THE IRONIC PERSPECTIVE IN SEAN O'CASEY'S DUBLIN TRILOGY

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is an analysis of the ironic vision which informs Sean O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy, and which reflects his ambivalent attitudes not only towards the public events that tore Ireland apart in his time but also towards his characters. Most often, O'Casey's irony stems from the juxtaposition of the abstract idealism of the Irish nationalist partisans with the grim realities of the war and the squalidity of tenement Dublin. In The Shadow of a Gunman, set in the War of Independence, the conflict between the political idealism and the indiscriminate brutalities of everyday life at the time is embodied in the character of Donal Davoren. He labours under the delusion that he is a poet and indulges in the illusion that he is an I.R.A. gunman. His playacting leads to death and destruction in the tenement he inhabits, just as the illusions of a few nationalists lead to mass-suffering on the part of the Irish population in the war. In Juno and the Paycock, O'Casey counterpoints the irresponsible fooling of two comic characters Captain Boyle and Joxer Daly with the disintegration of both Boyle's family and the new nation of the Irish Free State. In The Plough and the Stars, the ironic perspective is reflected in the juxtaposition of the actions of three groups of characters: the nationalists, who wage futile war on the British, the victims of that war, and a group of comic characters from the tenements whose actions mock the illusions of the nationalists. The overall effect of O'Casey's irony is to create a vision of despair; the final curtain falls on a tenement world ravaged by war, but fundamentally unchanged.

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INTRODUCTION

The ironic vision which is reflected in Sean O'Casey's Dublin trilogy stems not only from his own conflicting attitudes towards public events in Ireland from 1916 to 1921, but also from his ambivalent treatment of his characters. As Vivian Mercier, in his perceptive treatise The Irish Comic Tradition, points out:

> In The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars the audience's indignation and some of its laughter are directed against society, but O'Casey knows the common man too intimately to idealize him, so that we laugh at, as well as with his outcasts.[1]

In presenting this vision, O'Casey places himself in the Anglo-Irish tradition of Dean Swift and George Bernard Shaw, satirists, whose most dangerous weapon is irony. Swift's satirical monument, A Modest Proposal, is carried by irony; so it is with the plays of O'Casey's Dublin trilogy. The irony in A Modest Proposal grows out of Swift's disgust at the failure of the British to feed the people of Ireland properly. O'Casey's irony grows out of disgust at the failure of Irish national movements to effect any real change in the lives of Dublin's urban poor.

Most often in the Dublin trilogy, the irony stems from the juxtaposition of illusion and reality. The plays are borne along on the constant mocking of the abstract idealism of Irish nationalism by the squalid realities of war and proverty. O'Casey's anger is still felt in the plays but he was still able to choose a vantage point, distant from events, from which to view things and, therefore, to infuse his art with tones of irony.

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[1] Vivian Mercier, The Irish Comic Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 240.

O'Casey's early political stance arose from his experience as a union activist (he was an active member of Jim Larkin's Irish Transport and General Worker's Union, and was an assistant to Larkin during the General Strike of 1913). Indeed, some of his early plays were overtly propagandistic. For this reason, they were rejected by the Abbey Theatre. Lady Gregory, co-founder with Yeats of the Abbey Theatre and one of O'Casey's mentors, made the following comments on The Crimson in the Tricolour, one of the rejected plays:

> It is the expression of ideas that makes it interesting (besides feeling that the writer has something in him) & no doubt the point of interest for Dublin audiences— But we could not put it on while the Revolution is still unaccomplished--it might hasten the Labour attack on Sinn Féin, which ought to be kept back till the fight with England is over, & the new government has had time to show what it can do--[1]

However, by the time O'Casey wrote the Dublin trilogy, he had moved away from outright propaganda to a broader perspective which took account of the contradictions between the abstract idealism of the nationalists and the realities of Dublin life. He was seeking a truth about his own society which went beyond party politics; in so doing, he raised his work to the universal, beyond the level of a recorder of local dialect or a preacher of anti-nationalist rhetoric. He was well aware of his audiences, too, and he set out, deliberately, to provoke and disturb them for he knew where their sympathies lay in those early days of the Irish Free State:

> He saw clearly that the first task for the committed writer in the newly independent Irish Free State was to undermine and destroy false political and social values before attempting to replace them with alternative policies. There was

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[1] David Krause, ed., The Letters of Sean O'Casey, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1975; New York: Macmillan, 1980), I:95.

> an urgent need for satire and shock tactics rather than idealistic literature. Basically his Abbey plays criticize destructive elements in Irish life and society and specifically social deprivation and debilitation brought about by slum conditions.[1]

Because nationalist sentiment opposed social change, even alleviation of hardship through raising wages, O'Casey picked on the most obvious representatives of those sentiments, the men who waged the wars, as the targets of his irony in the Dublin trilogy. To his audiences these men had been transformed into mythical heroes by their actions; to O'Casey they were vain idealists who waged futile wars. Any discussion of irony must defer to the relationship of the artist with his audience; with O'Casey, it was a very definite antagonistic relationship, as noted by J.L. Styan: "In the very best modern tragicomedies, like Shaw's Saint Joan and O'Casey's The Plough and the Stars, the audience can be spiritually involved: not just the jury, but the prisoner in the dock."[2]

This antagonism on O'Casey's part must not be construed as political propaganda, although its roots are there. As I have said, O'Casey had abandoned institutional politics before becoming a writer of plays, but I believe, as Ronald Ayling has stated, that he was still motivated by the obvious need for social justice in the new state. I believe that he speaks on behalf of Dublin's urban working class, if he speaks for anybody, and not for any organized political group. His early political attitudes were formed as a result of being one of the urban poor. He also fought for them, and he was present when they were

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[1] Ronald Ayling, "Ideas and Ideology in The Plough and the Stars," Sean O'Casey Review, 2 (1976), 121.

[2] J.L. Styan, The Dramatic Experience (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965; paperback edition, 1975), p. 36.

betrayed by the nationalists during the General Strike and Lock-out of 1913.

It was this betrayal which infused energy into all O'Casey's work, beginning with the Dublin trilogy. To explain this treachery, it is necessary to look back, briefly, at the open sewer that was Dublin at the turn of the century. To the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, and its British counterpart, Dublin was, after London, the second city of the Empire. To them it was a playground; the lush, green, limestone-fed grass which surrounded Dublin allowed them to breed and play with their favourite animals, horses. While the ascendancy romped on horseback, Dublin's urban proletariat had to contend with inner-city conditions which were proven to be the most squalid in the Empire. For example, in January 1900, the death-rate in Dublin was 46.0 per 1000; in English cities it averaged 18 or 19. In early 1880, the year of O'Casey's birth, it was 44.8 per 1000, compared to 37.0 in Calcutta or 40.0 in Alexandria. In twenty years conditions had worsened. In fact, eight of O'Casey's brothers and sisters born before him had died in infancy. Neither landlord nor government was interested in finding a solution.

Jim Larkin tried to fight these conditions by organizing workers into "one big union," the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, a task in which he was closely abetted by Sean O'Casey. A direct result was the General Strike and Lock-out of 1913 which was instigated by a deliberately provocative act of union-breaking by the employers. The leader of the employers' association during this period was William Martin Murphy, staunch Catholic and an organizer of the nationalist private army, The Irish Volunteers. He encountered the ire of Yeats in the poetry of Responsibilities for his anti-union activities; he also

had a strong part in the destruction of Parnell.[1] In his newspaper, The Irish Independent, he virulently attacked the union, and engaged in personal attacks on Larkin. He also called for military and police aid to combat the strikers; they obliged with baton and sabre attacks on union meetings. His supporters also joined with the Catholic Church to prevent the starving children of Larkin's union members from living with the families of English union members for the duration of the strike. In a letter which sounds absurd today, the Archbishop of Dublin saw this plan as a deliberate act of proselytization by Larkin.[2]

The cumulative effect of the attacks, both verbal and physical, was to isolate Dublin's urban proletariat from the rest of Irish society:

> While the conflict lasted, the workers had not met merely the full force of entrenched capitalism, but also the indifference, and often the hostility, of a society none of whose cultures seemed to have a place for the urban proletariat.[3]

O'Casey may have drifted away from organized politics after the General Strike, but he never drifted away from his roots. In the Dublin trilogy especially, the isolation of the tenements of Dublin is sharply felt.

In concentrating on developing his craft as a dramatist, O'Casey had to take into account the realities of Irish society of the period. As I have already indicated, the direct propaganda of his early plays led to rejection, but he wanted his voice to be heard never-

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[1] F.S.L. Lyons, Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890–1939 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 76.

[2] For the information in this and the preceding paragraph, I have relied heavily on David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work, 2nd. ed., enl., (New York: Macmillan Co.; London: Collier Macmillan, 1976), pp. 1–18.

[3] Lyons, p. 161.

theless. He wanted to be heard through his drama, as the politicians were heard through their speeches:

> The politicians--Free State and Republican--have the platform to express themselves, and heaven knows they seem to take full advantage of it; the Drama is my place for self-expression, and I claim the liberty in drama that they enjoy on the platform (and how they do enjoy it) and am prepared to fight for it.[1]

The excerpt above is from a letter which O'Casey wrote to the press following the riots in the Abbey Theatre over the fact that the flags of the two nationalist armies were displayed in a pub in The Plough and the Stars. It indicates his concern with the inclination to censorship, official and unofficial, which characterized the new government.

That letter was written in 1926, but several years previously as we can deduce from the evidence of the Dublin trilogy, he had learned the value of being somewhat less than explicit in his attempts to expose the destructive nature of nationalist idealism. He had become, in the words of Conor Cruise O'Brien, an "ideological guerilla":

> If we take an intellectual to be a person who prefers to try to do his thinking for himself, even badly, rather than to delegate it to specialists trained to discharge this function with considerable subtlety, then we see that the intellectual, in a priest-led community, must develop strengthened means of defending himself. He acquires in the process special capabilities and special limitations, different from those affecting intellectuals in Protestant/agnostic countries. He is likely to set great store by irony, the versatile, durable and easily camouflaged weapon of every ideological guerilla; . . . .[2]

The Ireland in which O'Casey lived and worked was led by two priests, so to speak: one who was a minister of the Catholic Church, and one was

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[1] Krause, Letters, 1:170.

[2] Conor Cruise O'Brien, Writers and Politics (New York: Pantheon, 1955), p. xvii.

a minister of rabid nationalism. In the Dublin trilogy, the more dangerous of the two is the nationalist, and the weapon chosen to confront him is irony.

In The Shadow of a Gunman he embodies his ironic perspective on the War of Independence in the character of a divided man, Donal Davoren, a pseudo poet and pseudo gunman. Davoren's internal conflict is mirrored in the play's central conflict, the clash of illusions--the fanatical belief in the I.R.A. as messiahs--and reality--the brutality of the war and the poverty of the tenements. Davoren plays at being an I.R.A. gunman, heedless of the danger of doing so until the war bursts into the tenements, and he is forced to face reality.

In Juno and the Paycock, O'Casey changed his vehicle for irony from the near-tragic figure of Davoren to the farcical figure of "Captain" Boyle, a feckless fool who lives solely in the world of illusions. His irresponsible fooling is counterpointed with the brutal reality of the Civil War, represented by his son Johnny, physically and psychologically ruined by war, who betrays a comrade and is subsequently executed. His shiftlessness is also counterpointed with the abject poverty of his family and their environment, the tenement.

In The Plough and the Stars the focus is widened to include the war, the Easter Rebellion of 1916, as the exterior action. The causes and perpetrators of the Rising become the target of his satiric irony, which is again depicted in the conflict between illusions and reality. The illusions are those of the nationalists, who willingly sacrifice themselves in war for an abstraction, the Irish Republic. Reality is again represented in the poverty of the tenements and in the consequences of war. The chief purveyors of the ironic perspective are a

group of comic figures, who by word and deed, intentionally and unintentionally, mock the foolish idealism of the nationalists.

CHAPTER 1

DELUSION AND ILLUSION IN THE SHADOW OF A GUNMAN.

