midst of the confusion and appeals to Mrs. Gogan to end her quarrel. Peter's preaching sounds ironical as he himself is easily provoked by the Covey's most casual insinuations. "Before Peter is aware of it," Mrs. Gogan places her infant in his arms to physically fight with Bessie Burgess. When the

22. Ibid., p.203.

Barman pushes the two quarrelling women out of the pub "to settle their differences somewhere else," Peter is standing with Mrs. Gogan's infant, "plumped into his arms" which presents a comic spectacle. Mrs. Gogan does not care for her baby in the heat of settling her score with Bessie. Non-plussed, Peter goes out with the baby in his arms after the fighting females.

The pub is relatively quiet now and the outside excitement of the meeting seems to be coming to an end. But a fresh heat is generated from the heated discussion between Fluther and the Covey. The Covey tries to convince Fluther, against his superficial belief in the revolution, that the whole Irish struggle is a "blasted nonsense." To score his victory over Fluther, the Covey starts asking Fluther questions regarding "the mechanism of exchange," "the Relation of value to th' Cost o' production," etc. Rosie's intervening comment on the Covey's sense of intellectual "upperosity" is pertinent:

It seems a highly ridiculous thing to hear a thing that's only an inch or two away from a kid, swingin' heavy words about he doesn't know th' meanin' of, an' uppishly thryin' to down a man like Mистер Fluther here, that's well flavoured in th' knowledge of th' world he's livin' in.²³

When reprimanded by the Covey as a prostitute, Rosie's "wild" reply exposes the Covey's moral uprightness as hypocritical as his intellectual superiority and concern for the working class are:

You louse, you louse, you! ... You're no man.... You're no man... I'm a woman, anyhow, an' I'm a prostitute aself, I have

23. Ibid., p.209.

me feelin's.... Thryin' to put his arm around me a minute ago, an' givin' me th' glad eye, th' little wrigglin' lump o' desolation turns on me now, because he saw there was nothin' doin' You louse, you! If I was a man, or you were a woman, I'd bate th' puss o' you!²⁴

The Covey's obstinacy and Fluther's contemptuous attitude threaten a physical scuffle between them. But the Barman's intervention saves the situation from further deterioration. "He pushes the Covey to the door" and declares, "Fluther's a friend o' mine, an' I'll not have him insulted."

Now the pub is cleared of the peace-breakers. Fluther can brag to Rosie of his bravery and manliness. As Rosie would have it, "they go into the snug." While the sexual drama between Rosie and Fluther are taking place away from vision and the noisy tenement dwellers are altercating and fighting outside, the empty stage starts getting filled with the officials of the Irish Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers. Captain Brennan, Commandant Clitheroe and Lieutenant Lango appear on the stage with the banners of the Plough and the Stars. "They are in a state of emotional excitement. Their faces are flushed and their eyes sparkle; they speak rapidly, as if unaware of the meaning of what they said. They have been mesmerized by the fervency of the speeches."²⁵ They start drinking and conversing in a mood of excitement and heightened patriotism:

Capt. Brennan. We won't have long to wait now.

Lieut. Langon. Th' time is rotten ripe for revolution.

Clitheroe. You have a mother, Langon.

24. Ibid., p.210.

25. Ibid., p.213.

Lieut Langon. Ireland is greater than a mother.

Capt. Brennan. You have a wife, Clitheroe.

Clitheroe. Ireland is greater than a wife.

Lieut. Langon. Th' time for Ireland's battle is now--th' place
for Ireland's battle is here.²⁶

The momentum of excitement is capped by the final exhortation of the silhouetted figure. There is an unsparing satirical sting in O'Casey's mixing up the rhetoric of idealism, bereft of any touch with the reality of life and the cooing of gross sensual pleasure of Rosie and Fluther:

A bugle blows the Assembly. They hurry out. A pause. Fluther and Rosie come out of snug; Rosie is linking Fluther, who is a little drunk. Both are in a merry mood.²⁷

While the officer's voice giving command outside — "Irish Volunteers, by th' right, quick march!"—is heard, Rosie "putting her arm round Fluther," is heard singing a lascivious song. Act II of the The Plough and the Stars shows the deft handling of a master craftsman. Here, as our analysis above has demonstrated, we have the fullness and variety of life presented with a simultaneity of different events taking place in a way rarely encountered in modern drama.

