Ideology and Dramatic Form in the Plays of Sean O'Casey, 1922-49.

A Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree,

Master of Letters, University of Oxford,

Trinity, 1994,

by Peter Robert Higginson.

Sean O'Casey was a writer much involved in both social and theatrical politics. He was, by turns, a Communist, nationalist, pacifist, feminist and Christian-humanist, and one of the early concerns of the thesis is to clarify his political position *vis a vis* leading socialists of his time, and to explore the extent to which his politics took overt shape as an ideology within his plays.

A second and central concern is to explore the aesthetics of the less definite 'political' form of *carnivalism* within O'Casey's work, and to examine in the plays the relations between this form of anti-rationalist and anti-bourgeois comedy and a parallel mood of increasing despair and 'nihilism' which I believe to be related to O'Casey's frustration at finding so few of his political ambitions and values fulfilled in the Ireland of his time.

At its best, his carnivalism expresses a deeply *dialogical* grasp of metaphysical issues. At its worst, it twists into an entropic nihilism under the pressure of its own anti-idealistic materialism. In the later plays (1927-49), an attempt is made to balance the earlier nihilism with a stress upon carnivalistic elements of dance, song and play, but the later work is flawed at those moments where metaphysical expressions become detached from social and self-consciously discursive processes and become merely an expression of romantic vitalism.

Finally, one can theorise O'Casey's carnivalism as a response to the efforts of some contemporary writers to detach their literary language from ordinary social processes in the attempt to create a 'mythological' and nationally pure form of drama which had shed signs of its contemporaneity. I have chosen the example of W. B. Yeats to illustrate this point. O'Casey's carnivalism produces a hybrid form of Irish drama which is, by contrast, unashamed of its precipitation from the heteroglossic literary and social discourses of its time. Ultimately, however, O'Casey shares much of Yeats's suspicion of English empiricism and utilitarianism and his work can be seen as complementary to Yeats's own post-colonial development.

Ideology and Dramatic Form in the Plays of Sean O'Casey, 1922-1949.

A Thesis Submitted for the Award of Master of Letters, University of Oxford by Peter Robert Higginson, June 1994.

Supervised by Professor Terry Eagleton.

BODLEIAN LIBRARY
10 JUN 95

For Jayne Biddle.

"The bus swung round the corner, lights blazing. 'Oh', I said, 'I've forgotten to ask you what your ambitions are.' 'Ambitions?' he grinned. 'That the next may be a great play- and not to send the boy to Oxford.'"

(J. L. Hodson, in conversation with
Sean O'Casey, 1932.)

Preface.

Readers will note that primary source quotations set off from the text have been double-spaced for the reason that the plethora of itallicized stage directions by Sean O'Casey renders the material otherwise illegible.

Readers will also kindly note that note numbers for single-spaced off-set quotations have been rendered in standard and not in raised numerals so as to avoid interference with the the line above them.

Contents.

Introduction ..... p. 1.

Chapter One:

'The Politics of Sean O'Casey'..... p. 16.

Chapter Two:

'Carnival-nihilism' ..... p. 63.

Chapter Three:

'Plays, 1922-26' ..... p. 97.

Chapter Four:

'Plays, 1927-49' ..... p. 140.

Conclusion:

'Some Reflections on the
Contexts of Carnival-nihilism' ..... p. 180.

Bibliography ..... p. 194.

Introduction.

The literary criticism of Sean O'Casey has not been distinguished by its theoretical sophistication. Rather, a partisan and ideological debate regarding the nature of his political and literary merit has tended to hold sway, with more complex formal and historical analysis being displaced to the margins until quite recently. In contrast to the work of his peers and successors W. B. Yeats, James Joyce and Brian Friel, O'Casey's work has only recently received serious scholarly attention and this cannot, in truth, surprize us. The works themselves are neither the product nor the expression of a thought through system of ideas and do not contain, generally speaking, intellectual formulations or deeply reflective characterizations. Indeed, an insistent anti-intellectualism characterizes much of O'Casey's thought, as we can see from the epigraph to this dissertation. The plays and autobiographies depend for effect upon sensuous and theatrically passionate figures of speech and character, presenting the critic with serious resistance to his more theoretical abstractions.

The temptation to abandon the theoretical and develop a more sensuous and humanistic pragmatism has therefore been a strong factor in critiques of O'Casey's work. The critical consensus, indeed, is largely composed in this tradition. But if theoretical formulations threaten to kill the spirit of O'Casey's writing, the humanist pragmatism of the consensual

core often merely echoes its less satisfactory abstractions. The following are examples of work from the two poles of this discussion:

> What we are effectively being led to is an acknowledgement of O'Casey's command of space predicated upon a diffusion of dramatic focus and a reduction in the importance of an individual protagonist. Anne Ubersfeld, whose assertion is that the majority of dramatic texts are concerned with spatial conflict, extends her thesis in terms paralleling those developed by Yuri Lotman in La Structure du texte artistique where the text is seen as being divided into two sub-spaces: 'une zone A et **une zone non-A telles que, a tout instant, non-A se trouve defini par son rapport avec A.'** 1

cf.:

> What we are invited to consider is the things men do to each other, the appalling horror of the whole thing, the nasty mess that men in their folly and their aspirations, their heedlessness and their ideals, are making of life which consists essentially, and basically, of the way ordinary human beings live with each other, in laughter and pain, in love and in squabbling, in effort and in idleness. 2

If the first quotation feels cold and abstract, the second, though warmer, is similarly abstract in the universalism of its observations. Human beings reflect upon and feel and make meaning of their lives in particular historical formations and with particular epochal structures of feeling. [3] It is to the particularity of the structures of feeling of O'Casey's work that we must attend if we are to avoid the common universalistic formalism of both quotations.

The structure of feeling common in O'Casey's work is that of a carnivalesque and self-conscious theatricality linked to a moralising pacifism, both of which refuse to accede to the

endorsement of the dominant political formations of O'Casey's time. Because O'Casey perceived the moral high ground in Free State Ireland to be held by a pompous and murderous nationalist fanaticism, he occupied the low ground of carnivalesque parody in the name of common decency, but simultaneously attempted to outmanouevre nationalistic moralism with his own more universal humanism. The dramatic consequence is a theatre marked by rich ensembles of social feeling in counterpoint with cold and lethal ideological abstractions. The political consequence is that O'Casey had to abandon all ideologically coherent alternatives to nationalism for fear that they, too, might resemble the abstractions he sought to oppose and criticize. The plays thus resonate with a parodic laughter that threatens to degenerate into nihilistic cackling for want of a mature connection between the carnival of the bodily and the need to make cognitive sense out of social life.

O'Casey flirted always with this nihilism- a feature of his work that Samuel Beckett insightfully discerned as his "principle of disintegration", but he tried to hold this in tension with a positive humanism. [4] The two sides of his humanism: dark and parodic on the one hand, maternal and sincere on the other, do not seem to add up. Indeed, the former, borne and distributed as a rule by male figures, tends to flow over into and overwhelm O'Casey's more moralistic impulses so that the audience becomes quite confused as to the moral purpose of the play in question. Though nationalists like Uncle Peter in The Plough and the Stars are represented

in some scenes as deluded romantics in pantomime costume, we are encouraged, in other scenes, to view him tenderly as a gentle, domestic man with a righteous hostility to the psychological games of a socialist (The Covey) one might have expected O'Casey to have represented sympathetically. The truth is that O'Casey can find no political position to render faithfully for he feels he belongs to none of the traditions available to him in the Ireland of 1922-26. Written in the midst first of a terrible Civil War and then during post-colonial Ireland's development towards a Free State Catholic conservatism, these plays express a frustration against almost all signifying social forms including, as we shall see, O'Casey's own Ruskinian Christian socialism. [5]

O'Casey's theatrical 'apotheosis', so W. B. Yeats told him, was achieved during the first production of Juno and the Paycock at the Abbey Theatre in March 1924. The forty year old Sean had to go home from the peformance to look up the word for he had, until the successful submission of The Shadow of a Gunman in 1922, been a labourer upon the railways whose only previous apotheosis had been his key role (as Secretary of the Irish Citizen's Army) in the great 1913 General Strike in protest at the lock-out of members of the Transport Workers Union by William Murphy's capitalist cartel. All of his plays were written in the shadow of the defeat of that strike and of what O'Casey viewed as the demise of the labour movement into the distractions of nationalism. We should not be surprised to find, then, that much of the success of the dramatic work

lies in its refusal of the successful historical movements of the epoch in which O'Casey wrote. His theatre's energy arises from an anti-heroic and counter-mythological carnivalism which is directed specifically at contemporary forms of nationalist masculinity and generally at all forms of rationalism, idealism or cognitive pretension.

There is a peculiar ambivalence at the heart of this approach, however, for as O'Casey strikes with one hand at the foolishness of deluded men, he cannot help but be enchanted on the other by their fecklessness regarding the empirical realities of urban tenement life. Though we are supposed to condemn, say, Captain Boyle, for his ludicrous nationalist fantasies, we are, rather, captivated by the thrilling dramatic energy of his cavorting. Boyle is represented in carnivalising images (he "skips like a goat" into a snug) which stress his physical rather than mental prowess, but he is, simultaneously, the bearer of what remains of a 'metaphysical' consciousness of something other than the realities of colonial urban life. His first speech emphasises the disjunction between his own playfulness and his wife's more sober empiricism:

> The Captain. Sweet Spirit, hear my prayer! Hear ... oh...hear...me prayer...hear, oh hear... Oh, he...ar... oh, he...ar...me...pray...er!
>
> Joxer (outside). Ah, that's a darlin' song, a daarlin' song!
>
> Mrs. Boyle (viciously). Sweet spirit, hear his

prayer! Ah, then, I'll take me solemn affeydavey, it's not for a job he's prayin'! [6]

Though we are supposed, again, to view Boyle's consciousness as a delusive displacement from tenement realities, I find in Boyle's behaviour evidence of deep residual feelings which run counter to the empiricism of his environment are produced in structures and textures of social play.

The Gaelic word for this play is: craic, a form of social jouissance with deep roots in physical appetite on the one hand and with aspirations to delicate charm on the other. Where there is craic for an Irishman, there is a viscerally sensed and experienced sense of wonder kept alive in complex forms of social play mediated by song, story, dream, poem, historical reminiscence, music and dance. To see this as simply a form of fantasy in the face of unbearable realities represents a deep ignorance of the lived experience of such forms in Irish and, indeed, on occasion, English working-class culture, a point to which I shall shortly return. [7] For O'Casey, this carnivalistic sociality represents the body and soul of working-class culture and he has an excellent ear for the way in which working-class discourse is produced in figures of imitative and responsive verbal play.

In theorising this dramatic material, I have found the work of Russian linguist and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin to be of great value. Resistant to the worst kinds of theoreticist formalism without collapsing, on the other hand, into a form of emotional and dogmatic humanism, Bakhtin's concept of

dialogism and his analyses of carnivalism and literary syncretism have proved invaluable in my exploration of O'Casean theatre. His insistence that the "peculiarity of real-life utterances is that they are intertwined by a thousand threads into the non-verbal real-life context" [8] and his analysis of discourse as "a process teeming with future and former languages," [9] are peculiarly apposite for the study of an O'Casean theatre which does indeed teem with social forms, not merely at the level of character where Marxist faces Nationalist and Englishman, Irishman, but at the level of dramatic form where Naturalism is inter-weaved with vaudeville, melodrama and farce, to such an extent that the theatre we observe becomes syncretic, that is, deeply saturated with "future and former" literary and theatrical voices.

If Sean O'Casey remained frustrated by the failure of the political institutions of his day to offer anything but an authoritarian form of nationalism, he was at least able to produce a theatre which reminds us of the dangerous nature of the monological discourse of a society "none of whose cultures seemed to have a place for the urban proletariat." [10] In the famous second Act of The Plough and the Stars, for example, the authoritarian Voice of the Man (Padraig Pearse) intrudes in monological tones upon the bar-room figures Fluther, The Covey, Rosie et. al. and can be seen to "enter the artistic context as an alien body" for its monologism seems strange in the context of the collective carnivalism that has proceeded it. [11] With authoritarian discourse, "there is no space

around it to play in, no contradictory emotions ...", writes Bakhtin, [12] and indeed, in this scene, the Voice of the Man, mediated by Fluther, arrests Peter's playful exuberance, emphasising as it does so its own chilling monologism:

> [The silhouette of the tall figure again moves into the frame of the window speaking to the people.
>
> Peter (unaware, in his enthusiasm, of the speaker's appearance, to Fluther). I was burnin' to dhraw me sword, an' wave an' wave it over me--
>
> Fluther (overwhelming Peter). Will you stop your blatherin' for a minute, man, an' let us hear what he's sayin'!
>
> Voice of the Man. 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. [13]

Here we see an example of "the resistance of a unitary, canonical language, of a national myth bolstered by a yet-unshaken unity ... still too strong for heteroglossia to relativize and decenter." [14] In other words, we see a form of monological nationalism too authoritative for discursive play to confront, internalise and persuade of its own relativity viz a vis other, competing forms of consciousness, ideology

and feeling.

But elsewhere we see a more encouraging picture of working-class life which is not possessed by such abstractions. At its best, O'Casey's grasp of the dialogical principle of play can be exquisite, and we can experience in the plays the production of that quite unique space theorised by Johan Huizinga in which rationalistic and empirical concerns are suspended whilst a number of characters create playful figures of speech and action as,

> a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. 15

We must, for Huizinga, put aside rationalisations of this playful space and "accept the essential and original identity of play and ritual", for as we accept the 'sacredness' of the space of play, "we simply recognise the hallowed spot as a play-ground, and the misleading question of the 'why and the wherefore' does not arise at all." [16] The scenes in Juno and the Paycock where characters sing together and where Boyle and Joxer play hide and seek, or in Red Roses for Me where minstrels take over the stage for a considerable period, exemplify that aesthetic principle by which the dominant dramatic mode is suspended whilst some delightful inter-play is explored. The illusions of naturalism are constantly broken by O'Casey in this fashion for his theatrical roots are as deep in the conventions of episodic music-hall as they are in Ibsen and Strindberg. He simply cannot resist

carnivalising his own chosen form of tenement naturalism with sub-generic play and the result of the best examples of this work is that the "[p]lay casts a spell over us; it is 'enchanting', 'captivating'. It is invested with the noblest qualities we are capable of perceiving" for [p]lay has a tendency to be beautiful." [17] It has, too, a tendency to be parodic or satirical in its intentions, and this has what we might loosely call a 'political' aspect, for O'Casey's carnivalism and dialogism (discursive play) are intent upon the subversion of all forms of monological authoritarianism into a more ambivalently felt awareness of the existence of others. Thus, in The Plough and the Stars, The Covey's chaste marxism is confronted by the playful romanticism of the prostitute Rosie:

> The Covey. There's only one freedom for th'workin' man: control o' th' means o' production, rates of exchange, an' th' means of disthribution....
> Rosie (throwing off her shawl on to the counter, and showing an exemplified glad neck, which reveals a good deal of a white bosom). If y'ass Rosie, it's heartbreakin' to see a young fella thinkin' of anything, or admirin' anything, but silk thransparent stockin's showin' off the shape of a little lassie's legs! [18]

The confrontation of discourses here serves as a minor example of the dialogical nature of Sean O'Casey's stage-space in

which authoritarian language "loses its sealed-off and self-sufficient character ... when it becomes conscious of itself as only one among other cultures and languages." [19] There is, however, a negative side to O'Casey's theatre which any critic of his work must confront. Whilst able to produce complex figures of dialogism and social play at one turn, O'Casey also succumbs, at another, to a menacing feeling of nihilism which lies close to the heart of his work. The problem with being relentlessly opposed to all forms of social authoritarianism is that one can find oneself with nothing very authoritative to say, and with O'Casey, this contradiction is sometimes so acute that his characters' carnivalism twists towards a dark and destructive form of nihilism in which processes of mockery and demythologisation begin to mutate into a rather meaningless rush of materialism. Opposed so fully to the "unitary, canonical language" of his time ("The whole of Ireland's following a hearse these days", he wrote, "and Ireland herself's driving the horses"), [20] Sean O'Casey at times lapsed into a despair which can be seen to stalk his comedy as its destructive shadow. We shall explore the intensification of this mood throughout the years 1922-26, and its apotheosis in the play The Silver Tassie (1926) where hardly any social form of any warmth or worth seems to have survived O'Casey's representation of Ireland during World War One.

It is, ultimately however, the success of O'Casey's exploration of non-rational forms of discourse and behaviour that I wish to emphasize. In a colonial culture, as Ashis

Nandy reminds us, "the dominant idea of rationality is the first strand of consciousness to be co-opted by any successful structure of institutionalized oppression", and when "such co-optation has taken place, resistance as well as survival demands some access to the larger whole, howsoever self-defeating that process may seem in the light of conventional reason and day-to-day politics." [21] It is certainly the case that English imperialism in Ireland has altered its linguistic, cultural and religious practices dramatically, not to say catastrophically, and has "co-opted" its more rationalistic formations and fraction into dominant institutions from time to time. Ways of perceiving the world which owe more to "Celtic anti-materialism" than English utilitarian empiricism have become residual rather than typical features of common life. [22] Elements of resistance, nevertheless survive, and it is such "resistance" that I believe O'Casey to have found in the carnivalistic play of his Dublin tenement-dwellers. It is a resistance echoed in his syncretic use of forms where naturalistic 'rationality' is suspended by sub-generic play with its conventions. And it is such a resistance which fuels Captain Boyle's "self-defeating" but anti-materialist complaint that he does not want "the motions of me body to be watched the way an asthronomer ud watch a star," [23] for Boyle knows that to rationalise the stars is to violate his own playful, native life. He may be a waster and a rogue, but he bears, as we shall see in Chapter Three, the residual elements of a metaphysics that remains

resistant to the dominant strains of English empiricism and utilitarianism represented by, for example, the aptly named English school-teacher, Charles Bentham.

In the later work, O'Casey lost touch with much of the energy of the sociality of the slums and his work occasionally suffers from a splitting off of 'metaphysical' concerns from forms of social play. His own romantic lyricism mutates into a monological form in which 'dream' sequences of visionary intensity are divorced from any sense of dialogical play with their own conventions. His best work remains that which insists upon the excitement of the "teeming" voices of the Dublin tenements at the same time as it acknowledges the desperation of a people who have no social forms by which to politically transform their condition. The ambivalence of this position is expressed in my description of Sean O'Casey's aesthetic mode as one of carnival-nihilism, where the hyphen serves to emphasize that social play, whilst "keeping alive the values of a non-oppressive world", bears too the 'intimate enemy' of its own despair.

Notes.

[1] Shaun Richards, "'A Question of Location': Theatrical Space and Political Choice in The Plough and the Stars." in Theatre Research International (Spring, 1990), p. 32.

[2] Bonamy Dobree, "Sean O'Casey and the Irish Drama" in

Ronald Ayling, Sean O'Casey (Modern Judgements) (London, 1969), p. 98.

[3] See, for an explanation of the term 'structure of feeling', Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (Oxford, 1977), pp. 128-35.

[4] Samuel Beckett, "The Essential and the Incidental" in T. Kilroy, ed. Sean O'Casey (Twentieth-Century Views) (New Jersey, 1975), p. 168.

[5] See, for examples of O'Casey's disillusionment with Free State Ireland, Autobiographies 2 (London, 1980), pp. 73-74 and pp. 125-6, where the following remarks connecting Free State idealism to murderous fanaticism are typical:

> "The provisional government of the Free State began to cajole and coax the people to the grandeur of their state by sending telegrams in green envelopes, painting the postal pillar boxes a richer green than the green on the envelopes, crossing out the GR, and printing in the mystical symbol SE.... Not a leader left had the power or personality to check the drift, now flowing swift to an armed fight for dominance.... Here and now, the slick slogan of the clergy that civil war and all deforming crimes were in the mind and way only of those who forgot God was to be mocked at by catholic murder, catholic gunfire, and catholic torch setting flames to the homes of catholic people." ("Innishfallen Fare Thee Well" (1949) in Autobiographies 2, op. cit., p. 73.)

[6] Sean O'Casey, "Juno and the Paycock" in Three Plays (London, 1980), p. 10.

[7] As, for example, Raymond Williams in his short chapter on Sean O'Casey in Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 161-69.

[8] Mikhail Bakhtin, Bakhtin School Papers, ed. A Shukman (Oxford, 1983), p. 12.

[For useful discussions of the terms 'heteroglossia', 'dialogism', 'internal persuasiveness' and so on, see M. Holquist's Glossary to M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, (Austin, Texas, 1981).]

[9] Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, op. cit., p. 357.

[10] F. S. L. Lyons, Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890-1939 (Oxford, 1979), p. 77.

[11] Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, p. 344.

[12] ibid., p. 344.

[13] Sean O'Casey, "The Plough and the Stars" in Three Plays (London, 1980), p. 164.

[14] Mikhail Bakhtin, op. cit., p. 370.

[15] Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture (London, 1970), p. 32.

[16] ibid., p. 39.

[17] ibid., p. 29.

[18] Sean O'Casey, "Plough", op. cit., p. 165.

[19] Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, p. 370.

[20] Sean O'Casey, Autobiographies 2, op. cit., p. 83.

[21] Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism (Oxford, 1983), p. 113.

[22] See David Cairns and Shaun Richards, Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture (Manchester, 1988), p. 68, and pp. 58-71 of that work for an interesting discussion of "Saxon materialism" and the Yeatsian appropriation of "Celtic anti-materialism" for his own work.

[23] Sean O'Casey, "Juno", op. cit., p. 15.

Chapter One: The 'Politics' of Sean O'Casey.

Sean O'Casey is, for the critic Seamus Deane, "the Irish dramatist who, more than any other, paid tribute (of whatever kind) to Irish politics," [1] and, certainly, O'Casey's carnivalist impulse, though not a directly political form in the sense that it occupies any coherent ideological ground, can be said to have political effects in its refusal of authoritarian or even merely authoritative social discourses and practices. This carnivalism, I shall argue, represents a displaced and sublimated political theme that remains unincorporated by the dominant political formations of O'Casey's time, finding form not in his political practices but as an energetic critique of empirical, idealistic and rationalistic forms of thought and being in his drama. Though we will arrive at conclusions regarding the nature of his conscious political principles, I wish to show that the energy of his theatrical politics resides more with his working-class carnivalistic anti-idealism than with any faithfully represented rational ideology. Carnival bears an unconscious proletarian passion which complicates O'Casey's more overtly rationalised Christian socialism with its viscerally playful and social pleasures.

However, this carnivalism is counter-balanced in his work by a troubling and, in the case of the later 'Dublin' plays, a negating nihilistic attitude to Irish history. This nihilism should not, perhaps, surprise us given O'Casey's

involvement in a bloody Civil War, a General Strike and various other aspects of the anti-colonial and class struggles of 1916-24, but it is not a structure of feeling common to that period in which nationalist optimism and, on occasion, fanaticism, deepened the involvement of people with organisations committed to the improvement of historical circumstances. O'Casey's political vision is, essentially, deeply oppositional to nationalism and, unable to find a political institution following the disintegration of socialism in Ireland after the 1913 lock-out, its oppositional energy mutated in the drama into a form of carnival protest which gradually encountered its own roots in political and historical despair. With the very political figure of O'Casey, though, we must begin with the debate regarding the nature of his consciously formulated socialist or pacifist views before exploring their expression in the drama.

Much of the existing politico-aesthetic discussion of O'Casey's work focusses on the apparent disjunction between the Communist views he is judged to have held from 1913 to 1926 and their failure to materialise in his drama until as late as 1939 with the overt statements of The Star Turns Red. "The 1913 strike", writes Jack Lindsay, "was the high-water experience and provided the criteria that never left him. Essentially, he went on judging all the phases of political struggle that followed in terms of that experience." [2] Few would disagree that the Dublin lockout and Transport workers strike of 1913 formed an elemental part of the young O'Casey's

consciousness and that the experience of Easter 1916 destroyed his faith in the ability of Irish society to establish socialism as its fundamental creed. If 1913 was a titanic demonstration of Irish working-class resolve to better its conditions in the name of a common humanity, the Easter Rising represented, for O'Casey, a bitter betrayal of that human promise. Following the succession of James Connolly to James Larkin, O'Casey felt an historical betrayal in Connolly's harnessing of working-class energies to a national rather than universally 'human' cause. His protest found expression in the symbol not of Larkin, but in the pacifist-feminist Francis Sheehy-Skeffington:

> In Sheehy-Skeffington, and not in Connolly, fell the first martyr to Irish Socialism, for he linked Ireland not only with the little nations struggling for self-expression, but with the world's Humanity struggling for a higher life. 3

Sheehy-Skeffington was, for O'Casey, the "living antithesis of the Easter Insurrection: a spirit of peace enveloped in the flame and rage and hatred of the contending elements, absolutely free from all its terrifying madness." [4] Connolly's folly was to have led the Irish workers' organisation, the Irish Citizen Army, to which O'Casey had until prior to the insurrection been secretary, into an irrelevant and destructive putsch which would put back the cause of Labour for a generation.

In 1913, by contrast, James Larkin's leadership of the I.T.W.U. had seemed to presage a new Millenium for Labour:

> Men, full of the fire of battle, thronged in dense masses the wide, expansive area facing Liberty Hall. The city was surging with a passion full, daring, and fiercely expectant; a passion strange, enjoyable, which it had never felt before with such intensity and emotion. It was felt, unconsciously, that this would be the Irish Armageddon between Capital and Labour.... 5

The passion of O'Casey's devotion to Larkin was dashed on the rocks of Connolly's sacrifice of the I.C.A. to the nationalist cause, a cause O'Casey could only perceive as sectarian and middle-class. Critics have taken sides over the view taken by O'Casey: was it politically naive, personally motivated or far-sighted, and to what extent does it find expression in his plays?

The historian C.D. Greaves finds O'Casey's hostility to Connolly's marxist-nationalism to be naive. For Greaves, Connolly's analysis was both sophisticated and utterly necessary to the emancipation of the Irish working class. Far from betraying the workers to nationalism, argues Greaves, Connolly recognized that only through a nationalist uprising could the workers long-term interests be secured, finding it "unfortunate that O'Casey did not understand that the national liberation of Ireland through **democratic** change is part of the world **socialist** revolution." [6] For Greaves, O'Casey's position on the Easter Rising was hopelessly ultra-leftist in that he was "unconcerned with the actual wrongs that people are trying to right because the action taken to right them does not remove all the other wrongs as well." [7] O'Casey lacked, in this view, a sense both of the immediate historical possibilities for liberation (these were always rich for him

despite particular circumstances) and of tactics and political timing. Connolly, on the other hand, recognized the necessity to press forward first with a national struggle, given the prevailing ideological and historical circumstances in post-1913 Dublin:

> The Irish nationalist, even when he is from the economic point of view intensely conservative, even with his false reasoning, is an active agent in social regeneration, in so far as he seeks to invest with full power over its destinies a people actually governed in the interests of a feudal aristocracy. 8

Connolly's genius in Greaves's eyes was that he understood the complexity of constructing a counter-hegemony to Catholic middle-class nationalism by first opposing British imperialism through a common national struggle in which Catholic workers' consciousness could be won to socialist ideas:

> An Irish republic would then be the natural depository of popular power; the weapon of popular emancipation, the only power which would show in the full light of day all these class antagonisms and lines of economic demarcation now obscured by the mists of bourgeois patriotism. 9

In this he was supported by Lenin who argued that "the bourgeois nationalism of <u>any</u> oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed <u>against</u> oppression, and it is that content that we <u>unconditionally</u> support." [10] It was absurd to imagine that Labour and Capital might face each other in the Armageddon that O'Casey had imagined 1913 to be:

> Very likely one army will line up in one place and

> say, 'We are for socialism', while another will do so in another place and say, 'We are for imperialism' and that will be the social revolution! Only from such a ridiculously pedantic angle could one label the Irish rebellion a 'putsch'. 11

Lenin's contempt is directed at the very terms of O'Casey's critique of Connolly's supposed adventurism and Greaves concurs that O'Casey's analysis was blinded by his political infantilism, "a phenomenon of untrained emotions ... common in those whose socialism is insufficiently educated to be scientific." [12]

Seamus Deane has also criticized O'Casey, not so much for his infantilism as for the familist quietism evident in the paean to Francis Sheehy-Skeffington and in the plays with their moral favour for an apparently domestic, Christian morality. Deane has argued that O'Casey's familism is "an eidetic image ... from the past. To dwell in it is an example of bad faith." [13] In response to Connolly's complex marxism, O'Casey developed a cult of domestic pacifism which counterbalances the violent action of his plays, and for Deane this represents a de-politicized nostalgia. But David Cairns and Shaun Richards, whilst conceding this point to a degree, assert that O'Casey and not Connolly was the stronger materialist:

> Deane ... does not examine the extent to which O'Casey's apparent retreat from specifically nationalist politics is counterbalanced by the implicit assertion of a politics which is necessarily founded in material conditions rather than abstractions.... Knowledge which does not empower action, and action which does not represent need, are at the heart of O'Casey's critique of a political movement which embraced abstraction and denied

reality. 14

The weakness of this argument is that it does not specifically credit Connolly's point that the 'abstractions' of nationalism were a necessary ideological component of the long-term political struggle. Though Connolly had no illusions about the motives of the nationalist leaders, seeing them as "from the economic point of view intensely conservative," [15] he nevertheless recognized that the Irish worker's long-term interests required that "the governmental power of England over us must be destroyed; the bonds which bind us to her must be broken." [16] It is hard to recognise Connolly's position in Cairns' and Richards' analysis of "the concept of nation which only worked to the advantage of those who gained political power on the backs of 'the class they elected to despise and pass by'." [17] This represents Connolly as a cynical nationalist in disguise and flatters O'Casey's materialism. If O'Casey was a materialist it was in his stress upon attention to working class conditions rather than on theories of materialist change through intervention in a complex colonial history. For O'Casey, the historical and tactical particularities of the political struggle for change were secondary to the primary matter of dealing with economic deprivation. His "sympathies were always with the rags and tatters that sheltered the tenement-living Temples of the Holy Ghost," reports Jack Lindsay, [18] and not with the complexities of colonial struggle within a developing history.

