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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Roy W. Mehaffey entitled "The Four Late Comedies of Sean O'Casey." I recommend that it be accepted for nine quarter hours of credit in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Speech and Theatre Arts.

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THE FOUR LATE COMEDIES OF SEAN O'CASEY

"The Four Late Comedies of Sean O'Casey" investigates the varying types of comedy treatment in four of O'Casey's late plays. Three comedies, Purple Dust, Cock-a-doodle Do!, The Plough and the Stars, and The Drums of Father Ned, are examples of O'Casey's later writing, which ranges from farce to symbolic fantasy.

A Thesis

Presented to
the Graduate Council of
The University of Tennessee
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
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by
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ABSTRACT

"The Four Late Comedies of Sean O'Casey" investigates the varying types of comedy treatment in four of O'Casey's late plays. These comedies, Purple Dust, Cock-a-doodle Dandy, The Bishop's Bonfire, and The Drums of Father Ned, are examples of O'Casey's later writing, which ranges from farce to symbolic fantasy.

Data for this study was gathered through the study of the above-mentioned plays, and the research of secondary sources, such as biographies on and critical texts about O'Casey and his works. The University of Tennessee Graduate Library was used as the resource center for this study.

The four comedies reveal many different dramatic techniques, such as melodrama, farce, fantasy, and symbolism. The structure of each play, with the exception of Purple Dust, leaves something to be desired as the action meanders in no set pattern. Youth triumphant over age is a common theme in each of the plays as O'Casey attempts to point out the repressiveness of tradition and orthodox religion. The use of symbolism ranges from very little in Purple Dust to very extensive in Father Ned, which is a symbolic allegory.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO SEAN O'CASEY'S DRAMATIC WRITING

I. BACKGROUND

This thesis is concerned with the four late comedies of Sean O'Casey: Purple Dust, Cock-a-doodle Dandy, The Bishop's Bonfire, and The Drums of Father Ned. These comedies, representatives of O'Casey's later writing, indicate varying types of comedy treatment. They range from farce in Purple Dust to the fantastic in Cock-a-doodle Dandy. The first chapter presents a general introduction to O'Casey's life and his works, and subsequent chapters will deal with the specific plays. Basic themes in Sean O'Casey's plays concern Ireland and Irish character, and the man and his work are best understood if they are related to the time and place in which he lived. Let us, therefore, discuss first the environment which influenced O'Casey's writing.

Following the Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland in the twelfth century, the Irish made many attempts to achieve Home Rule. Charles Stewart Parnell was one of the most popular modern leaders in such a movement that came close to achieving success. All of Ireland revered Parnell

as its savior. In I Knock at the Door, the first of O'Casey's six autobiographies, he describes the feeling of Irishmen toward Parnell. The occasion is O'Casey's mother returning home in a cab from the hospital with her second baby boy who had just died. The cab became blocked by cheering crowds, and O'Casey describes the scene as follows:

--We'll have to go a roundabout way, he said, or wait here till God knows when, for a fly couldn't get through a crowd like this, much less an animal like a horse. They're bringing Charlie Stewart Parnell to the Rotunda with bands and banners, where he's to speak on the furtherance of Home Rule for Ireland. That band knows how to rattle out The Green Above the Red, I'm telling you. They've the best belly-drummer in the whole bloody country. My God Almighty, looka the way that fella's twirlin' the sticks. He's nothin' short of a genius at it.

Then she heard a rolling roar of cheers breaking out that held on for many minutes, the cab-driver waving his hat, and yelling out a fierce and excited approbation.

--That's Parnell himself that's passed, he said, when the cheering had subsided, Ireland's greatest son. I'd sell me hat, I'd sell he horse an' me cab, I'd sell meself for him, be Jasus, I'd nearly sell me sould, if he beckoned me to do it. He's the boyo'll make her ladyship, Victoria, sit up on her bloody throne, an' look round a little, an' wondher what's happenin'.¹

¹ Sean O'Casey, Mirror in My House (New York), vol. 1, p. 11. I Knock at the Door is a separate autobiography in the complete collection entitled Mirror in My House.

Parnell died in 1891, and for a few years after his death there was a lull in political activity. In this period the nation's spirit expressed itself in a renaissance of Irish literature.

In 1898, William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory, and others founded the Irish Literary Theatre. In 1902, they joined with a group of amateur actors, headed by Frank and William G. Fay, and established the Irish National Theatre Society. Because she was impressed with this movement, Miss A. E. F. Horniman, an English Quaker, bought the Mechanics' Institute in Dublin in 1904, converted it into a theatre, and gave the use of it to the Society. At this time the Irish Literary Theatre became known as the Abbey Theatre.