The locale of action shifts back to the tenement dwelling. This time it is Mrs. Gogan's narrow apartment. She is discovered consoling her ailing child, Mollser, who seems to be irretrievably ill. Mrs. Gogan's concern for her child is devoid of any touch of sentimentality, which, combined with her behaviour with her baby

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., p.214.

in the pub in last scene, may give an impression of cruel irresponsibility. But if we put the different pieces of her altercation with Bessie together about her life of continuing misery since the death of her husband, our impression of her personality will certainly be different. Here is a woman who has been braving by herself the cruel odds of life where calamities are to be faced and accepted and sentimentalities have no place. Even though she knows that Mollser is terribly ill, she consoles her that she is improving.

The kalædoscöpic focus quickly moves from Gogan's personal miseries to those of Nora Clitheroe. Since Jack Clitheroe went out "to fight for Ireland" Nora has been running about on the streets to track him down and save him from the disaster which his mad patriotism is likely to lead him to. The revolution has started in a violent manner with shooting going on all night. Fluther has been running after Nora lest in the midst of shooting some harm should be done to her person. The Covey reports the situation on the street as follows:

Throttin' along, heads in th' air, spurs an' sabres jinglin',
an' lances quiverin', an' lookin' as if they were assin' them-
selves, "Where's these blighters, till we get a prod at them?"
When there was a volley from th' Post Office that stretched
half o' them, an' sent th' rest gallopin' away wondherin' how
far they'd have to go before they'd feel sage.²⁸

Except Bessie, who is satirically critical of the men-folk, who, in the words

28: Ibid., p.217.

of W.B. Yeats have desire for freedom without the courage to fight for it,²⁹ everybody else is concerned about Nora. We will have occasion for comments on Bessie's apparently sadistic attitude later. Peter is sceptical about Fluther's efforts because of his being "such a wild card." The anxious waiting of the well-wishing neighbours of Nora ends with her being physically escorted by Fluther on to the stage. Nora is completely exhausted in her search for her husband. To add to her miseries, people have been taunting her for her cowardice and lack of patriotism, which demands of her sacrifice of her natural human urges:

I could find him nowhere, Mrs. Gogan. None o' them would tell me where he was. They told me I shamed my husband an' th' women of Ireland be carryin' on as I was.... They said th' women must learn to be brave an' cease to be cowardly.... Me who risked more for love than they would risk for hate.... (Raising her voice in hysterical protest) My Jack will be killed, my Jack will be killed! ... He is to be butchered as a sacrifice to th' dead!³⁰

In the midst of Nora's desperation and prophetic bewailing, Bessie's comments appear rather inhuman:

Yous are all nicely shanghaied now! Sorra mend th' lasses that have been kissin' an' cuddlin' their boys into th' sheddin' of blood! ... Fillin' their minds with fairy tales that had no beginnin', but, please God, 'll have a bloody quick endin'!... Turnin' bitter into sweet, an' sweat into bitter.... Stabbin' in th' back th' men that are dyin' in th' threnches for them! It's a bad thing for any one that thries to jilt th' Ten-

29. "No Second Troy," Peter Allt and Russel K. Alspach, The variorum Edition of The Poems of W.B. Yeats eds., (Macmillan, New York, 1956), pp.256-7.