Though Cairns and Richards acknowledge Connolly's

"ideological penetration" of the "apparent monolith" of Catholic nationalism in the attempt to establish working class leadership of the national agenda, [19] they split off this complex materialism from the more romantic and untheorized middle class nationalism of groups such as The Gaelic League and vindicate O'Casey by identifying such groups as the successful hegemonic force he was compelled to oppose. In this, they oppose O'Casey's materialism to the nationalist's romanticism and drop from the equation Connolly's complex articulation of the two sides of the argument:

> If the economic and social life of the ancient Gael had developed in Ireland an enduring sense of collective values, the religious observance of his medieval descendants had contributed universal Christian values which remain fundamental to the Irish consciousness. In his own lifetime- regarded by him as the period of maturing international capitalism - Connolly argued that only under a socialist order could these values again become actualised in social practice. 20

In other words, nationalist traditions could only be historically reinvented by Communism. But Communism must first fight the national war for freedom, thus indicating its willingness to penetrate national-popular consciousness with Communist ideology. Here Connolly can be viewed as a shrewd theoretician of what the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci has described as "expansive hegemony", that is, the attempt to establish moral and intellectual leadership amongst a national population by articulating popular sentiment and patriotic feeling through a particular political optic. The group seeking hegemony must forge a link between popular structures

and textures of feeling on the one hand and the particular ideologies the aspiring group espouses on the other. The hegemony is established when the particular social and political interests of the group in question appear to the masses to represent their general intellectual, moral and spiritual interest. [21]

Connolly recognized that Gaelic nationalism had gained a strong hold on the consciousness of the Irish people through the cultural efforts of, amongst others, the Gaelic League, which had carefully articulated Catholic familism and moralism to its own cultural goals. That hegemony could only be dislodged through a counter-hegemonic engagement with some of its living themes: the nobility of the Gael, the sanctity of the family, the devotion of the peasant to his Catholic faith. It could not be brushed off in the manner of an O'Casey as some Romantic irrelevance but must be spoken to, and through, in order to shape Irish working-class consciousness towards revolutionary socialist goals. 1913 had shown Irish socialists, as we have already noted, the indifference of a political society which had little time for the culture of working-class life, [22] and so only through gaining leadership of dominant nationalist cultural formations, believed Connolly, could marxists hope to intervene to adapt their patriotic fervour for Gaelic culture, religion and language towards socialist tasks. Connolly's strategy was to sieze the discourses of nationalist hegemony from within, hence his intense concentration on religious and national issues in such essays as "Patriotism and Labour" and "The Language Movement".

O'Casey's emotional inclination, according to his critics was to refuse such notions by invoking the immediate material realities of the tenements: "Irish speaking or English speaking, they are all what they are, convalescent homes of plague, pestilence or death." [23] One can understand O'Casey's frustration: Easter 1916 seemed to have achieved few of Connolly's aims and to have resulted in barbarous slaughter for the next seven years. Yet there is recent evidence that O'Casey's position was closer to Connolly's than we have allowed. Marxist Jack Mitchell has argued that O'Casey never simply opposed his own 'tenement materialism' to the vagaries of Romantic ideology for "O'Casey never stopped being a republican and passionate champion of national liberation after he became a class-conscious militant in 1911-13," [24] argues Mitchell, quoting this little known observation of O'Casey's from a letter written in 1917:

> What I think the Labour movement ought to do is to make the workers, by education and propaganda, a power in all these [Gaelic] organizations, particularly in those that appeal to the national sentiments of the people.... 25

This represents a quite different position from that outlined so far and indeed it forms part of Mitchell's polemic with the position of Greaves outlined above. O'Casey's programme, continues Mitchell, "was for the workers and their movement to establish hegemony in all the relevant organizations," [26] for "while the ultimate destiny of Ireland will be in the hands of Labour", wrote O'Casey, "it would be foolish to deny that the

present is practically in the hands of the Sinn Fein Organisation." [27] It would appear from this evidence that O'Casey had developed a position close to that of Connolly by 1917, but there is a hint of dissonance between these quotations and Connolly's mature analysis. An important distinction must be made between an intellectual-moral and a tactical position. If Mitchell is right regarding O'Casey's sophistication on this question, we would need more evidence than the above quoted remarks that O'Casey accepted the need for a complex counter-hegemonic struggle. His remarks here reveal an enthusiasm for a tactical rather than intellectual-moral bid for leadership. The terms are practical rather than philosophical- O'Casey concedes that socialism must adapt tactically to Sinn Fein leadership, not that socialism must re-invent itself in the terms of the national-popular consciousness dominated by Gaelic nationalism. To that extent, Mitchell's attempt to exonerate O'Casey from the charge of ultra-leftism is less persuasive, though offering an important counter-point to Greaves' perhaps over-stated analysis of 'infantilism'.

Like Cairns and Richards, other critics have refused the route taken by Mitchell in attempting to redeem O'Casey in this fashion and have accepted the charge that his position <u>was</u> opposed to that of Connolly, preferring to support rather than deny his 'tenement materialism'. Jack Mitchell himself has elsewhere argued that "the 'solving' of the national question had proved to be worth nothing in real terms to the poverty-stricken masses" thus implying, despite himself, that

O'Casey's anti-nationalist position on 1916 has been historically vindicated. [28] Sean O'Faolain concurs that,

> the class that ... came to power and influence [in 1922-3] was not a labouring class; the most able among them changed their nature by changing their place in life- they graduated rapidly into petit-bourgeois, middlemen, importers, small manufacturers, thus forming a new middle class to fill the vacuum formed by the departure ... of the alien middle class. [29]

Hence, for O'Faolain, "Sean O'Casey's plays are ... an exactly true statement of the Irish Revolution whose flag should be, not the tricolour, but the plough and the stars of the labouring classes." [30] On this view, O'Casey's tenement realism was the true representation of the needs of the Dublin working class and we should not seek to apologise for his intransigence on the issue.

For Robert Lowery, indeed, "Sean O'Casey's politics can be seen as a continuation and integration of marxist theory" in that they reveal an essentially <u>socialist</u> vision. [31] Lowery finds O'Casey's 'unshakeable faith in man' by definition "affirmative. It implies a progressive view of history, an understanding of the multi-layered political and economic forces in capitalist society, and belief in the ability of mankind to shape, control or determine its own destiny." [32] Here Lowery lays claim to a deeper tradition of socialism than that offered by Connolly's apparent expediency. The depth, indeed is prehistoric: "Communism isn't an invention of Marx; it is a social growth, developing through the ages, since man banded together to fight fear of the

unknown, and destroy the danger from mammoth and tiger of the sabre-tooth." [33]

Lowery expounds O'Casey's ideas as a form of fundamentalist historicism which is ultimately more profound and integrated than his critics have allowed. Far from accepting, with Greaves, that O'Casey's contradictions and failures were due to political immaturity and even personal circumstance, [34] Lowery has "reason to suspect that O'Casey's inability to function within the Irish political structures contributed to his decision to leave Dublin", [35] that is, that his vision was too deep for the petty politicking of Irish nationalism. Sean Richards confirms that from "O'Casey's political standpoint a major tragedy of the period was that there was no uncompromised political space that [he] could occupy...." [36] O'Casey developed, instead, a socialist aesthetics to compensate for his political loss and Lowery argues that his drama of 'tenement materialism', with its rich, colourful humanism, lies deeply within the marxist traditions of realism outlined here by Georg Lukacs:

> Marxist aesthetics requires only that the essence conceived by the writer should not be represented abstractly, but as the essence of the phenomena in which surging life is organically hidden and out of which it grows. [37]

A colourful representation of teeming social life, then, connects O'Casey to a deep theme of socialist tradition: the notion that all social life is, at root, commonly human. The Covey of The Plough and the Stars makes the point that

"there's no such thing as an Irishman ... we're all only human bein's" [38] and this universalism represents, for a Lowery concerned to rescue O'Casey from the charge of reactionary emotionalism, a truly marxist position. But this depends upon a perversely selective reading of Lukacs whose theories of marxist aesthetics involve a complex dialectical relationship between artistic and historical forms which is not reducible to the kind of photographic vitalism suggested by Lowery. [39]

The Marxist Jack Lindsay follows a similar line of reasoning to Lowery in arguing that "it is through the babblers and the fantasists" of O'Casey's drama that we "feel the possibilities of great positive liberations. We gain everywhere a sense of the potentialities of transformation in the people through the ceaseless leavening of realism with fantasy...." [40] Again concerned to rescue O'Casey from the charge of pacifist familism and apolitical romanticism, Lindsay discerns in the drama a "dialectical conflict between the crushing actuality and the gay, even delirious resistances of the spirit." [41] For this critic, the plays represent a direct anti-nationalism from a marxist point of view:

> The plays debunked the middle-class rhetoric, which was taken over from the old Republican Movement but which now, at this crucial moment of choice in the far more advanced class situation, revealed much that was sentimental and false in its oversimplified notion of what constituted the Irish; but they were not therefore pacifist and anti-heroic. 42

Both Lowery and Lindsay attempt to reclaim O'Casey for a warm but sober marxism that rejects the hot-headed fantasy of

nationalism, even as espoused by Connolly. For these writers, O'Casey and not Connolly is the true heir of Irish marxism in his close feel for the universal spirit of human warmth and the power of the transformative imagination in the depths of social squalor. Connolly, by implication, represents a contrasting bloodless particularism which captures none of this human truth. The moral and political value of the drama for Lowery and Lindsay is the insistence upon creative vitalism amidst economic suffering. But C.D. Greaves insists that O'Casey's humanism was politically faulty:

> He took no part in the Rising of 1916 for reasons which were probably more personal than political.... He condemned it, however ... because it was concerned with the tasks that confronted Irish people at the time, and paid no attention to the more advanced tasks O'Casey now wished to see undertaken.... Now because the national revolution was not completed- because, indeed a counter-revolution supervened- the conditions in which these more advanced tasks were called for never materialized. Instead of returning to what was historically necessary, O'Casey demanded them all the more insistently. But the possibility of performing them did not exist. 43

For Greaves, O'Casey's humanism, because not linked to the practical historical means for effecting liberationary change -the Easter Uprising- remains outside the traditions of mature marxism. He may have been a Communist of the heart, but he was not a theorist of practical social transformation. His imaginative tenement dwellers are less transformative than deluded.

O'Casey's socialist credentials, then, are a matter of some controversy amongst Leftist critics, as is the issue of

the degree to which the plays represent his privately held beliefs in any case- a matter I shall come to shortly. But some critics have refused the debate about his socialist legitimacy, preferring instead to read his humanism as a valid ideology in itself, regardless of its historical relatedness. The critical consensus around the Dublin trilogy, indeed, reads the plays as constitutive of a 'anti-heroic vision' which is deeply informed by an universal Christian, rather than socialist, humanism. This position has been best exemplified by the work of David Krause, though it includes such critics as Bonamy Dobree, Herbert Goldstone, Saros Cowasjee and Hugh Hunt. Sean O'Casey and Denis Johnston, writs Dobree, were " bitter about politics because both realise that man is better than politics," [44] here echoing Lowery and Lindsay's affirmation of O'casey's humanism though with a depoliticized emphasis. David Krause reinforces this emphasis with his comment that "O'Casey has not been served well by his sympathetic marxist critics; they have misplaced their praise of his proletarian genius by distorting his dramatic art in order to construct his work to a hard line of Communist dogma." [45]

For Krause the playwright's aesthetic skills and universal humanism outweigh any narrow historical or political considerations and he cites for support O'Casey's own rather philistine view that "the dramatist is neither Tory nor Communist, but only a playwright, setting down his characters as he knew them, giving, if he can, an added depth...." [46] Far from being politically revolutionary in his deepest being,

argues Krause, O'Casey developed a more temperate view of history as "the revolution brought about by Time and the slow-moving or swift-moving winds of change." [47] There is an organicism in this image familiar to romantic-humanist conceptions of historical development, [48] and it is such a humanism that dominates Krause's consensual reading of the plays.

"O'Casey was more concerned with human beings than with national politics" writes Krause in his influential Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work: "the personal tragedy is more important than the political tragedy in these plays." [49] G. J. Watson concurs that "ordinary life ... becomes the standard of value in O'Casey's dramatic world- human nature and its necessity- the flux of petty, unheroic life that creeps beneath the surface of great historical moments- provide the dramatic centre...." [50] The resulting aesthetic is "tragi-comic" rather than political and this tragi comic 'vision' "penetrates all the material of the play and gives it over-all unity," [51] argues Krause, quoting with approval George Jean Nathan's celebration of the plays' "deep roots in comic character, their deep penetration into human eccentricity, and withal their beautiful, drunken dramatic literature." [52] This is not a directly political form of criticism, yet it suggests quasi-political imperatives: the integrity of character, the depth of spirit, the sense of life as a rich pageant of balanced tragi-comic forces. This humanist-aestheticism is the ideological counterpart of a

cruder distaste for the sordid nationalist and socialist politics of the "tin-horn patriots" whom Krause contemptuously identifies as:

> those who today take part in the St. Patrick's Day parades in American cities- who imagine Ireland to be as green and as level as a lawn, where the girls go around with their eyes cast down, green garlands in their hair, and rosaries at their girdles, while the men, armed only with shillelaghs, beat heavily armed battalions of British soldiers. 53

Krause's anti-heroic vision is legitimated by his view of nationalism as romantic delusion, his characteristic riposte being a strong stress on the now familiar realism. The character Seumas Shields in The Plough and the Stars had stated that "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," and Krause contends that "for Seumas life is more sacred than patriotic slogans; human realities are more meaningful than fanatical abstractions, particularly when in the name of national honour the revolution devours its own children." [55] The characteristic anti-political bent of this view is clear in the tones of liberal-humanist recoil from the necessities of political violence within particular configurations of history. A kind of folk-loric suspicion of ideology lurks behind such statements, contributing to their occasionally cliched texture. It is a political position disguised, albeit unconsciously, as natural wisdom.

Once again, the absent figure of this critique is James Connolly, few of whose statements could be described as "tin-

pot patriotism". The failure of O'Casey and his critics to engage Connolly's sophisticated counter-hegemonic politics signals a protracted weakness in their work. One symptomatic indication of this occurs in The Plough and the Stars where The Speaker utters the following chilling statements:

> Comrade soldiers of the Irish Citizen's Army, we rejoice in this terrible war. The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields.... 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! [55]

and:

> Bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation that regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood.... There are many things more horrible than bloodshed, and slavery is one of them. [56]

One would have expected the represented figure to be that of Connolly- the General in charge of the insurrectionary forces during the days depicted by O'Casey, but this is the voice, or rather the adapted prose, of the Catholic nationalist Padraig Pearse. The confrontation with Connolly is avoided through sleight of hand- Pearse's words offering an easier target for O'Casey's contempt than Connolly's final statement to the I.C.A. during the Rising might have:

> If we should win, hold on to your rifles because the volunteers may have a different goal. Remember we're out not only for political liberty but economic

liberty as well. So hold on to your rifles. 57

Here, Connolly's clear commitment to socialist tasks during the very moments of the Rising depicted by O'Casey profoundly problematizes the latter's socialist-humanist opposition to the war on the grounds of its nationalist disregard for economic improvement in the Dublin slums. Connolly clearly indicates here his socialist vision of colonial struggle and O'Casey's rejection of this revolutionary violence thus places him closer to Krause's Christian humanism than to Lowery and Lindsay's universalist marxism. If O'Casey was a Marxist in the nineteen-twenties it was a marxism that refused to countenance the necessity of colonial war in the pursuit of social goals. The political weakness of this position can be disguised by marginalising Connolly's complex analyses of the nationalist formation and representing the entire movement as the merest romantic folly. The lacuna at the heart of claims for O'Casey's political integrity remains the common refusal to engage the work of Connolly.

David Krause's later work has acknowledged the political aspect of O'Casey's philosophy and has developed from its earlier stress upon his political neutrality and contempt for ideological fantasy. "He must inevitably emerge" writes Krause "as the Irish Ruskinite Communist with marxist and Christian affinities". [58] This is a suggestive formulation in that it may illuminate O'Casey's ambivalence over Connolly's historical praxis. Ruskinism is closely identified with "an

ethic of self-fulfilment", writes Herbert Goldstone, [59] and there will clearly be deep tensions with Communism in such a Ruskinite formation for in such an ethic, "a liberal education in literature and the arts ... enables the ordinary person to enjoy some of the fruits of culture usually denied him, but helps him satisfy an almost religious zeal through artistic appreciation and self-development." [60] O'Casey was, indeed, proud of his own auto-didacticism and, like Marx, deeply fond of aspects of bourgeois literature, but, unlike Marx, he grasped little of the historicity of Ruskinian conservatism, preferring to adopt at times a universalistic conception of 'culture' as always and everywhere enlightening and progressive. The O'Casey of 1914-26 can be said to have held marxist views, then, only with three qualifications:

1. That his marxism was evolutionary and philosophical rather than practically revolutionary.

2. That it was a conviction tempered by a more general Christian humanism that stressed the importance of education, domesticity, pacifism and human warmth.

3. That it refused to negotiate with nationalist and Catholic reformism in what Lenin would describe as 'infantile' fashion:

> For to imagine that social revolution is <u>conceivable</u> without revolts by small nations in the colonies ... without the revolutionary outbursts of a section of the petty bourgeoisie <u>with all its prejudices</u>, without a movement of politically non-conscious and proletarian masses against the landlord, church, monarchal, national and other oppression- to imagine that means <u>repudiating social revolution.</u> 61

O'Casey clearly had, by 1922, repudiated social revolution not only in his desecration of the Uprising but also in his refusal to represent positive and believable socialist figures- a task which seemed hardly possible at all in a society "none of whose cultures seemed to have a place for the urban proletariat." [62] Rather, the attitude that underlies his theatrical representations is negative and contemptuous of the common people's flirtation with nationalism, an unattractive attitude captured representatively in this piece of late autobiographical prose:

> Again, the felon's cap had become the noblest crown an Irish head could wear. Nothing could be too good for the boys. When one spoke, all had to remain silent. They led at all meetings, dominated committees, won at cards, got everything anyone had to give, and were everywhere forced to lay down the law on all philosophy, patriotism, foresight, prophecy, and good manners. Was he out in Easter Week? became the touchstone of Irish life. And it was those who hadn't been out themselves who roared silence at anyone venturing to send a remark into a conversation led by a lad home from a prison or a concentration camp.... who forgot that most of Dublin, willy-nilly, was out in Easter Week; that there weren't many Dublin houses without bullet-holes in them; and that casualties were heavier among those who weren't out than among those who were. So for a long time, Easter Week became the Year of One in Irish history and Irish life. 63

The characteristic stress upon common suffering is there and this is surely admirably humanistic, but there is simply no attempt to understand the passions of the people for their revolutionary heroes. An embittered refusal to engage a subject people's militant anger with the executions that followed the Rising is all that O'Casey can offer. Indeed, part of the bitterness may originate in a sense of guilt, for

O'Casey himself was one of those "who hadn't been out" due to the necessary care of his ailing mother. For David Krause, however, his scorn is apposite:

> On the nationalist side there was the hortatory attempt of the political apologist to glorify individual behaviour in terms of a purification and idealisation of national life; and on the literary side, there was the imaginative attempt of the artist to express his own vision of experience in terms of the reality of national life. 64

For Krause, "the impossible pieties of British domination had been replaced in the popular mind by the improbable pieties of Irish idealism. Such a situation was ripe for comic desecration," [65] but this was not the automatic response of W.B. Yeats, for example, who, far from desecrating the nationalist Uprising by his previous enemies, famously captured the national feeling with the poignant and ambivalent tones of Easter 1916:

> I write it out in a verse-
> MacDonagh and MacBride
> And Connolly and Pearse
> Now and in time to be,
> Wherever green is worn,
> Are changed, changed utterly:
> A terrible beauty is born.

Yeats's ambivalence is all the more poignant for including the socialist revolutionary Connolly in his litany, a figure O'Casey had seen fit, as we have seen, to marginalise and denigrate in his Story of the Irish Citizen's Army.

David Krause's vindication of O'Casey's contempt stretches to a philosophical principle in his assertion that

"attempts to canonize the national character ironically threaten to become the occasion of national hypocrisy. They also become the inevitable target of those uncompromising writers who gain the final victory because they owe their Irish allegiance to what might be called the higher nationalism- the search for the truth about man, the quintessential nature of his character and his world." [66] But this is little more than sophistry. There is hardly a sense in which O'Casey's universalising humanism could be considered a form of nationalism except in a disingenuous mis-use of the latter term. Krause is more convincing when he abandons the attempt to articulate O'Casey's pacifism to a higher national ideal and claims instead, with impressive feeling, that "O'Casey turns away from the stock responses of patriotic grief as Juno utters her classic lament for the higher idealism, the sacredness of life itself...." [67] Here, the consensual position is more convincingly stated: that O'Casey's humanism represents a higher ideal than the political nationalism of his violent and sentimental opponents, a position echoed by Marianne Levander, quoted here with approval by Reudiger Ahrens:

> If O'Casey stands out as a realist I think this is also due to his attitude to traditional Irish nationalism and hero-worship. The special brand of Irish hero-worship tends to be morbid. A true hero is one who is happy to die for Ireland. The patriots behind the Easter Rising had a glorious vision of a free Ireland achieved through the sacrifice of her people. O'Casey chose to explode the myths behind the high-sounding phrases of the patriots. In play after play he exposes the Irish myths. 69

But what kind of 'realism' is it which includes such disparate theatrical elements as farce, tragedy, melodrama and music-hall sketch within a few lines of dialogue? O'Casey's theatre is anti-nationalistic, but not through the genre of 'realism'. It is, rather, a carnivalesque theatre which, in opposing nationalist delusion, threatens to drag down all cognitive coherence into a melange of cognitive dissonance. O'Casey's contempt for the deluded mythologisation of the common people topples, at times, into a nihilism of ridicule. The question which must next engage us, however, is the extent to which O'Casey's ideology translated into his drama. To what extent, if at all, was O'Casey's satirical, Ruskinite Communism reflected in his plays?

Seamus Deane has argued that it appears in the Dublin trilogy only in the form of an inadaquate protesting humanism in recoil against the deluded oppressiveness of the Easter Rising:

> O'Casey wanted ... a visionary socialism. But the Irish Revolution of 1916-22 seemed to him to have given the dream only. The opportunity for a truly revolutionary outburst had been lost when James Connolly ... had thrown in his lot with Padraig Pearse and the Irish Volunteers.... Politics, whether of the right or of the left, appears in his plays as nothing more than systematic oppression under the guise of some seductive illusion- one usually provided by religion. 70

O'Casey's socialist vision fails to enter the plays because by the time he had come to write them he could find no political form or historical character to believe in. Unlike Larkin, Connolly was no hero for O'Casey and Larkin's mass trade

unionism had given way to a useless and feckless violence. Deane implies that O'Casey's pacifism might have been less pronounced if he could have found a political legitimation for violence:

> ... when we see the final violation of the private, domestic world of the tenement by the British armed forces [in The Plough and the Stars], we are left to wonder if violence as such has been condemned or whether only this kind of violence which does not lead to liberation for the mass of the people. [71]

But as it is, the plays do not reflect a coherent socialist ideology to counteract nationalism. Rather, the protest is rendered in the domestic terms explored earlier such that O'Casey comes to "identify joy, comic spirit and wit with an utterly amoral and apolitical stance of the sort we find in Captain Boyle and Joxer Daly in Juno." [72], a position Deane finds unacceptable in its failure to manifest a political alternative, for O'Casey "offers the morality as a form of behaviour necessarily alternative to the political behaviour of his people, whereas in fact, it is neither an alternative nor a necessary corrective." [73] This is a suggestive point frustrating in the vagueness of its formulation- Deane is unclear as to why a domestic morality should not indeed be preferrable to a murderous politics. If we consider the nihilistic tone of the following 'political' encounter it is difficult to simply dismiss O'Casey's pacifism as a simple-minded weakness:

> --Make me a prisoner, murmured the unhappy lad, the hoarseness of fear darkening his voice; a prisoner of

war- I surrendher.

--You asked us that before, said the Colonel; but it's easier said than done. The house at home's too crowded to take another soul. What are you sweating for, man? Are you afraid of what's coming to you, or what? I thought all Republicans were above that sort of thing.

--I'm an old comrade of yours, Mick, the young man pleaded.

--Sure I know that well, said the Colonel heartily, and I'll say this much- for the sake of oul' times, we won't let you suffer long.

--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. [74]

If this is the political alternative, then for more humanist critics, the domestic pacifism and familism of the plays are anything but unacceptable. Far from intending to translate socialist ideology into the plays, O'Casey has, for David Krause, crafted an essentially anti-ideological human drama in which "Juno sees life in terms of the essential human situation- bread on the table and love in the heart," [75] and

Fluther "in his comic anti-heroism ... plays the fool for man's sake. In his vitality and humour there is a hope that man may endure." [76] On this view, the plays do not represent an evasion and a failure but are a successfully realised vision of essential human life that fully reflects O'Casey's polemical intention.

George Watson, like Deane, however, finds the 'politics' of the plays inadequate. O'Casey's humanist position depends upon the maintenance of a split between the political and the human and, following Krause, Watson identifies the apparent philosophy:

> O'Casey consistently tries to suggest that the hearts of stone and the hearts of flesh [in Juno] live in two different and totally separated worlds, and that true morality for his hearts of flesh consists in maintaining the separation, in a complete and healthy scepticism about what Juno refers to as 'principles'- 'principles' which the play suggests have nothing to them but sloganising bombast .... Juno's heroic humanity ... is possible only because she is apolitical, or even anti-political. [77]

This schism is ineffective, for Watson, however, because Juno's refusal to engage the political except with contempt ("you lost your best principle when you lost your arm, my boy- them's the only principle's any good to a working man") [78] results in a "simple-minded and sentimental" structure of feeling at the play's core, a structure the audience finds moving but intellectually unconvincing such that "O'Casey's opposition of politics to 'genuine humanity', which results in the hollow and superficial portrayal of nationalism in his work, prevents him getting to grips with his subject in any

serious way." [79]

The general feeling of both Deane and Watson, in contradistinction to Krause, is that the plays' humanism is weak and unstructured due to its failure to articulate the human feelings of the insurrectionaries with anything but a parodic contempt and a pious pacifism. As Louis Althusser puts it, "'passion' itself, opposed to 'duty' or 'glory' is no more than an ideological counterpoint- never the effective dissolution of the ideology," by which he means that ideology is itself composed of emotional elements- such feelings as national pride, sentimental nostalgia for the war-dead, deep love of the land and patria and so on- such that its negation cannot be necessarily guaranteed by a Juno-esque alternative of passionate and Christian humanism. Sincere emotion can appear, as it were, on both sides of the equation, though this is rarely true in O'Casey's representations as we can see from the following example from Act Two of The Plough and the Stars, in which the moral dice are loaded in favour of pacifism by the unconsciously idiotic sentiments of this trio:

> [They go into the snug as Clitheroe, Captain Brennan, and Lieut. Langon of the Irish Volunteers enter hurriedly. Captain Brennan carries the banner of The Plough and the Stars, and Lieut. Langon a green, white, and orange Tri-colour. They are in a state of emotional excitement. Their faces are flushed and their eyes sparkle; they speak rapidly, as if unaware of the meaning of what they said. They have been

mesmerized by the fervency of the speeches. Clitheroe (almost pantingly). Three glasses o' port!

[The Barman brings the drinks.

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

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

Clitheroe. You have a mother, Langon.

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 ....

Capt. Brennan (catching up The Plough and the Stars). Imprisonment for th'Independence of Ireland!

Lieut. Langon (catching up the Tri-colour.) Wounds for th' Independence of Ireland!

Clitheroe. Death for th' Independence of Ireland!

The Three (together). So help us God! 81

Here the parody is blunt and dramatic. The characters have lost their individuality as their emotions are rhetorically and self-consciously ridiculed to darkly comical effect. The stage-direction stresses their loss of consciousness and the triadic structure of their speeches underlines the lethal, unconscious fantasy into which they have fallen. O'Casey's humanism is represented obliquely by the satire: if this is the state of mind of men involved in revolution then public politics resembles a wicked farce. When "the facts of farce",

as Raymond Williams has it, stand back to back like this with "the facts of killing", [82] a quietist humanism appears the more attractive option.

A question remains, however, as to the extent to which O'Casey's perceived humanism was his intended statement, anyway. In a short essay written in 1975 Francis Mulhern argues that,

> the formal characteristics of a literary text cannot be considered as the aesthetic expression of its author's pre-existing ideological positions.... Moreover, the ideological positions affirmed by a literary text need not even coincide with the positions formally maintained by its author. They are the determinate effects of the form of the text, and may in fact be deeply inconsistent with the latter. 83

Mulhern's point is that the literary forms mobilized by the author may bear ideological determinations of which the author is not consciously aware. Far from being an expressive tool, the text may take on an ideological life quite contrary to the author's pre-existing ideological position:

> O'Casey's political criticisms of the Dublin Rising of 1916 were profoundly at variance with his theatrical treatment of that event.... His 'Dublin plays' represent a humanist critique of all forms of political violence counterposing the 'human' values of domesticity, compassion and so on to the destructive passions of public, political life. 84

So far, the position is uncontroversial. But the decisive assertion is that O'Casey's humanist position "was in fact the ideological effect of the naturalistic theatrical modes which, at that time, he had not yet discarded." [85] Mulhern

scandalously suggests that O'Casey's humanism was an effect not of polemical intention but of an accident of form, a suggestive but problematical position. This would imply that O'Casey had no conscious control over his politico-ideological or even moral position in his work and that he was a victim of unconsciously borne points of view inscribed in the very nature of the literary materials he was developing. His humanism is less a function of his Ruskinite Christian socialism on this view than a mere contingency of the adoption of naturalist forms.

"Early naturalism", writes Raymond Williams, presents the world "of an individual who is breaking away from what is offered as a general truth: a uniquely representative figure ... who is in revolt against the unrepresentative environment other men have made. The world of action, characteristically, is then the action of others; the world of consciousness is one's own." [86] It is not difficult to see how O'Casey might have unconsciously adopted this naturalist mode in his treatment of a figure like Juno Boyle who alone recognises and resignedly protests against the follies of masculine nationalism with her plea to the "Sacred Heart of Jesus" to "take away these murdering hearts of stone and give us hearts of thine own eternal flesh." [87] Her 'trapped' consciousness is typical, too, of a later phase of naturalism absorbed by the young O'Casey in which are manifest "struggles and conflicts ... between the physical limits and pressures of a shaped and shaping natural and social world, and the determined sense of a self, a possible self, which could try

to get beyond them, though it usually failed." [88] Her 'trapped' domestic life with the willingly unconscious Captain Boyle and the pressures of the Civil War contain her passionate and resourceful self until the very end of the play. O'Casey may have absorbed this structure of feeling despite himself through his use of the naturalist mode in Juno, and it is not difficult to recognise the structure of feeling of The Plough and the Stars in this next quotation for that is a play in which a group of slum dwellers literally look (and listen) out onto a world being made outside their control:

> The decisive action is elsewhere, and what is lived out, in these traps of rooms, are the human consequences.... To stare from a window at where one's life is being decided: that consciousness is specific in this great early phase [of naturalism]. [89]

The ideological consequence of such a theatrical mode would tend to resemble a form of humanism in which 'trapped' figures reflected philosophically rather than transformatively upon their environment. It would tend to support Watson's reading of Juno as a politically unadventurous play with strong moral and sentimental overtones.