The old Mechanics' Institute, which had been situated on Capel Street, acquired the site of the burned-out Theatre Royal Opera House on Abbey Street. The Institute, because of low finances, became almost derelict; however, Miss Horniman spent about 1300 pounds on alterations when she acquired the property for the Theatre Society. In 1905 she bought some stables next to the building and converted them into the green-room, the office, a small wardrobe-room, and a rehearsal-room. Later Miss Horniman converted other stables into a large scene-dock, a paint-room, six

dressings-rooms, and a workshop. The Abbey opened on December 27, 1904, and proved to be a famous institution in the theatre world.

During the period of the founding of the Abbey the Irish Republican Brotherhood was working for separation from England and the creation of an Irish Republic. In 1910 an organization called Sinn Fein ("We Ourselves") adopted the same policy.² The Irish Nationalist Party, a third political party, wanted to have Home Rule but remain within the British Empire. Other political groups were the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, an unskilled workers' trade union--founded by James Larkin and James Connolly--which fought for higher wages; and the Unionist Party in Ulster, predominantly Protestant and hostile to both Republican and Home Rule policies. When the British government sponsored the Bill for Irish Home Rule in 1912, the Unionists organized a large army known as the Ulster Volunteers to oppose independence. Then, in 1913, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union recruited the Irish Citizen Army, and in 1914 Sinn Fein

² William A. Armstrong, Sean O'Casey (London), p. 6.

³ Ibid., p. 7.

formed an army known as the Irish Volunteers. The two armies proclaimed the establishment of the Irish Republic on Easter Sunday, 1916, and held the Dublin Post Office before being overrun by the British. The execution of the leaders of the Easter Rising intensified public feeling against the English and toward the separatist policy of the Sinn Fein.

The Irish Republican Army used guerrilla tactics against the special police force of England, nicknamed "Black and Tans" by the Irish because they wore khaki coats, black trousers, and black caps.³ In 1921 Lloyd George made a treaty with Dail Eireann, the legislative assembly of the Sinn Fein, which gave Home Rule to the newly-formed "Irish Free State;" however, it did not include the six counties of Ulster, which have remained within the United Kingdom as "Northern Ireland." Republican Irishmen regarded this agreement as a betrayal, and from 1922 to 1923 they fought a bitter civil war with the pro-treaty government of the Free State, which was victorious.

A general idea of the political struggles described above is useful to an understanding of O'Casey's last four comedies. For example, the hostility of the Irish toward

³ Ibid., p. 7.

the English portrayed in Purple Dust will now better be understood, as well as the feelings of the free Irish toward Ulster, as indicated in The Drums of Father Ned. Irish politics figure to some extent in the late comedies, and we can better understand the role of the Black and Tans in Father Ned through a knowledge of such politics.

Certainly, whether or not O'Casey uttered a truism when he stated that "the main element in any play is the author," his own background and experience play a vital role in the conception and execution of his literary works. . . .⁴

II. O'CASEY'S EARLY LIFE

Sean O'Casey was born on March 30, 1880, at 85 Upper Dorset Street in Dublin.⁵ He was christened John, and his surname was Casey. In his twenties he learned the Irish language, became interested in the cause of Irish freedom, and gaelicized his name to Sean O'Cathasaigh. When the Abbey Theatre accepted his first play, he anglicized his surname to O'Casey.⁶ He was the last of thirteen children,

⁴ Jules Koslow, The Green and the Red (New York), p. 19.

⁵ William A. Armstrong in his book, Sean O'Casey, gives the date and place as March 31, 1880, Lower Dorset Street.

⁶ David Krause, Sean O'Casey, The Man and His Work (New York), p. 1.

eight of whom had died in infancy. His family lived in a poor section of town, and O'Casey had only three years of formal schooling. At fourteen he began to work for three shillings and sixpence a week. During his later 'teens he lived in a two-room tenement at 18 Abercorn Road and made friends with the Rev. E. M. Griffen, the Protestant rector of the church of St. Barnabas. Through him O'Casey became well-read in the idioms and imagery of the Bible.

Sean's father, Michael, although born of Catholic parents, had been brought up as a Protestant and knew the Bible well. Michael often expressed his opinion that Popery was repugnant to the plain words of the Scripture and that there need be no middleman between man and God. Sean learned intolerance for the Catholic Church, the main denomination in Ireland, from his father. Sean also had unpleasant experiences with the Church.