In his discussion of the satire in The Shadow of a Gunman, B.L. Smith states that "it is clearly not O'Casey's intent to glorify the insurrection, nor to romanticize those who die bravely for creed or nation."[1] More positively stated, it is O'Casey's intent to satirize the outcome of the War of Independence, its effect on those least involved in the struggle--the urban poor of Dublin--and its failure to bring about any change of substance for the better in their miserable lives. In The Shadow of a Gunman the irony is sustained through the use of a character, Donal Davoren, whom O'Casey places on the stage for the entire play, and in whose ironic substance is embodied what O'Casey perceived to be the truth about the nationalists. The irony of their idealism is seen in Davoren's failure, both as poet and gunman, following his initial appearance as a figure of great promise to the tenement dwellers. His story is a re-enactment of the nationalist war, both cultural and military.

Their cultural propaganda speaks only of past glory, not the present needs of the people they seek to liberate. O'Casey places some of this propaganda in the mouth of a semi-drunken tenement dweller, Tommy Owens, to point to its absurdity in the context of the tenement.

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[1] B.L. Smith, O'Casey's Satiric Vision (n.p.: Kent State University Press, 1978), p. 16.

Tommy sings a nationalist hymn, with fervour, in the presence of Davoren:

> God save Ireland ses the hayros, God save Ireland ses we all,
> Whether on the scaffold high or the battle-field we die,
> Oh, what matter when for Ayryinn dear we fall!
>
> (Tearfully) Mr. Davoren, I'd die for Ireland! (p. 95)[1]

Tommy, not long afterwards, heads for the nearest pub. The absurdity of the glory myths counterpoints the deadly seriousness of the war. As one of the characters in the play, Seumas Shields, indicates, Tommy Owens could get his wish without his stir: "It's the civilians that suffer; when there's an ambush they don't know where to run. Shot in the back to save the British Empire, an' shot in the breast to save the soul of Ireland." (p. 111)

The Shadow of a Gunman is set in May 1920, during that period of Irish history now referred to as the War of Independence, a guerilla war waged by an irregular force, the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.), against the British forces occupying Ireland. The I.R.A. was composed mostly of part-time members who carried on normal lives during working hours, but who fought guerilla actions against the British troops during their time off. Since they did not wear any uniforms, identification by the security forces was difficult. However, as soon as an I.R.A. member was identified, it became necessary for him to go on the run, to move from one safe place to another, maintaining as much personal security as possible by avoiding contact with other people. To augment this security the I.R.A. employed a mixture of persuasion and intimidation: it

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[1]This, and all future textual references throughout the thesis are to Sean O'Casey, Three Plays: Juno and the Paycock; The Shadow of a Gunman; The Plough and the Stars (London: Macmillan; Papermac, 1966).

was the aim of the I.R.A. to persuade the people that the man on the run was a representative of a long and glorious tradition of freedom fighters, therefore, deserving of their succour and their silence; if this approach failed, then the I.R.A. employed physical intimidation, with death as the ultimate threat. Consequently, the suspected presence of a man on the run in a neighbourhood usually threw the people into a state of terror, for retribution could come from two sides: if the British believed that a man on the run was being harboured, then his sanctuary was raided with indiscriminate brutality; if the I.R.A. as much as suspected collaboration with the British, the putative informer became the victim of summary vengeance.

The action of Gunman is accurately copied from this element of the war not solely for the purpose of dramatic realism, but also for the purpose of O'Casey's satire. In the best traditions of the satirist, O'Casey did not want his target misunderstood nor his intent misconstrued. These events were topical and very fresh in the minds of his first audiences; indeed, as the play opened at the Abbey Theatre on April 12, 1923, the Civil War, the aftermath of the War of Independence was still in progress; terror was still a part of the way of life outside the walls of the abbey, and sometimes inside the walls, as well.

In The Shadow of a Gunman, the life of a Dublin tenement is disturbed by the presence of a stranger, Donal Davoren, who desires to be alone, to get away from the world, for he believes that he is a poet. This self-imposed solitude is mistaken by the other tenement dwellers for the self-enforced isolation of an I.R.A. gunman "on the run" and, as a result, he is continually interrupted by sychophantic neighbours, and, ultimately, by the British forces. He makes little effort to discour-

age these unfortunate slum dwellers in their belief, one especially --Minnie Powell-- a pretty girl of the slums, who is attracted to the notion of Davoren as a gunman. His failure to correct this mistake leads to a raid by the British forces, and ultimately, to the death of Minnie.

Indeed, the play is given its internal form by the series of interruptions to Davoren's privacy. He is first disturbed by a neighbour trying to awaken his roommate, Seumas Shields, a sluggard pedlar, and then by Maguire, a genuine I.R.A. gunman who is also an itinerant vendor, and who deposits a bog for safekeeping containing, it is believed, his stock-in-trade. The landlord, who tries to collect the rent, gives the first hint that the neighbours think Davoren to be a gunman on the run. He is followed by Minnie, who confirms the gossip of the neighbourhood, and as I have already mentioned, is attracted to the idea. Her scene with Davoren is interrupted by Tommy Owens, the first drunken wastrel of the trilogy, and he is closely followed by Mrs. Henderson and Mr. Gallogher, who petition Davoren for I.R.A. justice in settling a union squabble between tenement neighbours.[1] The last interruption of the first act is provided by a newsvendor, offstage, who announces the death of Maguire in an ambush.

The interruptions are continued in Act II by Mrs. Grigson, concerned about her husband's absence after curfew and, as well, by Grigson, the second comic drunken wastrel of the trilogy, who is an expansion of the character of Tommy Owens. Grigson's entrance is

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[1] In 1921, the I.R.A. was running a parallel government to that run by the British. One of the services offered by the parallel government was a system of law courts.

followed by scenes depicting the main action of the second act, a raid on the tenement by the Black-and-Tans. By this time Davoren and Shields discover that Maguire's bag contains bombs, not hairpins, and are thrown into fits of fear by their find. Minnie takes the bag to her room in the mistaken hope that the Tans would not search a woman. The Tans find the bag and Minnie is taken prisoner as Davoren cowers, paralyzed with fear, in his room. The vehicle taking Minnie away is ambushed and she is shot to death, her blood obscuring Davoren's name on a love-note.

In the very first stage direction, O'Casey establishes that Davoren's character is that of a man divided and struggling with himself:

> There is in his face an expression that seems to indicate an eternal war between weakness and strength; there is in the lines of the brow and chin an indication of a desire for activity, while in his eyes there is visible an unquenchable tendency towards rest. His struggle through life has been a hard one, and his efforts have been handicapped by an inherited and self-developed devotion to 'the might of design, the mystery of colour, and the belief in the redemption of all things by beauty everlasting'. His life would drive him mad were it not for the fact that he never knew any other. He bears upon his body the marks of the struggle for existence and the efforts towards self-expression. (p. 79)

The word "handicapped" indicates an internal conflict between illusion and reality in which illusion is dominant. It is this handicap which seems to isolate him from the reality of the squalid tenement in which he lives, and, ironically, gives the other tenement dwellers the impression that he is a figure of great promise, an I.R.A. gunman. It is this handicap that also distinguishes him as "O'Casey's stage poet."[1] Seumas Shields, who functions as the wise fool in the play and is, therefore, much closer to the author's attitudes, avers that

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[1]Smith, p. 22.

"the poet's claim to greatness depends upon his power to put passion in the common people." (p. 107) To this Davoren responds in a diatribe in which he places the poet beyond the realm of human needs:

> 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 might of design is a three-roomed house or a capacious bed. To them beauty is for sale in a butcher' shop. To the people the end of life is the life created for them; to the poet the end of life is the life he creates for himself; life has a 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. The people . . . (p. 107)

The elitist tones of Davoren's speech anticipate the speeches of the Platform Orator in The Plough and the Stars; both speakers are vain and pietistic. They attach to themselves an importance greater than the humans they claim to save, and both speeches are marked by an almost total dismissal of reality for abstractions. Of course, both speeches are rendered ironic by their context: they are heard against a background of tenement squalidity. Casey is also creating a world of illusion for Davoren; if he can inhabit a world of poetic illusions, then it is not difficult for him to shift into another sham world, that of the romantic nationalist. His vanity prevents him from truly understanding the dangers of playing the role of I.R.A. gunman. He fails to heed the warning implied in the death of Maguire in an ambush. This death lends ominous irony to Davoren's question at the end of Act I: "And what danger can there be in being the shadow of a gunman?" (p. 104) The question ridicules Maguire's death and, by implication, the war.

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[1] Ibid, p. 20.

As I have already stated, it is easy for Davoren to exchange one set of illusions for another; in the presence of Minnie Powell he easily becomes an I.R.A. gunman. It is part of his ironic nature that he should boast of "his poise gained through experience."[1] It is also easy for a character who does not know who he is to adopt an identity just to maintain the attentions of a pretty woman, even though that pretty woman is prepared to accept him as a poet, but not just a poet. In the play, the part of Minnie is necessary to give Davoren a motive for accepting the role of gunman, but she is also necessary, along with the comic characters, to the development of the character of Davoren as a device for sustained irony in the play. Minnie's unabashed honesty is clearly contrasted with the smug posturing of Davoren as he invents his new identity: "I'll admit one does be a little nervous at first, but a fellow gets used to it after a bit, till, at last, a gunman throws a bomb as carelessly as a schoolboy throws a snowball." (p. 92) However, despite Minnie's attractive characteristics, she is typical of all the others in the tenement, and, as Ronald Rollins points out, of most people of her race, in that she has a "tendency to be attracted to and then tragically deceived by meretricious trappings, especially flamboyand, Byronic attitudinizing and fustian."[2] In her case, her "tragic deception" is actually her death at the end of the play, a death closely related to her own mindless mouthing of Republican slogans and myths: "Poetry is a grand thing, Mr. Davoren, I'd love to be able to write a poem - a lovely poem on Ireland an' the men o' 98 . . . it's time to

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[1] Ronald Rollins, "O'Casey and Synge: The Irish Hero as Playboy and Gunman," Arizona Quarterly, 22(1966):220.

[2] Ibid., p. 217.

give up the writing an' take to the gun." (p. 90) With this attitude it is not hard for her to be fooled by the likes of Davoren.

The attraction of Davoren to Minnie leads to a kiss never completed because of the interruption by the first comic wastrel of the trilogy, Tommy Owens, who is also given to the repetition of republican slogans, but much more volubly and incoherently than Minnie. In the scene with Owens, the ironic depiction of Davoren is carried one step further: Davoren's "identity" as a gunman is to be carried beyond the four walls of the room by a pathetic drunk. Owens' deference to Davoren results from the instinct for self-preservation, and a desire to be close to "those who he thinks are braver than himself." (p. 93) Consequently, while seemingly attempting to put Davoren at eage, he is really trying to ensure his own safety:

> Tommy. . . .; you needn't be afraid of me, Mr. Davoren.
> Davoren. Why should Ibe afraid of you, Mr. Owens, or of anybody else?
> Tommy. Why should you indeed? We're all friends here - Mr. Shields knows me well - all you've got to say is, 'Do you know Tommy Owens?' An' he'll tell you the sort of a man Tommy Owens is. There's no flies on Tommy - got me?" (p. 94)

The empty, mindless patter of that speech is the forerunner of other such speeches in Gunman and in the other plays in the trilogy; Owens is the precursor of Joxer Daly and Fluther Good in this regard. In itself, the manner of speech has a certain comic value, but it is a speech pattern easily recognizable as coming from the streets of Dublin, and as such contributes immensely to the irony of the scene. Here, we see "generally acceptable patriotic sentiments" expressed by "characters unacceptable to Irish audiences."[1]

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[1] Ronald Ayling, "Popular Tradition and Individual Talent in Sean O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy," Journal of Modern Literature, 2(1972): 499.

Davoren is clearly unacceptable for he is masquerading as a gunman, a well respected figure of the period, merely because it gives him a sense of identity, and, even more unpalatable, because it allows him to dally with Minnie. Owens' lack of respectability results from his citizenship of the Dublin slums, and, even worse, the fact that he has been drinking, not a fit preparation for the utterance of slogans and the singing of republican hymns.

O'Casey's intent here is obviously provocative, and continues in this vein through Davoren's denial of the role of gunman to Owens. This denial has ironic significance for the remainder of the play, not merely because one unacceptable character is denying the romantic nationalist fantasies of another, but because Davoren is telling the truth; he is not a gunman. However, because Davoren has already "admitted" his role to Minnie, he is not telling the truth for the sake of telling the truth, but is doing so in the guise of a lie, for a real gunman must always deny that he is such. His denials, then, merely reinforce the masquerade in the minds of Owens and Minnie, driving him closer to the point of no return.