But Sean Richards finds Mulhern's argument unconvincing and Seamus Deane's contention that O'Casey intended a humanist reading more persuasive. Deane finds the humanism of the Dublin trilogy to be "marvellously contrived" [90] theatre rather than an unconscious epiphenomenon of a theatrical mode and it does seem remarkable that O'Casey should have had no

conscious control of his ideological position in the fashion Mulhern suggests. Terry Eagleton's reply to Mulhern offers a useful modification:

> O'Casey's humanism is indeed, but surely not merely, the effect of his naturalistic forms; for these forms mutate materials which contain the historical possibility of such humanism ... as the tired other face of revolutionary struggle. 91

A certain deterministic formalism survives this insight, but Eagleton's point is that the naturalist mode articulates historical themes and is not merely a literary or aesthetic form. The sense of resigned frustration common to revolutionaries in O'Casey's own historical epoch has much in common with the trapped consciousness of the bourgeois drama outlined by Raymond Williams. Hence, naturalism does not have some purely literary effect upon O'Casey's conscious political intention but ideologically parallels his own post-revolutionary frustration. The implied humanism of naturalist literary forms does not create O'Casey's view for him, rather it provides a literary form which he can adapt to represent his already existing humanistic frustrations.

But even this qualification denies the author the conscious calculation of which Deane speaks and of which Sean Richards's analysis of spatial structure in The Plough and the Stars is convinced:

> What a reading of The Plough in terms of space reveals is a confirmation of Deane's view of O'Casey's intention; a consistent and coherent presentation of the public, political space as profoundly negating all positive values. This is

> less a failure to present the political than a conscious refusal to engage with the political specifics of this moment of Irish history in any mood other than total condemnation and, inadequate as that may be in itself, it does demonstrate the extent to which O'Casey intended, and achieved, the embodiment of his thesis within the spatial dimension of the play. 92

Richards' material analysis of spatial structure reveals O'Casey's intention to have been thought through at the level of theatrical spatial structure and not at all dependent on the reflexes of the naturalist ideological mode. He demonstrates how the use of public space is confined to riotous immorality and treacherous idiocy whilst the inner, domestic space of the home is developed as a vehicle for the more humane humanistic insistence upon such activities as play, tenderness and sexuality. The exterior 'public' world has projected onto it all those values which O'Casey finds abhorrent or at least problematical, and the dramatic space is very consciously structured through stage-directions to achieve this effect. We cannot help but conclude, then, that O'Casey's intention was to produce a humanistic and pacifistic critique of the nationalism of 1916-23 and that he was forced to this position by his failure to develop or find political terms with which to articulate a more transformative vision of human consciousness. His choice of naturalism as at least one part of the aesthetic mode of his resignation was a wise rather than inadvertent development, as was his later evolution of a more expressionist mode which, despite its formal difference to naturalism, embodies very similar structures of feeling and consciousness:

> The person looking from the window of that trapped room is still there; but the room around him has gone ... and what he sees from the window, now through his own eyes, is not the orthodox world but his necessary version of it: a look from the window that is now, in essence, the dramatic form. 93

O'Casey's Expressionism continues rather than overthrows his naturalist experiments and, despite the plays' implicitly transformative leavening of reality with fantasy, it reinforces the pessimistic perception that O'Casey had developed regarding the possibilities of his Dubliners developing a socialist consciousness.

What emerges from his plays, instead, is a more disintegrative and subversive consciousness that is deeply ambivalent. Frustrated by an absence of political forms which could contain it, O'Casey's oppositional energy was projected into a riotous carnivalism which resonates through all the levels of his drama: the physical, the discursive, the bodily, the dialogical, the ideological and so on, finding itself in tension with his more sober, quasi-metaphysical moralism. The carnival is directed at the complacent pieties of ideological nationalism but it tends to overwhelm O'Casey's own moralism in the process for carnival is difficult to contain at conscious levels once it is unleashed into theatrical proceedings In Juno and the Paycock the most moving and intense ideological centre of the drama is, as we shall see, undermined by a moment of black farce. In The Shadow of a Gunman and The Plough and the Stars, it is impossible to know what ideological position to empathize with since the most

humane characters are also capable of the emptiest kinds of banality, treachery and ignorance. Hardly any coherent sense is allowed to stand for long without being undermined by the circus-like energy around it.

The nature of this deconstructive energy is touched upon by Raymond Williams in his analysis of O'Casey's work in Drama from Ibsen to Brecht. Williams belongs to that tradition critical of O'Casey's moral and dramatic integrity in his view that "the feelings of the fighters, in that real history, are not dramatically engaged at all; all we see and hear is the flag, the gesture, the rhetoric. The need and the oppression are silent...." [94] In this he echoes Watson's contention regarding the structural weakness of the play's sentimental pacifism, and he provides some legitimation for Deane's claim that the pacifism is, anyway, "bogus" because it was part of an emotional protest rather than a thought-through position. Williams elaborates:

> The use of random colour, of flags, of slogans, of rhetoric and comic inflation, of the sentimental song, of reminiscences of theatre ... is a rush of disintegration, of catching at temporary effects, the separated consciousness, writing from within a life it cannot accept in real terms yet finds endlessly engaging and preoccupying. 95

This "separated consciousness" produces what Williams calls a form of "naturalist caricature" in which sloppy control of dramatic devices follows from a contemptuous treatment of tenement lives by a writer unable to occupy its forms of consciousness. O'Casey is, for Williams, a writer with little

commitment who observes bluster and idiocy but is unable to assign cognitive or moral integrity to his characters. This is much to the chagrin of David Krause who retorts that "O'Casey's exploitation of the comic spirit is too rich and penetrating to be reduced to caricature- Mr. Williams ignores the main current of mock-heroic humour and satire in the plays...." [96]

Krause is surely justified in pointing to the generic elements of the Dublin trilogy which do not belong to the naturalist mode. To mistake them for degenerate moments is, in a sense, to overlook their own generic integrity as, for example, moments of melodrama, farce, self-conscious theatricality and so on, moments which may form no part of the naturalist intention but belong, rather, to other intentions: the desire to parody, subvert and dialogise nationalist ideologies and structures of feeling. Though Williams reads these elements as "degenerate", which implies a lack of moral and dramatic control, I shall argue that these elements bear much of O'Casey's intention and that the "long confusion and disintegration" Williams speaks of, the "feckless rush" experienced by the audience and characters, the "catching at temporary effects", all form part of O'Casey's expression of a carnivalism at odds with the perceived ideological complacencies of romantic and deluded nationalism on the one hand and with all forms of bourgeois rationalism on the other. Though the moral and political control may be fractured, the aesthetic mode is not that of naturalist caricature but of self-conscious theatrical play with bourgeois and popular

conventions to produce a realism in, as it were, "quotations". The generic form is so manifold that no single mode establishes theatrical hegemony and the characters delight in their generic 'play'. This impulse represents the revenge of the socially accented forms that rationalism and idealism marginalise in their attempts to establish a mythology of national purity or of monadic individualism. O'Casey's theatre creates a form of aesthetic socialism, as it were, in which the genres and discourses of the drama are foregrounded in their playful contingency and rich social dissonance:

> The dramatic unity even of the early plays is a unity of heterogeneously contrasting elements that only become effective on the stage if these elements are allowed to retain their autonomy within the whole. It is the task of the theatre to make these structures 'talk', and it is a debatable point whether the theatre has hitherto evolved a type of acting that can bring out the full richness of these early plays. 97

The generic modes of O'Casey's drama are much more complex than Williams allows. He mistakes the carnivalesque for the degenerate and fails to recognise that O'Casey's sources were diverse and rich. His work derives from the popular melodrama and the music hall", writes James Simmons, "but one can also detect the influence of Shakespeare and the Authorized Version of the Bible." 98 It is, in other words, a drama that teems with heteroglossia. We can add to Simmons' list the influences of Ibsenite naturalism, cinematic farce, the Shavian theatre of ideas, German Expressionism, classical tragedy, nativity play and pantomime. The modes are at one

extreme cheap and externalistic ("the theatrical effect is at once simple and brutal ... and would not seem out of place in an Abbot and Costello film") [99] and, at the other, are "beautiful, drunken dramatic literature" [100] and the critical challenge is to understand that this is not the result of a lack of dramatic maturity or aesthetic control but something quite new in Irish Literature: a theatre that is filled with the social voices that could find no place in the political forms of Sean O'Casey's time.

It is important, finally, however, not to idealise this carnivalising tendency, for, as we shall see shortly, it was accompanied by an at times severe despair at the outcome of political events in Ireland after the failure of the 1913 general strike. Sean O'Casey could harbour long and bitter grudges against both individuals such as the Countess Markiewicz (who later represented Sinn Fein as the first British woman M.P.) for her influence upon the political direction of the Irish Citizen's Army, and against whole formations and organisations such as the Irish Volunteers and the Catholic clerisy in general. His anti-institutional tendency deepened throughout the late nineteen-twenties into what I have described as a form of social nihilism in which almost every historical or political event or institution came, for O'Casey, to resemble a wicked farce. The culmination of this tendency was his bleak vision of life in Ireland during World War One captured in The Silver Tassie, a vision which contributed, along with his dispute with W. B. Yeats over the play's production, to O'Casey's decision to

leave Ireland for Devon where, he felt, one could experience a more authentic Celticism than one could in Dublin.

Notes.

[1] Seamus Deane, "Irish Politics and O'Casey's Theatre" in Thomas Kilroy, ed., Sean O'Casey: Twentieth Century Views (New Jersey, 1975), p. 149.

[2] Jack Lindsay, "Sean O'Casey as a Socialist Artist" in Ronald Ayling, ed., Sean O'Casey: Modern Judgements (London, 1969), p. 193.

[3] Sean O'Casey, The Story of the Irish Citizen Army (West Nyack, New York, 1980), p. 64.

The nature of O'Casey's disappointment with Free State Ireland is discussed in the notes to my Introduction but a more objective view of the limited aims of post-Independence Ireland is offered here by David Cairns and Shaun Richards commenting upon the succession to Arthur Griffiths and Michael Collins:

"Their successors in the 1920s followed conservative economic and social policies, their radicalism confined to the sphere of foreig n affairs where they pushed to consolidate and then develop the freedoms of dominion status which the Treaty had conferred. Domestically, however, the persistence of pre-independent economic structures, and particularly the Free State's dependence upon the British market for export of its pastoral products, together with the continuing reluctance to see industrial development as suited to Irish needs, ensured that **both** the material and cultural bases of familism continued to be reproduced." (Writing Ireland (Manchester, 1988), p. 116.)

This economic conservatism and the growth of sectarian struggle were the main targets of O'Casey's ire in a Free State Ireland where, as Patrick Lynch reports, "The social conflict, as seen from Wolfe Tone to Connolly, and indeed by socialist republicans after him, had become submerged...."

("The Social Revolution that Never Was" in Desmond Williams, ed., The Irish Struggle, 1916-26 (London, 1966), quoted in Sean O'Faolain, The Irish:An Exploration of a People and Their Culture (Harmondsworth,1980), p. 150).

[4] ibid., p. 64.

[5] ibid., p. 3.

[6] C. Desmond Greaves, Sean O'Casey: Politics and Art (London, 1979), p. 195.

[7] ibid., p. 92.

[8] James Connolly, in James Connolly Heron, ed., The Words of James Connolly (Cork and Dublin, 1986), p. 13.

[9] James Connolly in P. Berresford Ellis, ed., James Connolly: Selected Writings (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 127-28.

[10] V. Lenin quoted in Robert Lowery, "Sean O'Casey : Art and Politics" in David Krause and Robert Lowery, eds., Sean O'Casey: Centenary Essays, Irish Literary Studies 7 (Gerrards Cross, 1980), p. 127.

[11] C. Desmond Greaves, op. cit., p. 92.

[12] ibid., p. 138.

[13] Seamus Deane, Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980 (London, 1985), p. 110.

[14] David Cairns and Shaun Richards, Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture (Manchester, 1988), p. 128.

[15] See note [8].

[16] James Connolly in James Connolly Heron, ed., op. cit., p. 18.

[17] David Cairns and Shaun Richards, op. cit., p. 130.

[18] Sean O'Casey in Irish Statesman (7 Feb., 1925), quoted in Jack Lindsay, op. cit., p. 192.

[19] David Cairns and Shaun Richards, op. cit., p. 95.

[20] Bernard Ransom, James Connolly's Marxism (London, 1980), p. 19.

[21] See David Cairns and Shaun Richards, op. cit. , pp. 13-16 and pp. 99-101, for a fuller discussion of these terms which, for reasons of space, must be omitted here. Readers are also referred to Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks trans. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London, 1971) for primary

references to these concepts.

[22] F. S. L. Lyons, writing in Culture and Anarchy in Ireland (London, 1982), noted that while the 1913 lockout 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" (p. 77). See note 10 in my Introduction.

[23] Sean O'Casey, quoted in David Cairns and Shaun Richards, op. cit., p. 128.

[24] Jack Mitchell, review of C. Desmond Greaves, Sean O'Casey: Politics and Art, in Robert Lowery, ed., O'Casey Annual no. 1 (London, 1982), p. 200.

[25] Sean O'Casey quoted in Jack Mitchell, op. cit., p. 201.

[26] Jack Mitchell, op. cit., p. 202.

[27] Sean O'Casey in Jack Mitchell, op. cit., p. 201.

[28] Jack Mitchell, op. cit., p. 204.

[29] Sean O'Faolain, "Ireland After Yeats", The Bell (Summer, 1953), quoted in Jack Lindsay, "Sean O'Casey as a Socialist Artist" in Ronald Ayling, op. cit., p. 194.

[30] ibid., p. 194.

[31] Robert Lowery, "Sean O'Casey: Art and Politics" in David Krause and Robert Lowery, ed.s, Sean O'Casey: Centenary Essays, op. cit., p. 122.

[32] ibid., p. 144.

[33] Sean O'Casey quoted by Robert Lowery, op. cit., p. 152.

[34] See, for instance C. D. Greaves's suggestion in his Sean O'Casey: Politics and Art that O'Casey "took no part in the Rising of 1916 for reasons which were probably more personal than political" (p. 194) and his view that "the deep hidden trauma of O'Casey's political life was that he was not out in 1916" (p. 120).

[35] Robert Lowery, "Sean O'Casey: Art and Politics", op. cit., p. 135.

[36] Shaun Richards, "'A Question of Location': Theatrical Space and Political Choice in The Plough and the Stars", Theatre Research International vol. 15, no. 1 (Spring, 1990), p. 34.

[37] George Lukacs, quoted in Robert Lowery, op. cit., p. 144.

38 Sean O'Casey, "The Plough and the Stars" in Three Plays (London, 1980), p. 143.

39 There is a sleight of hand in Lowery's analysis of marxist aesthetics when Lukacs appears here to be an apologist for humanist organicism rather than the theorist of socio-aesthetic totality which a fuller analysis of his work would reveal him to be.

40 Jack Lindsay, op. cit., p. 195.

41 ibid., p. 195.

42 ibid., pp. 194-95.

43 C. D. Greaves, op. cit., p. 194.

44 Bonamy Dobree, "Sean O'Casey and the Irish Drama" in Ronald Ayling, op. cit., p. 95.

45 David Krause, "The Risen O'Casey: Some Marxist and Irish Ironies" in Robert Lowery, ed., O'Casey Annual, No. 3 (London, 1984), p. 134.

46 ibid., p. 135.

47 ibid., p. 135.

48 See, for a discussion of the tradition of romantic-humanist organicism, Raymond Williams, Culture and Society (London, 1958) where Williams traces the development of the organicist motifs of Romanticism into the twentieth-century through the mediation of mid-nineteenth-century English social criticism. The analysis of Ruskinism (pp. 130-48) is particularly apposite to Sean O'Casey's philosophical position.

49 (London, 1960), p. 86.

50 George Watson, Irish Identity and the Literary Revival: Synge, Yeats, Joyce and O'Casey (London, 1979), p. 247.

51 David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work, p. 89.

52 George Jean Nathan, Intro. to Five Great Modern Irish Plays (New York, 1950), pp. xi-xii.

53 David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work, p. 39.

54 ibid., p. 68.

55 Sean O'Casey, "The Plough and the Stars", op. cit., p. 164.

56 ibid., p. 162.

[57] James Connolly in James Connolly Heron, ed., op. cit., p. 14.

One should note the remarks of Padraig Pearse (The Voice of the Man), quoted in the same text, that "a nation may ... determine that all sources of wealth whatsoever are the property of the nation ... and that all surplus wealth shall go to the national treasury to be expended on national purposes, rather than be accumulated by private persons" (p. 14). Such a statement adapted for the stage would offer a very different view of the values of the Uprising than that offered by O'Casey in this anti-nationalistic play.

One should note, too, the sections of Pearse's prose that have been excised from the text and replaced by ellipses in The Man's speech. The real text has the following: "We may make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people; but bloodshed is a cleansing and a satisfying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. There are many things more horrible than bloodshed, and slavery is one of them. " (Quoted in F. S. L. Lyons, op. cit., p. 90.) The extraordinary admission that prefaces the remarks adapted by O'Casey seems ludicrously absurd for such a sophisticated ideologist. It is remarkable that O'Casey did not see fit to include it given his mood of satirical anti-nationalism , but one must presume that the audience would have found the remark unbelievable and that O'Casey did not want to risk losing the effect of militant fundamentalism that the ensuing words carry.

[58] David Krause, op. cit., p. 167.

[59] Herbert Goldstone, In Search of Community (Cork and Dublin, 1972), p. 13.

[60] ibid., pp. 13-14.

[61] V. Lenin, quoted in Robert Lowery, "Sean O'Casey: Art and Politics", op. cit., p. 131.

[62] See note 22 above.

[63] Sean O'Casey, "Innishfallen, Fare Thee Well" (1949) in Autobiographies 2 (London, 1980), p. 3.

[64] David Krause, "Sean O'Casey and the Higher Nationalism: the Desecration of Ireland's Household Gods" in Robert O'Driscoll, ed., Theatre and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Ireland (London, 1971), p. 114.

[65] ibid., p. 121.

[66] ibid, p. 115.

[67] ibid., p. 128.

68 Marianne Levander, "O'Casey and Realism", Moderna Sprak 69 (1975), p. 126, quoted in Reudiger Ahrens, "National Myths and Stereotypes in Modern Irish Drama: Sean O'Casey, Brendan Behan, Brian Friel", Literature and Linguistics Vol. 21 (Spring, 1988), pp. 64-5.

69 Reudiger Ahrens, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

70 Seamus Deane, A Short History of Irish Literature (London, 1986), pp. 164-65.

71 ibid., p. 164.

72 ibid, p. 164.

73 Seamus Deane, Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880-1980 (London, 1985), p. 108.

74 Sean O'Casey, "Innishfallen Fare Thee Well" (1949) in Autobiographies 2 (London, 1980) p. 91.

75 David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work, op. cit., p. 69.

76 ibid., p. 80.

77 George Watson, Irish Identity, op. cit., pp 264-65.

78 Sean O'Casey, "Juno and the Paycock" in Three Plays, op. cit., p. 27.

79 George Watson, Irish Identity, p. 265 and p. 282.

80 Louis Althusser, For Marx (London, 1977), p. 144.

81 Sean O'Casey, "The Plough and the Stars", op. cit., pp. 177-78.

82 Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 164.

83 Francis Mulhern, "Ideology and Literary Form: A Comment", New Left Review 91 (1975), p. 85.

84 ibid., p. 85.

85 ibid., p. 85.

86 Raymond Williams, op. cit., p. 390.

87 Sean O'Casey, "Juno and the Paycock", op. cit., p. 72.

88 Raymond Williams, "Social Environment and Theatrical Environment: the Case of English Naturalism", in Problems in

Materialism and Culture (London, 1980), p. 141.

89 Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, op. cit., p. 387.

90 Shaun Richards, op. cit., p. 38.

91 Terry Eagleton, "Reply to Francis Mulhern", New Left Review 192 (1975), p. 107.

92 Shaun Richards, op. cit., p. 39.

93 Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, p. 391.

94 ibid, p. 166.

95 ibid., p. 166.

96 David Krause, Sean O'Casey: the Man and His Work, op. cit., p. 87.

97 Maik Hamburger, "Anti-illusionism and the Use of Song in the Early Plays of Sean O'Casey", in Robert Lowery, ed., O'Casey Annual No. 2 (London, 1983), p. 3.

98 James Simmons, Sean O'Casey (London and Basingstoke, 1983), p. 1.

99 ibid., p. 38.

100 George Jean Nathan, Intro. to Five Great Modern Irish Plays (New York, 1950), quoted in David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work, op. cit., p. 85.

Chapter Two: Carnival-Nihilism

Sean O'Casey's early work oscillates between, and sometimes conflates, the twin poles of carnivalism and nihilism. The structure of feeling connecting both is a bathetic anti-idealism which can be socially playful (carnivalistic) or disturbingly empty (nihilistic) and this peculiar structure of feeling takes complex forms which we shall explore shortly in relation to each play. It is a structure which is apparent not only in character, dialogue and action, but also in the more general levels of genre, tone and dramatic rhythm, for O'Casey's argument with idealism and rationalism extends to all the dramatic planes. No part of the dramatic structure escapes the mood of irreverence: the most tragic scene is undermined by bathetic farce, the most lofty ideal comes crashing to the stage floor in what Samuel Beckett calls "a spasm of dislocation." [1] The problem for the dramatist in this mode, however, is that the higher centres of his own philosophy- pacifism, sexual affection, feminism- cannot escape the general entropic decay ("in every case, such ascendancy is short-lived", comments Ronald Ayling) [2] until what begins as parody of nationalist delusion concludes with the strong accents of a general despair.

Sometimes the twin poles of the drama complement one another, sometimes they are held in tension and sometimes they thwart each other in a combative pas de deux in which a scene is left agonizingly poised between the joy of social laughter and the horror of bodily decay. O'Casey's plays are extremely

physical events- a fact realised in few productions but apparent in many stage directions and in the dramatic dialogue itself. If the carnival is there in Fluther Good's dancing, the Boyles' singing, Minnie' Powell's gay laughter and the general social energy, then the nihilism lurks in the empty posturing of the social body as it seeks to make meaning despite overwhelming physical feelings: the fear of Seumas Shields, the horror of Bessie Burgess and the grief of Juno Boyle.

The Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin has described carnival as "syncretic pageantry of a ritualistic sort" with its syncretism lying in its subversive combinations of genre, mood, gesture, discourse and physicality. [3] In carnival, the king's crown is worn by an ass, the most lofty poetic form is butchered by obscene performance, the most revered theological language blasphemed against with comical arrogance. Carnival is no respecter of the intellectual, the powerful or the sacred: "The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival.... All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people." [4] This is particularly appropriate to forms of domestic Irish working-class behaviour for it is in motifs of carnivalism that much working-class discourse and behaviour is constructed. Though unable to affect the economic or political necessities of a colonial life, O'Casey's tenement dwellers endeavour to create a cultural space within the

horrors of the slums which is both playful and iconoclastic in the manner suggested by Bakhtin. Following his suggestions, it is possible to establish a working typology of seven carnivalistic features which are of immediate relevance to O'Casey's work:

1. The procedure of crowning and de-crowning. This process, writes Bakhtin, "is a dualistic ambivalent ritual, expressing the ... joyful relativity of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) position." [5] Michael Bristol confirms that carnival achieves "a transformation downward or 'uncrowning' of de jure relations of dependency, expropriation and social discipline." [6] This irreverent and illegal 'downward' movement will be a key feature of the analysis of O'Casean drama: its decrownings, debunkings and what both Samuel Beckett and Raymond Williams describe as the "rush" of disintegration and fecklessness belong in this category. The following serves as an archetypal illustration:

> Darry (loudly.) Keep a sthrain on her, man, keep a sthrain on her; we have to get this straightened out first, before we can brood over your spectacles!
> Barry (suddenly noticing the oil drum). The oil, the oil!
>
> [He lets go of the rope, and runs over to the oil drum. Darry disappears up the chimney.
>
> Barry (lifting the drum and shaking it). Not a drop left in it, not a single drop! What're we goin' to

do n--

[He turns and sees that Darry has disappeared.

Lizzie (speaking outside in a voice of horror). The heifer, the heifer!

Darry (calling out). Lizzie, Lizzie!

[Lizzie rushes in as Darry falls down the chimney.... [7]

Here, in a very physical example, Darry's attempts to maintain some rational order and control ("we have to get this straightened out first") are ruined as he is unceremoniously decrowned, first in an upward rush of energy and secondly through a downward rush of undignified decomposure. There is little social discipline here (the wife, Lizzie who bears the authority of the household is absent for much of the scene), little by way of 'structure and order' and even less of cognitive and ideological concern. The primary force here is one of destructive farce in which the physicality of the action drives the dramatic movement in an essentially music-hall routine. Darry and Barry have been 'crowned' heads of the household by Lizzie while she is out ploughing the field in an already carnivalesque inversion of masculine and feminine roles, but they cannot maintain the dignity of their position and, as we shall see in more detail later, they unleash entirely destructive forces of disorder and comical mayhem.

2. Twinned and Paired Images. "Very characteristic for

carnival thinking" writes Bakhtin, "is paired images, chosen for their contrast (high/low, fat/thin etc.) or for their similarity (doubles/twins). Also characteristic is the utilization of things in reverse: putting clothes on inside out (or wrong side out), trousers on the head, dishes in place of headgear, the use of household utensils as weapons, and so forth." [8] In the following example the twinned characters Halibut and Mulligan confront each other over a stolen wallet. Mulligan has taken a wine bottle as a club:

> Halibut. I'll not let you destroy yourself--come away from that window, or I'll flatten you!
>
> Mulligan (wheeling around, still holding bottle by the neck to use it as a club, and facing towards Halibut). Looka Halibut, leave that club down. (Coaxingly) Now, be sensible, Dan, like a good chap, and drop that club. Halibut. Drop that bottle first, I say; drop that bottle first!
>
> Mulligan. Drop that club I tell you. (Fiercely) Drop that club!
>
> Halibut (dancing up and down--panic-stricken). Put that bottle down! Put it down, and go to bed, I tell you!
>
> Mulligan (dodging about). Drop that club at once, Halibut!
>
> Halibut. Put that bottle down immediately!
>
> Mulligan. I command you!
>
> Halibut. I command you! [9]

The twins confront each other with household objects for weapons and appear like mirror images of each other in gesture, tone and discourse. Bakhtin's description here perfectly describes the tenor of this scene and helps us to understand that carnival structures form a firm part of O'Casey's theatrical experience and expression. He was delighted by the Musical Hall and by the antics of Boucicauldian drama as a young man, and the influence of carnivalesque conventions could not be clearer than in this example. Other examples of this twinning for knockabout include Stoke and Poges in Purple Dust, Capt. Boyle and Joxer in Juno and The Covey and Uncle Peter in The Plough and the Stars. It is a principle which has survived even in contemporary film and cabaret in the form of such 'double acts' as Laurel and Hardy, Morecambe and Wise and others, and this coupling of characters has the effect of deconstructing bourgeois notions of monadic individualism. The O'Casean proletarian is far more likely to define himself in terms of social knockabout in this paired form than through his individual identity and self-possession.

3. Parodic Stylization. O'Casey makes use of parody and the related, cheaper form of pastiche to devastating effect to make obliquely didactic points indirectly or for pure theatrical effect. "To the pure genres (epic, tragedy)," writes Bakhtin, " parody is organically alien; to the carnivalized genres it is, on the contrary, organically

inherent." [10] This excellent insight helps us to view O'Casey's parodic stylization not simply as a matter of internal thematic concern to the play but as a condition of its very form. O'Casey's plays parody and pastiche stable discourses, stock notions of character and even the generic forms in which the drama is composed. This 'play' is not some accidental feature of the drama but its structural principle. A rather base parodic 'principle' informs so much of the action of these plays that we can describe it as the drama's poetic. At its most charged, several levels of parody and pastiche can occur on stage at once. In the following example, a scandalous parody of the sincere discourses of human rights is enacted by an irreverent pair of rogues in a discussion regarding Juno Boyle's power in the household. At the same time, the audience is aware of the pastiched nature of their stage-relationship: this is the conventional 'buddy' talk of a Laurel and Hardy or a Music Hall double-act reproduced with relish:

> Boyle. She has her rights--there's no denyin' it, but haven't I me rights too?
>
> Joxer. Of course you have--the sacred rights o'man!
>
> Boyle. Today, Joxer, there's goin' to be issued a proclamation be me, establishin' an' independent Republic, an' Juno'll have to take an oath of allegiance. [11]

The words are rendered ironical by the appropriation of the historically significant discourses of human rights and

national struggle to describe the basely personal affairs of these twinned spoilers. O'Casey carnivalises the revered political discourses of his audience by placing them in the mouths of disreputable rogues who refract the sanctified vocabulary of their contemporaries' triumphant nationalism with comical irreverence.

In an example from the same play, the theosophical system associated with W. B. Yeats is delicately parodied by being placed in the mouth of the self-consciously 'stage-English' Bentham, the irony of whose name will not have escaped the audience. This joke at Yeats' expense is then further besmirched by the outburst of Mrs. Boyle and the farcical posturing of the Captain:

> Bentham. Theosophy's founded on The Vedas, the religious books of the East. Its central theme is the existence of an all-pervading Spirit-- the Life-Breath .... This Life-Breath is called the Prawna.
> Mrs. Boyle. The Prawna! What a comical name!
> Boyle. Prawna; yis, the Prawna. (Blowing gently through his lips) That's the Prawna! [12]

That an English rationalist with an appropriately resonant name should appropriate Yeatsian idealism is ironic enough, but the further linguistic irreverence of the Boyles is typical of the parodic principle at work in O'Casey's drama: an intellectual formulation like Bentham's has little chance of any coherent survival against such mock ignorance. In one

short sequence we witness the parodic undermining of English Utilitarianism, Ascendancy idealism, Eastern mysticism and masculine working-class pretentiousness with the comical energy of the encounter between stage-Englishman and stage-Irishman providing the fuel for an almost absurd form of parodic theatre.