For example, when he was about eight years old, his eyes began to pain him from a recurring ulcer in the cornea. Although the doctors strictly ordered Sean to stay at home, the rector of his parish, the Rev. T. R. S. Hunter, forced him to attend both church and school; such attendance led at one point to a severe bronchial attack. Mr. Hunter and other members of the Church staff were very hypocritical

toward Sean; they would smile and fawn over him inside the church and then turn him out to walk home in driving rains.

Sean also had unpleasant experiences in school.

Once, while he was keeping an eye out for the school-teacher, "oul Slogan," as Georgie Middleton and a few others gambled, Slogan caught them all. Leaving the bigger boys to be punished according to their consciences (Slogan had heard them say that they would break his skull if he ever attempted to cane them), he picked out Johnny, mercilessly caned him and made him stand on a chair facing the class. But when Slogan's head was bent in prayer, Johnny slipped down, picked up the heavy ebony ruler and brought it down with all his force on the bald head of the teacher, and fled. Johnny's mother firmly turned down Mr. Hunter's proposition that Johnny should present himself the following morning at school for a sound thrashing. With that Johnny's schooling came to an end; in all it had lasted for about three years.

This incident is of particular significance, not simply because it deprived him of an opportunity of primary education, but because it was the first of the many instances of injustice he was to face in life. And his answer to every injustice that befell him later had some semblance to the blow he had dealt at Slogan's head. He had seen through the hypocrisy of the Church and its ministers, and was to voice his thanksgiving some forty years later.⁷

When Sean's father died suddenly of a spinal injury at

⁷ Saros Cowasjee, Sean O'Casey, The Man Behind the Plays (Edinburgh), p. 3.

the age of 49, the rest of the family was reduced to poverty and low life. The squalor of the tenements was a crucial experience in O'Casey's life. Infectious diseases and malnutrition were the main causes of an abnormally high infant mortality rate late in the nineteenth century in Dublin, and young O'Casey contracted an extremely painful chronic eye disease. He was forced to avoid all forms of strong light, and spent much time hiding and moaning in dark corners. In his autobiography he describes the disease.

When he was five, his mother noticed a look of torment in his eyes. They harboured a hot and torturing pain that made him rub them vigorously, and cry long and wonderingly in the sunny hours of the day and through the long dark hours of the night. Small, hardy, shiny, pearly specks appeared on the balls of his eyes. He began to dread the light; to keep his eyes closed; to sit and moan restlessly in the darkest places he could find. For many weeks life became a place of gloom, streaked with constant flashes of pain. They folded a big white handkerchief into a bandage, and wound it round his head, like a turban, to guard his eyes from the touch of whatever sunlight tottered in through the little windows of the little house.⁸

These early years of pain and isolation scarred both mind and body of the young boy.

⁸ O'Casey, Mirror in My House (New York), vol. 1, p. 16.

There was another influence along with tenement life on young O'Casey. This was the labor leader Jim Larkin, called the "Uncrowned King" of the Dublin working class.⁹ He was a revolutionary angered by the social and political conditions described above and by the miseries of the exploited poor people. Larkin launched a fight to improve living standards by preaching what was known as "the divine mission of discontent." This was to be a significant phrase for O'Casey.

All life functions, including birth and death, were carried on in one room in the tenement houses. Many seven-or-eight-room houses had an average of over fifty people in a house. Generally the only water supply was furnished by a single faucet in the yard. The toilet, usually broken, was either in the yard or a rat-infested basement. In later years O'Casey described life in the tenements.

Then, where we lived, with thousands of others, the garbage of the ashpit with the filth from the jakes was tumbled into big wicker baskets that were carried on the backs of men whose clothing had been soaked

⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

in the filth from a hundred homes; carried out from the tiny back yards, through the kitchen living-room, out by the hall, dumped in a horrid heap on the street outside, and left there, streaming out stench and venom, for a day, for two days, maybe for three, till open carts, sodden as the men who led the sodden horses, came to take the steaming mass away, leaving an odour in the narrow street that lingered till the wind and the rain carried trace and memory far into outer space or into the heaving sea. Hardly a one is left living now to remember how this was done, or the work remaining behind for the women to purify hall and kitchen so that the feet felt no crunching of the filth beneath them, and the sour and suffocating smell no longer blenched the nostrils.¹⁰

It was in such conditions that Jim Larkin played a part. He organized unskilled workers in his Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and brought a militant, hopeful spirit to the people. O'Casey became an active member of the union and served as one of Larkin's assistants during the 1913 strike. Like O'Casey, Larkin had lived through great hardships and carried on a personal campaign against unfair working conditions. These conflicts between labor and management also left a mark on O'Casey. Since he had been exposed to ideas of men like Larkin, Connolly, and Ryan, it is significant that his first published article, "Sound the Loud Trumpets," was published in Ryan's Irish