The seventh scene, which immediately follows, has been the object of much criticism, mostly because of its length and seeming irrelevance to the plot.[1] Yet it has significance in the ironic shaping of Davoren's fate. It is, primarily, a comic scene, relying again on Dublin street patter, malapropisms, misuse and abuse of legal terminology, and, lastly, on the difference in height between the large Mrs. Henderson and the mousy Mr. Gallogher. It is a scene in which Mr. Gallogher importunes the I.R.A. courts, through Davoren, for justice

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[1]This, and all future references to scene numbers, are to the numbering system employed by Robert Hogan, The Experiments of Sean O'Casey (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960).

in the settling of a tenement dispute brought about by the overcrowding. Davoren has little dialogue in this scene, mainly because of the loquacity of the others, and, because he seems to be intimidated by their presence. (In a stage direction, O'Casey indicates that he is "subconsciously pleased, but a little timid of the belief that he is connected with the gunmen.") (p. 96) However, despite the farce, as Robert Hogan points out, it is the scene in which Davoren is forced into "irretrievable acceptance of the role of gunman."[2] Furthermore, Davoren's agitated denial of Maguire, the real gunman, foreshadows his cowardice in the crisis of the raid later in the action; the shadow denies knowledge of the substance. This lack of moral fibre is cemented by his own words at the end of the act: "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?" (p. 104)

In the second act we are introduced to a second "unacceptable" comic wastrel, who resumes Owens' obsequious ways, and who also functions as an ironic counterpoint to Davoren. He is Adolphus Grigson, and is, as Robert Hogan asserts, "certainly O'Casey's first brilliant comic creation."[1] By his drunken bragging we recognize him as an extension of Owens, but, as if to be fair in the cultural war, O'Casey turns him into an Orangeman, with appropriate pronouncements of loyalty to the Crown of England and suitable Bible-thumping lines: "Fear God an' honour the King--that's written in Holy Scripture, an' there's no

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[1] Ibid., p. 32.

[2] Ibid.

blottin' it out." (p. 117) Grigson replaces Owens in the second act as the drunken braggart, but O'Casey effects a successful transition from one to the other, by having Grigson report on Owens' drunken bragging in a pub frequented by both:

> You'll never get some people to keep their mouths shut. I was in the Blue Lion this evening, an' who do you think was there, blowin' out av him, but that little blower, Tommy Owens; there he was tellin' everybody that he knew where there was bombs; that he had a friend that was a General in the I.R.A.; that he could tell them what the staff was thinkin' av doin'; that he could lay his hands on tons av revolvers; that they wasn't a mile from where he was livin', but that he knew his own know, an' would keep it to himself. (p. 119)

We now know where Owens went to await the call to arms and the barricades, but more significantly and in keeping with the ironic tones of the play, this drunken boasting is hinted at as the most likely cause of the raid on the tenement by the Black-and-Tans, an incident which forms the main tragic action of the play. This pathetic bragging by a comic wastrel about his passing acquaintance with a "shadow-gunman" precipitates a tragic act, and so sustains the ironic nature of Davoren's character.

"The madness, throughout the action of The Shadow of a Gunman, is a kind of touchstone which reveals to viewers and readers the relative values and the deep flaws in the human character," asserts B.L. Smith.[1] The raid, in the final scenes of the play, is the climax of that madness, and it becomes the touchstone by which we judge Davoren's true qualities. It is the point in the play at which the illusion merges with the reality, the point at which Davoren, the imaginary gunman, is given a prime opportunity to be a genuine hero. As Ronald Rollins points out, a similar opportunity was given to another hero of

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[1] Smith, p. 17.

the Abbey stage, Christy Mahon, in The Playboy of the Western World, and he became transformed: "Unlike Christy, the lie does not enable Donal to achieve his self-liberation; he remains the same inept, histrionic, and cowardly fellow he was at the beginning."[1] The irony of character is consistent as he fails to fulfill the promise seen in him by his miserable fellow tenement dwellers, and consequently, everything that occurs during the raid is given to pathos, from the paralytic cowering of Davoren in his room, through the comically drunken antics of Grigson, to Minnie's tragic death. Even more pathetic is the fact that Minnie goes to her death protecting Davoren, without ever knowing his true nature, with one of his typed love notes close to her breast. Her blood obscures his identity, even in death: "They found some paper in her breast, with 'Minnie' written on it, an' some other name they couldn't make out with the blood; . . ." (p. 130)

The final ironies of Davoren's life in the tenement are contained in the last few lines of the play. The tenement has undergone the trauma of a brutal raid by the Black-and-Tans; many of the inhabitants have been humiliated, or scared into paralysis, and Minnie is dead. The men, despite their braggadocio, capitulate to fear while the women become the agents of action. Minnie tries to hide the bombs, and even under arrest she protects the identity of her false lover. Mrs. Henderson, the object of farce at the end of the first act, becomes a heroine through her struggle with the soldiers. (p. 127)

However, despite all the convulsions of the raid, life, for Davoren and Shields, seems to return to an insensate normality. Davoren's

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[1] Rollins, "Playboy and Gunman," p. 221.

final utterance, far from being the speech in which he demonstrates that he sees "himself and his world with terrifying clarity"[1] is actually the reflexive act of a self-centred weakling. It is spoken, not with words that express grief at the loss of a loved one by such violent means, but with words which reflect his poor attempts at poetry, and, consistent with his character, with words that show his fear of guilt;

> "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 is broken. Oh, Davoren, Donal Davoren, poet and poltroon, poltroon and poet!" (p. 130)

It is language reminiscent of the mock grief shown by Macbeth following the discovery of the body of Duncan. The final words of Shields are "irrelevantly ironic,"[2] but because they are consistent with his continual recourse to superstition for explanations of human folly, they bring down, with stunning relevance, the curtain on a world unchanged: "I knew something ud come of the tappin' on the wall!" (p. 130)

Davoren's failure, then, is like the failure of the nationalists: he offered illusory and abstract greatness but failed to contend with the realities of existence. The rise to power of the nationalists following five years of convulsive bloodshed saw little change for the better in the lives of Dublin's poor, the denizens of rotten Georgian tenements. As the curtain falls on The Shadow of a Gunman, the impression of disillusionment is overbearing: nothing has changed within the tenement walls.

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[1] Krause, The Man and His Work, p. 67.

[2] Hogan, Experiments, p. 35.

CHAPTER II

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK: THE COMIC PERSPECTIVE

In Juno and the Paycock, O'Casey's irony is presented through the use of two characters, rather than one as in Gunman. However, because of their symbiotic relationship, the two characters, Captain Jack Boyle, the "universal braggart-warrior" or miles gloriosus, and Joxer Daly, the "universal parasite-slave,"[1] seem to function as one. They are, on the surface, comic buffoons whose boasting, lying and malingering seem well calculated by O'Casey to draw guffaws from his Abbey audiences, but whose real functions in the play must be evaluated in the context of the play's political and social setting. Juno and the Paycock is set in a Dublin tenement house during the Irish Civil War of 1922-23, a war which followed almost immediately on the heels of the War of Independence, or the Black-and-Tan War as it is sometimes called, and which was waged over a certain clause in the Anglo-Irish Treaty which ended the War of Independence. As the nation disintegrates in Civil War outside the tenement walls, Boyle indulges in irresponsible escapism, through alcoholism, through recounting his imagined past adventures, either as a sea-captain plying the high seas or as a rebel patriot during the Easter Rebellion of 1916 in Dublin, and, in the process, manages to lead his already impoverished, demoralized and brutalized family into economic ruin on the expectation of plenty

[1] Krause, The Man and His Work, p. 78.

from a badly worded will. As the play progresses, according to Ronald Ayling, his comic antics take on "more serious overtones"[1] when juxtaposed with the break-up of the family, and the tragedy of the Civil War as seen in the story of Johnny.

This chapter will be concerned mainly with an examination of the ironic roles played by both Boyle and Joxer, but will concentrate its focus on Boyle, since Joxer's role is dependent totally on Boyle's. Joxer is "a parasitical person who has little dramatic justification other than as the foil to, and 'feed' for, the Captain and yet acts as a splendid support for the leading male figure and, indeed, becomes a distinct personality in his own right," according to Ronald Ayling.[2] Joxer, then, will only be referred to when and insofar as he plays the role of foil and feed.

As I have already stated, the play is set in a tenement house during the Irish Civil War of 1922-23. The Boyles, whose two-room flat provides the set for the play, are a poor family, made even more poverty-stricken by the alcoholism and malingering of the father, known as "the Captain" for dubious seafaring reasons, by their son Johnny's, inability to earn a living because he was crippled in a major battle of the Civil War, and by Mary's inability to work because of a strike. Life seems brighter with the news of a legacy brought to them by a Charles Bentham, O'Casey's version of the stage Englishman. While waiting for the money to come, the Boyles borrow from the neighbours

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[1] Ronald Ayling, "Sean O'Casey and the Abbey Theatre, Dublin," Sean O'Casey: Centenary Essays (Gerrards Cross, England: Colin Smythe, 1980), p. 34.

[2] Ibid., p. 31.

and purchase furniture and gaudy decorations on credit. However, the will, which was drawn up by Bentham, proves defective through the faulty wording of the clause which is most relevant to the Boyles, and they get nothing from it. The creditors begin to move in at the same time as other tragic events begin to happen in the family: Mary, seduced by Bentham, is now pregnant, a sinful state since she is unmarried and living in Catholic Ireland; Johnny is taken away by Republican gunman and shot to death for betraying a comrade-in-arms. Boyle, unable to take the pressure, repairs to the nearest pub with his drinking "butty" Joxer. The play ends as they return to the flat, drunk, disorderly, and singing half-remembered bits of songs, unaware of the repossession of the furniture, the execution of Johnny, and the departure of Juno and Mary to new quarters.

There is a parallel between the disintegration of the new nation of the Irish Free State in the heat of the Civil War, and the break-up of the Boyle family hastened by the false legacy. The shooting began in April of 1922 and lasted until the "Irregulars" (Republicans) were given the order, by their own commanders. to dump arms in April of 1923. The opening of hostilities was provoked by internal dissension within the ranks of the I.R.A. and members of the Dail (Irish Parliament) over the wording of one of the clauses in the Anglo-Irish Treaty which ended the war with the British. In general, the Treaty gave the new nation dominion status within the British Empire, with the King as Head of State, and a local parliament in Dublin with full powers. Many thought that this was the best they could get at the time, since the British Prime Minister Lloyd George had made the initial peace over-

tures. However, there were two obstacles to universal assent; the six north-eastern counties were to remain an integral part of the United Kingdom with its own parliament, since the Protestant majority did not want to be part of Ireland independent from Britain; and all officials of the new Irish Free State were required to take an oath of allegiance to the King. The first obstacle precluded the immediate establishment of an all-Ireland republic; the second obstacle, in the minds and hearts of die-hard Republicans, negated all the victories won against the British in the War of Independence. Furthermore, they suspected the motives of Lloyd George, who sought peace only after the Protestant extremists in the north had established their own legislature, and who then forced acceptance on the Irish negotiators by threatening to resume the war. Most of the I.R.A. seemed tired of the war, and saw the Treaty as a stepping stone to the later establishment of the Republic; the die-hards wanted a full Republic or nothing at all, and they were prepared to continue the war against whomever stood in the way of that dream, including their former comrades-in-arms. It is this stand which is stated by Johnny, in Juno, when he says: "Ireland only half free'll never be at peace while she has a son left to pull a trigger." This prompts Juno's sardonic reply: "To be sure, to be sure--no bread's a lot betther than half a loaf." (p. 27).