4. Physical Supremacy. "The basic principle of grotesque or Carnival realism", writes Michael Bristol, "is to represent everything socially and spiritually exalted on the material, bodily level. This includes cursing, abusive and irreverent speech, symbolic and actual thrashing" and so on. [13] O'Casey's work brims with abuse. Characters are verbally thrashed, cursed, derided and generally brought crashing to earth if found in possession of a delusive ideal or, indeed at times, any kind of cognitive formulation at all. But the body speaks, too, at the level of theatrical process: the drama is intensely physical at times with chase scenes, mock-fights, hideaways and dances often stealing scenes from more ideological concerns. In this episode the ideological dispute between the revolutionary Marxism of The Covey and the sentimental nationalism of Uncle Peter has degenerated into an abusive pantomime chase:

> The Covey. Aren't you th' little malignant oul' bastard, you lemon-whiskered oul' swine!
>
> [Peter runs to the sword, draws it, and makes for the Covey, who dodges him round the table; Peter has no intention of striking, but The Covey wants to take

no chance. The Covey (dodging). Fluther, hold him, there. It's a nice thing to have a lunatic like this lashin' around with a lethal weapon! [14]

The Covey had been articulating a position one might have associated with the younger O'Casey during his post-1913 marxist idealism, and the chance is offered here for O'Casey to represent the nationalist discourse informing Peter's actions with some discursive integrity. Instead, O'Casey prefers to produce a collapse from discursive rationalisation into infantile pantomimicry with the revered nationalist signifiers of Peter's wardrobe and armoury being foregrounded by this domestic dispute as ludicrous costumery. The physical abuse and thrashing explodes into the domestic space, thrusting aside the possibilities for any rational discussion or discursive development of ideas. The socially and spiritually exalted is indeed represented on the material and bodily level to the exclusion of its cognitive potential and historical relevance. Little that enters the verbal-ideological world of O'Casey's early drama can escape this movement for long.

5. Celebration of movement and energy as an end in itself.

Many critics such as Raymond Williams and James Simmons have found themselves angered by O'Casey's lack of ideological and theatrical control. "This lack of control" Simmons believes to be "something new in literature" [15] but he is frustrated by

O'Casey's use of "the decorative flourish, not defining anything and not to be developed." [16] For Bakhtin, however, carnival celebrates precisely the decorative flourish rather than the developed ideologeme: "Carnival celebrates the shift itself, the very process of replaceability, and not the precise item that is replaced. Carnival is, so to speak, functional and not substantive. It absolutizes nothing, but rather proclaims the joyful relativity of everything." [17] O'Casey's language, particularly in the later Dublin work, often seems decoratively absurd or hyperbolically stretched, but in carnivalized genres this energetic flow of physical material- the following parade of guttural signifiers in the third Act of The Plough, for instance- is to be celebrated for itself as a joyful, verbiose dance. In Terry Eagleton's words, it represents that "semiotic flow which in decomposing significance nonetheless courses with the impulse of comradeship." [18] Though aesthetically imprecise, O'Casey's breathless and colourful poetic-prose belongs fully to the carnival mode in its willfully social extravagance:

> Mrs. Gogan (plunging out into the centre of the floor in a wild tempest of hysterical rage). Y'oul' rip of a blasted liar, me weddin' rings been well earned be twenty years be th' side o' me husband, now takin' his rest in heaven.... An' that's more than some o' you can say that are kep' from th' dhread o' desthruction be a few drowsy virtues, that th' first whisper of temptation lulls into a sleep, that'll

know one sin from another only on th' day of their last anointin', an' that use th'innocent light o' th' shinin' stars to dip into th' sins of a night's diversion!

Bessie (jumping out to face Mrs. Gogan, and bringing the palms of her hands together in sharp claps to emphasize her remarks). Liar to you, too, ma'am, y'oul' hardened threspasser on other people's good nature, wizenin' up your soul in th'arts o' dodgeries, till every dhrop of respectability in a female is dhried up in her, lookin' at your ready-made maneouverin' with th' menkind!...

Fluther (trying to calm Mrs. Gogan). Now Jinnie, Jinnie, it's a derogatory thing to be smirchin' a night like this with a row; it's rompin' with th' feelin's of hope we ought to be, instead of bein' vice versa! [19]

Repetitions, physical emphases, intense rhythmical pulsions combine with the extravagant language to produce a powerfully theatrical social energy that is crowned by Fluther's innocent malapropism. The alliteration of "dhread o' dhestruction be a few drowsy virtues" may seem overwrought but together with the metaphorical extravagance of the language ("rompin' with th' feelins of hope") the intended theatrical vitality is established without shame. We only find such writing flawed if we mistake it for an overblown naturalism rather than a language saturated by the principles of the carnivalesque. In

carnival mode, such language is as effective for its comical elaboration of the signifier as for its articulation of a stable signified. The materialism of the syllable, rhythm and sound necessarily overwhelms much of the ideological content. This is very much a theatrical language concerned to fill the spaces of a theatre with the colour and rhythm of sound. As a literary language it often seems embarrassed by the page but as carnivalesque writing it implies a collective audience by its very extravagance.

6. A working-class jouissance, or, 'The Craic'. Not named as such by Bakhtin, an intractable mode of social life characterized by warm laughter, visceral excitement, role and game-playing, parodic 'quotation', a deep soulful grasp of the history of the present, charm, wit and joie de vivre forms the spirit of O'Casey's better work. The craic, a Gaelic term difficult to conceptualise in English, forms the bright side of carnival in direct opposition to its nihilistic tendencies. The craic bestows joy on all its participants through a rich social complexity composed of song, music, dance, tale, joke, character, social wisdom and solidarity. The following is a beautifully modulated example:

> Mrs. Madigan. A bottle o' stout ud be a little too heavy for me stummock afther me tay .... A-a-ah, I'll thry the ball o'malt. [Boyle prepares the whisky. Mrs. Madigan. There's nothin' like a ball o' malt occasional like--too much of it isn't good. (To

Boyle, who is adding water) Ah, God, Johnny, don't put too much wather on it! (She drinks.) I suppose yous'll be lavin' this place.

Boyle. I'm looking for a place near the sea; I'd like the place that you might say was me cradle, to be me grave as well. The sea is always callin' me.

Joxer. She is callin', callin', callin' in the win' an' on the sea.

Boyle. Another dhrop o' whisky, Mrs. Madigan?

Mrs. Madigan. Well, now, it ud be hard to refuse seein' the suspicious times that's in it.

Boyle (with a commanding gesture.) Song!...Juno...Mary... 'Home to Our Mountains'!

Mrs. Madigan (enthusiastically). Hear, hear!

Joxer. Oh, tha's a darlin' song, a daarlin' song! [20]

The delightfully mock-coy play between Boyle and Mrs. Madigan over the drink, the unconscious playfulness of Joxer in his choral role with his breeze of playful imagination ("The sea is always callin' me"), the physical nourishment of 'stummock' through whisky and the ubiquitous proletarian 'tay', together with the staged command of the turn to song are elements which build to form delicate social textures. The craic is about dissembling, dreaming, reproducing and mocking social roles, discursive conventions and literary/historical images in a carnival eucharist of food, drink and playful ceremony. O'Casey is a master of this dramatic mode, capturing precisely the composed playfulness which forms the soul of this working-

class social jouissance. In Bakhtinian terms, the feeling of craic arises from a complex composition of speech-acts that are internally modulated by the awareness of the social presence of others. The audience is privileged to experience it simply as an unconscious delight.

7. Syncretic dialogism. Closely connected to the former category, this aspect of Carnival shows it to be deeply disrespectful of social and aesthetic boundaries in that it brings about "a striking combination of what would seem to be absolutely heterogeneous and incompatible elements: philosophical dialogue, adventure and fantasticality, slum naturalism, utopia and so forth." [21] This could have been written in a very precise review of Juno, for example, with all of the necessary elements being mentioned. But carnival does not stop, as I pointed out above, with these internal literary considerations, pressing on, rather, with "the destruction of all barriers between genres, between self-enclosed systems of thought, between various styles etc., it destroyed any attempt on the part of genres and styles to isolate themselves or ignore one another; it brought closer what was distant and united what had been sundered." [22] The dialogical process that follows from this pluralism stresses, again, the relativity of all concepts, discourses and aesthetic modes. The different emphases and accents of social consciousness embodied in these various forms do not lie discretely in the work but are forced against each other and made to speak. In a sense, the Dublin tenements form the

perfect breeding ground for this kind of carnival dialogism for theirs is a deeply social space in which many ideological, discursive and aesthetic modes come face to face and compete for supremacy. The point is captured by Terry Eagleton in his observation that "such a social order breeds plurality and fragmentation as surely as it generates social deprivation ... in a melee of idioms, ethnic origins, life-styles, national cultures", the consequence being a reluctant but necessary dialogical face off in which "any particular belief system will find itself wedged cheek by jowel with unwelcome competitors; and its own frontiers will be thrown into sharp relief." [23] This is precisely the case with O'Casey's Dublin drama as we can see from this brief example:

> Fluther. We're all Irishmen, anyhow; aren't we?
>
> The Covey with hand outstretched, and in a professional tone). Look here, comrade, there's no such thing as an Irishman, or an Englishman, or a German or a Turk; we're all only human bein's. Scientifically speakin', it's all a question of the accidental gatherin' together of mollycewels an' atoms....
>
> Fluther (scornfully). Mollycewels! (He begins to untie his apron.) What about Adam and Eve?
>
> The Covey. Well, what about them? [24]

Here, Catholic and rationalist discourses confront each other. Pressed as they are, 'cheek and jowel' in the tenement space, the discourses compete for supremacy through the device of two

warring characters. Fluther and the Covey's dialogisation of the rationalist 'molecules' into a more Dublin-accented "mollycewels" visceralises the word a little and mocks its cognitive pretension. Fluther's emphatic then outburst produces an 'image' of the Covey's rationalism which relativises the two forms of speech such that the Covey's gain no authoritative and monological space. This may account for not a little of his anger.

"Dialogic relationships" are also possible, for Bakhtin, "among images belonging to different art-forms," [25] and we shall see from our discussion of Juno and the Paycock that Sean O'Casey produces a theatre in which heterogeneous dramatic modes compete for discursive domination of particular scenes. The dialogism, in other words, is not a matter of simple discursive 'imaging' but of generic imaging too, that is, where the characters begin to produce quite alienated 'quotations' of sub-generic forms which alienate the audience from the dominant 'naturalist' mode of the drama. A dialogism results in which the naturalism of the production cannot maintain a 'monological' space and form for it is consistently re-framed by non-naturalistic elements such as farce, melodrama and music-hall routine. At times, the audience is simply unaware of which generic conventions they should observe, for a moment of tenement realism will twist into a moment of ludicrous farce at the drop of a hat. This is particularly the case with Juno and the Paycock, as we shall see. We must now turn, however, to examine the textures of

the nihilistic pole of O'Casey's drama.

By 'nihilism', I mean that structure of feeling associated with the experience that life is a meaningless sham, trick or void, that the world is propelled by a godless materialism and that there is no transcendent metaphysical meaning, truth or teleology at work in human affairs. Nihilism in O'Casey is an attitude and a behaviour rather than a conscious ideology- it accompanies carnival as its dark, entropic shadow, converting gay laughter to grave shuddering and the metaphysics of visceral pleasure into the merely empirical sensations of a physical body. Nihilism in O'Casean drama is expressed through a kind of entropic fatalism in which carnival, in the process of overturning and emptying idealist fantasies of cognitive authority, threatens to turn upon itself and empty even its own procedures of any teleological meaning beyond their own immediate process. Nihilism is the dark other face of carnival, inscribed in its deconstructive practice as the dark emptiness of a life without nourishing thought. By shadowing the above typology with its negative terms we can establish the dramatic counterpoint to the carnivalism we have explored. Aspects of nihilism, then, include:

1. Entropic Disintegration. If crowning and decrowning enact a process of birth, death and re-birth , what Bakhtin earlier called 'shift and renewal', there is a tendency in O'Casey for the third part of the sequence to be submerged in destructive action. The renewal rarely comes and the energy of solidarity

flowing from the decrowning of self-important posturing often evolves into a despairing failure at the possibility of any decent human future at all:

> Davoren. Ah me, alas! Pain, pain, pain ever, for ever! It's terrible to think that little Minnie is dead, but it's still more terrible to think that Davoren and Shields are alive! Oh, Donal Davoren, shame is your portion now till the silver cord is loosened and the golden bowl be broken. [26]

Few plays have ended on such a nihilistic note. Here, the Romantic epigram much spoken by Donal becomes horrifically literal. This idea of 'pain forever' is typical of O'Casey's bleakest vision during these desperate years of Civil War and political assassination. The culmination of the play here in an irredeemable damnation is echoed in the closing sequences of both Juno and the Paycock and The Plough and the Stars, where the stage is finally abandoned to political despair, drunken chaos and civil annihilation. These early plays typically conclude with death and not rebirth. The carnivalesque temper of reconstruction is resisted powerfully when it comes to concluding sentiments for O'Casey can see no redemption, finally, in the historical events of his time.

2. Twinning and Repetition Leading to a Hollow Theatricality. Where twinning is obvious (Barry Derrill and Darry Berrill) or more subtle (Davoren and Seumas) there is a tendency to undermine the realism of the naturalistic genre and produce an

episodic theatricality reminiscent of music-hall, variety or filmic farce sequences. The audience becomes aware of the staged nature of the drama and a loss of belief in character, historical setting and ideological sincerity results. The language is so automated that the effect is a theatre of near non-being:

Cloyne. It might be worse.

Barney (striking a match to light the paper). We're goin' to be worse, I'm tellin' you.

Cloyne. We can't be worse than we are.

Barney [as the flames of the paper die down]. There's no chance o' kindlin' here. Why did you say, then, that we might be worse.

Cloyne. Well, so, indeed, an' we might.

Barney. How can we be worse, woman, when we're as bad as we can be?

Cloyne. Simply be bein' worse than we were.

Barney. How can we be worse than we were, when we're as bad as we can be now?

Cloyne. You'll see we'll be worse before we're betther.

Barney. Damn these logs! Isn't that what I'm sthrivin' to dhrive into your head?

Cloyne. What are you sthrivin' to dhrive into me head?

Barney. That we'll be worse than we were before we're as bad as we are now, an' in a week's time

> we'll be lookin' back with a sigh to a time, bad as it could be then, that was betther than the worst that was on top of us now. [27]

Comical at one level in its repetitive mirroring, the sub-text of the farce is the blackness of the feeling of doom symbolized by the failure of the fire to take. The mood is bleak, closer to that of The End of the Beginning than to Juno or Cock-a-Doodle-Dandy. It is difficult to perform as comedy for though the obvious joke lies in Barney's extended and confusing final 'logic', the dialogue simultaneously betrays a foreboding sense of disaster in its obsession with 'the worst'. The grimness of the underlying nihilism is that "[t]here's no chance o' kindlin' here" where language has become so twisted upon its own logical absurdities. The twins trap rather than motivate each other. It is not difficult to see sources here for Samuel Beckett's early drama where twins such as Vladimir and Estragon confront each others' nihilistic paralysis with hopeless language games.

3. Parody Degenerating into Relativistic Emptiness. O'Casey has a tendency to turn his parodic impulse against all higher forms of consciousness to such an extent that he almost makes it impossible for a character to think at all in his plays without being mocked, ironized or simply insulted. At its worst, this tendency reveals a neo-Nietzschean suspicion of all rational coherence. O'Casey foregrounds the sound and tropical content of discourses in order to reveal their

rhetorical contour, their social performativeness rather than ideological truth, as in this example from The Plough and the Stars where the portrayal of the Marxist Covey results in a deformation of what might have been represented as a mature cognitive position into The Covey's chaste and stylized dogma:

> The Covey. There's only one freedom for th' workin' man: conthrol of th' means o' production, rates of exchange, an' th' means of disthribution. (Tapping [the prostitute] Rosie on the shoulder) Look here, comrade, I'll leave here to-morrow night for you a copy of Jenersky's Thesis on the Origin, Development, an' Consolidation of the Evolutionary Idea of the Proletariat. [28]

Underlying the stylization of the Covey's language is a nihilistic emptiness in which "science shows you," as he claims to the indignantly Catholic Fluther, "that th' head o' your god is an empty one." [29] It is difficult not to hear an implied author here given O'Casey's known contempt for the follies of Catholic dogma but confusion reigns because the Covey's discourse is too parodic for him to be convincing as the author's representative. His gross misjudgement of the sexuality of the scene and his extravagant vocabulary undermine his position as a socialist representative. Marxist ideology, a living and persuasive force in O'Casey's time, is discursively imaged as an absurd and inappropriate linguistic performance in which the weight of vocabulary drowns any

ideological sense. The impulse to pastiche and parody ideological language rebounds on the author's intention. In a near double-bind, O'Casey finds it impossible to sympathetically represent even his own philosophy without undermining it for fear of its repressive power. When rational coherence becomes synonymous with the Covey's dominative lifelessness one can find oneself beset, as here, by a cognitive nihilism that will shortly result in another episode of thrashing and abuse. All discourses in this carnivalised theatrical space enter as simply one more language to be relativised as a piece of empty social performance.

4. An anti-Rational 'Physics'. Carnivalization is a double-edged weapon. What can be gained from a stress upon physical processes (burps, farts, raspberries and obscene gestures) is a delightful comical irreverence. But what can be lost is any sense of metaphysical or even broadly social meaning. Though cocking a snook at pompously orthodox metaphysical beliefs (nationalism, Marxism, Catholicism) may be immediately liberationary, a refusal to restore those metaphysical practices to any kind of grace can lead to a barbarous materialist negativity which shivers with a fear of the grave. The constant debunking of Catholic and nationalist ritual as superstitious and ridiculous can result not in liberationary laughter but merely in a desperate and farcical cackle at these solemn metaphysical pieties. If the metaphysical movement of life is refused then the physical can take on a

grotesque and threatening character. O'Casey's plays are littered with terrified, broken, disfigured and diseased figures of the social psyche as this random impression from six different plays demonstrates: "his body made a collhander of ... me darlin' son was riddled with bullets ... he got hit in the hip ... U-ugh, I'm afther gettin' a terrible twinge in me right leg! ... This the stiff? ... I'm dyin', I think I'm dyin' ... then again is heard a scream of pain ... Ooh! Sacred Heart! Me thumb's desthroyed! ... We've found him lying in a dead faint ... staring in front of her and screaming ... stop the bleedin! ... it hurts terrible when I thry to do anythin' serious!"

One is tempted to observe that it must have 'hurt terrible' for O'Casey to represent any discourse seriously without deforming it with physical action into a form of abuse. The plays are so dominated by physical and mental suffering that the audience is sometimes overwhelmed by the sheer weight of physical action which lies in store, as it were, like a potential energy ready to rush the stage should any character get above himself and develop some form of stable consciousness. Extraordinarily excited by its kinetic energy, we nevertheless long at times for this theatre to articulate some philosophical insight that represents more than a mere target for the flood of dramatic energy to engulf.

5. Processes that Imprison Consciousness. A simple point to make here is that though the love of movement, colour and energy evident in much of O'Casey's work from The Plough to

Cock-a-doodle-Dandy can be admirably carnivalistic in relation to the pious hypocrisies of clerical nationalism and Catholicism, it can simultaneously represent, particularly in the later work, a rather cheap romanticism which leaves the audience with little cognitive or emotional nourishment. The fact that O'Casey's characters have "so much energy despite their deprivation" and the fact of their "vivid spite and grandiose dreams, their endless ability to escape from reality" [30] can lead to tiresomely emptying fantasies of colour and movement with little complex social judgement. These escapist fantasies are, in a sense, the bright other face of an individualistic nihilism which trusts social institutions such as Roman Catholicism with nothing. There is a "surface warmth", remarks Raymond Williams, "over a deeply resigned contempt" for authority figures in particular. [31]

> Young Woman [mockingly]. Oh, hand me over to a policeman, would you? I see.... Get back, get back, please; gangway, gangway, there--policemen making a gangway for Jesus Christ! [The Bishop stiffens himself behind his book. With intense scorn and bitterness].... Go out into the sun, and pick the yellow primroses! Take your elegant and perfumed soul out of the stress, the stain, the horrid cries, the noisy laugh of life; and go out into the sun to pick the yellow primroses! [32]

In Within the Gates, an unsuccessful play of O'Casey's second

period, this typically 'colourful' protest against the Bishop's repressive institutionalism is rendered with an unconvincing charge. The young woman's vision is fantastic but contemptuous and the image of the yellow primroses is cheapened by that persistent O'Casean mockery. This kind of playfulness is bitter rather than productive, representing less a playful metaphysical critique of repressive rationalism and more the romantic thinness of its author's anti-institutional vitalism.

6. The Predominance of Fear. "Laughter", writes Bakhtin, "is a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically.... Laughter delivers the object into the fearless hands of ... free experimental fantasy." [33] At its most optimistic, O'Casey's drama achieves precisely this kind of fearless and joyful fantasy through colourful riposte, punning, tenderness and joie de vivre. But the underbelly of such delight is a driven, almost neurotic, awareness of fear, anxiety and terror. The Dublin slums are a space threatened by military and guerrilla violence, by shootings, raids, sudden visitations, fire, disaster, abuse and general misfortune. The stage directions betray a preoccupation with fear, particularly in The Shadow of a Gunman, and the general tone of much of the early work reveals a pessimistic gloom as to Man's fitness for peace. Much of the energy of the nihilism stems from this root pessimism. "One ridicules" observes Bakhtin wisely, "in order to forget" such horror as

this: [34]

> Nora (clinging to Clitheroe, and indicating Brennan). Look, Jack, look at th'anger in his face; look at th'fear glintin' in his eyes.... He himself's afraid, afraid, afraid!... He wants you to go th'way he'll have th' chance of death sthrikin' you an' missin' him!... Turn around an' look at him, Jack, look at him, look at him!... His very soul is cold... shiverin' with th' thought of what may happen to him.... It is his fear that is thryin' to frighten you from recognizin' th' same fear that is in your own heart! [35]

There is no craic here. This material represents play's negation.

7. A fallen world? Despite the cacophony of social interaction, complex dialogism and frenetic pacing of the action, a lurking suspicion at the root of the drama is that humanity itself rather than any specific form of it - clericism, capitalism- is damned. This ultimate nihilism finds expression in the 'valley of dry bones' section of The Silver Tassie which resonates with the horror of Ezekiel's vison of a fallen world:

> Croucher [resuming]. And I prophesied, and the breath came out of them, and the sinews came away from them, and behold a shaking, and their bones fell

asunder, bone from his bone, and they died, and the exceeding great army became a valley of dry bones. [36]

George Bernard Shaw captures the structure of feeling of this bleak play with his characteristically supportive remark to O'Casey that "you really are a ruthless ironfisted blaster and blighter of your species; and in this play there is none righteous- no, not one." [37] That specifically Protestant, not to say Calvinistic, vision of species depravity haunts this writer in certain moods. If sublime play represents carnival at its most delicate and redemptive, scenes of nihilistic fear and guilt suggest the ultimate futility of such play in the face of forces of overwhelming historical destruction.

We can use the fourteen points of reference outlined above as a matrix for our discussion of first the 'Dublin ' sequence of plays and then, with a different accent, the mature work. Professor David Krause has long since coined the term "the tragi-comic muse" to summarize O'Casey's aesthetic mode, but I believe we must intensify the terms if we are to do justice to his ouevre. [38] The terms Nihilistic and Carnivalistic roughly correspond to the Tragic and Comic elements of Krause's analysis and represent both a more precise and a more extreme emphasis which is necessary to capture the shifts of tone in O'Casey's work. They lie, so to speak, to the extreme left and right of Krause's terms, stressing the more perverse elements of O'Casey's drama which escape Krause's more humanistic rationalisations.

A play which quintessentially illustrates these acutely

ambivalent dramatic tones is that one-act play much admired by Samuel Beckett, The End of the Beginning. "Mr. O'Casey", wrote Samuel Beckett," is the master of knockabout in this very serious and honourable sense- that he discerns the principle of disintegration in even the most complacent solidities, and activates it to their explosion." [39] The sense of collapse is familiar from Raymond Williams's observation regarding the noted "rush of disintegration" he finds in O'Casey and this knockabout forms part of the carnivalism I have explored, but it is hard to escape the corresponding mood of nihilism which informs the play to which Beckett is referring above. The End of the Beginning, a one-act play published in 1934 but not performed at the Abbey Theatre until 1937, contains elements in common with Juno and the Paycock, as Beckett points out. But it is a play informed by a bleak mood of farce. If that sounds contradictory -one would expect farce to be comedic and light perhaps- Christopher Bigsby explains that "[f]arce has always been concerned with the elimination of character, with the creation of an almost hysterical intensity in which character is flung off by the sheer centrifugal force of language and action." [40] This violent and rather empty genre echoes with the cackle of a meaningless materialism. In The End of the Beginning,the characters' very names, Darry Berrill and Barry Derrill, signal the absence of considered characterization: the play takes place in an externalised world in which the physically material dominates in the absence of psychological interiority:

Darry (shouting madly). Barry, Barry, come here quick, man! I turned the key of the tap too much, 'n it slipped out of me hand into a heap of rubbish 'n I can't turn off the cock, 'n I can't find the key in the dark. Come quick, man, or there won't be a drop of oil left in the drum! [41]

The farce resonates with a hollow physicality and with precisely that centrifugal materialism that "throws off" character. Darry's stage directions are almost entirely composed of abusive and hysterical tones and the dominant structure of feeling is of a consciousness which is becoming sclerotic as the environment makes "mechanical toys" of the protagonists. The play articulates an attitude of frustrated paralysis symbolic for O'Casey of a national condition in which historical meaning has been replaced by existential anxiety:

I can't do anything ... I don't know what to do ... What in the Name of God has happened? ... can you do nothin' right! ... God grant that it won't be the end ... Is the clock stopped? For God's sake, touch nothing ... It's as dark as pitch in there ... (pp. 21-30)

The dialogue is thickly materialistic and theatrical: "Dad th' didee dah th' diddy dah th' diddy dee ... Dum dah de de dum da dee dee dum ... Dih dih dih- ..." hum the characters mechanically as they go about their ludicrous work:

"Darry falls down the chimney ... there'll be a nice panorama of ruin ... nothin' done but damage ... I'm after nearly destroyin' meself!" (p. 33)

This work is the product of a deep ambivalence toward the events of a disastrous history, that colonial "heap of rubbish" (p. 31) that the Berrills' house seems to represent and that has been mentioned, in a slightly different context, by Conor Cruise O'Brien. His remark that his generation "grew into the chilling knowledge that we had failed, that our history had turned into rubbish, our past to a 'trouble of fools'" contains strong echoes for us in the analysis of this short play, [42] for O'Casey seems to have produced in Barry and Darry's materialistic nihilism an objective correlative for his country's post-Free-State paralysis. "We were bred to be patriotic, only to find that there was nothing to be patriotic about; we were republicans of a republic that wasn't there", [43] remarks O'Brien, and his Yeatsian quotation ('that history turns into rubbish') resonates with a despair O'Casey would recognise and which he increasingly entertains as the Free State grows older through the mid to late nineteen-twenties. O'Casey's early work confronts a shattered history and struggles to oppose to this a redemptive principle of carnivalesque play which is, particularly in the case of Juno and the Paycock thrillingly enjoyable and redemptive. In the end, though, perhaps this couplet from his theatrically minor but aesthetically central play suggests that his mood had become, by 1932, irredeemably pessimistic:

Darry. Can't you find anything?

Barry. I can see nothing. (p.24)

Notes.

1 Samuel Beckett, "The Essential and the Incidental" in Thomas Kilroy, ed., Sean O'Casey: Twentieth Century Views (New Jersey, 1975), p. 168.

2 Ronald Ayling, "Character, Control and Alienation in The Plough and the Stars", James Joyce Quarterly (Autumn, 1970), p. 35.

3 Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 8, trans., ed., C. Emerson (Manchester, 1984), p. 122.

4 ibid., pp. 122-23.

5 ibid., p. 124.

6 Michael Bristol, Carnival and Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England (New York, 1985), p. 22.

7 Sean O'Casey, "The End of the Beginning" in Five One-Act Plays (London and Basingstoke, 1990), p. 33.

8 Mikhail Bakhtin, op. cit., p. 125.

9 Sean O'Casey, "Bedtime Story" in Five One-Act Plays, p. 124.

10 Mikhail Bakhtin, op. cit., p. 125.

11 Sean O'Casey, "Juno and the Paycock" in Sean O'Casey: Three Plays (London, 1980), p. 24.

12 ibid., pp. 36-37.

[13] Michael Bristol, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

[14] "The Plough and the Stars" in Sean O'Casey: Three Plays, op. cit., p. 146.

[15] James Simmons, Sean O'Casey (London and Basingstoke, 1983), p. 38.

[16] ibid., p. 32.

[17] Mikhail Bakhtin, op. cit., p. 125.

[18] Terry Eagleton, Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism (London, 1981), p. 146.

[19] Sean O'Casey, "Plough", op. cit., pp. 170-71.

[20] Sean O'Casey, "Juno", op. cit., p. 42.

[21] Mikhail Bakhtin, op. cit., p. 134.

[22] ibid., pp. 134-35.

[23] Terry Eagleton, Ideology: an Introduction (London, 1991), p. 107.

[24] Sean O'Casey, "Plough", op. cit., pp. 143 and 144.

[25] Mikhail Bakhtin, op. cit., p. 185.

[26] Sean O'Casey, "The Shadow of a Gunman" in Sean O'Casey: Three Plays (London, 1980), p. 130.

[27] Sean O'Casey, "Purple Dust" in Sean O'Casey: Collected Plays, III (London, 1951), p. 52.

[28] Sean O'Casey, "Plough", op. cit., p. 165.

[29] ibid., p. 144.

[30] James Simmons, op. cit., p. 14.

[31] Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 163.

[32] Sean O'Casey, "Within the Gates" in Sean O'Casey: Collected Plays, II, op. cit., p. 163.

[33] Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Carol Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas, 1981), p. 23.

[34] ibid., p. 23.

[35] Sean O'Casey, "Plough", op. cit., p. 197.