30. The Plough and the Stars, pp.219-20.

Commandments, for judgements are prepared for scorers an' sthripes for th' back o' fools! (Going away from window as she sings:)

Rule, Britannia, Britannia rules th' waves,
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!³¹

However, in the context of the entire situation of the play, the apparent despicable blabbing of Bessie appears full of bitter truth and has certainly the authorial endorsement. And this is supported by Nora's realistic attitude towards the whole frenzy of revolution against a mighty world power:

What do I care for th' others? I can think only of me own self.... An' there's no woman gives a son or a husband to be killed — if they say it, they're lyin', lyin', against God, Nature, an' against themselves!... One blasted hussy at a barricade told me to go home an' not be thryin' to dishearten the men.... That I wasn't worthy to bear a son to a man that was out fightin' for freedom.... I clawed at her, an' swashed her in th' face till we were separated.... I was pushed down th' street, an' I cursed them— cursed the rebel ruffians an' Volunteers that had dhragged me ravin' mad into th' sthreets to seek me husband!³²

The Covey's rejoinder to Nora's angry moaning sums up the whole reality about the revolution: "If they were fightin' for anything worthwhile, I wouldn't mind."

In Nora's raving there are already symptoms of insipient insanity. There is a resultant mixture of emotions of anger and pathos. As Nora is led by Mrs. Gogan into the other room, Bessie passes by, offering a mug of milk to Mollser silently and throwing a few satirical words on Fluther and Peter:

31. Ibid., p.220.

32. Ibid., pp.220-21.

You an' your Leadhers an' their sham-battle soldiers has landed a body in a nice way, havin' to go an' ferret out a bit o' bread God knows where.... Why aren't yous in th' G.P.O. if yous are men? It's paler an' paler yous are gettin'.... A lot o' vipers, that's what th' Irish people is!³³

To while away their idle time, Fluther and the Covey start playing the game of betting which is cut short by the "boom of a big gun" outside. The "boom" takes out all patriotism and talk of glory in martyrdom from the mind of Peter. While Peter is nervous at the apprehension of a shell landing on his head and the Covey and Fluther are busy tossing the Coins, "Bessie runs in excitedly. She has 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."³⁴

The confusion created by the shooting on the main street has given an opportunity to people to indulge in looting. A vivid picture of the drama now at a different level has been given by Bessie as follows:

They're breakin' into th' shops, they're breakin' into th' shops! Smashin' th' windows, batterin' in th' doors, an' whippin' away everythin'! An' th' Volunteers is firin' on them. I seen two men an' a lassie pushin' a piano down th' sthreet, an' th' sweat rollin' off them thryin' to get it up on th' pavement; an' an oul'wan that must ha' been seventy lookin' as if she'd dhrop every minute with th' dint o' heart beatin', thryin' to pull a big double bed out of a broken shop-window!³⁵

33. Ibid., pp.222-23.

34. Ibid., p.224.

35. Ibid.

Fluther and Peter get interested in having their share of the loot outside. But Peter is too frightened to venture to go out in the midst of shooting. His bravery and heroism will never encourage him to risk any danger to his life either for personal gain or for help to anyone. That is why the stranger woman, who has run to the tenement for safety, finds no readiness for help by Peter in escorting her to "pilot her in the direction" of her relatives. Peter frankly refuses to help the woman out: "D'ye think I'm goin' to risk me life throttin' in front of you?"

Bessie is not satisfied with the loot that she has brought home. She is looking for some bigger container which could hold a lot of things she proposes to loot from the shops. She quarrels bitterly with Mrs. Gogan to claim the pram that their neighbour had left there. Their quarrel covers altercation about all the subjects from personal accusation to lack of nationalism. However, they patch up their differences and, as a friendly compromise, decide to share the use of the pram between themselves. Peter, who inspite of his strong temptation, does not go out for fear of being shot, lashes at the Covey who "comes staggering in with a ten-stone sack of flour on his back.":

Makin' a shame an' a sin o' th' cause that good men are fightin' for.... Oh, God forgive th' people that, instead o' burnishin' th' work th' boys is doin' to-day with quiet honesty an' patience, is revilin' their sacrifices with a riot of lootin' an' roguery!³⁶

Peter's talk of nationalism to cover his own cowardice is well expressed by the Covey:

Isn't your own eyes leppin' out o' your head with envy that you haven't th' guts to ketch a few o' th' things that God is givin' to His chosen people?... Y' oul' hypocrite, if everyone was blind you'd steal a cross off an ass's back!³⁷

The Covey's and Peter's accusation of each other is interrupted when "Bessie and Mrs. Gogan enter, the pride of a great joy illuminating their faces. Bessie is pushing the pram, which is filled with clothes and boots; on the top of the boots and clothes is a fancy table, which Mrs. Gogan is holding on with her left hand, while with her right hand she holds a chair on the top of her head."³⁸ It is well to remember that Mrs. Gogan has left her baby in the lap of her ailing daughter as she had once left her in the lap of Peter in the last Act.