In Juno, O'Casey was obliged to adopt the mask of irony in the presentation of his attitudes regarding the Civil War, to understate its mindlessness by juxtaposing it with the apparent fooling of two wastrels. However, in his Autobiographies, he is less reticent in the presentation of his attitudes, a fact which illuminates the understatement of Juno and the Paycock, and, in particular, explains the offending

clause device in the play. He saw the war, in Inishfallen Fare Thee Well, as a futile battle of egos over an almost meaningless interpretation of a clause in the Treaty. The confusion felt by the average man in Ireland at the time is formulated by the ubiquitous commentator of the Autobiographies, the tram-conductor: "D'ye mean, asked the puzzled tram-conductor, at last, that Document No. 2 shifts the British Empire outside of Ireland's allegiance, while Ireland's sovereign status and external association brings the British Empire inside Ireland's external recognition?"[1] However, despite O'Casey's trivialization of the war's causes, he is, nevertheless, very conscious of the horror of internecine strife, as illustrated in a chapter in the same volume entitled "Comrades"; the following excerpt concludes one strand of the narration in that chapter, a strand which tells the story of the relentless hunting down of a young Republican by one of his former comrades:

> "--Jesus! whimpered the half-dead lad, yous wouldn't shoot an old comrade Mick!
>
> The Colonel's arm holding the gun shot forward suddenly, the muzzle of the gun, tilted slightly upwards, splitting the lad's lips and crashing through his chattering teeth.
>
> --Be Jasus! We would, he said, and then he pulled the trigger."[2]

In an article written in 1957, introducing Juno to Hungarian readers, O'Casey outlines his attitudes to the Civil War:

> In the play the impact is shown on two worker families, on two mothers each of whom has lost a son; and, if there be a message in the play, I imagine it to be that a Civil War should be waged only for a deep and a great cause, like the overthrow of tax paid without representation that evoked the

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[1] Sean O'Casey, Autobiographies II (Inishfallen Fare Thee Well, 1949; Rose and Crown, 1952; Sunset and Evening Star, 1954; rpt. 3 vols in 1, London: Macmillan, 1963), p. 72.

[2] Ibid., p. 91.

> American War of Independence, the overthrow of Feudalism as in the French Revolution, and the establishment of political and economic rule and ownership by the people as in the October Revolution of the Soviets. We, should, however, be careful of personal idealism; good as it may be and well-meaning, its flame in a few hearts may not give new life and new hope to the many, but dwindle into ghastly and futile funeral pyres in which many are uselessly destroyed and enormous damage done to all.[1] (emphasis mine)

It is these attitudes of horror and futility that O'Casey presents in the irony of Juno.

I will attempt to show how these authorial attitudes are conveyed through the progression of Boyle and his butty from "fool" to "knave." David Krause does not subscribe to the idea that these characters are more serious than comic: "O'Casey satirizes them unsparingly for the shiftless rascals that they are, yet because he also sees the amusement of a universal frailty in them--they are fools not knaves--he is able to laugh with as well as at their hilarious mischief."[2] Boyle's behaviour can hardly be categorized as rascally human frailty. It is certainly that way in the first act of the play, but as tragic events begin to envelop the family, his demeanour exhibits no justification for forgiveness as "hilarious mischief." Nor does it mitigate his patent knavery as he is blissfully unaware of the plight of his son, and as he viciously orders his wife and pregnant daughter out of their hovel, which is later stripped bare by the repossession men, as he escapes his responsibilities in a pub. The movement of the play is very clearly one of order, meaning here the normal family life of a Dublin slum family as perceived dramatically by O'Casey, to "chassis", as seen in

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[1] Sean O'Casey, Blasts and Benedictions, selected and introduced by Ronald Ayling (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), p. 136.

[2] Krause, The Man and His Work, p. 78.

the seduction of Mary, the break-up of the family, the destruction of the home, and the tragedy of Johnny. This movement is paralleled by a similar one in the character of Boyle, in which he moves from "fool" to "knave" well supported by Joxer, and at the end, horror and futility dominate, where once "hilarious mischief" ruled: . . . there is nothing glorious or magnificent or falstaffian about him at the end. On the contrary, he is in turn maudlin and vicious, self-pitying and vindictive."[1]

The first act of Juno, is given over to the comic antics of Boyle and Joxer, in particular, Boyle's hilarious attempts to avoid having to take a job. This is more like the "hilarious mischief" referred to by Krause, and is more in keeping with his contention that the average man gets vicarious pleasure from watching Boyle fooling:

> "It is . . . possible that many men are more than amused by the 'pay-cock's' game and secretly envy the Captain and his 'buttie' their merry pranks. The average man who realizes he cannot cope with his besetting problems on an heroic scale may well have an unconscious desire to get rid of his problems entirely by emulating the Captain in his irresponsible, and, therefore, irresistible dreaming and singing and drinking."[2]

The comic buffoonery in Act 1 is augmented by O'Casey's manipulation of Dublin street language, and of the incongruity between the proletarian dialect and the allusions occasionally inserted by the playwright. In comparing the characterization in Juno to that of Gunman, James Scrimgeour, states that "O'Casey succeeds in fusing the poltroon

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[1] Ronald Ayling, Continuity and Innovation in Sean O'Casey's Drama: A Critical Monograph (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1976), p. 64.

[2] Krause, The Man and His Work, p. 78.

and poet together."[1] There is present in Boyle that "touch of the poet" that was not present in Davoren. When he discovers that Jerry Devine, a former suitor of Mary and union organizer, has been searching for him to inform him that there is a job waiting for him, and that the search has taken Jerry into Boyle's favourite "snugs," places he has just denied recently frequenting to Juno, he utters in indignant tones:

> "What business is it o' yours whether I was in a snug or no? What do you wanmt 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 catherin' at his heels?" (p. 15)

The language establishes Boyle's character, particularly in the oft-quoted speech to Joxer, in which he "recalls" his adventurous seafaring days "from the Gulf o' Mexico to the Antanartic Ocean," but it is the allusions made by Boyle to contemporary Irish political issues which establish O'Casey's ironic purposes at this early stage in the play. According to Ronald Ayling the use of these allusions was one method O'Casey employed for satire and irony: "Throughout his life O'Casey enriched the surface texture of his writings with a diverse selection of quotations, references and clichés drawn from both popular and learned sources, using them for a variety of effects, though most often for satire or irony."[2] "Today, Joxer," Boyle informs his butty, there's goin' to be issued a proclamation be me, establishin' an independent Republic, an Juno'll have to take an oath of allegiance." (p. 24)

"The satiric value of his manifesto," B.L. Smith indicates, "is

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[1] James R. Scrimgeour, Sean O'Casey (Boston: G.K. Hale and Co., Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 77.

[2] Ayling, "Popular Tradition," p. 493.

not lost on an audience so recently shaken by Great Britain's demands that officers of the Irish Free State must take oaths of allegiance to the British Crown."[1] The irony is found in the allusion to the root cause of the violence of the Civil War by a character whose shiftless nature has already been established, and whose "independent republic" dissolves at the first opportunity he gets to establish its validity. This behaviour establishes a facet of Boyle's character which is exploited for ironic purposes by O'Casey; his ability to adapt or change to suit his perception of the situation: " . . . he concentrates on shadow rather than substance--on what appears to be rather than what is."[2] This tendency is best illustrated in the early stages of the play in his attack on the Catholic Church, because it was a priest who had found him a job:

> " . . . I'm goin' to tell you somethin', Joxer, that I wouldn't tell to anybody else--the clergy always had too much power over the people in this unfortunate country . . . Didn't they prevent the people in '47 from seizin' the corn an' they starvin'; didn't they down Parnell; didn't they say that hell wasn't hot enough nor eternity long enough to punish the Fenians? We don't forget, we don't forget them things, Joxer. If they've taken everything else from us, Joxer, they've left us our memory." (p. 22).

As Ayling demonstrates in his article on popular tradition in the Dublin trilogy this attitude was a well known part of the rebel canon, in particular, that faction of the rebel I.R.A. which still believed in the thirty-two county Republic:

Part of the delicious irony here, of course, is derived

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[1] Smith, p. 33.

[2] Ibid.

> from our knowledge of the specious patriotism of the speaker himself, and the fact that he is prepared to forget all these injustices (more, to repudiate them) as soon as he becomes, as he thinks, a man of property; yet the author himself is in deadly earnest in this indictment of the political and economic betrayal of the Irish people by their clergy, and the lyrical intensity of Boyle's outburst - ludicrous as it may be in the full dramatic context - does give a momentary sense of conviction to his argument.[1]

The full extent of O'Casey's ironic exploitation of that sentiment can only be realized in the second act, through Boyle's abrupt reversal of his earlier stand. The statement of the clergy's treachery, alone, would be of comic value out of Boyle's mouth; its reversal, and the circumstances of that reversal give it ironic value. Now that he perceives himself as belonging to the middle class, he considers himself in a position to adopt the attitude of fawning benevolence towards the church typical of the new middle class; there is material benefit to be gained by Boyle other than what he perceives as the support of the church for men of property implicit in his new persona. In the scene in question, the truth is probably spoken by Needle Nugent, the tailor: "I seen you talkin' to Father Farrell . . . . He'll be folleyin' you . . . like a guardian angel from this out . . ," (p. 32), and Boyle replies with the "authority" of a man of property: "'Mr. Nugent,' says I, 'Father Farrell is a man o' the people, an', as far as I know the History o' me country, the priests was always in the van of the fight for Ireland's freedom." The full irony is realized when he rejects shamelessly his own earlier statement, spoken in almost the same words as he had used: "'Who are you tellin'?' says he! Didn't they let down the Fenians, an' didn't they do in Parnell? An' now . . . ' 'You ought

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[1] Ayling, "Popular Tradition," p. 494.

to be ashamed o' yourself; says I, interruptin' him, 'not to know the History o' your country.' An' I left him gawkin' where he was." (p. 33)

As B.L. Smith points out:

> "Donning his new mask, Captain Boyle becomes ludicrously pompous and authoritative concerning the responsibilities of money, man's true relationship to the church, and his newly acquired, money-inspired authority on any subject."[1]

Boyle interrupts Nugent at a strategic point; the 'An' now' is a clear reference to some present clerical misdeeds, in particular episcopal intervention in the Civil War on behalf of the Free State; O'Casey might have finished Nugent's 'An' now' in the second volume of his Autobiographies:

> "The bishops again! The Men of Ninety-Eight; the Fenians; Parnell; and now the unfortunate Republicans in the Irish jails recommended to the hangman, or to a firing-squad. A way of thought that seems to be nothing new to the Vatican bishops. No episcopal voice raised, nor word spoken, asking the executioners to go slow. Republicanism had in it the seed of anti-clericalism, so let it be banished by rifle-fire, or dangle dead at the end of a rope."[2] (emphasis mine)

As most O'Casey critics have noted, the device of the false legacy is a common tool of the melodramatist; however, in this case, I believe that O'Casey's use of the will was no mere resort to expediency in seeking an "exterior action" for the play.[3] Through the legacy he is able satirize the Anglo-Irish Treaty and its consequences, The Civil War, and one of the symptoms of the disease of poverty, the penchant for easy money. Ronald Ayling describes the device of the will as follows:

The will in Juno and the Paycock--set in Dublin during the

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[1] Smith, pp. 33-34.

[2] O'Casey, Autobiographies II, p. 94.

[3] Hogan, Experiments, p. 31

> Civil War of 1922—. . . reflects a significant national issue. Here, the Boyle family (like Ireland itself in 1921) comes into a modest inheritance only to find that the document which promised this independence is drawn up in a dubious way. In the first case the Boyle family loses the legacy altogether and then disintegrates as a family unit; in the other, there is civil war over the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty by which the Irish Free State was disinherited of six northern counties.[1]

The legacy then serves well the purposes of structure and theme. The mere mention of easy money from the will is enough for Boyle to reverse his previous reaction to the death of his relative, "Sorra many'll go into mournin' for him," to ". . . we'll have to go into mournin' at wanst." (pp. 38-39) His new found riches immediately cause him to cast off his 'oul butty' Joxer, for no apparent reason other than the fact that his new financial status requires a different type of respectability: "Juno, I'm done with Joxer . . . . I'm a new man from this out. . . ." (p. 30) Indeed he is a new man for he now finds himself in control of the family, a title ceded to him by Juno in one of her few moments of weakness: "You won't have to trouble about a job for awhile, Jack." (p. 29) However, as B.L. Smith points out, the "shadow" is merely taking a new shape; "he undergoes no real change in substance."[2] What is happening, instead, is that we are becoming more and more aware of his knavish nature, a nature emphasized in the greed for easy money.

In general, Act II is constructed on the counterpoint between the Boyle's celebration of the will, and the funeral of Robbie Tancred, an I.R.A. comrade betrayed to the Free State authorities by Johnny. The funeral makes Boyle uncomfortable; it is just another of life's duties to be avoided, or better still, to be disposed of by the government.

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[1] Ayling, Continuity and Innovation, p. 8.

[2] Smith, p. 33.