[36] Sean O'Casey, "The Silver Tassie" in Sean O'Casey: Collected Plays, II, op. cit., pp. 36-7.

[37] In Eileen O'Casey, Sean (London, 1973), p. 63.

[38] See David Krause's chapter, "The Tragi-Comic Muse" in Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work (New York, 1960).

[39] Samuel Beckett, op. cit., p. 167.

[40] Christopher Bigsby, Joe Orton (London, 1982), p. 17.

[41] Sean O'Casey, "The End of the Beginning", op. cit., pp. 136-37. [All further references to this work appear in the text.]

[42] Conor Cruise O'Brien, "The Embers of Easter" in O. D. Edwards and F. Pyle, ed.s, 1916: The Easter Rising (London, 1968), p. 231.

[43] ibid., p. 231.

Chapter Three: Plays, 1922-26.

The Shadow of a Gunman

"Oh, this is a hopeless country."

(Act Two.)

"Among its other miseries, slum life inflicts upon its victims a degrading lack of privacy," [1] writes Maureen Malone and, as if to confirm this, the poet Donal Davoren complains that "it's quite plain I'm not going to get much quietness in this house." [2] The space of the tenement is penetrated by interruptions, disturbances and social noise of various kinds and from the beginning, the play's atmosphere is one of savage intensity. If a room in naturalism represents, pace Raymond Williams, a form of 'trapped' consciousness, [3] then the space of this room and, by implication, the civilized space of Davoren's mind, are threatened all the time by barbarous forces. Davoren's counter-part Seumas Shields is "sallow-complexioned. In him is frequently manifested the superstition, the fear and malignity of primitive man" (p. 80), and the Voice at the Door, ominously disembodied, complains that it has had to "have the house turned into a bedlam tryin' to waken" Davoren (p. 80). The latter's "devotion to 'the might of design, the mystery of colour, and the belief in the redemption of all things by beauty

everlasting'" (p. 79) is confronted by the materialism of an Irish People "still in the stone age. If they could", bemoans Shields, "they'd throw a bomb at you" (p. 80). The higher forms to which Davoren aspires: Romanticism, dreaming inspiration, the glamour of the gunman, are rendered lowly by the ensuing action. Davoren represents through his poetry a Yeatsian romanticism coupled through the development of the play with a posturing nationalist idealism, and his is the mythological aspiration to which the action of the play represents a wicked riposte.

At one level, the carnivalism of the play is quite bright and joyous in its proletarian decrowning of discursive propriety, its "process of deflation", as Roger McHugh would have it. [4] In a letter to the I.R.A., the tenement dwellers produce a farcical pastiche of public discourse:

> Mr. Gallogher (reading): 'Deeming it disrespectable to have an open hall door, and to have the hall turned into a playground, made a solemn protest, and, in consequence, we the complainants aforesaid has had no peace ever since. Owing to the persecution, as aforesaid specified, we had to take out a summons again them some time ago ... but we did not proceed again them as me and my wife--to wit, James and Winifred Gallogher--has a strong objection to foreign Courts as such.... While leaving it entirely in the hands of the gentlemen of the Irish Republican Army, the defendant, that is to say, James Gallogher of

fifty-five St. Teresa Street, ventures to say that he thinks he has made out a Primmy Fashy Case against Mrs. Dwyer and all her heirs, male and female as aforesaid mentioned in the above written schedule. (pp. 99-100)

The delightful illiteracy of this discursive deconstruction is thrillingly comical to an audience that relishes the tenderness of the portrayal of ignorance. We do not laugh at the ignorance of the people but at the ludicrousness of official socio-ideological language in all its awkwardness. The botched letter makes its bourgeois language strange, defamiliarizing it from a proletarian perspective to the delight of the audience.

Similarly, Davoren's bourgeois-poetic impulses are frustrated to comic effect by the materialism of the surrounding action:

Davoren. Ah me! alas, pain, pain ever, for ever!

Seumas. Are you goin' to let me shut the door, Mr. Mulligan?

The Landlord. I'm here for me rent; you don't like the idea of bein' asked to pay your just an' lawful debts.

Seumas. You'll get your rent when you learn to keep your rent-book in a proper way....

The Landlord (throwing the papers into the centre of the room. What am I better? It was the sorry day I ever let you come into this house....

Seumas (with a roar). Ah, go to hell!

Davoren (pacing the room as far as the space will permit). What in the name of God persuaded me to come to such a house as this? (pp. 86-7)

Davoren's restless pacing to the limits of the space he never leaves represents his trappedness, his romanticism brought low in a rush of feckless action between Seumas and the Landlord. His own literary precision is similarly shattered by the comical inarticulacy of the slum-dwellers who relativise his bourgeois poetic individualism by foregrounding the collective process of literary construction in their bargaining regarding the content of a ludicrous letter to the I.R.A:

Davoren (lilting an air as he composes):

Or when sweet Summer's ardent arms outspread,
Entwined with flowers, Enfold us, like two lovers newly wed,
Thro' ravish'd hours hours--
Then sorrow, woe and pain lose all their powers,
For each is dead, and life is only ours. (p. 80)

.....

Mrs. Henderson (holding out her hand as a constable would extend his to stop a car that another may pass). Excuse me, Mr. Gallicker, but I think the word 'shockin'' should be put in there after

abominable; for the language used be these tramps has two ways o' bein' looked at-- for it's abominable to the childer an' shockin' to your wife-- am I right or am I wrong, Mr. Davoren...?

Davoren (afraid to say anything else). I think the word might certainly be introduced with advantage.

Mrs. Henderson. Go over there, Mr. Gallicker, an' put in the word shockin', as aforesaid. (pp. 100-101)

The masculine Romantic poet is here brought low again through his fear of the constabulary Mrs. Henderson. Her indignant inarticulacy wins the day over the poet's better grammatical judgement, with the butchered bureaucratic jargon of the tenants' letter ("as aforesaid") now spilling into the spoken conversation. Davoren's hygienic lyricism fares poorly here in the context of the rich comedy at the expense of bourgeois language. Whether it be poetry or bureaucratese, these proletarians return monological discourses to their roots in social processes as they produce shattered images of the purer language in their attempts to imitate its tones and vocabulary.

A similar decrowning occurs with regard to Seumas Shields whose cognitive prowess is undermined by this discursive knockabout:

Mr. Gallogher (venturing an opinion.) Mr. Shields is a man of exceptional mental capacity, and is worthy of a more dignified position.

Mrs. Henderson. Them words is true, Mr. Gallicker, and they aren't. For to be wise is to be a fool, an' to be a fool is to be wise.

Mr. Gallogher (with deprecating tolerance). Oh, Mrs. Henderson, that's a parrotox.

Mrs. Henderson. It may be what a parrot talks, or a blackbird, or, for the matter of that, a lark--but it's what Julia Henderson thinks, any ... whisht, is that a Stop Press? (pp. 101-102)

The extraordinary downward movement here from cognitive observation to mock-philosophical cliche, to ludicrous mishearing and ignorance, to opinionated arrogance to the interruption, once more, of external action (the Stop Press) is typical of O'Casey's deconstruction of cognitive pretension. Those who attempt to maintain an idealistic view of themselves are dragged down into ignorant inarticulacy through the action of a merciless materiality. This is a quite extraordinary departure in an Irish drama which had, in circumstances of national aspiration, maintained a largely ideological propriety or a poetic purism of discourse and form. Almost every scene resonates with this kind of rush of materialism and the effect is a theatre of deep comic energy, visceral in its intensity. The men in these scenes fear the women's tongue and fist far more than they respect their own judgement. Exploding braces, shouting matches and vaudevillian double-acts occupy the stage by turns whilst the central characters try to reserve some kind of sense. The

counterpart to this comic enthusiasm, however, is a raging disorder.

"Do you believe in nothing?" asks Seumas of Donal in Act Two, a question that resonates from beginning to end of these plays as traditional certainties of belief come undone in spasms of dislocation:

> Seumas. I wish to God it was all over. The country is gone mad. Instead of counting their beads now they're countin' bullets; their Hail Marys and paternosters are burstin' bombs--burstin' bombs, an' the rattle of machine-guns; petrol is their holy water; their Mass is a burnin' buildin'; their De Profundis is 'The Soldier's Song', an' their creed is, I believe in the gun almighty, maker of heaven an' earth--an' it's all for 'the glory o' God an' the honour o' Ireland'. (p. 110)

It is difficult not to hear an implied authorial voice here, and the characteristic materialism of the outburst is much in O'Casey's style: ideals have been broken down into destructive objects in a sacrilegious process of disintegration. Here, the carnival mood does not dominate. The downward rush is that of a hollow and meaningless materialism. The ritualism of Catholicism has become a ghastly apparatus of technological warfare. Seumas finds that even his own body is coming to resemble a machine as he ruminates further upon the country's spiritual condition:

Seumas. Is there no Christianity at all left in the country?

Davoren. Are we ever again going to know what peace and security are?

Seumas. If this continues much longer I'll be nothing but a galvanic battery o'shocks. (p. 112)

Indeed, fear abounds in this play. It is a sub-dominant tone of feeling which infects the whole drama:

"Seumas ... (Anxiously). I suppose Maguire has come and gone? ... Davoren (shocked). ... Maguire. Keep your hair on ... Minnie (fervently). ... I'm all of a tremble when I hear a shot go off ... Davoren (frightened at the suggestion). ... Seumas (suddenly and with a note of anxiety in his voice). ... (Religion and philosophy are forgotten in the violent fear of a nervous equality). ... Mrs. Grigson. I'm afraid to go to bed, Mr. Shields ... Seumas and Davoren cower down in the room" (pp. 30-90).

The anxiety is so pervasive that it becomes the deepest emotion of the piece, its only certainty and deeply affective of the characters' moral condition. At the end of the play Minnie is utterly betrayed by the cowardice of the leading protagonists. Seumas prays that she won't betray them to the Auxiliaries and Davoren whimpers whilst Minnie sacrifices herself for the pair of them meaninglessly. The general tone of the underlying darkness of this material has already been

captured in this Shelleyan ode transcribed by Davoren:

> When night advances through the sky with slow
> And solemn tread.
> The queenly moon looks down on life below,
> As if she read
> Man's soul, and in her scornful silence said:
> All beautiful and happiest things are dead. (p. 105)

Davoren had himself considered that "[t]here is an ugliness that can be made beautiful, and there is an ugliness that can only be destroyed, and this is part of that ugliness" (p. 105), 'this' being the tenement slummery in which he now finds himself. The romantic secularism of this character is clear. In response to Seumas's taunting regarding his lack of religious conviction, Davoren retorts, "You're welcome to your angels; philosophy is mine; philosophy that makes the coward brave" (p. 111). But it is a philosophy that deserts him in his moment of need, its rationalism dissolved in the galvanic battery of shocks: "Davoren (in a tone of horror-stricken doubt). D'ye hear what they're sayin', Shields, d'ye hear what they're sayin'--Minnie Powell is shot" (p. 129).

Minnie Powell's death (a mistaken sacrifice in protection of the 'shadow' gunman Davoren) represents an indictment of all posturing and fantastic idealism. Though she has died for the nationalist cause, hers is a simple death borne of quiet conviction and mildly deluded romantic affection rather than dogma. O'Casey's bitterness is reserved

for the committed supporters of militarism, his anti-nationalism being apparent in his tender celebration of the simple illiteracy of a decent common people, a tone established eloquently here by Seumas Shields:

> Seumas. 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)

But O'Casey's affection for these people is limited by his sense of the dark entropy of this tenement life. "Damn the people! They live in the abyss," howls Davoren, "To them beauty is for sale in a butcher's shop. To the people the end of life is the life created for them.... The people view life through creeds, through customs, and through necessities; the poet views creeds, customs, and necessities through life" (p. 107). The nihilism of his romanticism is very clear here. For Davoren, as for O'Casey, life is supreme over all forms of social convention and the nihilism consists in precisely this- for what kind of natural human life would be possible without social structures? Without the conventions of social life, its rituals, organisations, discourses, practices and beliefs, what kind of life could exist at all? One may rail at the ossification of some of these forms of consciousness, but to oppose them outright reduces the critic to the status of a nihilistic primitivist who would suspect all ritual and collective organisation as commitments to a kind of collective damnation.

"The people live in the abyss." It is difficult not to discern in this specific context a specifically Protestant romantic individualism suspicious of the more ritually organised paraphernalia of the social body of Irish Catholicism. On the one hand able to reproduce 'the craic' of social life in its comical illiteracy and vaudevillian playfulness, O'Casey harbours, on the other hand, a suspicion of Catholic sociality as an entropic and damnable unconsciousness, a view supported, for instance, by his comment in Innishfallen, Fare Thee Well that the Catholic Church had moulded the expanding universe into "a doll's house" for his girlfriend Nora, and that "there she lived by thronging duties pressed, with sorrows surging round, death shadowing her." [5] The ambivalence of O'Casey's Irishness here is very pronounced, much more so than David Krause's consensual 'tragi-comic' reading allows. The Shadow of a Gunman inaugurates in Ireland a theatre in which the polarities of O'Casey's conflict regarding Irish society are minutely explored. He develops an aesthetic and ideological form which can take many twists and turns in its specific expression as we shall see with regard to the ensuing plays.

Juno and the Paycock.

"Have none of yous any respect for the Irish people's national regard for the dead?"

(Act Two.)

This is the most heteregeneous play of O'Casey's ouevre. Carnival elements abound along with a metaphysically tragical despair at man's inhumanity to man. The depths of fear plumbed here extend beyond those of The Shadow of a Gunman, and the theatrical energy is more intense than in that play. Naturalism is forfeited to vaudeville which in turn gives way to a set-piece of melodramatic realism which slips into a theatre of poetic religiosity. At times, in an extraordinary image of theatrical complexity, several genres occupy the stage at once, the actors adapting contradictory stage conventions as they find their characters articulated in entirely dissonant modes. A multitude of social accents confront each other in the process and the result of it all is a drama of such deep sociality that it is all the more shocking to find the rich dissonance culminating in a final scene of frustrated despair.

Once again, the play establishes 'higher' elements which it determines to bring low: Mary's 'principles' resulting in an unwanted pregnancy, Johnny's 'principles' resulting in a brutal death, Bentham declining from theosopher to thief, Jerry Devine falling in grace from noble Socialist to treacherous hypocrite. A cynical tone running through this play establishes the view that each character's humanity "is just as narrow as the humanity of the others." [6] At best this tone represents a cruel pragmatism, spoken surprizingly here by the otherwise admirably sensitive Juno:

Mrs. Boyle. He was only a chiselur of a Boy Scout

in Easter Week, when he got hit in the hip; and his arm was blew off in the fight in O'Connell Street.... Here he is, Mr. Bentham; Mr. Bentham, Johnny. None can deny he done his bit for Irelan', if that's goin' to do him any good.

Johnny (boastfully). I'd do it agen, ma, I'd do it agen; for a principle's a principle.

Mrs. Boyle. Ah, you lost your best principle, me boy, when you lost your arm; them's the only sort o'principles that's any good to a workin' man. (p. 27)

There is a touch of betrayal here already: the Irish working class mother humiliating her son in front of the middle class English Bentham in a complete refusal of her son's political conviction. But a wise actress might determine that behind this bravado lies a private terror of the loss of this only son to a bitter history. Juno's contempt overlays a deeper grief but the emotion is, nevertheless, scornful.

At worst, the cynicism of the play produces a bleak nihilism: "there isn't a God, there isn't a God; if there was He wouldn't let these things happen," (p. 70) cries Mary, with the following verse suggesting that the protagonists occupy a blighted Universe:

Then we saw our globe of beauty
Was an ugly thing as well,
A hymn divine whose chorus
Was an agonizin' yell;

Like the story of a demon

That an angel had to tell;
Like a glowin' picture by a
Hand unsteady, brought to ruin;

Like her craters, if their deadness
Could give life unto the moon;
Like the agonizing horror
Of a violin out of tune. (p. 25)

There is a gothic tone to this sub-textual material which adds a dissonant tone to the play's dominant naturalism. The "agonizing horror" occurs like a motif throughout the play in descriptions of murders and executions, and in Johnny's terror of his trench-coated executioners. The sense of a dying cosmos adds metaphysical horror to the already political and historical horrors that penetrate the tenements, horrors such as the fraught dissonance of Johnny's terrified passion and the crowd's blank funereality:

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

The Young Man. Boyle, no man can do enough for Ireland....

[Faintly in the distance the crowd is heard saying:

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee;

Blessed art Thou amongst women, and blessed etc. (p. 50)

In a successful production, the audience should be devastated by the tension between the boy's fearful grief and the spectral incantation. The sound of the burial sermon functions here not as a naturalistic representation of a 'real' external

event but as a shift of dramatic mode in which Robbie Tancred's burial party become a disembodied poetic chorus presaging his betrayer's murder. The dissonance is not just emotional but generic.

Similarly, in an earlier scene depicting Johnny's terror, O'Casey introduces a generic shift which grotesquely warps the episode's dominant structure of feeling. Johnny has been seeing visions of Robbie Tancred, the Die-hard comrade he betrayed, the cast has heard a "frightened scream" from the bedroom, and Johnny has pleaded for God to have pity on him:

> Johnny. Oh, why did he look at me like that?... it wasn't my fault that he was done in.... Mother o' God, keep him away from me!
>
> Mrs. Boyle. There, there, child, you've imagined it all. There was nothin' there at all--it was the red light you seen, an' the talk we had put all the rest into your head.... (To Boyle) Go in, Jack, an' show him it was only in his head it was.
>
> Boyle (making no move). E-e-e-e-eh; it's all nonsense; it was only a shadda he saw.
>
> Mary. Mother o'God, he made me heart lep!
>
> Bentham. It was simply due to an overwrought imagination--we all get that way at times....
>
> Johnny. Mother, go into the room an' see if the light's lightin' before the statue.
>
> Mrs. Boyle. (to Boyle). Jack, run in an' see if the light's lightin' before the statue.

Boyle (to Mary). Mary, slip in an' see if the light's lightin' before the statue.

[Mary hesitates to go in.

Bentham. It's all right; Mary, I'll go. (p. 39)

The perverse shift here is from an intense, if mildly melodramatic, sincerity to a farcical mock-horror routine. The representation of Johnny's predicament is not allowed to dominate the audience's perception for very long before O'Casey slides beneath it a deftly structured piece of farce. The triadic structure of the incident underlines its self-conscious theatricality. First Johnny then Juno then Boyle request that someone else go in. The buck is passed down an unwilling line with the effect of implicating all concerned in a superstitious ritualism quite at odds with the scene's general naturalistic tenor. All, that is, except the rationalist Bentham who manages to restore the realism of the dramatic order with his observation that "[e]verything's just as it was" (p. 39).

The Dublin trilogy is full of this kind of play in which the dialogue anticipates a response, whether it be an echo, a refutation, a confirmation or a complete dismissal. The character of the response matters less than its function in structuring an intimate sociality. In the following scene, Joxer echoes Boyle's imaginative ruminations to indeterminate effect:

Boyle. ... I ofen looked up at the sky an' asses

meself the question--what is the stars, what is the stars?

Voice of Coal Vendor. Any blocks, coal-blocks; blocks, coal blocks!

Joxer. Ah, that's the question, that's the question--what is the stars?

Boyle. An' then, I'd have another look, an' I'd ass meself--what is the moon?

Joxer. Ah, that's the question--what is the moon, what is the moon? (p. 23)

This is a deeply intimate scene but its indeterminacy lies in the manner of its production. For Joxer can either undermine Boyle here with an irritating repetition which alienates Boyle from the audience and makes us laugh at his pretension, or we can share in the couple's reverie and their intimately social play upon the metaphysical question. If the latter course is taken by the production then we can begin to discern that recurrent principle in O'Casey's work in which metaphysical experiences and questions are felt to be deeply structured by social play. There should be a powerful tension in this scene between the genuinely metaphysical questions at hand and the intimate 'craic' between the pair which warms the questions with a rich comic energy. The beauty of the question "what is the stars?" lies not so much in the nature of the question as in its dialogical inflection. The question, "What are the stars?" might easily be asked in a scientifically rationalistic discourse , but the question ," what is they?"

can only be asked by the uneducated with a delightful illiteracy. The question implies a cosmic unity ('is they') over a more materialistic atomism, but it is the pace of unfolding choral play which makes the scene great.

The Puritan man, according to R. H. Tawney, "follows a lonely star" but here these men, quite the antithesis of puritanism in their behaviour, project a shared cosmos. The metaphysical nature of Boyle's question is structured in intimate choral play between himself and Joxer, and is penetrated too by the most earthy of interventions to balance the aerial enquiry: the voice of the vendor of the 'coal blocks' reminds us of the necessarily social mediation of an element as 'natural' as the stars. There is a doubly accented emphasis here upon the social reproduction of natural elements and in Boyle and Joxer's imitative behaviour we might even scent what Theodore Adorno has called those "traces of the utopia which could shake the structure of domination" [7], for in his playful exploration of metaphysical and historical situations, O'Casey reminds us that it is through the imitation of each other and not in hysterical individualism that we have our social being. Rarely does he treat philosophical matters with reverential bourgeois solemnity, but typically with an eye on the literally 'ludicrous and socially shared nature of the events in question.

The imaginative material of this scene is not reducible to deluded fecklessness or to some kind of degenerate fantasy, nor is this a poorly handled naturalism into which 'fantastic' elements have unconsciously intruded. Here, there is no

simply empirical world by whose rules the pair's fantasies can be morally judged. Rather there is a metaphysics of wonder invoked in a proletarian eucharist of sausage, gravy and 'tay'. The invocation is as 'real' in its structure of feeling as is any other moment of the play. Though the empirical rationalist may recuperate the scene as a moment of drunken and sentimental fantasy, O'Casey offers no such internal point-of-view. The fantasy is not contained by the naturalism but has structurally altered the dominant mode of the play. Playful wonder has simply taken the stage out of its naturalistic mode. This is a quite new generic element singular to the work of Sean O'Casey.

The naturalistic and nihilistic realism of the play cannot penetrate this reverie. It is only later that the beauty of the scene is undone when we are invited to consider it as a mutual delusion following Boyle's 'elevation' to bourgeois status with his cousin's will. We then witness Boyle's contempt for Joxer as the world of property, materialism and 'status' breaks the intimacy of their relationship and its mutually playful pleasure. Boyle's temporary betrayal of Joxer and the 'stars' sequence is one of the few unspoken tragedies of the play, though the terrible beauty of the closing sequence, as we shall shortly see, redeems the pair's historico-metaphysical comradeship in the midst of an utter material collapse.

The aesthetic outcome of such scenes is the production of the kind of "syncretic" theatre theorized by Mikhail

Bakhtin in which there resides "a striking combination of what would seem to be absolutely heterogeneous and incompatible elements: philosophical dialogue, adventure and fantasticality, slum naturalism ... and so forth." [8] But the effect in performance is a perverse modulation of the dramatic energy to the extent that the theatrical play problematizes, continuously and insistently, the naturalist mode. In the following scene four generic modes, naturalism, self-consciously underlined theatricality, knockabout and metaphysical poetic-drama occupy the stage at once. The foregrounded theatricality consists in the self-conscious turn-taking for song in which the 'action' of the play has been suspended, the knockabout in Joxer and Boyle's joshing, the naturalism in Mrs. Boyle's tenement common sense and the poetic-drama in Mrs. Tancred's deeply disturbing and moving metaphysical pleading. The conventions of each genre are contradictory and dissonant and the final effect is of a disintegration of the dramatic form into a discrete series of set-pieces:

1. [Joxer ... solemnly closes his eyes, and begins to sing in a very querulous voice: She is far from the lan' where her young hero sleeps,
An' lovers around her are sighin'... sighin'...
sighin' ... [A pause.

2. Boyle (imitating Joxer):
And lovers around her are sighing!
What's the use of thryin' to sing the song if you

don't know it? ... Gramophone!...I hate to see fellas thryin' to do what they're not able to do.

3. Mrs. Boyle. Come in an' have a hot cup of tay, Mrs. Tancred, before you go.

4. Mrs. Tancred. Ah, I can take nothin' now, Mrs. Boyle--I won't be long after him.... Mother o'God, Mother o'God, have pity on the pair of us!... O Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets, when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets!... Sacred Heart of the Crucified Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone and give us hearts o' flesh!... Take away this murdherin' hate ... an' give us Thine own eternal love!

[They pass out of the room.

(pp. 45-46)

Shortly, the burlesque returns in a disintegrative attempt to continue the 'craic', and the play has moved far beyond the boundaries of the "photographic realism" that many critics thought they saw in its first productions. The point to be grasped in the series outlined above is that these are not simply emotional modulations within a naturalist space, but quite discrete generic episodes in which naturalism is exploded by music-hall and metaphysical-poetic conventions. It is simply impossible for Joxer and Boyle to continue their joshing in this scene whilst Mrs Tancred speaks, indeed, the actors must form a tableau at one end of the stage if her

metaphysical poetry is not to be generically undermined by their music-hall contempt for such pieties. Following her departure, the stage is returned to an uneasy alliance of music-hall and naturalist conventions as we witness a tenement space still being occupied by performance routines of song and dance. We could recuperate the scene by arguing that this is a realistic representation of what Irish people do at home, but in performance, the stage has simply been taken over by a different set of conventions and it is no surprise that in some of the early performances of this play at the Abbey Theatre, sections of the audience joined in the singing, assuming that it was time for the sing-a-long they had been used to partaking of in their own music-hall experiences.

Throughout Juno and the Paycock we have been treated to the burlesque behaviour of the pair of rogues at the play's comic centre, so it is no surprise that some audiences should have been confused as to their own role vis a vis the play. Capt. Boyle and Joxer form a typical music-hall pair, one being dominant and brusque and the other feckless and submissive. The following exchange is typical of their irreverence:

> Joxer (Picking up a book from the table) Whose is the buk?
>
> Boyle. Aw, one o' Mary's; she's always readin' lately-- nothin' but thrash, too. There's one I was lookin' at dh'other day: three stories, The Doll's House, Ghosts, an' The Wild Duck--buks only fit for

chiselurs!

Joxer. Didja ever read Elizabeth, or Th'Exile o' Sibayria?... Ah, it's a darlin' story, a daarlin' story!

Boyle. You eat your sassige, an' never min' Th'Exile o'Sibayria.

[Both sit down; Boyle fills out tea, pours gravy on Joxer's plate, and keeps the sausage for himself.

(pp. 20-1)

The characteristic downward movement here from literary thoughts to the interests of the stomach and the wicked deception of Joxer counter-balances the mock-philosophical play of the couple examined earlier. Here, the foremost progenitor of modern naturalism is self-consciously brutalized by Casey through the contempt of Boyle, and though we might think that the joke is on the character, it is really on the naturalist dramatist himself for O'Casey's theatre exists, as we have seen, to satirize that author's solemn realism. If we are meant to despise Boyle we do not because the action is too viscerally delightful to alienate us from him. A peculiar moral feeling results in which the most obnoxious views are given the most thrilling theatrical production. O'Casey's moral intention is short-circuited by the magnetism of the 'craic' on stage. This exemplifies a common double-bind in O'Casey's work in which ideological and moral integrity is debased into meaninglessness through the use of farce, but in which the farce is simultaneously so enjoyable that we repress

any thought of its moral emptiness. The generic dissonance explored above is echoed in this aesthetic and moral dissonance. The nihilism of this element of Joxer and Boyle's knockabout has, in a perverse twist, become theatrically thrilling.

Juno and the Paycock climaxes with a moral vacuity rendered in a compelling theatrical fashion which illustrates the point. Having been moved by Juno's reiterated plea to the Sacred Heart for a time of peace (a moment to be examined in Chapter Four), and finding ourselves in a mode of poetic drama within an intense naturalist climax, the burlesque erupts once again into the stage space in darkly drunken form. A nihilistic sense of sacrilegious disintegration composes the scene's structure of feeling, but the audacity of the entropic conclusion is spellbinding. The play concludes, like The Waste Land with fragments shored against the protagonists' ruins: half-digested details of Western culture, mythological discourse, literary quotation and historical reference. The mode is one of apocalyptic farce:

> Boyle. I'm able to go no farther.... The last o' the Mohicans....The blinds is down, Joxer, the blinds is down!
>
> Joxer (walking unsteadily across the room, and anchoring at the bed. Put all...your throubles...in your oul' kit-bag...an' smile...smile...smile! Boyle. The counthry'll have to steady itself...it's goin'...to hell.... Where'r all...the chairs...gone

to...steady itself, Joxer....Chairs'll...have to...steady themselves....No matther...what any one may ...say.... I'm telling you...Joxer...th'whole worl's...in a terr...ible state o'...chassis! (pp. 72-3)

O'Casey has the extraordinary capacity to fuse philosophical despair with theatrical jouissance, thus leaving the audience bereft of a moral conclusion. "It would, in fact, be difficult to find anywhere else in dramatic literature so extraordinary a combination of farce with loathing and a bleak despair", writes J. W. Krutch, [9] and we can concur that whilst everything requires us to morally condemn this pair for their disgustingly intransigent refusal of responsibility for the tragedy, the theatrical energy of their comradeship is with them to the end. Their social knockabout redeems the earlier betrayal of Joxer by Boyle, and though confused and broken they fall together amongst the historico-metaphysical ruins of their discourse and situation. Our moral criticism is compromised by our dramatic fascination. And this is just one of the ambivalencies of O'Casey's theatre.

.....

The Plough and the Stars.

"It's all dark, dark!"

(Act Four).