Contrasted with the situation of selfishness, cruelty and concern for the self is the situation of the "heroes" fighting for Ireland. "Captain Brennan comes in supporting Lieutenant Langon, whose arm is around Brennan's neck. Langon's face, which is ghastly white, is momentarily convulsed with spasm of agony. He is in a state of collapse, and Brennan is almost carrying him. After a few moments Clitheroe, pale, and in a state of calm nervousness, follows, looking back in the direction from which he came, a rifle, held at the ready, in his hands."³⁹ Brennan blames Clitheroe for firing over the heads of the crowd who were riotously indulging in the loot. Clitheroe in his reply to Brennan exposes the latter's mad nationalism: "No, no, Bill; bad as they are they're Irish men an' women." It is at this

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., p.231.

junction that "Nora rushes wildly out of the house and flings her arms round the neck of Clitheroe with a fierce and joyous insistence ... her eyes are agleam with the light of happy relief."⁴⁰ Clitheroe, realizing the danger he has put himself into, regrets his rejoining the Irish Citizen Army: "I wish to God I'd never left you." It is Bessie who offers the choric commentary on the "chicken heartedness" of the heroes who are afraid of losing their lives but who would not confess their fear.

Captain Brennan's taunt at Clitheroe's taking a shelter from danger into the security of his wife's arm, pricks his ego and he starts talking hypocritically of his loyalty to the national cause in terms of his allegiance to his comrades. Fearing for the smearing of his public image he brutally rejects his wife's appeal to remain home lest he should be called "a renegade." Lieutenant Langon needs medical help urgently. But going out in the midst of bullets from the British soldiers is certainly to throw oneself in the mouth of death. Brennan's taunting at Clitheroe's hesitation to go out in the danger is, in fact, a hypocritical trick to save his own life which is clearly perceived by Nora:

Nora (clinging to Clitheroe, and indicating Brennan). Look, Jack, look at th' anger in his face; look at th' fear glintin' in his eyes.... He himself's afraid, afraid, afraid!... He wants you to go th' way he'll have th' chance of death sthrikin' you an' missin' him! ... Turn round an' look at him, Jack look at him, look at him!... His very soul is cold... shiverin' with th' thought of what may happen to him.... It is his fear that is thryin' to frighten you from recognizin' th' same fear that's in your own heart!⁴¹

40. Ibid., p.232.

41. Ibid., pp.235-36.

Clitheroe under the compulsion of a self-imposed false idealism, goes out, leaving Nora in a desperate mental and physical situation. She needs medical attendance immediately. Peter is too cowardly to be of any help. Fluther, who has arrived on the scene, is fully drunk, trying to hold the "half-gallon jar of whisky" lest some of the precious "liquor" might be spilled. Mrs. Gogan is too selfish to volunteer. It is Bessie who shows a supreme sense of self-sacrifice and of humanity with determination. Putting on the "shield" of her religious conviction, she rushes out into the street to get a doctor for Nora: "Oh, God, be Thou my help in time o' trouble. An' shelter me safely in th' shadow of Thy wings!"⁴²

The action in the final Act takes place in the living room of Bessie Burgess, the look of which is that of a "compressed confinement" with an "unmistakable air of poverty bordering on destitution." "A pane of the window is starred by the entrance of a bullet. Under the Right is an oak coffin standing on two kitchen chairs. Near the coffin is a home-manufactured stool, on which are two lighted candles"⁴³. Some items of the loot are hanging on the wall. "The room gets no light except from the two candles and the fire." The Covey and Fluther are playing cards "sitting on the floor by the light of the candles on the stool near the coffin." The stage direction gives an impression of a place which is shadowed by gloom and the presence of death. In the midst of this gloomy atmosphere the game of cards may sound discordant. But it is an integral part of the Irish slum ethos which indicates the