In reply to Juno's stated relief that the gramophone was not playing as Mrs. Tancred descended the stairs on her way to the hospital to receive the body of her murdered son, Boyle says: "Even if we had aself. We've nothin' to do with these things, one way or t'other. That's the Governments's business, an' let them do what we're payin' them for doin'." (p. 47) According to Juno, the Government, whatever that is in the midst of Civil War, does not seem to be doing very much:

> "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 massacreed? 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 an ambush a few eeks ago, an' now, poor Mrs. Tancred's only child gone west with his body made a collandher of. Sure, if it's not our business, I don't know whose business it is." (p. 47)

Juno does not identify the political allegiances of the victims, and it is consistent with her character that she shows that it is the women who must bear the grief. It is consistent that Boyle, when faced with the brutal reality of life, retreats to escapism:

> "Here, there, that's enough about them things; they don't affect us, an' we needn't give a damn. If they want a wake, well, let them have a wake. When I was a sailor, I was always resigned to meet with a wathery grave; an' if they want to be soldiers, well there's no use o' them squealin' when they meet a soldier's fate." (p. 47)

Again, the pattern of irony is maintained, because as Boyle speaks, sitting close to him is his son, whose tragic plight is very much Boyle's business; Boyle's pompous moralizing is comic, but takes on bitter irony through Johnny's presence in the room, and against the background of the funeral, which has been caused by Johnny's treachery. "However," as Saros Cowasjee argues, "the shadow of disaster has fallen upon the Boyles

themselves and comedy loses its way till almost the end of the play."[1]

In an article written for O'Casey's centenary, Ronald Ayling, contends that O'Casey probably wanted to write a play about a character such as Johnny, but because of his admiration for the two Abbey actors, Barry Fitzgerald and F.J. McCormick, decided to write a play emphasizing the comic. However, it is obvious that he could not get away from the serious theme, in particular the theme of betrayal, not only in the story of Johnny but in all the rest of the sub-plots as well as the main plot. In the sub-plot, which deals with Johnny's fate, the theme of betrayal is played off against that same theme in Mary's story, the betrayal of the family by the badly made will, the betrayal of Juno by Boyle's profligacy, and, by implication, the betrayal of the Irish people by the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Johnny is a real gunman who became a shadow, a coward and an informer, apparently as the result of physical and psychological injuries sustained in the Easter Rebellion and in a major battle of the Civil War. It is Johnny's fate which is counterpointed against Boyle's irresponsibility, because as Saros Cowasjee has indicated, "the presence of Johnny on the stage or even in the wings, is a constant reminder that the joys of the legacy cannot last."[2]

However, the seriousness is not deepened by this association; Johnny's death is simply rendered more futile; it is also, as Seamus Deane demonstrates, "dramatically speaking, deserved."[3] It is very difficult to feel

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[1]Saros Cowasjee, "The Juxtaposition of Tragedy and Comedy in the Plays of Sean O'Casey," Wascana Review, 2(1966): 82.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Seamus Deane, "Irish Politics and O'Casey's Theatre" Threshold, 24(1973), rpt. in Thomas Kilroy, ed., Sean O'Casey: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 150.

any sympathy for Johnny, not only because of his betrayal of Robbie Tancred, but because of his whining presence in the play. James Scrimgeour finds the character of Johnny:

> Unsatisfactory mainly because O'Casey himself appears confused at to what attitude to take toward him . . . Does O'Casey mean for Johnny's death to take on tragic significance . . . or does he mean to portray Johnny as a weak sniveling coward whose continual whining gets on our nerves? O'Casey simply cannot have it both ways. Johnny cannot excite fear and pity at the same time that he makes us sick."[1]

In the light of this evaluation, Johnny's fate should be considered as part of the greater tragedy of the destruction of the family, and of the destruction of the nation, both of which occur as a result of treachery.

Mary's story is also one of betrayal, but here again O'Casey drains away some of the sympathy that is part and parcel of the age old story of the seduced and abandoned maiden. As with the legacy, this is not one of the melodramatist's tricks to play on the sympathies of the audience, but another strain in O'Casey's ironic designs in Juno. Through Mary, he is again satirizing the delusions of the working class in regard to the bourgeoisie as seen in Mary's choice of Charles Bentham over Jerry Devine. Indeed neither male offered much, but her choice of Charles seems to have something to do with her reading, the plays of Ibsen, and his pseudo-intellectual attachment to eastern mysticism. However, the irony is seen to greater advantage in Boyle's reaction to the news of Mary's pregnancy which he blames on Bentham's "yogees" and "prawna" and on Mary's "readin'." He is also very concerned about how this will appear to the neighbours, to Mrs. Madigan, to the nuns, and most of all, to Joxer. Typically, he is concerned only about how this

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[1] Scrimgeour, p. 79.

will reflect on his new found respectability, which, of course, no longer exists:

> "An' it'll be bellows'd all over th' district before you could say Jack Robinson; an' whenever I'm seen they'll whisper, 'That's th' father of Mary Boyle that had th' kid be th' swank she used to go with; d'ye know, d'ye know?' To be sure they'll know—more about it than I will meself." (p. 62)

Juno establishes the well-known Catholic attitude toward extra-marital pregnancies by stating that Mary's condition is worse than consumption; Boyle prescribes the Catholic cure for this disease known as pregnancy, "... he'll have to marry her!" (p. 61) Mary's sin is small in comparison to Boyle's destructive fooling or Johnny's betrayal of a comrade and friend, yet Mary is to be banished from her home. Here Boyle, in keeping with his new attitudes toward the church, is echoing the standard Catholic doctrine: Mary had committed one of the most serious sins known to the Irish church, she had indulged herself in sexual passion.[1] In their haste to punish Mary (Magdalen?) they forget their own sins which in O'Casey's humanist canon are severely mortal.

Boyle's final words on the matter presage the break-up of the family; here he plays the role of the aggrieved and scandalized father, and it is in the following speech that he achieves consummate knavery: "I'm goin' out now to have a few drinks with th' last few makes I have, an' tell that lassie o' yours not to be here when I come back; for if I lay me eyes on her, I'll lay me hans on her, an' if I lay me hans on her, I won't be accountable for me actions." (p. 64) Consistent to the end, as his world collapses about his ears, the best way Boyle knows to handle the situation is to repair to the nearest pub; he is trying to tell the

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[1] Lyons, pp. 154-159, passim.

world that a man deserves a few pints when he has to deal with such recalcitrant children. All the "hilarious mischief" is destroyed in that speech, even more so than in the final scene, for even though he might not be capable of carrying out his vicious threats of bodily harm against his pregnant daughter, the viciousness is inherent in his haste to escape from the home and responsibilities as a human being and as a father. His hypocrisy is made even more intolerable by his haste to get to the pub before Mary returns, and by issuing threats through a third party, Juno. That is the mark of a true knave.

Keeping step with Boyle's movement from fool to knave is his utterance of the catchphrase, "the whole worl's in a state o' chassis," on various occasions throughout the play. The world is in a state of "chassis" which grows progressively worse as the play goes on, but Boyle is not reacting to the real world, either without the tenement or within. He comments on trivial events, as for example, in the first act when he sees and hears Jerry asking Mary to allow him to kiss her "little, tiny, white hand!" One would think that the "chassis" would be the result of the War, or Tancred's murder, or even his disagreement with Juno over getting a job; but no, "the whole worl's in a state of chassis" because "chiselurs don't care a damn now about their parents", meaning that they hold hands in front of their elders. The next occasion upon which the phrase is uttered is the party to celebrate the legacy; here it is uttered upon the discovery that "Consols was down half per cent", which is why "the whole country's in a state o' chassis." (p. 35) It is hardly likely that a half per cent drop in Consols is likely to send the country into "chassis"; furthermore, the whole statement was only made to impress Mary's new boyfriend, who, as has already been mentioned, had

delusions of intellectualism. The last occasion upon which it is used is during that final scene when Joxer and Boyle enter into the deserted and broken home, drunk and incoherent. Boyle's world has disintegrated: his daughter has been abandoned, pregnant, his son has betrayed a comrade and has suffered the consequences, there is no legacy, and he has been left to wallow in his mire by his wife and daughter. Is that why the "whole worl's in a state o' chassis"? (p. 73) No. The "chassis" is the room seen through drunken dizziness.

The final scene of the play has been the focus of much critical attention. Robert Hogan describes the scene as follows: "The fusion at the end of the play when the impact of the final scene between Boyle and Joxer is contrasted with the previous scene containing Juno's speech, is one of the most devastating moments in modern drama."[1] David Krause calls the scene "a final scene of horrible humour."[2] The final scene functions very much in the same way as the final scene of Gunman: the curtain comes down on two characters, who, despite the upheaval in their world remain substantially unchanged. The scene is a synthesis of all the comic antics which identified Boyle and Joxer throughout the play, but, on this occasion, the fused whole is juxtaposed with the tragedy of family and war; it exposes the futility of war, and strengthens Juno's prayers championing individual love. In that single page at the end of the play, O'Casey has precisely summarized Boyle's drunkenness, his addiction to the catchphrase, his ridiculous escapes into his imaginary past, in this case his non-existent participation in the Easter Rebellion.

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[1] Hogan, Experiments, p. 41.

[2] Krause, The Man and His Work, p. 79.

All of this is neatly supported by Joxer's non-sequiturs, and carried out in a room dismantled, "an apt symbol," as Ronald Rollins indicates, "for a collapsing family and nation."[1] Samuel Beckett articulates best the critical attitudes to this scene:

> If Juno and the Paycock, as seems likely, is his best work so far, it is because it communicates most fully this dramatic dehiscence, mind and world come asunder in irreparable dissociation--"chassis" (the credit of having readapted Aguecheek and Belch in Joxer and the Captain being incidental to the larger credit of having dramatized the slump in the human solid)."[2]

In Juno and the Paycock, as in the other two plays of the trilogy, O'Casey is seeking the truth about his own society, caught in war and poverty with little hope for the future. Because O'Casey is an artist his search for the truth about Dublin of the early part of this century becomes universal: he reaches beyond the narrow minded strictures of the I.R.A. and the Free State, and relates very clearly to the individual. While I have tried to explain, in some cases, O'Casey's use of "popular tradition" in his plays, I hope that this method of taunting the Abbey audiences can be seen as part of the larger irony of the play, that the "freedom" of Ireland did not mean freedom from the "chains and slaveree" of poverty. As Juno and Mary leave the tenement to resume their lives, they do so only with the comfort of each other, not with the riches of the legacy. Their lives are essentially unchanged. The hope embodied in Juno is that of the ability to survive

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[1]Ronald Rollins, "Dramatic Symbolism in Sean O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy," West Virginia University Bulletin Philological Papers, 25 (1966): 53.

[2]Samuel Beckett, "The Essential and the Incidental," The Bookman (London), LXXXVI (1934), rpt. in Thomas Kilroy, ed., Sean O'Casey: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views, p. 167.

in an environment which conspires to destroy her; she will go on doing just that, surviving.

Juno and the Paycock is more than just a domestic tragedy. The disintegration of the family ironically parallels the disintegration of the new nation of the Irish Free State. The family's destruction is caused by the profligate spending based on the expectation of riches from a false will. Ireland is in ruins because of nationalistic illusions and the expectation of freedom based on the confused wording of a treaty clause: "For what [was the war fought]," asks O'Casey in Autobiographies, "For Document No. 2! Not to abolish poverty. No; just for a spate of words that Alice in Wonderland wouldn't understand."[1] Again, the ironic vision is created from despair born of the sight of Irishmen reaching for illusory abstractions at the cost of basic humanity.

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[1] Autobiographies II, p. 80.

CHAPTER III

THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS: THE GLORY MYTH MOCKED

In The Plough and the Stars, O'Casey widens his focus to include war as the exterior action of the play: "Here, as in earlier plays, the madness of war affects the fate of O'Casey's people; but here it controls that fate, whereas in the earlier plays it afforded only the setting and the circumstances for the human involvements of the characters."[1] Here again the target of his satiric irony is the vain, narrow, anti-humanist nationalism of those who take upon themselves the task of freeing Ireland from the British while neglecting the more realistic concerns of the majority of the population. In this case the target is those who rose up in rebellion against the British in Dublin, on Easter Monday, 1916. Again O'Casey is not taking the side of any of the belligerent groups; the war and its results are shown as the destructive consequences of misplaced idealism.