"I'm dyin', I'm dyin'...I feel it," moans Bessie Burgess as she feels her life ebb away at the climax to this disturbing play. [10] The Plough and the Stars represents a shift in Sean O'Casey's vision towards what is, at least as far as Ireland is concerned, an irredeemable nihilism. He will not write another play in Dublin and had already decided to move to England by the time of The Silver Tassie controversy which, it is often presumed, prompted his departure. Though this play ostensibly represents the events of 1916, it is written in 1925 following the bitter Civil War represented in Juno and its subject-matter is much infected by its author's deepening pessimism regarding the character of the people of Ireland. "My Jack," protests the exhausted Nora at the climax of the play, "is to be butchered as a sacrifice to th' dead!" (p. 184) and the "tradition that fortifies this romance of death for the cause", observes T. O. McLoughlin, "comes across as insidious and deluding from the real responsibilities of life." [11] Bessie Burgess emerges as a figure of some courage and integrity and we can sense a positive charge to her clear-sighted Protestantism compared with all the negativity of the deluded Catholic-nationalism of the other protagonists: "we are shown", writes Frances Doherty, "a community in turmoil, lacerating itself, where everyone is a deceiver or a deceived." [12] Though O'Casey is no sectarian in that he represents the proletarian Catholicism of the slum-dwellers with occasional wry charm, his

rationalistic Ruskinian Christianity is much at odds with the mystical and patriotic Catholicism of a Padraig Pearse as we see from this imaging of Pearse's prose as fanatical oratory:

> Voice of the Man. 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)

The written words are represented as riot-inducing oratory and dialogised to emphasise their rhetorical fanaticism rather than their appeal to deeply traditional nationalist feeling. The roots of O'Casey's nihilism do not lie simply in a revulsion at such ideological horrors but in a despair at the response of the common people. "Come on man," says Fluther on hearing the Man's words, "this is too good to be missed!" (p. 164) The others respond, Peter departing with a "look of venomous dignity on his face," (p. 164) leaving only The Covey, a character obnoxiously impervious to common sense, to denigrate the hysteria. We are beginning to see the development of that pessimism which finds "no man righteous", a Biblical phrase with a specifically Protestant emphasis. "The people," it seems, belong more firmly than ever in this

play to "the abyss."

The sense of despair is deepened by the disintegration and death of the characters who might have held some chance of redemption. If there is no man righteous in these plays of O'Casey's then at least in Juno there was a positive emphasis of some kind upon the virtues of redemptive feminism. "My poor little child that'll have no father!" laments Mary towards the end of that play; "It'll have what's far betther- it'll have two mothers," responds Juno firmly (p. 71). In The Plough and the Stars by contrast, the figure corresponding to Juno, Bessie Burgess, is murdered and the figure corresponding to Mary, Nora, disintegrates into psychosis at the folly of the nationalist men. As O'Casey's historical subject has shifted back in time from 1922 to 1916, his despair has developed a stronger timbre at the expense of the enjoyable knockabout of, for example, Joxer and Boyle.

Nora resembles at the outset a dutiful wife with a romantic disposition, fond of song, flirtation and domestic stability with a feminine common sense to balance the general masculine madness: "If you attempt to wag that sword of yours at anybody again", she warns the irascible Uncle Peter, "it'll have to be taken off you an' put in a safe place away from babies that don't know th' danger o' them things" (p. 148). But by the end Nora's psyche has become a raging storm of madness. She drifts Ophelia-like through the battle sites resembling the figure in Edvard Munch's "The Scream":

Nora. All last night at th' barricades I sought you,

> Jack....I didn't think of th' danger--I could only think of you....I asked for you everywhere....Some o' them laughed....I was pushed away, but I shoved back....Some o' them even sthruck me...an' I screamed an' screamed your name!...My love for you made me mad with terror. (p. 196)
>
> .....
>
> Nora. (thoughtfully). There is something I want to remember, an' I can't. (With agony) I can't, I can't I can't! My head, my head! (p. 205)

The audience finds itself in another peculiar double-bind in relation to the degeneration of Nora's domestic and psychic stability, for though she carries the scream of protest against the outrages of the Irish Volunteers she has been from the beginning a rather fanatical figure herself. Her solicitation of Jack at the outset of the play possesses already an unattractive, neurotically ambivalent tone: "Nora (coquettishly removing [Clitheroe's] arm from around her). Oh, yes your little red-lipped Nora's a sweet little girl when th' fit seizes you; but your little, little red-lipped Nora has to clean your boots every mornin', all the same" (p. 154). Nora's pleas for Clitheroe to stay away from the Uprising are coloured with an hysterical urgency which alienates the audience's sympathy. We are supposed to accept pace Juno that the feminine domestic sphere represents a more wholesome humanism to the public terrors of ideological nationalism,

but, as Seamus Deane points out, "domestic bliss and its corollaries is as much an 'idea' as nationalism and can take equally fanatic forms" [13] as in the case of Nora. The implication is that the domestic sphere cannot resist the penetration of the public madness and that, for O'Casey, there are fewer credible responses to the rising tide of horror:

> Mrs. Gogan (drinking). The Foresthers' is a gorgeous dhress! I don't think I've seen nicer, mind you, in a pantomime.... Th' loveliest part of th' dhress, I think, is th' osthrichess plume.... When yous are goin' along, an' I see them wavin' an' noddin' an' waggin', I seem to be lookin' at each of yous hangin' at th' end of a rope, your eyes bulgin' an' your legs twistin' an' jerkin', gaspin' an' gaspin' for breath while yous are thryin' to die for Ireland! (p. 167)

The mention of the pantomimicry of the occasion once again foregrounds the theatrical nature of the stage action at the expense of any historical seriousness the men may have mustered for the occasion, and, paradoxically, these lines are spoken by a character who will later defend herself against Bessie Burgess's insinuations with violent aggression: "Mrs. Gogan (screaming). Fluther, leggo! ... There's nothin' for it but to show this lassie a lesson or two" (pp 171-172). The pacifistic mockery of her first observation is undermined by the viciousness of her second. Similarly, Bessie Burgess, the heroine of the piece if one exists at all, can seem

ambivalently ugly in her heroism, Ronald Ayling reminding us that Bessie "seems least humane immediately before she enters to pick up Nora.... We are flung straight from hating her, into admiring her." [14] The effect of both characterizations is alienating for these are not just different aspects of character but wild ambivalencies of dramatic tone in which no character appears to have any mature cognitive or emotional centre. O'Casey's developing nihilism is extending to all areas of the drama. Hardly a character is capable of shaping or receiving an integrated thought. As the following selection shows, the cognitive transactions of the play are perverse in that they are composed largely of jibe, threat, violation, irritation and provocation, a feature which makes strange Herbert Goldstone's remark that "the play affirms a basic elemental self as fundamental": [15]

> The Covey (rather loudly).... There's no fear o' the Church tellin' you that mollycewels is a stickin' together of millions of atoms o' sodium, carbon, potassium o' iodide, etcetera, that, accordin' to th' way they're mixed, make a flower, a fish, a star that you see shinin' in th' sky, or a man with a big brain like me, or a man with a little brain like you!
>
> Fluther (more loudly still). There's no necessity to be raisin' your voice.... (p. 143)
>
> Clitheroe (kissing her).... I'll talk to her to-morrow when she's sober. A taste o' me mind that'll

shock her into the sensibility of behavin' herself! (p. 150)

Peter (tearfully). It's not th' word; it's the way he says it: he never says it straight out, but murmurs it with curious quiverin' ripples, like variations on a flute! (p. 166)

The Covey (outside). Cuckoo-oo! (p. 166)

Peter. (to Mrs. Gogan). If I was you, Mrs. Gogan I'd parry her jabbin' remarks be a powerful silence that'll keep her tantalizin' words from penethratin' into your feelin's. (p. 170)

Fluther (viciously folding his apron). Ah, you're not goin' to be let tap your rubbidge o' thoughts into th' mind o' Fluther. (p. 144)

The exclamation marks in themselves tell much of the tone of the exchanges. The general effect is of a chaotic failure to internalize any mature meaning or feeling. The characters resemble children trapped in some psychotic pantomime from which there is no escape, in which there is no-one "with a titther o' sense" (p. 160) and about which nothing coherent can be thought for thoughts themselves are "rubbidge" and conversation merely 'penetrates' the mind like a painful weapon. Thoughts here shock, threaten and frighten, but they have little moral or intellectual content:

Nora (softly). A penny for them, Jack!

Clitheroe. Me? Oh, I was thinkin' of nothing. (p. 153)

The carnival energy of the play, occasionally apparent in the shadow of the revolutionary events, represents the "ironic converse of ... nationalist issues" [16] in which O'Casey contemplates the thrill of a counter-ideological knockabout, but which sadly degenerates, according to Reudiger Ahrens, into a "trivial and grotesque ... bickering."[17] Unlike the delicate play of Juno, here the thrashing of consciousness and feeling is foregrounded as fight scenes resulting from ideological tete a tetes and screaming matches resulting from religious and sexual insinuations dominate the action. Foregrounded, too, are the characteristic decrownings: of The Covey's High Marxism by Rosie's sexual play; of Clitheroe's fervent nationalism by his wife's insinuation that he joined only on the strength of a promotion; of Uncle Peter's nostalgic hero-worship by the cast's mocking remarks. But there is little delight in the proceedings. The mood is one of contempt rather than irreverent pleasure and the play twists darkly towards an entropic climax in which the tenement space is penetrated by murder and insanity. No knockabout, it seems, can redeem such ugly scenes. Though Fluther and Bessie show noble signs of bravery, they are implicated in looting amidst a general degeneration into horror: "I'm bleedin to death ... Her face has written on it th' shock o' sudden agony ... We'll jab the belly aht of 'im, we will! ... Ambu...lance! ... Blast you ... Oh, dead as bedamned ... Take me away, take

me away ... me sight's goin'!" (pp. 215-218) The horror of the Somme already beckons for O'Casey as a subject, not, it must be stressed, because it forms part of a logical historical sequence -the Dublin plays reflect historical events in reverse sequence if anything- but because O'Casey's attitude of depression was deepening throughout the period 1923-34. The choice of the killing fields of World War One as the subject for The Silver Tassie was a choice to express, as much as to represent, an historical nihilism. The Plough ends with an intensely moving fragment that could have come from The Tassie itself. The words of Ivor Novello, intended to be warmly patriotic, are here alienated, for an Irish audience aware of their black irony given the devastation these soldiers have wreaked upon Dublin, into tones of empty despair:

> [The voices of soldiers at a barricade outside the house are heard singing:
>
> There's a silver loining
> Through the dark cloud shoining,
> Turn the dark cloud inside out,
> Till the boys come 'owme! (p. 218)

The final flourish of the play is as perversely ambivalent as much of the preceding material. The song is not, as in Juno, of the Irish hearth but is one of imperialist sentimentality. Ivor Novello's tender and nostalgic patriotism has the final word in a calculated insult to Irish audiences of 1926 who

were, as the events of 1916 grew more mythological in folk-memory, increasingly inspired by the example of Connolly's martyrdom. O'Casey's disgust with such sentiment is clear in his stress upon the arbitrariness of that Rising, and it is a disgust which has, by 1926, overwhelmed his more optimistic demeanour.

.....

The Silver Tassie.

"Breathe upon these living that they may die."

(Act Two).

If The Plough and the Stars represents a lurch towards a despairing vision of chaos, The Silver Tassie represents the consummation of that play's nihilism. There is scarcely a moment of jouissance to be had in this bleak play. The apocalyptic second Act stands as a poetic monument to the irredeemable inhumanity of war and the rest of the play represents a cruel, spiteful, violent and spiritually bankrupt domesticity. We have come a long way from the idealism of Minnie Powell, through the courageous anger of Juno, the psychotic fear of Nora, and now to the cynical hatred of Mrs. Heegan with her desire to see her son sent to France so she might pocket his maintenance money, a hatred symbolized by her

cold vigil at the door:

> Mrs. Heegan [shivering and shuddering]. U-u-uh, I feel the stream of blood that's still trickling through me old veins icifyin' fast; u-uh. [18]

She is an evil spectre, the unconscious shadow of Juno Boyle, representing an anxious, misogynistic version of the Mother absent from that earlier work. And she is just one of the characters in this play who represent, in Raymond Williams's words, "a persistent indifference to each other" and "an empty incapacity". [19]

A "feeling of numb distance between me and the touches of them all" haunts Harry Heegan by the end of the play, ruined as he is by a paraplaegia representing that "trapped consciousness" familiar from the earlier naturalism but now symbolic of a deeper disintegration into solipsistic rage and bitterness. [20] It is important to stress that O'Casey is not merely representing in some kind of 'photographic' realism the suffering of the war victims of 1914-18, but is presenting in Harry an objective correlative of the body politic of 1926. Harry's paralysis below the waist is symbolic of the degeneration of a sexual and life-enhancing sociality into a bitter savagery. "May you find in her the pressed-down emptiness of a whore!" swears Harry at the man who saved his life upon finding him with his ex-lover, his misogyny sounding all the more sad from a man who has made an entrance resonant with echoes of the triumphant Christy Mahon of Playboy of the Western World:

[The sound of a concertina playing in the street outside has been heard, and the noise of a marching crowd. The crowd stops at the house. Shouts are heard-- "Up the Avondales!"; "Up Harry Heegan and the Avondales! Then steps are heard coming up the stairs, and first Simon Norton enters, holding the door ceremoniously wide open to allow Harry to enter, with his arm around Jessie, who is carrying a silver cup joyously .... (p. 25)

Like Synge, however, O'Casey eyes the community with deep suspicion. His family and friends insist that Harry go to war, unlike the Nora of The Plough and the Stars who demanded that her husband stay home to be loved and saved from the horror. This is a community that demands a blood-sacrifice:

Harry.... Are you game, Barney ... [t]o go to the spread and hang the latch for another night?

Barney.... No, no. We must go back!

Mrs. Heegan. No, no, Harry. You must go back.

Simon,

Sylvester, [together.] You must go back.

Susie

Voices of crowd outside. They must go back!

[The ship's siren is heard blowing.

(p. 31)

Harry is hemmed in by an insistent insanity rendered here in a

dramatic ritual that fractures the naturalist mode of the piece. The death-sentence of the group ripples outward from his mother and best friend through the rest of his close associates and out into the wider community in an extremely self-conscious theatrical set-piece. There is no space here for any redemptive vision or playful delight. Resembling the scene explored above in which the Boyle family refuse to enter the bedroom to examine the votive light, the ritual transaction here is fuelled not by the audience's thrilled laughter but by its frustrated despair.

What carnivalism there is in this play is perversely paradoxical in its structure of feeling. An earlier interruption of the naturalist mode occurs when the enraged Teddy Foran, later to be horrifically blinded, chases his wife downstairs after half-blinding her with a hatchet:

> The door against which Sylvester is leaning bursts suddenly in. Sylvester is flung headlong to the floor and Mrs. Foran, her hair falling wildly over her shoulders, a cut over her eye, frantic with fear, rushes in and scrambles in a frenzy of hate under the bed .... Sylvester hurriedly fights his way under the bed with Mrs. Foran. (p. 21)

This explosion of Whitehall farce mixes grotesquely with the familiar O'Casean emotions of fear and frenzy. The domestic violence dished out by Mr. Foran cannot morally sustain such comedy. The murderous misogyny of the husband is simply too real to burlesque and is not charming as was the case with

Joxer and Boyle's joshing. O'Casey seems to lose control of the scene altogether when he has the evangelist Susie repeatedly pop in her head in a farcical mode which belies her recently established spiritual sincerity:

> Susie [popping her head in.] God is watching-- oh, he's gone! (p. 24)

The suggestion elsewhere is that Susie's evangelism is the result of unrequited love: "She fancied Harry and Harry fancied Jessie", claims Sylvester, "so she hides her rage an' loss in the love of a scorchin' Gospel," (p. 16) for O'Casey will have no redemptive outlets from the intensity of his pessimism, not even the Protestant evangelism of his own youth that Susie naively represents.

The world O'Casey sees and feels is a damned, material world in which "mechanical persistence" (p. 7) triumphs over spiritual or metaphysical being. Indeed, O'Casey's sense of the tyranny of material processes is so strong that it begins to resemble a metaphysical sub-text in its repetitive insistence upon a deterministic, homogenous sense of time: "Time's hand runnin' ... Time eatin' his heart out ... We have beaten out the time upon the duckboard ... the clock ticks tamely ... Quick timed by hell's fast, frenzied drumfire ... When the future hours have all been spent ... his 'God have mercys on me' running after every third or fourth tick of the clock" (pp. 18-46). This reaches its climax in Susie's insistence upon the reality of the homogeneous time of hell:

Susie. Oh, if the two of you could only grasp the meaning of the word eternity! ... Time that had no beginning and never can have an end--an' there you'll be--two cockatrices creeping together, a desolation, an astonishment, a curse and a hissing from everlasting to everlasting. (p. 15)

It is a tone echoed in the horrors of the 'eternal' time of war in which the field gun has become the one hope of a "Forgotten" army and in which the cognitive nihilism of The Plough and the Stars has come to full fruition. This is a body of men incapable of rationalizations:

The Rest [chanting sleepily]. Why's 'e 'ere, why's 'e 'ere--that's wot e' wants to know!

Barney [singing to the air of second bar in chorus of "Auld Lang Syne"]. We're here because we're here, because we're here, because we're here! (p. 39)

How far a cry this lament is from the promise of 1913 with its promise of a "lovely autumn sunset ... followed by the dawn of ... social emancipation". [21] All that remains of the thrill of that day is a "body dead from the belly down" (p. 65) inhabiting a fallen world which "these empty eyes of mine can never see," (p. 102) a world in which O'Casey's despair has supplanted his faith in Man. It is to the later work that we must look for the revival of carnivalism, and with limited success. The quintessential work of the early years remains Juno and the Paycock with the attitude of nihilism beginning

to hold sway over the theatrical energy in the years following the success of that play. The frustrated political impulses and desires which could find no place in O'Casey's political life and were projected into his theatrical work instead following the decline of socialism in Ireland after 1913. But the deepening historical crisis around the colonial struggles in Dublin deepened O'Casey's pessimism regarding the Irish people's capacity to shake off their nationalist delusions and deal with their pressing economic problems. He knew that in their laughter and play lay energies that could revitalise Irish society, but he saw this energy sunk by the hopeless catholic-nationalist moralism and piety of a nation in the thrall of a middle-class clerisy, and eventually he could see little else of Ireland than the shadow cast by his own pessimism:

> Teddy: Strain as you may, it stretches from the throne of God to the end of the hearth of hell.
>
> Simon. What?
>
> Teddy. The darkness. (p. 89)

Notes.

1 The Plays of Sean O'Casey (Carbondale, Illinois, 1970), p. 25.

[2] Sean O'Casey, "The Shadow of a Gunman" in Three Plays (London, 1980), p. 81. [All further references to this work appear in the text].

[3] See Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 399.

[4] Roger McHugh, "The Legacy of Sean O'Casey " in Thomas Kilroy, ed. Sean O'Casey (Twentieth Century Views) (New Jersey, 1975), p. 40.

[5] Sean O'Casey, Autobiographies 2 (London, 1980), p. 191.

[6] Sean O'Casey, "Juno and the Paycock" in Three Plays, op. cit., p. 67.

[7] "The human is indissolubly linked with imitation: a human being only becomes human at all by imitating other human beings. In such behaviour the priests of authenticity scent traces of the utopia which could shake the structure of domination." (Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life (London, 1974), p. 154.)

[8] Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, ed. C. Emerson (Manchester, 1984), pp.134-35.

[9] J. W. Krutch, writing in "The Nation" (1927), quoted in David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work (London, 1960), p. 84.

[10] Sean O'Casey, "The Plough and the Stars" in Three Plays, op. cit., p. 216.

[11] Tom McLoughlin, "Violence, Disintegration and the New Vision in Sean O'Casey's Plays", Irish Quarterly Review vol. 71, (1982) part 284, p. 349.

[12] Frances Doherty, "Displacing the Hero in Modern irish Drama" in Theatre Research International (Spring, 1990), p. 49.

[13] Seamus Deane, Celtic Revivals (London, 1985), p. 110.

[14] Ronald Ayling, "Character, Control and 'Alienation' in The Plough and the Stars", James Joyce Quarterly (Autumn, 1970), p. 43.

[15] Herbert Goldstone, In Search of Community: The Achievement of Sean O'Casey (Dublin, 1972), p. 57.

[16] Ruediger Ahrens, "National Myths and Stereotypes in Modern Irish Drama: Sean O'Casey, Brendan Behan, Brian Friel", Literature and Linguistics, vol. 21 (1988), p. 97.

[17] ibid., p. 97.

[18] Sean O'Casey, "The Silver Tassie" in Collected Plays, Vol. 2 (London, 1967), p. 17. [All further references to this work are cited in the text].

[19] Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 167.

[20] ibid., p. 168.

[21] Sean O'Casey, The Story of the Irish Citizen Army (London and West Nyack, New York, 1980), p. 3.

Chapter Four: Plays, 1927-47.

The later plays of Sean O'Casey are somewhat disappointing in that we discover an evaporation of the earlier carnivalesque energy into a 'vitalistic' theatricality, and find ourselves frustrated, too, by the corresponding degeneration of the dramatisation of nihilism into an unconvincing intellectuality. But we find ourselves doubly engaged with the drama for its extraordinary and insistent exploration of social 'play'. Though O'Casey lost touch with the audiences that nourished his 'Dublin' work, he continued to produce drama which, at its best and often despite itself, dramatises social life as a complex and thrilling process of play-structured being. Following the expressionist experiments of The Plough and The Stars and The Silver Tassie, O'Casey abandons his stage to pantomime caricatures, music-hall double acts, stage English and Irishmen, melodramatic villains and talentless bards who foreground their theatricality to the exclusion of much of the residual naturalism.

It must be stressed that this does not represent some appalling lack of theatrical or intellectual ability but is part of O'Casey's development of a socialist theatre that is to teem with different forms of representation. Characters are not seen as monadic, bourgeois civilians but as self-consciously playful and socially implicated figures. Theodore Adorno points out that human beings' conscious experiences

"always contain an element of imitation, play, wanting to be different," for a "human being only becomes human at all by imitating other human beings," [1] and O'Casey's drama teems with imitations: dances, mimes, choral song, parody, caricature and allusion. His stock characterization device of the double-act is precisely composed of such imitative sociality and herein lies his theatre's politics for O'Casey is no dogmatic socialist. For him, socialism must include social play, and any ideology which excludes and marginalises this truth is simply a form of domination and is to be trusted with nothing.

The author remains troubled, however, by a suspicion of play, which, I shall later argue, is the product of his anti-social romanticism. His drama is weak in its attempts to portray a socially disembodied metaphysics, as in the unconvincing dreaming and lonely dancing of the characters of Within the Gates or in the stylised apocalypse of Purple Dust. At times, O'Casey resembles "the nihilist who denounces the [social] rules as absurd and conventional, who refuses to play because the game is meaningless." [2] He can be so despairing of the oppressive structures of actually existing social life as to reject it altogether in favour of a mysteriously redemptive cosmic force. Where he is more impressive, however, is in capturing the movement of human consciousness in its playful structuring of social life.

There is a paradoxical movement, then, in the structure of Sean O'Casey's feelings about social life, and though this paradoxical principle changes character in almost every play

we encounter, its general character resembles that disturbing structure of carnival-nihilism found in the 'Dublin' sequence. On the one hand thrilled by the rich 'play' of social life, O'Casey cannot but find this morally destructive at another level, an attitude reflected in his adoption of a heavy 'poetic' moralism which attempts to contain the amoral impulses of the playful material. The paradox seems to be that the best theatre (imaginative play) accompanies a pervasive amorality and the worst theatre (lyrical extravagance) occupies the space of the play's moral centre, a principle illustrated by the following play, treated here slightly out of historical sequence in order to establish the theoretical point.

The Star Turns Red.

"A world to gain! Let them throw in the sun, moon, and stars as a tilly, and we'll be talking!"

(Act Three.)

Play can be cerebral, imaginative, ritualistic, physically energetic or deeply visceral. Common to all its manifestations, however, is the principle of imitation which realises the playful intention. The ability to imitate is, as Adorno suggests, the condition of sociality and even of humanity, and O'Casey's work resonates with a variety of imitations which structure the social space, as in the choral

verses which resound throughout this play, and as in the following example where the imitation is less constructive. After a series of imitations of what her husband has been saying, the Old Woman here experiences his scorn:

> Old Man. ... Man wants but little here below, nor wants that little long.
> Old Woman [with murmuring echo and nodding head]. Nor wants that little long.
> Old Man [resentfully]. Don't be chiming in on me like the ding-dong-dell of an old church bell. With your [mimicking] "Less than what they had before-- Nor wants that little long"! Let me do me coupons in peace. [3]

In the Old Man's imitation of an imitation we have an early confirmation of the principle that is to fundamentally structure The Star Turns Red: the principle of dialogical social play. As the nihilistic figure of these early scenes he does not celebrate but damns the woman's unconscious play and, by implication, her attempt to maintain a modicum of sociality within a bleak marriage. In the following scene from The Star Turns Red the imitative principle is realised more successfully:

> Old Woman [who has been looking out of the window, through which the star and church spire are seen.] I wonder, now, if that is the east out there? Julia. [facing towards the window] East? I never bothered

to know whether it was east or west.

Old Man [facing towards window]. Nor me either; no, nor north nor south either.

Julia [to Old Woman]. Why, Old Woman?

Old Woman [in a reverie]. If only that wonderful and wondering light, watching our movements, happened, now, to be the star.

Old Man. Which star?

Julia. What star?

Jack [interested]. Whose star, Mother?

Old Woman. The star which led the three kings to where the little child lay.

Old Man. Which kings?

Julia. What child?

Jack. Whose star, Mother?

Old Woman [in a reverie]. The star of Him who is called Wonderful, Counsellor, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace....

[the Waits can be faintly heard singing "O Come, All ye Faithful"....]

Old Man [disgustedly]. Oh, let's think of serious things, and not be disturbing our heads about stars and kings and never-present princes of peace! (pp. 255-6)

There is an innocence to the Old Woman's imaginative play which is exquisitely intensified through the 'choral' responses of the three other characters. She mythologises the

space outside the window and their responses are ritually organised so that the naturalism of the scene is fractured and the imitative, playful principle of O'Casey's drama can emerge. The genre switches from quotidian naturalism to spellbinding nativity play as a reverie intrudes upon the domestic scene in a ritualised pattern and the actors find themselves playing the parts of wondrous children. The innocent tone of the triadic responses intensifies the metaphysical emergence, and the audience, if the scene is produced sensitively, should experience a feeling of delightful charm. We experience the tenderness of metaphysical feeling through the lower theatrical form of the nativity play, a typically carnivalesque O'Casean motif, and we are then returned to the quotidian world by the Old Man's signal that the 'play' has ended. His demand for seriousness is typical of the nihilist who finds such metaphysical play deluded. He "plunges his head into the football coupons" in an attempt to repress his spiritual disturbance.

At one level "only a pretend", such play proceeds, for Johan Huizinga, "with the utmost seriousness, with an absorption, a devotion that passes into rapture and, temporarily at least, completely abolishes that troublesome 'only' feeling." [4] The play is both serious and non-serious and is not reducible to either term. The Old Man's insistence upon a return to the definitely 'serious' shows him to have little capacity for the sublime flexibility of play that takes place in an ambivalent 'space' which cannot be rationalised or recuperated by naturalist or empiricist conventions. As with

Joxer and Boyle's play with 'the stars', this scene enchants us with its suspension of the dominant dramatic codes in favour of a literally ludic-rous nativity reverie.

Elsewhere, O'Casey allows us the thrill of a rougher playfulness which belongs strongly to the "pantomime" genre upon which The Star Turns Red draws. The employers' leader, a figure corresponding to the historical figure of William Murphy, is rendered as 'Sir Jake Jester', the Lord Mayor is represented as a "cross between a robin redbreast and a snipe", appearing as some kind of melodramatic grotesque [5], Red Jim is a pastiche figure with heroic pantomime posturing, and we have the 'episodic' structure of incidents typical of pantomime tradition with 'sketches' such as Joybell's flirtation with Julia, his music-hall act with the Old Man in Act Four, the melodramatic entrance of the Purple Priest and the choral dancing of the cast throughout. This is an extraordinary mode in which to represent the events of 1913 and the weaving of generic textures leads us so far from anything resembling Naturalism that in the following scene we witness a double alienation effect: a carnivalisation of a pantomime representation of history. Here, the traditionally conclusive pantomime 'knighting' of the heroic characters is subverted by working-class parody:

> Brannigan [with a yell]. Yah, I'll do for yous! I'll let daylight through yous, one be one! I'll skewer the four of you together! I'll let some of the arrogance escape out of you. Come on out here,

in front of me, you golden-snouted snails!

Brallain [appealingly]. Now, now, Brannigan, please; that's enough, like a good man. Please, please put up that bayonet. We're only for your own good. We meant no harm ....

Sheasker [searching a pocket and taking out a shilling]. Here you are, Brannigan, me son, a shilling for a drink.

Brannigan [eyeing the shilling with scorn]. Put that back for fear it'll catch cold.... A ten-shilling note from you, and five shillings each from your coadjutors; and over here with you all to present the tribute money, kneeling down on one knee in a fit and tidy fashion to receive the honour of a proletarian knighthood....

Brannigan [tapping Brallain on the head with the bayonet]. Rise up, you ready-ripened son of serve yourself. [Tapping Eglish on the head with the bayonet] Rise up, you shattered idea of a man made backwards. (pp. 289-90)

Here we witness a grotesque alienation of the historical into generically defamiliarizing terms. Its pantomimical self-consciousness defamiliarises the naturalist representation of a well known period of Irish history through the perspective of carnivalising generic forms: morality play, melodrama, music-hall, nativity play and pantomime. History is 'played' through some of the cheapest and most irreverent genres in

order to capture the spirit of those viscero-aesthetic pleasures of the proletariat with all its vulgar, but often tender, social perception.

On the other hand, O'Casey does not quite trust his characters with their rich playfulness. He knows from historical experience that the proletariat can be, precisely, metaphysically reverential, deluded, feckless and brutal to their own historical cost, and the working-class is elsewhere the object of his scorn. The characters Joybell and The Old Man are delightfully playful in character (the former's words degenerating all the time into hysterically comical monologism) and the pair of them play out a music-hall sketch with the bunting in Act Four which absorbs much of the audience's comic sympathy; but they are immoral creatures, collapsing into subservience to fascism at the drop of a hat. O'Casey reveals the underside of carnival playfulness to harbour a cruel emptiness, and he is forced to establish a romantic moralism to counteract this nihilistic proletarian impulse:

Red Jim:

The flaming hemlock here will burn to ashes
The rose that sucked its power from men's dejection;
And from the flaming hemlock, dying here,
The tree of life shall grow. (p. 351)

The romantic socialism of Red Jim redeems the fascistic

tendencies of his proletarian flock, but his is a mode of only temporal redemption. "Death is nothing," he explains to Julia, a dogmatic claim in which he embraces one form of nihilism in order to counter what we have been encouraged to see as another. If Catholicism offers only murderous delusion in the empty posturings of the Purple Priest, Red Jim responds with a romantic moralism which is similarly empty at the metaphysical level. Though resembling a spiritual position in its poetic intensity, the redemption offered by Jim to a grieving Julia at the play's climax, is simply the offer to join "the glowing hour" of the present excitement. [6] As the proletarian army wins the historical day, Jim resorts to non-historical metaphors of 'life' (" The rose that sucked its power.... The tree shall grow ...) which oppose a vitalistic organicism to a deathly sociality. It is not surprising that the "glowing hour" of the present is all Jim can offer, since he has had to reject almsot all actually existing social structures in order to legitimate his own cosmic romanticism. This represents a form of romantic ultra-leftism in which existing social forms must be merely chopped away like so much dead wood. O'Casey's metaphysical energies are still with the social play of his proletarian characters. As compensation for their amorality he produces a stylised socialist romanticism which is too pious for him to play with and consequently too dogmatic to be dramatically convincing.