42. Ibid., p.238.

43. Ibid., p.239.

efforts of these poverty-stricken people for trying to sustain their existence. The spectrum of life constituted of different colours has been presented with remarkable precision, clarity and effectiveness. As the cards are shuffled, cut, and turns are taken, sound of bullet-shots and the Red-Cross ambulance is heard outside the tenement. Intermingled with the playing of the game is the casual talk about the desperate condition of Nora whose prematurely delivered baby has died. That Bessie Burgess has been nursing Nora day and night has also been the topic of the talk. The dead "born kiddie lyin' there in th' arms o' poor little Mollser" is a vivid visual realization of death in the tenement. Mrs. Gogan's condition of utter destitution, which has led to the fatal worsening of her consumptive daughter's state, is also summarised in a moving manner. The Covey, who otherwise is a sceptical and satirical person, is full of sympathetic words for Mrs. Gogan:

Sure she never got any care. How could she get it, an' th' mother out day an' might lookin' for work, an' her consumptive husband leavin' her with a baby to be born before he died!⁴⁴

Having thus established the conditions of Mrs. Gogan and Nora and the ongoing onslaught of human life on the street as well as the large unpropagated humanity of Bessie Burgers and the determination of Fluther and company to keep their life in the midst of danger, O'Casey proceeds to take up these facets one by one for elaboration through dramatic action.

Nora has gone mad under the pressure of her sufferings on account of her being cruelly left behind by her husband and the death

44. Ibid., p.241.

of her newly-born baby. The cup of her suffering is not full yet. Captain Brennan comes to inform her that Clitheroe was shot dead. The only help offered to him when he was wounded and the blood was flowing out of his body, was Brennan's saying "a prayer for th' dyin'" and "twining his Rosary beads around his fingers." It is well to recall that it was Brennan who taunted at Clitheroe when the latter was a bit hesitant in going out to procure medical help for the wounded Captain Langon. Clitheroe was branded as cowardly, hen-packed and a renegade. But when Clitheroe was wounded, Brennan confesses, "I could do nothin' for him — only watch his breath comin' an' goin' in quick, jerky gasps, an' a thiny sthream O' blood thricklin' out of his mouth, down over his lower lip.... I said a prayer for th' dyin', an' twined his Rosary beads around his fingers.... Then I had to leave him to save meself."⁴⁵ Bessie chides Captain Brennan for his cowardice without any reference to any idealism. She herself has already shown extraordinary courage in the midst of danger to help Nora towards the end of the last Act. Captain Brennan's message to Nora from her dying husband — "Tell Nora to be brave; that I'm ready to meet my God, an' that I'm proud to die for Ireland... Commandant Clitheroe's end was a gleam of glory" — to turn "her grief into joy," sounds despicably hollow when the carrier of the message has been intent upon saving his own life while "The Plough an' th' Stars was fallin' like a shot." When Nora appears, we find that she has completely lost the balance of her mind and is uttering incoherent words about imagining that her husband is courting her

45. Ibid., p.246.

and her baby is crying for her lap. Nora has reached that stage of insensitivity of mind where informing her of any bigger disaster will have no further destabilizing effect. Her friend and nurse in need — i.e. Bessie — knows that Nora's condition is irretrievably desperate. She can only voice her optimism born of her religious conviction to alleviate her present agony:

We'll have to be brave, an' let patience clip away th' heaviness of th' slow-movin' hours, rememberin' that sorrow may endure for th' night, but joy cometh in th' mornin'.... Come on in, an' I'll sing to you, an' you'll rest quietly.⁴⁶

She sings the optimistic lyric — "Lead, kindly light" as a lullaby to quieten Nora's agitated mind. Bessie's lullaby seems to work: Nora is "afther slippin' off to sleep again, thanks be to God,."