O'Casey's ironic perspective on "the Rising" is seen in the conflict between the illusions of the nationalist idealists and the mundane, squalid reality of the daily life of the tenement dwellers.[2] However, the conflict is felt in the dramatic juxtaposition of episodes, rather than in any dialectical confrontation. The conflict produces no resolution at the end, only "chassis." Perhaps, as Thomas Kilroy has

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[1] Smith, p. 44.

[2] Ibid., p. 44.

argued, this was O'Casey's intent.[1] However, at the end of The Plough and the Stars, the action seems to have brought about no fundamental changes in the lives of the tenement dewellers. Bessie's individual heroism is an indication of the sense of community felt by those who live in the tenements, which is also manifested in an act of heroism by one of the wastrels, Fluther Good. Bessie, however, is killed as a direct result of her heroism. The curtain scene shows two British soldiers in Bessie's flat, sitting next to Bessie's sheet-draped body, drinking tea and singing "Keep the Home Fires Burning" as Dublin lies in flames outside the tenement walls. This macabre scene sustains the irony to the very end, and we are left with the impression that when the fires are put out and the bodies buried, nothing will have changed.

Most of the facts relating to the uprising can be extracted from the play, for in The Plough and the Stars, as in Juno and Gunman, O'Casey was accurate as was possible at the time in presenting the details of historical events. "The Rising" was the vision of an organization known as the Irish Republican Brotherhood, better known to the world as the Fenians, an organization of which O'Casey had been a member during the planning years leading up to 1916. He was familiar with the philosophy behind, if not the actual details of, and armed uprising. The I.R.B. did not subscribe to the popularly-held notion that Ireland could be wrested from Britain by constitutional means; any move towards independence had to be made with force-of-arms. This type of thinking can be seen in the words of the Platform Orator of the second act:

> 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 . . . . (p. 162)

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[1] Twentieth Century Views, p. 14.

Thus, in 1916 the I.R.B. went ahead with plans to rise up against the British. The troops would be supplied by another organization known as the Irish Volunteers, a private army formed, initially, to combat the threat of separatism by the Ulster Orange Order. The I.R.B. also accepted the participation of the Irish Citizen Army (the group to which Clitheroe belongs in the play), another private army formed, initially, to protect union members from the attacks of police and British troops during the strikes and lock-outs of 1913, an organization of which O'Casey was a founder. The guns were supplied by Germany. The Commander-in-Chief of the combined forces of the Irish was Patrick Pearse, whose actual speeches O'Casey places in the mouth of the Platform Orator in the second act of The Plough and the Stars.

The I.R.B. decided on Easter 1916 as the best time for two reasons. The attentions of the British were occupied with the war in France, and, on Easter Monday most of the British officer corps would be out of Dublin at the Fairyhouse races. However, despite these obvious advantages, there was little hope of victory for Pearse. The Irish people, in general, seemed content to wait out the war in the hope that the British would grant Home Rule at the end of hostilities. Furthermore, many of the Volunteers joined the British army to show good faith to the British, thus weakening the force upon which the I.R.B. relied the most. They would go ahead with the rising, anyway, if only to keep alive the vision of an Irish Republic.

The Irish Republic was proclaimed outside the General Post Office on Easter Monday 1916. Other units dug in around Dublin city in a porous perimeter and waited for the British to come. The British came in force; with artillery, based on the gunboat "Helga" and on land, they

destroyed the centre of Dublin around the G.P.O. By Friday it was all over. The survivors were imprisoned and the leaders executed. The Rising would have been a ridiculous failure but for one mistake by the British. The executed leaders became martyrs almost immediately, which gave the Republican movement new spirit. War against the British was renewed in 1918, a war which forms the background for The Shadow of a Gunman, and was followed by the Civil War, which is the backdrop for Juno and the Paycock.

In the action of The Plough and the Stars, O'Casey juxtaposes the actions of three groups of characters to present his ironic perspective on the Easter Rising: the idealists, their victims, and a third group whose actions mock the futility of the efforts of the idealists in fighting for abstractions. This last group is composed of comic figures who are all closely related to the comic characters of the first two plays of the trilogy--Fluther Good, Peter Flynn, The Young Covey, Mrs. Gogan, and Bessie Burgess.

The idealists are all men; the victims are all women. Within the comic group the men are self-deceiving the women realistic in facing survival in the slums. Again O'Casey affirms the strength of women, on this occasion in the person of Bessie Burgess.[1]

In presenting his anti-heroic view of the nationalists in The Plough and the Stars, O'Casey was deliberately provoking his audience, because, as I have already stated, the dead leaders, despite their folly, were transformed into martyrs by the way in which they met their death.

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[1]Several critics have discussed the "group" concept in The Plough and the Stars; see, for example, James Scrimgeour in the work cited, p. 87, and Ronald Ayling, Continuity and Innovation, pp. 65-66.

Even W.B. Yeats was moved by their action to write a poem in which he glorified The Rising.[1] The opressiveness of cultural and social life in the early days of the Free State was as much a function of attitudes developed among the people after the Rising as it was of the privileged position of the Roman Catholic Church in the new state. That the Irish people were preoccupied with themselves is understating the case; this attitude is the target in the following statement made by Fluther in response to The Covey's invocation of Karl Marx: "What th' hell do I care what he says. I'm Irishman enough not to lose me head be follyin' foreigners!" (p. 175) Fluther's outburst is a detail in the ironic style of the play, of course, and it points to the obsession of the newly independent nation with cultural and racial purity. The "Irishness" of an individual was measured by his participation in or support of the 1916 Rising. The fact that the vast majority of the population did not seem to care very much about what happened during Easter Week of 1916 was conveniently forgotten about in the euphoria of independence. J.L. Styan's evaluation of Act II of The Plough and the Stars effectively formulates O'Casey's dramatic intent to attack that hypocrisy, not only in Act II, but in the whole play:

> The decision to present to a still impassioned Irish audience of 1926 the events immediately preceding the hallowed Easter Rebellion of 1916 through the talk in a squalid public-house was a deliberate act of comic provocation.[2]

The idealists in the play, like their historical counterparts, are a small group of ultra-nationalist zealots who rise up in rebellion against the British. Their spiritual guide is the "Voice of the Man,"

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[1] "Easter 1916"

[2] Styan, p. 132.

the Platform Orator of the second act. The rebellion is started by the proclamation of the Irish Republic on behalf of all the people of Ireland and the collective memory of their dead patriots who fell in other violent uprisings against the British. Against the overwhelming odds of the numerical and logistic superiority of the British Army and the apathy of the people, the Rising becomes a futile gesture, the Republic an "idealistic abstraction."[1] The patriots of The Plough and the Stars rejoice in the prospect of death and bloodshed, and march into battle with the foreknowledge of defeat:

> Capt. Brennan (catching up The Plough and the Stars). Imprisonment for th' Independence of Ireland!
> Lieut. Langon (catching up the Tricolour). Wounds for th' Independence of Ireland!
> Clitheroe. Death for th' Independence of Ireland!
> The Three (together). So help us God! (p. 178)

The manifestation of this fanaticism is seen on the individual level in the character of Clitheroe, who rejects the symbols of reality, pregnant wife and home, for the symbols of abstract idealism, the rhetoric and the uniform. O'Casey further undermines his patriotic fervour, in showing that it catches fire only after he finds out that he has been promoted, and that he is to lead a unit in the manoeuvres which will eventually become the Rising. In this and other ways, Clitheroe and the idealists mock themselves.

Their action is also mocked by the actions of the comic group, acting individually or in sub-groupings. However, the ironic perspective presented by O'Casey in the conflict between the illusions of the idealists and the reality of Dublin as seen in the comics would not have the same impact without the presence of the victims. Nora and Bessie seem to come straight from a melodrama, but O'Casey exploits the emo-

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[1] Scrimgeour, p. 107.

tional involvement of melodramatic devices to show that the sham-battles had become events with deadly consequences. The clash of illusion and reality without the visible evidence of these deadly consequences in Nora's insanity and Bessie's death would be reduced to that of the juxtaposition of comic fooling with the idealistic folly of the nationalists. It would remain an ironic view of events, but might result in misplaced sympathy for the patriots. A play about the Rising and its victims would be too melodramatic. It is in the juxtaposition of the actions of the three separate groups that O'Casey stage-manages his ironic perspective. It is the purpose of this essay to examine the function of the comic group in achieving that perspective.

Saros Cowasjee wrote the following of the second act:

> Though O'Casey follows the pattern with which we have familiarized ourselves, there is a shift of scale in the Second Act. So far we had noticed that illusions provided the comedy and actuality supplied the tragedy. In the Second Act, however, the illusions--namely the high idealism of the Sepaker and his impassioned callfor duty--have tragic overtones, while the actuality--the normal grossness of life--becomes comic.[1]

As with that of Styan, this evaluation of Act II can be easily applied to the play as a whole. However, the division is not that mathematical; the comic figures are not without their illusions, particularly in the first two acts. However, there is a difference between the illusions of the comics and those of the idealists, and that difference points to the central conflict of reality and illusion: for the comics, illusions are a necessary part of the equipment needed to deal with actuality, while for the idealists the illusions become the actuality. For the comics, illusions result in a certain amount of self-deception; for the nationalists, the result is self-destruction and the destruction

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[1] Cowasjee, p. 85.

of others.

O'Casey puts the illusions of the comic characters to use in the overall ironic perspective; they help to infuse the play with ironic tones in the acts which show the preparations for the Rising. O'Casey adds the dimension of a stylized dialect to help in the creation of the tone. The slum dwellers, on the occasions when they quarrel and strut, do not speak in the naturalistic language which was a source of comedy in both The Shadow of a Gunman and Juno and the Paycock. This new dialect relies heavily on poetic devices such as alliteration and hyperbole, and it is the overuse of these devices and figures which mocks both the speaker and his subject:

> Peter (plaintively, with his eyes looking up at the ceiling). I'll say nothin' . . . . I'll leave you to th' day when th' all-pitiful, all-merciful, all-lovin' God'll be handin' you to the' angels to be rievin' an' roastin' you, tearin' an' tormentin' you, burin' and blastin' you.
> . . . .
> I'll make him stop his laughin' an' leerin', jibin' an' jeerin', an' scarifyin' people with his corner-boy insinuations. (pp. 145-46)

These are the reactions of Peter to the taunting of The Covey; they could better be classified as over-reactions. However, as the material effects of the Rising on the tenements become clear, this language virtually disappears from use as the language of actuality begins to assert itself.

Raymond Williams has this to say of the stylized Dublinese:

> . . . [it is] the consistent evidence of poverty: of a starved, showing-off imagination . . . . Boyle and Joxer, or again Fluther, are in the same movement engaging and despicable; talking to hold the attention from the fact that they have nothing to say.[1]

Fluther provides a good example of its use in the first half of the

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[1] Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, 2nd. rev. ed., (n.p.: Chatto and Windus, 1968; Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1973), p. 165.

play. Within Fluther there is a struggle: to drink or not to drink. The former always wins for it meets with very little resistance. This is a weakness exploited for comedy by O'Casey throughout the trilogy; in The Plough and the Stars the comedy is strengthened by the language:

> . . . . Fluther's on the wather waggon now. You could stan' where you're stannin' chantin', 'Have a glass o' malt, Fluther; Fluther, have a glass o' malt,' till th' bells would be ringin' th' ould year out an' th' New Year in, an' you'd have as much chance o' movin' Fluther as a tune on a tin whistle would move a deaf man an' he dead. (p. 148)

The next time we hear that language out of the mouth of Fluther is in a bar that same evening, and that is not his first visit of the night, as Rosie informs us. On this occasion the language is spoken in justification of a "glass o' malt." The language of the proud abstainer is replaced by the blathering of a Sunday patriot:

> You couln't feel any way else at a time like this when th' spirit of a man is pulsin' to be out fightin' for th' thruth with his feel thremblin' on th' way, maybe to th' gallows, an' his ears tinglin' with th' faint, far-away sound of burstin' rifle-shots that'll maybe whip th' last little shock o' life out of him that's left lingerin' in his body. (p. 163)

Of course, this spirit does not last too long; at the end of the act as the patriots leave to prepare for war, Fluther leaves in the arms of Rosie. There are several other occasions in the play where O'Casey puts this language to good use; I will refer to them where they contribute best to the ironic perspective.