How different this is from the closing speech of Juno Boyle in Juno and the Paycock where her concluding moralism was effective precisely because of its dialogical 'play' with

the words of Mrs. Tancred. Her imitation of the previously bereaved mother in a self-consciously playful tone ("it's my turn to say it now") emphasises that deeply social mediation of the emotional which is characteristic of O'Casey's strongest work:

> Mrs. Boyle. What was the pain I suffered, Johnny, bringin' you into the world to carry you to your cradle, to the pains I'll suffer carryin' you out o' the world to bring you to your grave! Mother o'God, Mother o'God, have pity on us all! [7]

This speech represents an almost exact repetition of Mrs Tancred's words which were hardly internalised when first heard by Juno, but which are now recalled, as if from collective memory, by a Juno who now fully understands her neighbour's grief. The words are effective mostly because of their dialogical relationship to the earlier speech, with Juno re-presenting Mrs Tancred's words with remorse and understanding as she addresses the object of the Virgin. At the moment of intense metaphysicality we hear a doubly accented sociality directed both at the Mother of God and at the language of the Mother of Robbie Tancred. The most personal metaphysical language is thus seen to be saturated with social awareness for "the most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a thou)." [8] For Mikhail Bakhtin, this representation of another's

consciousness is deeply constitutive of the personal self for "everything internal gravitates not toward itself but is turned to the outside and dialogized, every internal experience ends up on the boundary, encounters another, and in this tension-filled encounter lies its entire essence." [9] No-one who sees this play can fail to be moved by this scene (Lady Gregory thought it the most moving scene in modern Irish drama), but it is not simply the emotion that moves us but the tension between the depth of human grief and the accented repetition of another's words. At the moment of greatest inner crisis, Juno reaches for a form of words with which we are already familiar so that the moment of singular personal tragedy is expressed in the form of a repetition. A scene in which consciousness might have been directed purely 'inwardly' is structured so that we can perceive the deepest personal feeling to be saturated with awareness of a 'thou'.

At the conclusion of The Star Turns Red O'Casey fails to establish such a resonant dialogism and his moralism becomes monological despite its poetical delivery. Jim's romantic optimism is self-possessed and dogmatic, offering little of the internally persuasive intensity of Juno's passion. In the following play there are similar signs of dramatic weakness in the splitting off of the moral imperatives from the dialogism of the social body.

Within the Gates.

"I wasn't mockin' enyone--I was only mockin' Genesis."

(Scene Three).

This is an ambitious play that seeks to juxtapose the forces of a "sour" and "withered" English life with a gay, poetic, life-affirming dance. The forces of death, The Older Chair Attendant, The Bishop's Sister, The Evangelist, The Salvation Army Officer and The Old Woman oppose the forces of life led by The Dreamer who envisages song and dance rather than prayer, sermon and confession as the forms appropriate to worship:

> Dreamer [to Young Woman]. Turn your back swift on the poor, purple-button'd dead-man, whose name is absent from the book of life. Offer not as incense to God the dust of your sighing, but dance to His glory, and come before His presence with a song! [10]

One difficulty with the play is that The Dreamer's humanist vision of a world in which laughter and gaiety can triumph over the fear of the grave, is stated rather than dramatized. The audience does not experience laughter and thrill as we had with the earlier work. O'Casey had found a visceral excitement in a carnivalism which was theatrically thrilling. But here the elements have come asunder. In Within the Gates, carnival confronts nihilism in a binary opposition of terms and the 'state o' chassis' which generated so much dramatic energy in Juno and the Paycock, has been artificially shaped into a discrete series of abstract propositions represented by

various ideological 'figures'. Instead of dramatising feelings of nihilism through intense dramatic action, here the dramatic feeling is rationalised in discourse such as, "wot we warnt to know, man, is who myde Gord!" (p. 179) where the Cockney vitalism of the language cannot enliven the ideological banality. The play's sociality is staged rather than played with the dark but delightful energy of Juno and there is an attempt to represent sociality through weight of numbers rather than through any complex dialogism. A mood of social dislocation consequently informs the work, as in this song of The Young Woman's:

> Young Woman [standing up, stamping her foot, and singing fiercely]:
>
> Let it fall to pieces then, pieces then, pieces then,
> Let it fall to pieces then, my fair lady. (p. 182)

There are strong echoes here, as in The Silver Tassie, of The Waste Land, for here "London Bridge is falling down" and the tone is one of menace rather than child-like pleasure. Like that bleak poem, this play explores a spiritual wasteland where "there are those who have no life for which to thank" God (p. 129) and in which "Life has pass'd us by," (p. 158) with the ever-present nihilism dominating the characters' consciousness:

> The Young One [enthusiastically]. Never you mind 'im, sir. Wot you says reminds man that Gord watches

even over the fall of the sparrer!

Atheist [mockingly]. Ay, an' the fall of the 'awk on the sparrer to tear it to pieces!

Older One [hotly]. You shut your rotten mouth, will you! Warn't to 'ear yourself torkin', torkin', do you? Try to look at things in perspective, carn't you? Wot's you or me in the general scheme of things, eh? Speck o' dust, blide o' grass, a nought, a nothing. (p. 131)

The intensity of the nihilism is strengthened by the confusion of the Older One's protest. He means to contradict the Atheist's nihilistic vision of nature but can only counter it with a stress on the emptiness of his own being. For O'Casey, neither atheism nor established religion holds any promise of redemption.

Once again, as in The Silver Tassie, Within the Gates produces a bad mother, embittered, manipulative and vengeful:

Old Woman [to the Young Woman--whiningly]. Why don't you try to be decent to your poor mother? She won't trouble you for long? I feel a few more months will see the end of me.... [fiercely flinging her back so that the girl falls on her knees]. I'll teach you a little of the duty a daughter owes to her mother! (pp. 166-67)

The character of the mothers in these plays has mutated from the nourishing and sceptical wisdom of Juno and Bessie Burgess

into an horrifically vengeful misanthropy. They do not nurture their children but destroy them for narrow material gain as they appear in terrifying psychic figures: "I'll tear every stitch of you into ribbons," screams The Old Woman to her daughter (p. 165). If Juno Boyle had represented some redemptive feminine wisdom with which to counter the nihilistic carnivalism of the men of the Dublin tenements, in the Depression England of 1934 the Mother has become a harbinger of grisly national death:

> The Old Woman [scornfully] ... truth's bent in two, and hope is broken! [Mournfully]. O Jesus! is there no wisdom to be found anywhere! All gone with the golden life of England into the bellies of worms! (p. 218)

O'Casey is conscious of the misogynistic nature of many of his characters. The Young Woman knows from experience that men despise her for satisfying their lust, for "there's only venom for a woman in the things you think of her" (p. 186). She knows, too, that she runs the risk of experiencing the ultimate nihilism of the "condemned man who is to be hanged for cutting a woman into bits" (p. 183). But the author seems obliquely complicit with such misogyny in his own fetishization of the prostitute's body. Throughout his writing the trope of the lovely calf and thigh recurs as a sexual motif but in this play O'Casey seems ambivalent about the young woman's sexuality. Provoking the gazing men contemptuously on the one hand, she seems happy to entertain

The Dreamer's voyeurism on the other:

> Young Woman. ... Now, you deaf and dumb perishers, have a look at a lovely pair of legs, if you're not blind as well! [She lifts her skirts as she dances, and makes her movements keep time with the tune. The Readers look over the tops of their papers and watch her.] All interested now? Well what do you think of them-- saucy, eh? [Slapping her left leg] This one's lovely. [Slapping the right one] This divine! (p. 186)

cf:

> Dreamer.
>
> Her legs are pliant and slim
> As fresh, golden branches of willow;
> I see lustre of love on each limb,
> Looking down from the heights of a pillow!
> Looking down from the heights of a pillow!
>
> (p. 171)

The tone of these scenes seems torn between a desire to represent a healthy sexuality and the necessity to highlight the misogyny of most men. The problem is that the sexual structure of each scene, a man viewing a woman's body detachedly, is similar. We are left confused by the ambivalence: is the Dreamer's voyeurism any more healthy and vitalistic than the Readers? We are meant, we suppose, to

think so, but are morally confused by the similarity of the sexual image. The Dreamer seems as fetishistic as any of the misogynists- a peculiar feature to ascribe to a character who embodies the forces of Life.

The consequence of such confusion is the "intellectual vacuum" mentioned by James Simmons, a feature of the play much reinforced by the unpersuasive and rather lack-lustre arguments of the leading characters, none of whom "presents a very pointed case." [11] Herbert Goldstone, indeed, finds the characterizations "stilted, diffuse, over theatrical, and even boring" [12] and we must concur, in the end, that Within the Gates is not a successful play. Though dialogism abounds here at the ideological level with atheists and rationalists, evangelists and priests, the old and the young, the unemployed and the working all interacting in song, speech and dance, the effect, at lower levels, is of an anti-social monologism. No-one really speaks to anyone else with words that are internally persuasive or sensuously accented. There is no 'craic' or delight in social play but only a sclerotic insistence upon the virtue of 'joy', a pleasure which O'Casey seems incapable of generating dramatically for it is here split off from its roots in the jouissance of a rich sociality. The consequence of this split is a moral insistence on joyfulness which, as we have seen with the sexual example above, appears confused, or at best ambivalent. The images which offer most joy appear fetishistically empty. Where O'Casey finds the social body, as here, worthy only of contemptuous mockery, his alternative naturalistic vitalism

appears pallid and unconvincing.

Purple Dust.

"There's so many gabbers goin' that there's hardly a listener left."

(Act Two.)

Purple Dust signals the revival of a carnivalism which contains all of the elements of knockabout, slapstick, pantomime and music-hall familiar from earlier work without that tension with the historical or the 'metaphysical' which generates the most dramatic climaxes in O'Casey's ouevre. It is, therefore, not a play which can detain the serious critic for long. In this play a verbal and physical carnivalism dominates the action to such an extent that the representation of the historical is reduced to the merest farce and the representation of the metaphysical to poetic pastiche. What is missing here is an exploration of that "threshold" theorized by Bakhtin where "the highest degree of sociality" is not "external, not material, but internal...." [13] In the better work we find that "conversation with an internally persuasive word that one has begun to resist" and which is "put in a new situation in order to ... get a feel for its boundaries, to experience it physically as an object." [14] In the best O'Casean dialogism we experience, as we have seen,

such a sense of " a second representing consciousness" at work on an utterance to define its boundaries and re-accent its tones. [15] Mostly this is a carnivalising mimicry or parody of the original as in Boyle and Joxer's treatment of historical quotations, though it can be as moving and sincere as Juno's final plea to the Virgin explored above where Juno has found Mrs. Tancred's words, precisely, "internally persuasive". There is little of the latter in Purple Dust for the dramatist is here concerned to purely externalise the action in the manner of a farce:

> Avril [ironically]. Basil is only trying to share his great knowledge with us.
>
> Poges. He calls that knowledge, does he?
>
> Souhaun. We must remember that Basil passed through Oxford, dear.
>
> Poges. I don't care if he crept under it or flew over it; he's not going to punish me with what he picked up there. (p. 27)

The downward movement of the dialogue is very clearly marked here, with Oxford offering an easy target for the enraged ignoramus Poges, but there is little in such dialogue that survives a first reading. The mirth passes and we move on, hungry for more nourishing dramatic fare. There is no shortage of carnivalistic material in the malapropisms, logical absurdities and historical nonsense of the following extracts but the total picture is of a series of sketches with

little tragic depth against which the knockabout can exercise itself. In the work examined previously, from The Shadow of a Gunman to The Star Turns Red, the comedy has been imbued with a sense of the nihilism of historical forces, but here it stands alone as self-justifying discursive farce:

> Poges ... What was his name, follower of the Prophet? You remember, Hegira, the white stone, or was it a black stone?--oh, what was the bounder's name?
> Souhaun [helpfully]. Tuttuttunkhamen, dear?
> Poges [scornfully]. Tuttuttunkhamen! My God, woman, he was only the other day!
> Avril [more helpfully]. The Mahdi, dear?
> Poges [more scornfully]. The Mahdi! [Plaintively] Is there no one here knows a line of the history of this country! (p. 20)

The ironies abound here with Poges' own ignorance vying for supremacy against that of his cohorts and the final irony of the irrelevance of all this to Ireland being strongly signalled. In the next sequence the Irish play with the Englishman's empirical precision as they set about destroying the fabric of his domestic psyche:

> [Plaster falls and a hole appears in the ceiling, almost directly over the fireplace; then a thin rope, with a bulb attached to its end, comes dangling down, followed by the face of a heavily Yellow-bearded Man, who thrusts his head as far as it can go through the

hole.

Yellow-bearded Man [to those below]. Hay, hay there; is this where yous want the light to go?

Poges [with a vexatious yell when he sees where the rope hangs]. No it isn't, no it isn't you fool! [Indicating a place near the centre and towards the back] There, there there's where it's wanted! Where my desk will be! Oh, they're knocking down more than they're building up! (p. 43)

Though theatrically hilarious in its way, O'Casey only fleetingly grasps the carnivalism of his earlier work here and the play suffers for the lack of an historical context with which it can play. In the Dublin sequence or in The Star Turns Red O'Casey had been able to run against the grain of the mythologisations of a well-known and contentious history, and much of his energy came from the combat with hostile and informed audiences. Here we see farce detached from history and reduced to the status of a sequence of music-hall sketches without that tension with the historical context which makes the better work so dramatically counter-pointed. David Krause notes the play's "theatrical ingenuity" and its "whirling through a profusion of burlesque turns and clowning acts" but can make no moral conclusion from this other than that the play somehow dramatizes O'Casey's "faith in man" [17]. The critic's humanism and his technical admiration fail to illuminate each other. Krause is more convincing when he earlier argues that "O'Casey's dramatic genius flourished more

readily in the realm of satiric comedy than moral prophecy,"[18] a point which emphasises the structural weakness of those scenes in which the moral expressions are least likely to benefit from the playwright's greatest gift: the talent for exploring the ambivalencies and complexities of social and discursive play.

The poetic moralism of the piece is, consequently, disappointing, as O'Casey opposes to the stage-Englishry of the leading protagonists a Celtic mysticism which achieves the singular feat of sounding both sentimental and propagandistic:

> O'Killigain [ignoring Poges's angry exclamation-- to Avril]. An' you, young girl, sweet bud of an out-spreading three, graft yourself on to the living, and don't stay hidden any longer here. Come where the rain is heavy, where the frost frets, and where the sun is warm. Avril, pulse of me heart, listen to me, an' let longin' flood into your heart for the call of life. The young thorn-three withered away now, can awaken again, an' spread its fragrance around us. Spit out what's here and come where love is fierce and fond an' fruitful. (p. 106)

The characteristically coarse alliteration and quasi-Romantic mysticism is not intended to be parody and yet only that intention could have redeemed the literary quality of the piece. A sense of ironic detachment here, convincingly achieved with the portrait of the similarly Romantic Donal Davoren, could have made the play an enigmatic and thoughtful

piece of self-conscious modernistic theatre in which the foregrounding of such discourses emphasised its artificiality. As it stands, the emotional climax of the play feels bogus and embarrassing, with any sense of the playful reproduction of the metaphysical subject lost in pastiched pastoralism.

Red Roses For Me.

"Hello, what kind of a circus is it's goin' on here?"

(Act One.)

Much critical attention to this play has focussed upon the 'visionary' utopianism of Act Three with its transformative dream of a metaphysical Dublin shining through the rubble of the empirical city. Herbert Goldstone finds the Act's "comprehensive interplay between vision and reality" convincing and David Krause admires the "incantation and mystery of [its] dramatic revelation", [19] but neither critic is entirely comfortable with its metaphysical lyricism, and we should not be too surprised since the Act generally lacks that ludic principle which might have strengthened its romanticism with a comically playful energy.

The vision of a post-revolutionary Dublin is one of synaesthetic charm where nature celebrates social progress:

Ayamonn. There's the great dome o' th' Four Courts lookin' like a golden rose in a great bronze bowl!

An' th' river flowin' below it, a purple flood, marbled with ripples o' scarlet; watch th' seagulls glidin' over it--like restless white pearls astir on a royal breast. Our city is in the grip o' God!

1st Man (emotionally.) Oh, hell, it's grand!

Eeada. Blessed be our city for ever and ever. [20]

Moving though the vision is for any tired socialist, there is an imaginative thinness to its terms which results from its lack of dialogical or carnivalesque resonance. Indeed, there is more of the latter in the pessimistic, resigned vision of the Catholic trinity of girls who oppose Ayamonn's utopianism with their own depressive chorality:

Ayamonn. Rouse yourselves; we hold a city in our hands!

Eeda [in a very low, but bitter voice]. It's a bitther city.

Dympna [murmuring the same way]. It's a black an' bitther city.

Finoola [speaking the same way]. It's a bleak, black, an' bitther city. (p. 196)

The triadic structure we are familiar with from The Plough and the Stars and The Star Turns Red here functions as a chorus of imitative despair. The playful, social moment reveals a resigned bitterness which is reinforced by the harsh alliterativeness of its consonants. And yet there is a comic energy in these lines which enlivens them and which could be

produced to ironise the girls' pessimism with a sense of the rather overdone rituality of their utterances. O'Casey, sensing perhaps that his solemnity could be undone by such a chorus, refuses to let this trio comment chorally on the ensuing utopianism, thus ensuring that the following romantic propaganda is not undone by a stronger form of playful feminine sociality:

> Ayamonn. Friend, we would that you should live a greater life; we will that all of us shall live a greater life. Our sthrike is yours. A step ahead for us today; another one for you tomorrow. We who have known, and know, the emptiness of life shall know its fullness. All men and women quick with life are fain to venture forward ... Oh, look! Look there! Th'sky has thrown a gleaming green mantle over her bare shoulders, bordhered with crimson, an' with a hood of gentle magenta over her handsome head- look! (p. 198)

It is when O'Casey is at his most positive about the possibilities of life that his dramatic skill most obviously deserts him. His power as a dramatist resides most strongly in a playful utopianism which does not so much imagine a golden future as challenge the empiricism of the present repressive realities with immediate social play. At the most intense moments of such drama, the containing naturalism of his play's production gives way to a foregrounded performativeness which suspends the dominant genre of the

production while some ludicrous activity takes place. In the Act examined above, the present sordid empiricality of Dublin is swept aside by a vision of a more magical possibility, but we do not experience the thrill of this possibility in the dramatic action itself. A kind of imaginative empiricism invades the scene in which a sordid reality is swapped for a colourful dream, but in which the participants do not produce their own drama through proletarian play. The dream is transformative, but the transformation is more natural than social.

How much more effective as a utopian prefiguration is the following scene in which the empirical co-ordinates of the dramatic mode are deconstructed by a ludic principle which subverts the dominant naturalism. The stage directions have established the empirically stable world ("The fireplace is in the right hand wall" etc.) of O'Casey's conventional tenement naturalism when the following ludicrous direction undermines the suspension of disbelief by grotesquely foregrounding the theatricality of the entire piece before its historical subject-matter has even begun to dramatically establish itself:

> Ayamonn wears a bright-green silk doublet over which is a crimson velvet armless cloak bordered with white fur. The back part of the cloak is padded so as to form a big hump between his shoulders. Across his chest is a dark-green baldric from which hangs a scabbard. A cross-hilted sword is in his hand. On

his head he has a black felt hat with narrow turned-up rims. A black band goes round the hat, and a crimson feather sticks up from it. His legs are in heavy, black, working corduroy trousers, and he wears heavy, hobnailed boots. (p. 128)

This subversion of the opening of the piece produces a grotesque symbol of the play's generic carnivalism. We can, of course, recuperate the image of the proletarianised Gloucester when we learn that Ayamonn is rehearsing for a play, but the impact of this scene upon the audience is such that we simply cannot orientate ourselves at the play's outset to any objective reality. Have we stumbled into some kind of picaresque farce? Is this an amateur production of some Commedia del Arte absurdism? Our perplexity is further increased when the first external character to intrude upon the scene is not the expected neighbour but the mythological figure of Brennan on the Moor! The audience is simply unable to rationalise the scene into some kind of dominating reality.

Generic dissonance and absurd disjunctions of mode and tone disturb our "horizon of expectation" to the point at which we cannot orientate ourselves as an audience in command of the production [21]. Though we come to recuperate the opening in the realisation that this is a rehearsal for a play and that Brennan on the Moor is a nickname, we can never again quite trust the dramatic mode we are in. The grotesque Shakespearian centaur (top half Gloucester, bottom half factory worker) is more effective in dislodging our perception

of the enduring character of the slum than is the romantic vision of Act Three because here we actually experience, as an audience, the disturbance of our objective attitude to this stage-world.

In the following scene, our recuperation of the opening is subverted again as O'Casey surrenders the naturalist space he has begun to establish to a number of vaudeville turns: "Is this a home-sweet-away-from-home hippodhrome, or what?" cries the nihilist Mulcanny when he sees the assembled cast of minstrels about to perform from their show (p. 151). The stage is then conceded to the Singer in such a fashion that the audience is unsure of whether it, too, occupies a serious theatrical space or a hippodrome as the stage is occupied by musicians and performers:

> Brennan [enthusiastically]. Sam, you're excellin' yourself! On again, me oul' son!
>
> Singer [singing].
>
> Her petticoat's simple, her feet are but bare,
> An' all that she has is but neat an' scantie;
> But stars in th' deeps of her eyes are exclaiming
> I carry a rich bunch of red roses for thee!
>
> (p. 151).

It is only by some tortuous ignorance of such theatrical moments that C. Desmond Greaves can argue that O'Casey's "method is realist throughout" [22] for this is to ignore the point that such dramatic scenes cannot be contained by the genre of naturalism or of any conventional 'realism'. At such

a moment, the mode of theatre itself is transformed from bourgeois event to music-hall occasion, and it is no wonder that some of O'Casey's earlier working-class audiences got confused and tried to heckle the performers on stage. Audience participation is a feature of music-hall performance, and the breaking of the stage illusion threatens to extend the carnivalism being represented to include the audience itself in the process of disrupting naturalist conventions. The moment of song in O'Casey must be allowed to retain its "autonomy within the whole", as Maik Hamburger puts it, and not be swallowed up by the 'realism' upon which Greaves insists, for it is the breaking of the empirical conventions of bourgeois theatre which admits contemporaneous utopian energies to the theatrical space.

Cock-a-Doodle Dandy.

> Messenger [gently]. She's gone, Julia.
>
> Julia. Gone? Gone where?
>
> Messenger To a place where life resembles life more than it does here.

(Scene Three.)

"Every year that has passed", wrote Frank O'Connor in 1942, "particularly since de Valera's rise to power, has strengthened the grip of the gombeen man, of the religious

secret societies ... of the illiterate censorship," and O'Casey's lively morality play is directed precisely against these agents of the post-Free State Ireland of the nineteen-forties. [23] O'Connor's remark is unlikely to have endeared him to De Valera himself who, just a year later spoke, on St. Patrick's day, of his vision of an Ireland whose "countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old age." [24]

But O'Connor's thoughts were much in the spirit of Sean O'Casey's criticisms of conservative Irish ruralism. Cock-a-Doodle Dandy, represents a riposte to De Valera's arcadianism for in this play we see little of the wisdom of "serene old age" in the ludicrous figure of the charlatan Shanaar whose wisdom extends merely to a "parley with the hens in a Latin dissertation" and who is described, venomously, by the hypocritical 'Sailor' Mahan as a "Latin-lustrous oul' cod of a prayer-blower" and an "oul' fool, pipin' a gale into every breeze that blows." [25] Rather than "athletic youths" romping to the sounds of 'joyous industry', O'Casey has the mischeivous double act of Mahon and Michael holding centre-stage with their feckless double-dealing and self-delusive blather:

> Michael Yes, yes; but we must suffer th' temptation accordin' to the cognisances of th' canon law. But

let's have a dhrink, for I'm near dead with th'drouth, an' we can sensify our discussion about th' increased price you're demandin' for carryin' th' turf; though, honest to god, Sailor Mahan, I can't add a ha'penny more to what I'm givin'.

Mahan A dhrink would be welcome, an' we can talk over th' matter, though, honest to God, Michael Marthraunm, blast th' penny less I'll take than what I'm askin'.

Michael [going to the porch, and shouting into the house] Marion, bring th'bottle of ten years maturin', an' two glasses! [He returns.] It's th' principle I'm thinkin' of. [26]

We are familiar with O'Casey's view of "principle" from Juno and the Paycock, and here the counterpointed irony of these rogues' quotation of "th' canon law" as they first deal and then drink does little to suggest that O'Casey shared De Valera's pastoral vision. In fact, he consciously opposed its arcadian moralism and found in rural Catholicism not a social structure worthy of the people but a lifeless moral system dominated by a lethal puritan clerisy:

Father Domineer [To the man] We were just talking of you, my man. I have told Mr Mahan to dismiss you. You know why. You're a scandal to th' whole place; you're a shame to us all. Either leave this woman you're living with, or go to where that sort of

thing's permitted....

Lorry-Driver [obstinately] I'll go if Mr Mahan tells me to go.

Father Domineer [in a fury] Isn't it a wondher God doesn't strike you dead.... [He lunges forward, and strikes the Lorry-Driver swiftly and savagely on the side of the head. The man falls heavily; lies still for a moment; tries feebly to rise; falls down again, and lies quite still. (pp 92-3)

The murder of the lorry driver is ignored by the community who are in the thrall of this vicious priest and it is at this point that O'Casey's moral play takes on elements of a psychomachia in which all institutionalised forms of social life are represented as wicked and depraved. Counterposed to this evil social force then is the vital aerial spirit of the Cock with its mysterious shape-shifting resistance to the moralists' repressive containment. Though theatrically exciting in its way as it demolishes the farm-house, terrifies the superstitious flock and enlivens the more 'natural' sexual figures of Lorileen and Marian, the Cock is expressly of nature rather than of discursive society, a point made very clear by the opposition O'Casey constructs between Latin language and the Cock's life-force:

Shanaar [thoughtfully]. If among th' fowl there's an illusion of a hen from Gehenna, it won't endure the Latin. She can't face the Latin. Th' Latin downs her. She tangles herself in a helluva disordher.

> She busts asundher, an' disappears in a quick column of black an' blue smoke, a thrue ear ketchin' a screech of agony from its centre! (p. 56)

Cocking a snook, as it were, at the superstitious adoption of Latin as a sacred mystery by the community, this scene also establishes a structural opposition between language and nature in which the former is seen to attempt to contain the experience offered by the Cock. Father Domineer has several words for the Cock which represents an archetype from many cultures ("Kylecoch, Le Coq, Gallus"), but his sophisticated language of the archetype does nothing to contain its immediate presence as a subversive force.

Indeed, Latin is parodied and satirised throughout the play in mock-prose which emphasises the language's absurdity. Here the Latin is quite literally carnivalised by a contemporary joke at Shannaar's expense:

> Michael [to Shanaar--half commandingly] In case it's what we're afraid of, you pop in, Shanaar, an' liquidate whatever it is with your Latin....
> Shanaar[fervently] Oh rowelum randee, horrida aidus, sed spero spiro specialii spam! (pp 58-59.)

Theatrically hilarious, the carnivalisation of Latin echoes the successes of Captain Boyle's ludicrous malapropisms and the linguistic posturing of Purple Dust, but the joke is, once again, upon the rituals of the Catholic Church, a feature of

the play which caused it to be ignored in production in Ireland for twenty-seven years, and the moral approval is with the dark spirit of the rogue bird.

Some peculiar ambivalencies arise from O'Casey's symbol here for the crowing of the Cock represents a direct allusion to the Cock of Yeats's Dreaming of the Bones, a figure from an elementally beautiful and poignant play about a refugee from The Easter Rising who encounters the ghost of the twelfth century Irish traitor Dervorgilla and is almost betrayed by her into forgiving his quisling countrymen for their betrayal of the Rising. The "Red bird of March" that begins to crow in this short, sad play accompanies a grieving vision of Irish loss and it is not easy to understand what O'Casey's cock with "the face of a cynical jester" should have in common with it:

> I can see
> The Aran Islands, Connemara Hills,
> And Galway in the breaking light; there too
> The enemy has toppled roof and gable,
> And torn the panelling from ancient rooms;
> What generations of old men had known
> Like their own hands, and children wondered at,
> Has boiled a trooper's porridge. 27

The Cock of Yeats's poem "symbolizes the dawn of a dark day in Irish history", [28] namely the rounding up and execution of the leaders of the Easter rebellion, but O'Casey's Cock is surely meant to represent some warm, though destructive, moral force, and it is difficult to see why he should have found the allusion apposite. One can only presume that he retained a little unconscious ambivalence here regarding the role of his supposedly gay spirited bird. Similarly ambivalent is

O'Casey's attitude to Irish Catholicism and song for he had been at pains to point out that his political argument was with clerical puritanism rather than with the common people's faith ("their devotion was always a beautiful manifestation to me," [29]) but here he savagely mocks the failure of Lourdes to aid the dying Julia for whom "there was no miracle" and who has "come back, without even a gloamin' thought of hope" to be touched with the Messenger's merely "questionable blessing" (p. 116). O'Casey's barbarous perception of Lourdes as a "well, sick with the scum of a thousand tumours" lies behind this anti-Catholic propagandism and it is an unwelcome sign of the degeneration of one part of his work into a cynical humanism which has broken the back of his original faith in the capacity of his common characters for social play. [30] In one other strangely ambivalent moment, he has the forces of death go to holy war singing beautiful Irish folk songs which it is difficult to believe that he meant to denigrate since song forms such a strong element in his own folksy vitalism:

> Father Domineer Back to hell with all bad books, bad plays, bad pictures, and bad thoughts! Cock o' th' north, or cock o' th' south, we'll down derry doh down him yet.... We know where we're goin', an' we know who's goin' with us.
>
> Michael The minsthrel boy with th' dear harp of his country, an' Brian O'Lynn.
>
> Bellman Danny Boy an th' man who sthruck O'Hara. (pp. 109-10)

Having conceded even Irish folk song to the clerical hegemony, O'Casey is left with few social forms with which to oppose the Catholic puritanism and his Cock represents, therefore, more of a universal principle of human play than one explored, as in the earlier work, in its discursive complexity.