When Nora has relapsed into a brief sleep we are presented with another spectacle of death: Mollser's dead body is there on the floor to be taken out for burial. Mollser is not the victim of war like Nora but that of consumption. The Covey says, "D'ye know, comrade, that more die o' consumption than are killed in th' wars? An' it's all because of th' system we're livin' undher."⁴⁷

Mrs. Gogan "Comes in tearfully, and a little proud of the importance of being directly connected with death." She is thankful to Fluther for having risked his life "settin' every thing with th' undhertaker an' th' cemetery people," for the burial of Mollser. Her old bitterness towards Bessie is now completely changed into the

46. Ibid., p.246.

47. Ibid., p.249.

latter's most human concern for Mollser during her ailment:

Indeed, it's meself that has well chronicled, Mrs. Burgess, all your gentle hurryin's to me little Mollser, when she was alive, bringin' her somethin' to dhrink, or somethin' t' eat, an' never passin' her without liftin' up her heart with a delicate word o' kindness.⁴⁸

While the spectacle of death and, worse than death, sufferings was being presented, the Covey and Company continued playing their cards. Their game of cards is interrupted by the entry of a Corporal who orders them to leave the place to be kept in a prison for the night so that the British soldiers could clear the city of the revolutionary snipers. But before this is done, Nora appears again lilting the love song which Clitheroe once sang to her. In her wayward movement in the room, Nora goes near the window exposing herself to the danger of being shot by the soldiers in the street aiming at snipers inside the tenement apartments. Bessie rushes to pull her away from the window. While doing so she "staggers against the window herself. Two rifle shots ring out in quick succession," and Bessie is fatally shot at, having been mistaken for a sniper. Bessie's accusations of Nora for being the cause of her imminent death — "I've got this through... through you... through you, you bitch, you! ... O God, have mercy on me!" — is in fact her profound regrets for forsaking Nora to her lot. She herself had run out of her house to get a doctor for Nora. But after all the males have been rounded up by the soldiers, there is nobody to respond to her cry, "for God's sake, somebody, a doctor, a doctor," But she does not give up her faith

48. Ibid., p. 251.

in the infinite mercy of Almighty God until the end. While she "feebly sings" her prayer to Jesus, Nora looks at her distractedly without understanding what is happening before her eyes. Nora had, in her insanity, laid the table for Clitheroe's tea. After Bessie is dead and she is symbolically "dossed in poor Mollser's bed" by Mrs. Gogan, the Corporal and the Sergeant settle down to drink the tea laid on the table. "In the distance is heard a bitter burst of rifle and machine-gun fire, interspersed with the boom, boom of artillery. The glare in the sky seen through the window flares into a fuller and a deeper red." The play ends with the whole city on fire. Against this visual realization of the destructive effect of war, aural projection of human yearning for peace, love and domestic life presented in the song of the soldiers, is heard outside in the street:

Let not tears add to their 'ardship,
As the soldiers pass along,
And although our 'eart is breaking,
Make it sing this cheery song,
Keep the 'owme fires burning,
While your 'earts are yearning;
Though your lads are far away
They dream of 'owme;
There's a silver loining
Through the dark cloud shoining,
Turn the dark cloud inside out,
Till the boys come 'owme.⁴⁹

The play thus concludes with the assertion of humanity in the midst of evils in human nature and sufferings caused by social and political factors.

49. Ibid., p.261.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Our foregoing analysis of O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy amply demonstrates, contrary to the contemporaneous evaluation, that O'Casey is comparable with Chaucer in creating a portrait gallery of humans where temperamental varieties are in God's plenty. Almost all imaginable human qualities—from the near sublime to the ridiculous, from the heroic to the cowardly, from the most agile to the laziest, from the seriously well-meaning to the abhorrent irresponsible, etc. — are presented in the three plays. If we have a sincere, though foolish, patriot in Minnie Powell, we have the hypocritical nationalists like Captain Brennan and Commandant Clitheroe. On the one hand we have irredeemably self-centred cowards like Seumas, and a hypocritical philanthropist and betrayer like Bentham, on the other we have characters like Bessie Burgess, Juno, and Nora who can lay down their lives for the happiness and welfare of others.