In the first act the ironic tone is established through the constant back-biting and bickering of the tenement dwellers, and the introduction of the conflict between Nora and Jack. The comics, especially, Mrs. Gogan and The Young Covey, engage in calumny and detraction. Mrs. Gogan ridicules Nora for "her notions of upperosity," which are, in fact, Nora's attempts to use basic manners. This is another per-

sistent theme of the trilogy: that anyone who attempts to redeem the ugliness of the tenement must be subjected to contempt. Nora is attacked, behind her back, for her efforts to civilize those around her:

> Mrs. Gogan. She's always grumblin' about havin' to live in a tenement house. 'I wouldn't like to spend me last hour in one, let alone live me life in a tenement,' say she. 'Vaults,' says she, 'that are hidin' th' dead, instead of homes that are shelterin' th' livin'.' 'Many a good one,' says I, 'was reared in a tenement house.' . . . . An' she has th' life frightened out o' them [The Covey and Peter]; washin' their face, combin' their hair, wipin' their feet, brushin' their clothes, thrimmin' their nails, cleanin' their teeth—God Almighty, you'd think th' poor men were undergoin' penal servitude. (p. 138)

Bessie attacks her to her face, because she insists on privacy, and because "she [is] always thryin' to speak proud things, an' lookin' like a might y one in th' congregation o' th' people!" (p. 149) Nora's quest for gentility meets with derision and contempt and establishes her as a victim of her environment before we perceive her as a victim of Jack's fantasy, and, ultimately, of the war.

The reality of tenement life is laid bare in scenes such as those mentioned above, in the scurrilous destructiveness of the language. The pattern of quarrel scenes is intended to keep this reality before us as we progress towards the more serious action of the play. While these quarrels always mock or point to the futility of the actions of the patriot idealists, they also perform the function of revealing the more contemptible side of tenement life. The running wrangle between The Covey and Peter is indicative of this malaise. Peter is shown, early in Act I, "foostherin'" around the flat, getting his Forester's uniform in order for the meeting which will take place that evening:

> 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.

Peter's uniform--that of a benevolent association--is a source of mockery to Mrs. Gogan: "Like somethin' you'd pick off a Christmas Tree;" and to The Covey: "Lookin' like th' illegitimate son of an illegitimate child of a corporal in th' Mexican army!" (pp. 139, 152) The uniform and Peter's superficial service to the cause of the Republic become the butt of The Covey's abuse for the first two acts of the play. It is true that Peter's shallow posturing is an obvious target, and that it is closely related to that of Jack and the other nationalists, but the fact that The Covey keeps up the refrain, accompanied by his mechanical repetition of half-perceived Marxist precepts, shows the poverty of his life. He engages in "a game of proddin' an' twartin'" just for the sake of it, because there is nothing else to do. Peter's whining responses indicate a similar paucity on his part.

Scene xi depicts the conflict between Jack and Nora that has only been hinted at in the gossiping which opened the play. This conflict is a foreboding and a microcosm of the play's central conflict which sets the illusions of the idealists against the reality of the slums. Nora has a vision of domestic bliss, a happy, civilized home and family. For the moment Jack appears willing to participate in the fulfillment of Nora's dream, because his own dream, a commission in the Citizen Army, appears to have dissolved. Jack is at home with his wife on the evening of the "Great Demonstration" because he is sulking:

> Mrs. Gogan. Just because he wasn't made a captain of. He wasn't goin' to be in anythin' 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 the door showing it off, till the man came an' put out the street lamps on him. God, I think he used to bring it to bed with him! But I'm tellin' you herself was delighted that that cock didn't crow, for she's like a clockin' hen if he leaves her sight for a minute. (p. 140)

Jack's obsession with the trappings of idealism are closely connected, in that speech by Mrs. Gogan, to Peter's similar preoccupation, and, as a result is denigrated as foolish ostentation.

The evening of domestic banter is interrupted by the entrance of Brennan in his I.C.A. uniform, with orders for Jack. He is to lead a unit of the I.C.A. in the demonstration and in the mock-attack on Dublin Castle to follow. Jack now discovers that he had in fact been promoted and that Nora had burned the letter which contained the information. Jack, now convinced of his destiny, leaves the flat to the sound of Nora's prophetic speech:

> . . . . 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! (p. 158)

The first act, then, exposes the formation and functions of the three character groups. The idealists, in the person of Jack, are seen to shun reality for the illusory Republic, and war is hinted at in Clitheroe's orders to take command of an I.C.A. unit, and "to see that all units are provided with full equipment; two days rations and fifty-rounds of ammunition." Furthermore, after the "Great Demonstration," the army will leave Liberty Hall for a reconnaissance attack on Dublin Castel." (p. 157) Nora's role as victim take shape through her relationship with the other tenement dwellers, and the fact that her dream of an evening of marital bliss becomes the first casualty of the war. The comic figures establish the overall ironic tones of the play through their bickering and back-biting. This bickering and back-biting, however, is merely a symptom of the disease which afflicts their lives, poverty, and that is the reality of life in Dublin in those "stirring" days leading up to the Rising.

The second act is built on the juxtaposition of the actions of two groups. While the nationalists hold their "Great Demonstration" in preparation for the Rising outside a public-house, the comic characters continue to strut and quarrel inside. Much of the dialogue inside the public-house is carried on in the stylized Dublinese to which I have already referred, and is juxtaposed with the direct and formal style of the parts of the Platform Orator's speech heard on four occasions during the act. The Orator welcomes the First World War as an example of the return of heroism to Europe, and example that should be heeded in Ireland; Irishmen should not be afraid to shed blood and die in the cause of freedom. The deadly seriousness of the Orator's call to arms and sacrifice is clearly mocked by the reality of the tenements, removed, for the time being, to its second home, the public-house.[1]

The foregoing is a very brief synopsis of the ideas expressed by the majority of critics. There is general agreement that the Orator's idealism is mocked by the realism of the public-house. However, there is one critic who takes the opposing view. It is difficult to understand why he singles out Act II of The Plough and the Stars as an example of the opposite of what O'Casey is trying to achieve in every other act of the trilogy. I am quoting the comments of this critic, P.S. O'Hegarty, in full, not only because I wish to argue against them, but also because they are a perfect example of the narrow-mindedness which typified the adherents of the Republican movement at the time:

> The conversation, the arguments, are those of the Dublin of the time, petty, squalid, not ennobling. Into the bar come two men [actually three], an Irish Volunteer and a member of the Irish Citizen Army, carrying flags. They come from a

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[1] Scrimgeour, pp. 105-106.

> meeting outside. They are worked up, enthusiastic. Their talk is of fighting for Ireland, dying for Ireland. There is the background, an actual true, artistic presentation of the background which was Ireland on Easter Monday of 1916. Across that whole scene comes in flashes, a sentence now and a sentence again, a voice from the outside, the voice of the orator at a meeting, and the words are the words of Pearse in that most unforgettable and most classic utterance of his, that speech at the grave of O'Donovan Rossa, which is one of the great Irish national orations. It cuts like a trumpet call, like the sword of the Lord, like a gleam of beauty, right across the squalidity, the maudlinism, the spinelessness, which was Ireland at the time; just as the Rising itself came, suddenly and like a sign from heaven. It is a true act, a perfectly beautiful act, true humanly and true historically, and to it I take off my hat.[1]

I believe those remarks represent a misreading of O'Casey's intent. Condensed in the words of the Orator we find all the futile idealism of the nationalist movement. The talk of "arms," "bloodshed," "sacrifice," and "the exhilaration of war" just does not connect with the squalidity of the public-house behaviour; this is the central argument, not only of The Plough and the Stars, but also of the whole trilogy. The nationalist goals are divorced from the reality that is the Dublin slums, and as a result, for O'Casey, become useless abstractions In war, the men willingly sacrifice themselves for these abstractions, while the women suffer real deprivation, both physical and emotional. In the end neither suffering nor sacrifice brings about change. Consequently, O'Hegarty's words praising the sentiments of the speaker in a historical context exist on the same level; they don't connect with historical reality, because they don't tell the whole truth about "Ireland at the time," and they certainly do not connect with the reality of O'Casey's drama, because he chooses to ignore the evidence of the other two plays of the trilogy, which preceded The Plough and the Stars, and

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[1] P.S. O'Hegarty, "A Dramatist of New-born Ireland," North American Review, ccxxiv(1927), rpt. in Ronald Ayling, Sean O'Casey: Modern Judgements (London: Macmillan, 1969; Nashville, Tennessee: Aurora, 1970), pp. 64-65.

the remainder of The Plough and the Stars itself. Rather than the words of the Orator cutting across the squalidity "like the sword of the Lord," the squalidity of Dublin, which is represented in the activity of the public-house stands as a scathing reproach of the Orator and all he represents.

Most of what takes place inside the public-house is comic counterpoint to the deadly seriousness of the action outside. A strain in the counterpoint is provided in the speeches of Bessie Burgess which are delivered in the comic language of the stylized Dublin dialect and rival the rhetoric of the Orator. On one occasion they even speak of the same subject, the First World War:

> Voice of the Man [Orator]. Comrade soldiers of the Irish Volunteers and of 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 battlefields . . . . 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. (p. 164)
>
> . . . .
>
> Bessie. There's a storm of anger tossin' in me heart, thinkin' of all th' poor Tommies, an' with them me own son, dhrenched in water an' soaked in blood, gropin' their way to a shattherin' death, in a shower o' sheels! Young men with th' sunny lust o' life beamin' in them, layin' down their white bodies, shredded into torn an' bloddy pieces, on th' altar that God Himself has built for the sacrifice of heroes! (p. 168)

The sentiments are almost the same; they both invoke the central mystery of the Roman Catholic Mass, the sacrifice, as metaphor for the carnage of war. However, their purposes differ in the extreme, one ridiculing the other. The Orator, in an act of ultimate vanity, deifies the abstract Republic, and calls on Irishmen to sacrifice themselves to this new god. Bessie's purpose is much more simple; she speaks of the war in the pub

hoping to provoke another quarrel. With the emotions of the habitués running in favour of the Orator for the moment, and in the presence of her arch rival, Mrs. Gogan, Bessie's tenement nurtured shrewishness finds a perfect outlet. As a Protestant, she feels isolated and threatened in an environment dominated by Catholics, and her form of defence is to take every opportunity to deride the Republicans, the vast majority of whom are Catholics. In the third act she continues to use the war in Europe to denigrate the war in Dublin, an ironic standard which shows that Bessie too has her illusions.

In Act II O'Casey clearly establishes ironic tension through the manipulation of language and situation. The Orator's call for the supreme sacrifice is ridiculed by the tenement blather, and by the frenetic entering of the pub by the comic figures for alcoholic refreshment, a need brought on, for Peter and Fluther at least, by the high emotional tones of the Orator: "Two halves . . . A Meetin' like this always makes me feel as if I could dhrink Loch Errin dhry." (p. 163) Apparently, the words of the Orator had the same effect on his soldiers. Just after the culmination of another quarrel between The Covey and Fluther, Brennan, Clitheroe, and a Volunteer, Langon, enter the bar, "mesmerized by the fervency of the speeches," and, in a provocative act by O'Casey, carrying the blessed symbols of their cause, their flags.[1] Their mechanical declarations of intent to offer themselves in sacrifice to Ireland are well timed by O'Casey; theirs is a total commitment to death, while the earlier "patriotism of Peter and Fluther has dissipated in drink and

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[1] For a first hand account of the riot which was provoked by the flags in the pub, see Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill, eds., Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press; London: Feffer & Simons, 1967), pp. 253-255.

blather:

> Clitheroe. You have a mother, Langon.
> 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.
> . . . .
> Clitheroe. Death for th' Independence of Irelan! (p. 178)

They leave the bar and give the orders to begin a march which will end in death and destruction five months hende. Between the orders to march Fluther and Rosie leave in each other's arms, to the words of Rosie's bawdy, life-affirming ditty.

The first and second acts show the preparations of war; the third and fourth show us the war and its consequences. Five months after the "Great Demonstration" the Volunteers and the Citizen Army rise up against the British and Dublin becomes a city under siege. However, the Rising is not seen from the point of view of the combatants, the viewpoint is the tenement. From there the action of the Rising cannot be seen as heroic; instead we see the heroism born of the will of the tenement dwellers to survive. They close ranks to protect one of their own, Nora, who now becomes a manifest victim of Jack's folly. Fluther seeks and finds her in the midst of the street-fighting into which she had ventured in search of Jack. Her failure to find him, the fact that she had to endure the verbal and physical abuse of the fighters and the camp followers, and her fears for Jack's life push her to the edge of insanity, to the point where she is unable to function alone. Nora's final distraught state is brought on by her confrontation with Jack, who arrives, in company with the wounded, Langon and Brennan, outside the tenement in the course of a retreat. The mesmerized idealism is now gone, but its after effects linger as he casts her off, no longer for the glory of the

Republic but for fear of being called a coward if he stays. (pp. 194-197) The fixation with appearances remains constant, and Nora is the victim, in any event. It is Bessie who shows the human resources, the ability to deal with reality, by comforting Nora and by braving the bullets to find her a doctor.