The roots of this approach lie in O'Casey's own Ruskinian and Christian socialist-humanism, an ideology only marginally expressed in the Dublin plays. "Of course", he wrote, "I am a Shelleyan Communist, and a Dickensian one, & (sic.) a Byronic one, and a Miltonic one, and a Whitmanian one, & one like all those who thought big and beautifully, & who cared for others, as I am a Marxian one, too." [31] His tradition of English social and romantic humanism, strange for a writer brought up in the Dublin tenements, reveals the origins of his social thought in a romantic and liberal-humanist articulation of marxist principles. It is a specifically Anglo-American Romantic tradition characterised by universalistic democratic motifs and the Cock of this play is its perfect non-social, non-religious, non-political symbol. O'Casey begins to resemble in his later life a kind of exiled Anglo-Irish Prospero who remains untouched by the specific complexities of Irish rural and urban Catholic-nationalism whilst his "bird-like Ariel of air and fire" speaks as his metaphysical representative from the Irish countryside. [32] The success of O'Casey's work resides in his skill with carnivalistic motifs, but when the carnival becomes the enemy of all social forms, then we recognise the ultimate

triumph in his work of that romantic humanism defined at the outset of this thesis which lay behind but never really penetrated his Dublin work. On balance, the conscious expression of his political ideology in later works like Cock-a-Doodle Dandy tends, sadly, to weaken the more unconscious dramatic genius of that earlier exploration of carnival-nihilism from 1922-26 to which I now return in order to conclude.

Notes.

[1] Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life (London, 1974), p. 153.

[2] Roger Caillois, Man, Play and Games (London, 1962), p. 7.

[3] Sean O'Casey, "The Star Turns Red" in Collected Plays, Vol. 2 (London, 1967), pp. 245-46.

[The reader will note that I have omitted consideration of Oak Leaves and Lavender from my discussion below, believing it to be worthy of little comment that would not be destructively critical. All further references to The Star Turns Red appear in the text].

[4] Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture (London, 1949), p. 27.

[5] See "The Star Turns Red", op. cit., p. 265.

[6] ibid., pp. 352-53.

[7] Sean O'Casey, "Juno and the Paycock" in Three Plays (London, 1980), p. 71.

[8] Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, ed. and trans., C. Emerson (Manchester, 1984), p. 287.

[9] ibid., p. 287.

[10] Sean O'Casey, "Within the Gates" in Collected Plays, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 228.

[All further references to this work appear in the text.]

[11] James Simmons, Sean O'Casey (Macmillan Modern Dramatists (London, 1983), p. 117.

[12] Herbert Goldstone, In Search of Community (Dublin, 1972), p. 96.

[13] Mikhail Bakhtin, op. cit., p. 287.

[14] Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, ed. M. Holquist (Austin, Texas, 1981), p. 348.

[15] ibid., p. 359.

[16] Sean O'Casey, "Purple Dust" in Collected Plays, Vol. 3 (London, 1967), p. 27.

[All further references to this work appear in the text.]

[17] David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work (London, 1960), p. 187.

[18] ibid., p. 156.

[19] Herbert Goldstone, op. cit., p. 174.

[20] Sean O'Casey, "Red Roses for Me" in Collected Plays, Vol. 3, op. cit., p. 200.

[All further references to this work appear in the text.]

[21] See, for an elaboration of this concept, Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception (Brighton, 1982), pp. 23-34.

[22] C. Desmond Greaves, Sean O'Casey: Politics and Art (London, 1979), p. 163.

[23] Sean O'Casey quoted in David Krause, Intro. , Cock-A-Doodle Dandy (London, 1991), pp. 14-15.

[24] ibid., pp. 15-16.

[25] Sean O'Casey, Cock-A-Doodle Dandy, op. cit., p. 64.

[26] ibid., p. 64. [All further references to this work

appear in the text.]

[27] W. B. Yeats, Selected Plays, ed. A. N. Jeffares (London, 1991), p. 119. See David Krause, Cock, op. cit., p.24 for a discussion of O'Casey's Yeatsian allusion.

[28] David Krause, op. cit., p. 24.

[29] Sean O'Casey in Krause, op. cit., p. 7.

[30] ibid., p. 24.

[31] ibid., p. 24.

[32] A point developed from Krause's own suggestion, op. cit., p. 25.

Conclusion: Some Reflections on the Contexts of Carnival-Nihilism.

In an early appeal for funds for the Abbey Theatre, W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn claimed that their theatre would "show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and easy sentiment, as it has been represented in the past, but the home of an ancient idealism." [1] Closer to the Gaelic nationalism of Arthur Griffith and the Gaelic League than he would later find himself, Yeats enthused over a national Theatre which would put right the gross representations of Stage Irishry perpetrated by such mid-nineteenth-century melodramatists as Dion Boucicault. Yeats and his collaborators planned to raise the aesthetic sensibilities of his audiences by "accustoming a public to the highest art that it can be led to appreciate" [2] and, in the words of the infamous 1898 manifesto drafted by Lady Gregory, by finding "an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory." [3]

In these early days of the Irish National Theatre Society, tensions between this kind of Anglo-Irish aesthetic nationalism and the increasingly political and polemical demands made upon the theatre by the Gaelic League had not become acute. It was still possible for there to be a consensus in the belief that national interests were served as fully by free artistic expression as by polemical intent. As

Hugh Hunt puts it, at this stage a national drama could be said to "express through the personal vision of the playwright the consciousness of a nation. No single ethos pervades this consciousness." [4] Yeats would not have disagreed greatly, either, with Thomas Davis's insistence that "there is a close connection between national Art and national Independence. Art is the born foe of slavery- of ignorance, or sensuality and of cowardice". [5] But, increasingly, Yeats felt the pressure from the more polemical elements of the Abbey board and its actors and audiences to project an ideological vision of Ireland as peopled by chaste wives, pious peasants and noble clerics: Irish men and women were, in this tradition, to be" depicted as morally unblemished, true patriots and virtuous wives," [6] with Sean Richards and David Cairns confirming that the "personification of Ireland as 'Woman' and 'Mother' necessitated that the purity of the image was maintained on all levels," for "'Woman' could only ever be an eternal essence beyond the physicality which suggested other, darker, demands and desires." [7]

Yeats withdrew increasingly from the demands of the Gaelic League for a theatre of this kind though it was intensely popular at the Abbey from the first production of Douglas Hyde's Twisting of the Rope. He insisted upon the artistic independence of the writer: "Truth and beauty judge and are above judgement. They justify and have no need of justification." [8] For Yeats, a writer must use historical figures as a medium for a universal expression of poetic ideals and not allow his art to be reduced to caricature by

politics. John Millington Synge, he argued, "used the Irish peasant as a means of expression, just as the painter uses the colours on his palette. His plays are the complete expression of his own soul," [9] a position unlikely to endear him to Arthur Griffiths, Douglas Hyde, James Connolly and those other nationalists who complained bitterly about the damage to Irish national pride done by the opening night of the 1903 production of Synge's Shadow of the Glen. Yeats's reply was characteristically provocative and precise:

> Literature is always personal, always one man's vision of the world, one man's experience, and it can only be popular when we are ready to welcome the visions of others.... I am a nationalist, and certain of my intimate friends have made Irish politics the business of their lives.... But if some external necessity had forced me to write nothing but drama with an obviously patriotic intention instead of letting my work shape itself under the casual impulse of dreams and daily thoughts I would have lost, in a short time, the power to write movingly upon any theme. I could have aroused opinion, but could not have touched the heart. 10

Yeats stresses here his nationalist credentials, but this is not a nationalism of organised dogma but one of personal integrity. From this point on, Yeats grew increasingly aloof and spiritual in his aesthetic ideas and in

his dealings with the Gaelic League. He began to distrust the audiences that could protest at Synge's Playboy of the Western World in their famously mob-like fashion. He had once quoted approvingly Victor Hugo's dictum that "[i]n the theatre the mob becomes a people" and the reaction to the performance on the second night of The Playboy's production at The Abbey (where the audience rioted and booed at the mention of a woman's shift') convinced him that the exact reverse could be true. [11] His notion that the nation "should be like an audience in some great theatre" now looked cruelly ironic. [12] He began to turn, by the end of this decade towards a "remote, spiritual and ideal" theatre which would be "distinguished, indirect and symbolic, having no need of mob or Press to pay its way- an aristocratic form." [13] He withdrew often into his "own world of painters, of poets, of good talkers, of ladies who delight in Ricard's portraits or Debussy's music, all those whose senses feel instantly every change in the imagination." [14]

O'Casey's theatre, though clearly naturalistic in one mode, could be seen to function as a carnivalization of the higher genres of this later Yeatsian idealism. Mikhail Bakhtin's comments regarding the 'novelization' of epic poetry are precisely relevant to the O'Casean deconstruction of the Yeatsian mythologies of Ireland:

> Alongside direct representation- laughing at living reality- there flourishes parody and travesty of all high genres and of all lofty models embodied in

> national myth. The 'absolute past' of gods, demigods and heroes is here, in parodies and even more so in travesties, 'contemporized': it is brought low, represented on a plane equal with contemporary life, in an everyday environment, in the low language of contemporaneity. 15

Mikhail Bakhtin could be describing O'Casey's work directly. The higher ideals of Yeats and even the Gaelic League itself, the 'demi-gods' of Kathleen ni Houlihan and Cuchullain, are brought low in O'Casey, brought face to face with contemporary urban realities in a process of "demolishing distance" between the remote ideal and the quotidian contemporary structures of feeling of tenement Dublin. [16] "By bringing privileged symbols and officially authorized concepts into a crudely familiar relationship with common everyday experience, Carnival achieves a transformation downward," [17] observes Michael Bristol, and this is, indeed, one part of O'Casey's intention: the denigration of the romantic nationalist poet Donal Davoren in The Shadow of a Gunman, the ridiculing of the Republican Johnny Boyle in Juno and the Paycock, the demonization of Padraig Pearse and the carrying of the tricolour into the pub in The Plough and the Stars amidst scenes of colourful and irreverent contemporary 'play' and craic, all function as reminders of "the lower levels" where "the heteroglossia of the clown sounded forth, ridiculing all 'languages' and dialects", where "there was no language-center at all, where there was to be found a lively play with the 'languages' of

poets, scholars, monks, knights and others." [18] In opposition to the literary nationalist's "task of cultural, national and political centralization of the verbal-ideological world in the higher official socio-ideological levels" of a national or mythological drama, [19] Sean O'Casey's Dublin dramas offer us a subversive and "comic-parodic reprocessing of almost all the levels of literary language, both conversational and written, that were current at the time." [20] Where, as perhaps in the Yeats of Deirdre or The Dreaming of the Bones, "everything that enters the work must immerse itself in Lethe, and forget its previous life in any other contexts," [21] in O'Casey's work this pure poetic impulse is forced into competition with heteroglossic discourses that dance, bawl and shout with gross energies and impure thoughts. If pure Yeatsian drama "strives towards a unitary language; one that is individualized merely through dramatic personae who speak it," [22] O'Casean drama is full of what Bakhtin describes as "speech diversity." [23]

Yet it would be an injustice to both O'Casey and Yeats to leave the matter there. If O'Casey was a relentless opponent of national mythologies he nevertheless shared an affinity with Yeats in his search throughout the later work for a principle with which to oppose clerical and capitalist puritanism. It is possible to view both Yeats's idealism and O'Casey's playful materialism through the optic of a common resistance to bourgeois English rationalism in which O'Casey's carnivalism complements, from a different class and ideological position, Yeats's decolonising concerns.

Seamus Deane has, in an essay carefully entitled "W. B. Yeats and the Idea of Revolution" (emphasis added) argued that Yeats was "one of that long line of European Romantic writers who combined a revolutionary aesthetic with traditionalist politics," [24] and it is interesting to explore the terms of such a revolutionary aesthetic. Far from offering the kind of narrow political points favoured by a more immediately transformative Gaelic League, Yeats's revolutionary contribution was, for Deane, to explore "the idiom of release from the manacles forged by the conspiracy between British empirical philosophy and urban industrial capitalism." [25] Yeats opposed not just the immediate political forms of colonialism but that underlying ideological world-view of English capitalist-liberalism shaped by technological materialism and empiricism:

> Locke sank into a swoon;
> The Garden died;
> God took the spinning-jenny
> Out of his side.
> **26**

For Yeats, in a typically romantic flourish, the world of organic, Celtic mystical pastoralism ("The Garden") perishes at the hand of post-Lockean capitalist rationalism, "the miracles of technology" having already "lost their aura inside the dreary frames of empiricism." [27] The counter-colonial movement for Yeats is not simply a war against a political or economic system of domination, but one against the industrial and utilitarian "ethic" [28] of imperial capitalism. This

"ethic" contains ideological and intellectual elements opposed to the spirit of the people of Ireland so that we find in Yeatsian aesthetics a riposte in the form of " a version of racial history ... which is married to a theology" of an art aesthetically opposed to the ethical domination of empiricist and utilitarian philosophy. [29]

Ireland represents for Yeats, one of the final spaces of resistance to such a philosophy, and in the kindred spirit of aristocrat and peasant, some kind of ethical opposition to English colonialism might be found, if not in political formations then at least in some of the explorations of a living art rooted in common speech patterns and structures of feeling. The theme most productive for an oppositional aesthetics was, for Yeats, the exploration of that threshold between concrete historical experience and the mythological forces that structure or inform the latter's empiricism. If there was one thing common to the men "born to pray and save" in Yeats's vision, it was their fear of and shrinkage from any contemplation of this issue. Attention to such an intractable issue offered Yeats a powerful psychological weapon in the battle against a class so hegemonic in all practical spheres. Though the empiricist petit-bourgeoisie held sway in all practical cultural matters, in the matter of metaphysics they were persuadable of their weakness and frailty to a writer bearing an "abhorrence of the neutralization of death in the middle-class consciousness." [30] The artist, in his contemplation and transcendence of the horror of mortality, offers, for Yeats, a figure of outright oppositional intensity

to bourgeois culturalism. If in capitalist cultures death has been banished to the margin of consciousness and has ceased to become a matter of any consequence, the most revolutionary writer might be considered to be he who reinscribes the matter of man's mortality at the centre of his aesthetic explorations. In a culture which has no time for death, a confrontation with its organic and metaphysical intensities might tear at the heart of such a culture's nihilism even in the moment of its near-total imperial triumph. The real enemy of English imperialism, in such an aesthetic, is not any petit-bourgeois nationalism or proletarian revolutionism, but the spectre of species-extinction conjured up by the Romantic poet. The political limitations of such a position are clear, for Yeats has little connection with any social movements which could sustain such an idea in any organised form. Indeed, the cultural organisation of such explorations already represents a form of negation of them. In this, there are clear parallels between Yeats and O'Casey, for both found themselves with an aesthetic contradictory to any possible political formation: Yeats for the reasons explored above, and O'Casey for the reason that conventional politics simply could not absorb the themes of his own carnival-nihilism.

It is often assumed that the disjunction between O'Casey's aesthetic explorations and his political views is a matter of confusion, immaturity or idiocy but my argument here is that O'Casey's theatrical politics functioned, parallel to

Yeats's, as an aesthetic opposed at all levels of form to the "dreary frames" of English empiricism and rationalism. Yeats's demand, writes Seamus Deane, "was always that Ireland should retain its culture by keeping awake its consciousness of metaphysical questions." [31] and we can add that Sean O'Casey's demand was that one should necessarily remember the socially playful nature of such a questioning. The fusion of delicate reflection with rough social play is what gives his work its special power in performance and it is when the one term of reference becomes dissociated from the other for some ideological or propagandist reason that his work becomes disjointed, ineffective and even embarrassing. It has not been generally accepted in the criticism of O'Casey, however, that the male figures of his plays produce any valuable forms of discourse at all. The men in the Dublin work are generally seen as feckless, fantasising layabouts whom the women struggle to rationalise and empirically contain. The latter activity is seen as admirable and the former scandalously wasteful, as in Raymond Williams's observation that "what is there is a feckless rush, endlessly evading and posturing, while through it one or two figures-mainly women- take the eventual burden of reality." [32] Williams speaks elsewhere of the "endless, bibulous, blathering talk" [33] of the men, contrasting it with the "intense suffering" of the women of the Dublin tenements, and it is with this conventional reading of the role of the imagination in O'Casey's work that I have tried to engage.

The aspect of O'Casey's work which most strongly

addresses his audience is not in the end the intense suffering of the women, profound though that is in Irish as in most patriarchal societies, but that suffering which is implicit though barely articulable in the hysterical activities of the men. Though the women in the Dublin plays bear empirical responsibilities esential to the survival of an oppressed culture in a real history, the men of O'Casey's Dublin bear the indignity and shame of preserving and nurturing in their social play the last feeble remains of those native structures of feeling decimated by colonial rationalism. Accustomed as we are to viewing Captain Boyle and Joxer's antics through the optic of idiocy, the delicacy of the carnivalism at the heart of Juno and the Paycock in particular, has been ignored in the consensual criticism.

This should not be surprising really, for few critics of O'Casey have experienced the life of the culture from and about which he wrote, and almost all, including the author himself at times, have succumbed to a universalisation or formalisation of his Dublin narratives into broadly humanistic terms. We must understand that we only truly approach an understanding of the universally human condition, however, through an exploration of metaphysical oppression, for it is in the exploration of the deepest and most 'personal' feelings that we discover the most complex filaments of social discourse, consciousness and feeling. In a peculiar way, the most intense 'personal' statement is always that most saturated with the manifold accentedness of social being.

O'Casey's greatest individual characters are always those who best accentuate a common structure of feeling in all its spontaneous and nuanced complexity. The excitement of the action has its roots finally in the cathexis of historical anxiety, rage and grief into figures of thrilling but self-destructive play. The feckless rush is the product of an hysterical outgrowth of a peculiarly Irish working-class metaphysics: the proletarian eucharist in which Boyle and Joxer contemplate the stars represents an historical structure of feeling at threat always from the outrageous and relentless rationalism of both political and cultural (including literary -critical) colonialism. The protest against rationalism is not uttered in that other form of rationalism, political ideology, but through the dramatisation of an anti-politics of carnivalism, an aesthetic form I take to be the expression of a surviving but desperate anti-rational and, by implication, anti-colonial metaphysics. The ambivalence of its movement arises from the fact that, in the end, despite his parodic laughter and defiance, O'Casey cannot trust his metaphysical play to the truly transformative politics of either nationalism or socialism and so its energies blacken and deepen into a mood of great despair. The intensity of the nihilism that consequently haunts the chaotic socio-visceral knockabout of these plays is a reflection of its origin in an historical loss too deep to be dwelt on for long in conscious thought.

Notes.

[1] From Lady Gregory, Our Irish Theatre (London, 1913), quoted in M. O'hAodha, Theatre in Ireland (Oxford, 1974), p. 28.

[2] Edward Martyn, "A Plea for a National Theatre in Ireland", quoted in M. O'hAodha, op. cit., p. 30.

[3] Lady Gregory, Our Irish Theatre, op. cit., p. 20.

[4] Hugh Hunt, The Abbey:Ireland's National Theatre 1904-78 (Dublin, 1979), p. 1.

[5] Thomas Davis, quoted by Hugh Hunt, op. cit., p. 11.

[6] Peter Costello, The Heart Grown Brutal (Dublin, 1977), p. 15.

[7] David Cairns and Shaun Richards, Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture (Manchester, 1988), p. 77.

[8] W. B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies (London, 1923), pp. 45-6, quoted in Una Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement (London, 1967), p. 65.

[9] W. B. Yeats, "Irish National Drama: Five Years of Progress", Cambridge Daily News, 25th May 1910, p. 2, quoted in E. H. Mikhail, ed., The Abbey Theatre: Interviews and Recollections (London, 1988), p. 99.

[10] W. B. Yeats in Seamus Deane et al., The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, II (Derry, 1991), pp. 322-23.

[11] W. B. Yeats, quoted in Una Ellis-Fermor, op. cit., p. 66.

[12] ibid., p. 66.

[13] W. B. Yeats, quoted in David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work (London, 1960), p. 96.

[14] W. B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions (London, 1961), p. 238.

[15] Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, p. 21.

[16] ibid., p. 23.

[17] Michael Bristol, Carnival and Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England. (New York, 1985), p. 22.

[18] Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, p. 273.

[19] ibid., p. 273.

[20] ibid., p. 301.

[21] ibid., p. 297.

[22] ibid., p. 405.

[23] ibid., p. 327.

[24] Seamus Deane, Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature (London, 1985), p. 38.

[25] ibid., p. 39.

[26] ibid., p. 39.

[27] ibid., p. 39.

[28] ibid., p. 39.

[29] ibid., p. 40.

[30] ibid., p. 41.

[31] ibid., p. 49.

[32] Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 163.

[33] ibid., p. 163.

Works Consulted.

1. Primary Sources Cited in Text.

a. Plays.

O'Casey, S. Collected Plays, Vol.s 1-4. London, 1967.

(Vol. 1: "The Shadow of a Gunman" (1922); "Juno and the Paycock" (1923); "The Plough and the Stars" (1925); "The End of the Beginning (1932); "A Pound on Demand" (1932).

Vol. 2: "The Silver Tassie" (1928); "Within the Gates" (1933); "The Star Turns Red" (1939).

Vol. 3: "Purple Dust" (1940); " Red Roses for Me" (1942); "Hall of Healing" (1949).

Vol. 4: "Oak Leaves and Lavender" (1944); "Cock-a-Doodle Dandy" (1947); "Bedtime Story" (1950); "Time to Go" (1949).)

---------- Five One-Act Plays. London, 1990.

("The End of the Beginning"; "A Pound on Demand"; "Hall of Healing"; "Bedtime Story"; "Time to Go".)

---------- Three Plays. London, 1980.

("Juno and the Paycock"; "The Shadow of a Gunman"; "The Plough and the Stars".)

---------- Cock-a-Doodle Dandy. Ed. David Krause. Washington D.C., 1991.

b. Prose.

O'Casey, S. Autobiographies 1. London, 1980.

("I Knock at the Door" (1939); "Pictures in the Hallway" (1942); "Drums Under the Windows" (1945).

---------- Autobiographies 2. London, 1980.

("Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well" (1949); "Rose and Crown" (1952); "Sunset and Evening Star" (1955)).

---------- The Story of the Irish Citizen Army. London and West Nyack, New York, 1980.

2. Secondary Sources.

a. Criticism of Life and Work of Sean O'Casey.

Ahrens, R. "National Myths and Stereotypes in Modern Irish Drama: Sean O'Casey, Brendan Behan, Brian Friel." Literature and Linguistics Vol. 21 (1988), pp. 89-110.

Ayling, R., ed. Sean O'Casey (Modern Judgements). London, 1970.

---------- "Character, Control and 'Alienation' in The Plough and the Stars." James Joyce Quarterly, Autumn 1970, pp. 29-47.

Cairns, D. and Shaun Richards. Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture. Manchester, 1988.

Cawosjee, S. Sean O'Casey:the Man behind the Plays. Edinburgh, 1963.

Deane, S. Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880-1980. London, 1985.

Doherty, F. "Displacing the Hero in Modern Irish Drama". Theatre Research International. Vol. 15, no. 1. Spring, 1990.

Duytschaever, J. and Lernout, G., ed.s Violence in Anglo Irish Literature. Amsterdam, 1988.

Eagleton, T. "Reply to Mulhern". New Left Review 92. July-August 1975, pp. 107-8.

Fallon, G. Sean O'Casey: The Man I Knew. London, 1965.

Goldstone, H. In Search of Community: The Achievement of Sean O'Casey. Cork and Dublin, 1972.

Greaves, C. D. Sean O'Casey: Politics and Art. London, 1979.

Harmon, M., ed. Irish University Review: Sean O'Casey: Roots and Branches Vol. 10, No 1. Spring, 1980.

Hogan, R. and Richard Burnham. The Years of O'Casey, 1921-26: A Documentary History. Cranbury, New Jersey, 1992.

Hunt, H. Sean O'Casey. Dublin, 1980.

---------- The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-78. Dublin, 1979.

Jones, N., comp. File on O'Casey (Methuen Writer-Files). London, 1986.

Kilroy, T., ed. Sean O'Casey (Twentieth-Century Views). New Jersey, 1975.

Krause, D., ed. The Letters of Sean O'Casey, Vol. 1: 1910-1941. London, 1975, and Vol. 2: 1942-54. New York, 1980.

---------- "The Paradox of Ideological Formalism: Art vs. Ideology". Massachusetts Review Vol. 28 (3), 1987, pp. 516-24.

---------- Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work. London, 1960.

---------- "Sean O'Casey" in Finneran, R. J., ed. Recent Research on Anglo-Irish Writers. New York, 1983, pp. 216-54.

---------- A Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Man: Sean O'Casey's Letters. Dublin, 1968.

Krause, D. and R. G. Lowery, ed.s. Sean O'Casey: Centenary Essays (Irish Literary Studies 7). Gerrards Cross, 1980.

Levander, M., "Sean O'Casey and Realism", Moderna Sprak 69, 1975.

Lowery, R., ed. O'Casey Annual No. 1. London, 1982.

---------- O'Casey Annual No. 2. London, 1983.

---------- O'Casey Annual No. 3. London, 1984.

Malone, M. The Plays of Sean O'Casey. Carbondale, Southern Illinois, 1970.

Margulies, M. B. The Early Life of Sean O'Casey. Dublin, 1970.

McCann, S., ed. The World of Sean O'Casey. London, 1966.

McLoughlin, T. "Violence, Disintegration and the New Vision in Sean O'Casey's Plays." Irish Quarterly Review Vol. 71 (284), 1982, pp. 344-59.

Mikhail, E. H. Sean O'Casey: a Bibliography of Criticism. London, 1972.

Mikhail, E. H. and John O'Riordan, ed.s. The Sting and the Twinkle: Conversations With Sean O'Casey. London, 1974.

Mulhern, F. "'Ideology and Literary Form': A Comment", New Left Review 91. May-June, 1975, pp. 80-88.

O'Casey, E. Sean. Ed. J. C. Trewin. London, 1971.

O'Connor, Garry. Sean O'Casey: A Life. London, 1989.

O' hAodha, M., ed. The O'Casey Enigma. Dublin, 1980.

Richards, S. "'A Question of Location': Theatrical Space and Political Choice in The Plough and the Stars". Theatre Research International, Spring, 1990, pp. 29-41.

Simmons, J. Sean O'Casey. London, 1983.

Watson, G. J., Irish Identity and the Literary Revival: Synge, Yeats, Joyce and O'Casey.. London, 1979.

Williams, R. Drama from Ibsen to Brecht. Harmondsworth, 1973.

b. Historical, Theoretical and Reference Works.

Adorno, T. Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life. London, 1974.

Adorno, T. et. al. Aesthetics and Politics. London, 1977.

Althusser, L. For Marx. London, 1977.

Archibald, A. Yeats. Syracuse, 1986.

Ashcroft, B. et. al. The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures. London, 1989.

Bakhtin, M. The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays, ed. M. Holquist, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin, Texas, 1981.

---------- Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (Theory and History

of Literature, Vol. 8). Ed and trans., C. Emerson. Manchester, 1984.

---------- Rabelais and His World. Trans. H. Iswolsky. Indiana, 1984.

Bakhtin, M. et. al. Bakhtin School Papers (Russian Poetics in Translation 10.) Ed. A. Shukman. Oxford, 1983.

Bakhtin, M. and P. N. Medvedev. The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics. Trans. A. J. Wehrle. Harvard, 1985.

Bigsby, C. Joe Orton. London, 1982.

Bristol, M. Carnival and Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England. New York, 1985.

Brown, T. Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-79. London, 1981.

Caillois, R. Man, Play and Games. London, 1982.

Connolly, J. Selected Writings. Ed. P. Berresford Ellis. Harmondsworth, 1973.

Costello, P. The Heart Grown Brutal. Dublin, 1977.

Deane, S. A Short History of Irish Literature. London, 1986.

Deane, S. et. al. The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing II. Derry, 1991.

Eagleton, T. Ideology: An Introduction. London, 1991.

---------- Walter Benjamin, or: Towards A Revolutionary Criticism. London, 1981.

Edwards, O. D. and F. Pyle, ed.s 1916: The Easter Rising. London, 1968.

Ellmann, R. The Identity of Yeats. Oxford, 1954.

Ellis-Fermor, U. The Irish Dramatic Movement. London, 1967.

Fallis, R. The Irish Renaissance. Syracuse, 1977.

Fanon, F. The Wretched of the Earth. Harmondsworth, 1983.

Foster, J. W. Colonial Consequences: Essays in Irish Literature and Culture. Dublin, 1991.

Heron, J. C. The Words of James Connolly. Dublin, 1986.

Huizinga, J. Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture. London, 1970.

Jauss, H. R. Toward an Aesthetic of Reception (Theory and History of Literature Vol. 2). Trans. T. Bahti. Intro. Paul de Man. Brighton, 1982.

Lyons, F. S. L. Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890-1939. Oxford, 1979.

---------- Ireland Since the Famine. New York, 1971.

McCann, S. The Story of the Abbey Theatre. London, 1967.

Nandy, A. The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism. Oxford, 1983.

Nathan, G. J., Five Great Modern Plays. New York, 1950.

O'Brien, C. C. States of Ireland. New York, 1972.

O'Driscoll, R., ed. Theatre and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Ireland. London, 1971.

O'Faolain, S. The Irish: An Exploration of a People and Their Culture. Harmondsworth, 1980.

Ransom, B. James Connolly's Marxism. London, 1980.

Tawney, R. H. Religion and the Rise of Capitalism. Harmondsworth, 1938.

Todorov, T. Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle. Minnesota, 1984.

Ure, P. Yeats the Playwright: A Commentary on Character and Design in the Major Plays. London, 1963.

Williams, R. Culture. London, 1981.

---------- Marxism and Literature. Oxford, 1977.

---------- Problems in Materialism and Culture. London, 1980.

Worth, K. The Irish Drama in Europe from Yeats to Beckett. London, 1978.

Yeats, W. B. Autobiographies. London, 1961.

---------- Essays and Introductions. London, 1961.

---------- Plays and Controversies. London, 1923.

Yeats, W. B. Selected Plays. Ed. A. N. Jeffares. London, 1991.

---------- Selected Poetry. London, 1974.