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

Nation; he also wrote a number of articles for the Irish Worker, a union paper edited by Larkin.¹¹

III. EARLY WRITINGS

In 1918 O'Casey had his first major work published by Fergus O'Connor, a small Dublin publisher of greeting cards, song books, and political literature. O'Connor bought a booklet of songs O'Casey had written to amuse his friends; it was titled Songs of the Wren: Humorous and Sentimental, by Sean O'Cathasaigh (Author of 'The Grand Oul' Dame Brittaina.')¹² Though this was not published for money, O'Casey was paid five pounds for the full copyright by the publishers.¹³ During the same year O'Connor also published O'Casey's first book, a short dramatic narrative of Thomas Ashe, a martyr of the Easter Rising. Published first as The Story of Thomas Ashe, it was expanded in a second edition called The Sacrifice of Thomas Ashe. The book

¹¹ Ibid., p. 18.

¹² Ibid., p. 28.

¹³ Cowasjee, p. 20.

stressed that Ashe was a martyred hero of Irish labor and nationalism. The following passage from the book is a typical example of O'Casey's early fiery writing:

Oppression of the Bloody Hands, you cannot put a rope around the neck of an idea; you cannot put an idea up against a barrack-square wall and riddle it with bullets; you cannot confine it in the strongest prison that all your slaves could ever build.

Thomas Ashe's body, today, is covered with Irish mould, but his principles are surging into a stronger life within the minds of the Irish Proletariat, the Irish Scholar, and the Irish Worker. Death has won a poor victory! Labour has lost a champion; Irish-Ireland has lost a son; Militant Ireland has lost a soldier; but all have gained a mighty and enduring inspiration. Ashe died that human liberty might be vindicated and that Ireland might live.¹⁴

Soon after the publication of this book, O'Casey was contracted to write a short history of the Citizen Army. His second book, Story of the Irish Citizen Army, was a first-hand account of the organization and activities of the Citizen Army up to the 1916 Rising. This was his first book written for money, and brought him fifteen pounds from the publisher.¹⁵ The same dramatic flair was true of this book as was true of the first. An example is the following description of Jim Larkin addressing a mass meeting at union headquarters at Liberty Hall.

¹⁴ O'Casey, Mirror in My House, vol. 1, p. 31.

¹⁵ Cowasjee, p. 20.

Suddenly the window is raised, and the tense, anxious feelings of the men crowded together burst out into an enthusiastic and full-throated cheer that shatters the surrounding air, and sends up into the skies a screaming flock of gulls that had been peacefully drifting along the sombre surface of the River Liffey. Louder still swells the resonant shout as Jim Larkin appears at the window, with an animated flush of human pride on his strong and rugged face, as he brushes back from his broad forehead the waving tufts of dark hair that are here and there silvered by the mellowing influence of Time and the inexorable force of issuing energy from the human structure. Again the cheers ring out, and Larkin quietly waits till the effort to demonstrate their confidence and affection will give place to the lustful desire to hear what he has to say to them, while hidden under the heavy shadows of the towering Custom House a darker column of massive constables instinctively finger their belts, and silently caress the ever-ready club that swings jauntily over each man's broad, expansive hip.¹⁶

Such early writings foreshadowed O'Casey's later dramatic genius.

IV. ASSOCIATION WITH ABBEY THEATRE

Most of O'Casey's early work consisted of occasional verse or prose: letters, articles, satirical stories and poems, a lament for Thomas Ashe, and an account of the Irish Citizen Army. O'Casey's first printed play was The Robe

¹⁶ O'Casey, Mirror in My House, vol. 1, p. 33.

of Rosheen, a fantasy, and was published in a Republican weekly called The Plain People.¹⁷ Cowasjee says,

Several searches have been made for it, but so far it has not been found. O'Casey in his letter to me says that he "cannot recall the manner and mind of it" except that it "was written in a vain effort to persuade against the Irish Civil War--the rending of Rosheen's Robe."¹⁸

Although no date has ever definitely been found for this play, it could possibly be 1911. Armstrong mentions that

O'Casey had written a short play in 1911, but he did not become seriously interested in drama as a medium until he became disillusioned with the principal parties in Irish politics.¹⁹

By the time O'Casey was forty, he had written three plays: The Frost in the Flower, The Harvest Festival, and The Crimson and the Tri-Colour; all were sent to the Abbey Theatre and all were rejected. However, in 1923 he sent a fourth play to the Abbey, which was immediately accepted with no revisions, except for the title, which was changed from On the Run to The Shadow of a Gunman.