In the last two acts the function of the comic characters becomes almost choric;[1] they evolve into ironic commentators on the exterior action. Acting singly or in sub-groups they stand apart from the exterior action, and by word and deed afford an ironic view of the participants in, and the events of, the Rising. Bessie, acting alone, harangues the male comic figures as well as Brennan, Langon, and Clitheroe in retreat. Fluther, Peter and The Covey play pitch-and-toss or cards as Dublin is shelled, or by the light of the candles on Mollser's coffin, all the time commenting wryly on the exterior action of the Rising. For the most part, their previous squabbling is forgotten, or referred to in only in passing, as they are drawn closer together. In addition to these choric roles, the morbid commentaries of Mrs. Gogan constitute an undertone of comic irony to the overall tragic tones of Acts III and IV.

As a choric figure Bessie remains strident in her condemnation of the Rising. Her theme is that of the more loyalist Irish of the period, who believed that Irishmen should support the British war effort in Europe rather than subvert it by armed rebellion; these are attitudes already expressed by her in Act II in her efforts to provoke a fight in the pub. Her harangues are delivered from a window above the level of the stage, thus setting her apart, physically, from the action on stage. Her

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[1] Hogan, p. 49.

vituperative mocking is no less forceful but is now spoken in the context of war, rather than in the uncertain atmosphere of preparation. The sham-battles have given way to the real ones. It is during scenes of extreme poignance in Nora's action that she is at her most abusive. Following the exposition at the beginning of Act III which announces the outbreak of hostilities, her role and tone as a choric figure is set:

> Maybe yous are satisfied now; maybe yous are satisfied now. Go on an' get guns if yous are men - Johnny get your gun, get your gun, get your gun! Yous are all nicely Shanghaied now; th' boy hasn't a sword on his thigh now! Oh, yous are all nicely Shanghaied now! (p. 183)

This speech precedes Fluther's return with Nora from her search for Jack. Nora is close to hysteria: "My Jack will be killed, my Jack will be killed! . . . He is to be butchered as a sacrifice to the dead!" (p. 184) Bessie's commentary, from the same window, in the same tones, and in almost the same words, as the one previously quoted, now has more serious overtones in the presence of a palpable victim of the war:

> Yous are all nicely Shanghaied now! Sorra mend th' lasses that have been kissin' an' cuddlin' their boys into th' sheddin' of blood! . . . Stabbin' in th' back th' men that are dyin' in th' threnches for them!
> . . . .
> Rule Brittania, Britannia rules the waves, Britons never, never, never shall be slaves! (p. 184)

She maintains her mocking theme throughout the scene depicting Brennan, Langon, and Clitheroe in front of the tenement in retreat, counterpointing the seriousness of the conflict between Jack and Nora, and Langon's cries for medical help:

> Th' Minstrel Boys aren't feelin' very comfortable now. Th' big guns has knocked all th' harps out of their hands. General Clitheroe'd rather be unlacin' his wife's bodice than standin' at a barricade . . . An' th' professor of chicken - butcherin', there, finds he's up against somethin' a little tougher even than his own chickens, an' that's sayin' a lot. (p. 194)

Her repetition of "choke the chicken, choke the chicken" does as much to mock herself as it does Brennan.[1] However, as already indicated, as the evidence of Nora's victimization becomes clear, Bessie's humanity, hinted at, in her almost surreptitious proffering of a mug of milk to Mollser, (p. 186) asserts itself.[1]

The first choral scene with Fluther, Peter, and the Covey is the fourth scene of Act III, with a similar scene in Act IV. In keeping with the progressively serious overtones of the comic action, characteristic of the Dublin trilogy, the first scene is provocative, the second, macabre. The first scene is an example of the comic provocation found throughout the trilogy: it shows three men playing pitch-and-toss as the British open fire with artillery on the nationalists. The shooting prompts no stronger reaction than an aborted resumption of the comic squabbling of the two previous acts:

> Fluther. Aw, holy Christ, that's not playin' th' game.
> Peter (plaintively). What would happen if a shell landed here now?
> The Covey (ironically). You'd be off to heaven in a fiery chariot.
> Peter. In spite of all th' warnin's that's ringin' around us, are you goin' to start yous pickin' at me again? (p. 187)

The second such scene opens the fourth act and also serves an expository function. We discover that the tenement has been attacked with machine guns and that the threesome--Fluther, Peter, and The Covey--has sought refuge in Bessie's flat as a result. Even there it is not safe to go near the windows because snipers are still active on both sides. We discover that Mollser has died and now lies in a coffin in Bessie's

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[1] Hotan, p. 50.

[2] Ayling, Continuity and Innovation, p. 81.

flat. Nora, now in the early stages of insanity, has miscarried and her dead-born child lies in the coffin with Mollser. We learn of these occurrences in the course of a card-game played by the light of the candles on Mollser's coffin. It is a scene of macabre humour in which O'Casey uses, by implication, the tradition of the Irish wake to create an atmosphere of comedy laced with terror.[1] The terror of the mock-wake is compounded by the imminent danger of attack from the outside. The news of destruction to city, tenement, and slum-dwellers is intertwined with the card-playing banter and drinking, with Nora's feeble moans and the expressiomistic "lilting chant" of the calls for ~~an~~ ambulance in the background:

> The Covey (having dealt the cards). Spuds up again.
> [Nora moans feebly in room on left;]
> Fluther. There, she's at it again. She's been quiet for a long time, all th' same;
> The Covey. She was quiet before, sure, an' she broke out again worse than ever.
> . . . What was led that time?
> Peter. Thray o'hearts, Thray o' hearts, Thray o' hearts.
> Fluther. It's damned hard lines to think of her dead-born kiddie lyin' there in th' arms o' poor little Mollser. Mollser snuffed it sudden too, after all.
> . . . .
> Voices in a lilting chant to the left in a didtant street.
> Red Cr . . . oss, Red Cr . . . oss! . . . . Ambu . . . lance, Ambu . . . lance! (p. 201).

The chorus also comments on Bessie's heroism which is thus set in ironic juxtaposition to the anti-heroic perspective on the Rising seen in the death and destruction wreaked on city and people:

> The Covey: . . . . I don't know what we'd have done only for oul' Bessie; up with her for th' past three nights, hand
> Fluther. I always knew there was never anything really derogatory wrong with poor oul' Bessie . . . (p. 202).

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[1] Vivian Mercier, The Irish Comic Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 47.

The looting, which breaks up the first choral scene with Fluther, Peter and The Covey, effectively points to the futility of the Rising. As the volunteers sacrifice themselves for the abstract Republic, the slum dwellers mock them by "pickin' up anythin' shaken up an' scathered about in th' loose confusion of a general plundher." For the slum dwellers, the Rising presents an opportunity to obtain some of life's necessities - food and clothing - that they would have no hope of having otherwise. It is a manifestation of the survival instinct common to all O'Casey slum characters: they "scramble amid bursting bombs and bullets to grab the only trophies that have any meaning for them."[1] It is also ironic that some of the bullets fired at them come from the guns of the Volunteers: it is an act consistent with the unreality of their ideals.

While most of the comic figures seek out food and clothing, Fluther loots a pub, a fact which O'Casey exploits for tragicomic irony. The scene (x) in which he returns to the tenement drunk is typical of the Dublin trilogy. Fluther's "wild, drunken yell" is heard as Nora, emotionally destroyed, is carried into the tenement by Bessie. His drunken songs and Dublin street argot are comic but his drunkenness renders him useless to help Nora, now in need of medical help. At this point Bessie's humanitarian tendencies are strengthened as she reacts against Fluther's drunkenness. Beyond this point Bessie is no longer a comic figure:

> You bowsey, come in over o' that . . . . I'll trim your thricks & drunken dancin' for you, an' none of us knowin' how soon we'll bump into a world we were never in before. (p. 199)

Bessie's victimization approaches the tragic, in that it has some

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[1] Krause, p. 72.

elements of catharsis. The harridan of the tenements has human qualities; she is redeemed by her death in the eyes of the audience. She knowingly enters an area of danger to save Nora and is shot dead. If the play were to end with the death of Bessie, then it would end on a note of hope: that the human qualities of tenement women might somehow outlive the negative, death-worshipping idealism of the nationalists and establish the Golden Age. The play does not end there, O'Casey plays one more scene around the sheet-draped body of Bessie which dims the hope engendered by her action.

The curtain scene is a more macabre version of the mock-wake scene around Mollser's coffin which opened the final act. Mollser's coffin is replaced by Bessie's sheet covered body; Fluther, Peter, and The Covey are replaced by two British soldiers. Nora is now experiencing hallucinations, and is led away by Mrs. Gogan. The chant for the Red Cross ambulance is reiterated in the background. The soldiers drink the tea made by Bessie for Nora and sing "Keep the Home Fires Burning" as Dublin burns outside. Seamus Deane argues that this scene is "O'Casey's most powerful single image of the vicious collusion which has taken place between domestic, homely bliss and political and military violence."[1] It goes beyond that! The presence of the two British soldiers, singing beside the body of their victim--the dead heroine of the tenements--with Dublin in Flames, in the final scene of the final play of the trilogy is O'Casey's final ironic testament to the fact that despite the glory myths and blood-sacrifice of the nationalist patriots, nothing has changed in the tenements. Those two soldiers could easily be Clitheroe, Langon and

[1] Deane, p. 153.

Brennan; both sets of belligerents believe in unquestioning duty for their country which precludes ordinary human considerations. It is a despairing end to a despairing vision.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, my purpose has been to show how the ironic vision which informs O'Casey's Dublin trilogy reflects his ambivalent attitudes to the public events which tore Ireland apart in his time. In The Shadow of a Gunman the ironic perspective on the War of Independence is embodied in the character of Donal Davoren, a pseudo-poet who decides to play at the role of I.R.A. gunman, initially, to dally with Minnie, but also because it gives him the recognition he craves. He is a vain man, whose vanity leads to destruction in the tenement, and ultimately the death of Minnie. The slum-dwellers suffer for the illusions of Davoren, just as the mass of the Irish population are made to suffer, in the War of Independence, for the illusions of a few.

In Juno and the Paycock O'Casey shifts his ironic focus from the near-tragic figure of Davoren to the comic character of Captain Boyle. Boyle inhabits a world of illusion where no reality is allowed to enter. Initially, his bragging and attempts to avoid responsibility are the source of hilarious comedy, but as the play progresses, his fooling gives way to malevolent knavery. He leads his family to destruction, spending prodigally on the basis of a false will and by living in the world of illusions. The destruction of the Boyle family ironically parallels the disintegration of the new nation of the Irish Free State outside the tenement.

In The Plough and the Stars O'Casey widens his ironic focus to include a group of comic figures. However, while possessing some of

Boyle's qualities, the members of this group are seen to represent the reality of tenement life. Through them O'Casey mocks the illusions of the nationalists who rose up in futile rebellion against the British on Easter Monday, 1916. While the nationalists wage war for idealistic abstractions, the tenement dwellers are seen quarrelling, drinking, womanizing, and looting. They also engage in acts of heroism to help a real victim of the rebellion, Nora Clitheroe, driven mad by her husband's espousal of the nationalist cause over wife and family. Again, the lasting impression is ironic: the nationalists' fight for freedom only leads to more suffering, and those who suffer most are those least involved in the fighting.

O'Casey's ironic vision in the Dublin trilogy is, ultimately, despairing. Dublin is seen in the throes of three wars fought for the greater glory of Ireland and its people, yet they only lead to suffering and death for those least involved, the tenement dwellers of Dublin. The constitutive image which congeals the playwrights' attitudes is the final scene of the final play of the trilogy. At the end of the violent convulsions which have wracked Dublin, two British soldiers, symbols of the domination of Ireland, sing and drink tea in a tenement as Dublin burns. At the end of the trilogy, as indeed at the end of those wars in Dublin, nothing much had changed for O'Casey.

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