The interesting thing to note is that almost all the male characters are either despicably self-centred, irresponsible and great simulators or they are apathetic to others' sufferings, sometimes even callously inhuman. Captain Boyle is the supreme example in this respect. Sham, hypocrisy and egotism, hiding the sordid psychological reality of the male characters, are most glaringly embodied in Clitheroe. Mutual betrayal for undigested hollow idealism can be seen in Jack, Boyle and Captain Brennan. Almost intolerable indifference to sentimental value is most vividly portrayed in the scene where, in the midst of death and, worse than death, insanity, male characters are busy playing the game of cards in The Plough and the Stars. Excepting the dramatically half-realized humanity of Davoren in his self deprecation and Fluther Good's unselfish efforts to save Nora from the dangers of the bullet-torn

street, we do not find any other character who has any positive humane qualities. The Covey's character has been handled by O'Casey with a fair amount of objectivity, but O'Casey has deliberately made his high talks of economic reforms look as a pretence because his points of view remain at the mere level of debate and are never realized through any action that he takes in this direction. If we parade the list of male characters from Seumas in the first play to Captain Brennan in the last play of the Trilogy, we find an array of people who are lazy, hypocritical, cruel, even inhuman and irresponsible — incapable of any meaningful existence. They are all targets of O'Casey's direct satirical lashing. But these characters are handled by O'Casey with such profound understanding and perceptiveness that inspite of the negative aspects of their characters they are not repulsive. Our sympathies for them, of course, do not flow involuntarily. But our response to them is not one of hatred — though we certainly do not endorse their behaviour — but of a mixed nature: diluted sympathy for their failings and weaknesses and mild rebuke for their actions and behaviours.

Contrasted with the males, O'Casey's female characters have more positive qualities. O'Casey's sympathies for these characters are so pronounced that he has been branded as a feminist. But, as we have shown during the analysis of the plays, O'Casey is unsparing in his objective handling of these characters. Minnie Powell draws our sympathy for her heroism but our response to her foolish idealism remains one of ironic detachment. Bessie Burgess does demonstrate a supreme sense of sacrifice but her cruelly ironic goading of Clitheroe into going to sure death is hardly human, at least in the context of what happens consequently. Even her quarrel with Mrs. Gogan at a petty

personal level does not appear in good taste. Juno has been praised by critics for her mental equilibrium in the midst of calamities and for her doggedness in braving the storms of life, but she, too, is responsible to an extent for the ruin of her family in her unrestrained spending at the prospect of a legacy. She, too, like the rest of the family gets intoxicated by the prospective prosperity which blunts the human edge of her soul. This is clear in her rather sadistic criticism of Mrs. Tancred's son's political affiliations. Her indifference to Mrs. Tancred's bereavement for a moment sounds unforgivable and her being meted out a similar calamity, in the form of a nemesis, brings a sense of satisfaction to the reader.

As we have seen during the analysis of the plays, the background and the ethos of the characters have got topical and temporal contexts. In fact, these contexts are a metaphor which points to wider human concerns. The Irish war background of the three plays is, in fact, a parameter for all chaotic idealism, hypocritical claims and outer chaos created by human weaknesses and failings. Some critics have opined that the plays give an impression that it is the chaos outside the tenements which is the cause of suffering. In fact, it is the other way round. It is, what Juno and Mrs. Tancred have said, because of the "stupidity of men" and their evil weaknesses which create chaos in the tenement life as well as outside of it. The themes dealing with hypocrisy, betrayal, false idealism, sham heroism and egotistical fulfilment are not Irish but universal, and these are the themes which are the main concerns of the plays. Like the world of Ibsen the dramatic world of O'Casey also has God withdrawn from it. Hence human responsibility is exclusive for whatever sufferings we witness in the plays. It is

because of this withdrawal of God from the affairs of the humans and non-interference of any guiding or controlling supernatural agency that human stupidity and suffering are characterised by a starkness that borders on despair. But the general chaos and the resultant suffering do not bring in any pessimistic experience. In spite of all the hardships, sufferings and the ravages of war, the characters remain lively and determined to live. Even though Boyle is left all to himself, his perception of life is not one of gloom or despair. More than him, Juno is determined to reconstruct her life on the debris of the general ruin which has engulfed her family.

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