From one standpoint The Shadow of a Gunman was a very topical and autobiographical play. During the conflict

A year later the Abbey produced O'Casey's Juno and the

¹⁷ Cowasjee, p. 25.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁹ Armstrong, p. 10.

between Sinn Fein and the Black and Tans, O'Casey took lodgings with a friend at tenement 35 Mountjoy Square. The neighbors assumed that he was a patriot taking cover. Soon afterward, the Black and Tans raided and destroyed the house and arrested a man who had been hiding bombs in the backyard. The play shows a poet, Donal Davoren, staying with a friend in a tenement in "Hilljoy Square, Dublin," and being mistaken for a gunman on the run.²⁰ The play realistically portrays other topical matters such as curfew restrictions, the brutality of the Black and Tans, and quarrels among inhabitants of the overcrowded Dublin slums. It proved to be a very popular play.

There was original invention in the play, especially good counter-balance between comedy and tragedy, and broad laughter took some of the sharpness off the indignation. Most Abbey productions ran at least a week, but with an unknown playwright the directors decided to give the play a three-day trial at the end of the season. On the final night the Abbey was sold out, the first time in its history. A year later the Abbey produced O'Casey's Juno and the

²⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

Paycock, which was extended two weeks, the first time in Abbey history a play had been extended. Also, for the first time, many people were turned away. At the time O'Casey was still working as a common laborer, but after Juno's success he gave up that job and tried to write for a living. He was forty-four years old when his association with the Abbey Theatre began in earnest.

Besides The Shadow of a Gunman in 1923 and Juno and the Paycock in 1924, O'Casey, during the same period, had two one-act plays produced at the Abbey: Kathleen Listens In (1923), and Nannie's Night Out (1924).²¹ The former play was sent to the Abbey with another one-act, The Cooing of Doves, which was rejected. The Cooing of Doves later became the second act of The Plough and the Stars.²² By 1926 the Abbey Theatre and O'Casey were deeply indebted to each other. The Abbey helped him discover and develop his genius by staging his plays; O'Casey revived the fortunes of the Theatre when they were failing. There had already been strained relationships by 1926, however.

²¹ Krause, p. 19.

²² Cowasjee, p. 26.

In 1926 O'Casey wrote The Plough and the Stars, one of his masterpieces. David Krause called it a genuine Irish theatrical triumph, greeted with shouts of blasphemy and obscenity, flying objects and fists, and finally the arrival of the police in the Abbey Theatre.²³

The play exposed the three strong Irish taboos--religion, sex, and patriotism. It defended victims in tenements, brought the sacred Republican flag into a pub, and portrayed an Irish girl as a prostitute. The play revealed Ireland as it really was, and the audience would not accept it. On the fourth night after opening, the show was completely stopped by a full-scale riot. The audience threw vegetables, shoes, chairs, and stench bombs at the stage, and a group jumped on the stage to fight with the actors. The police were called to restore order. Yeats, Director of the Abbey, made the following speech, as recorded the next day in the newspapers:

You have disgraced yourselves again. Is this to be an ever-recurring celebration of the arrival of Irish genius? Synge first and then O'Casey. The news of

²³ Krause, p. 37.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

the happenings of the past few minutes will go from country to country. Dublin has once more rocked the cradle of genius. From such a scene in this theatre went forth the fame of Synge. Equally the fame of O'Casey is born here tonight. This is his apotheosis.²⁴

There was also an uproar among the personnel of the theatre. Two members of the board of directors strongly objected to the play; its language was too strong and indecent, one love scene was too passionate, and an Irish girl as a prostitute was impossible. During rehearsals actors wanted to change or omit objectionable lines, and some refused to say their lines. All these difficulties, public and private, alienated O'Casey. Years later the writer Sean O'Faolain wrote about this period of O'Casey's life.

"Sean O'Casey's plays are thus 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. We must, finally, understand that the class that thus came to power and influence was not a labouring class; the more able among them changed their nature by changing their place in life--they graduated rapidly into petit bourgeois, middle-men, importers, small manufacturers, thus forming a new middle class to fill the vacuum formed by the departure or depression of the alien middle class. These men, naturally, had had very little education and could have only a slight interest in the intellectuals' fight for liberty of expression. They were ordinary, decent, kindly self-seeking men who had no intention of jeopardizing their mushroom-prosperity by gratuitous displays of moral

²⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

courage. In any case, since they were rising to sudden wealth behind protective tariff-walls they had a vested interest in nationalism and even in isolationism. The upshot of it was a holy alliance between the Church, the new businessmen, and the politicians, all three nationalist-isolationist, for, respectively, moral reasons, commercial reasons, and politico-patriotic reasons. The intellectuals became a depressed group. Possibly they were also infected by the atmosphere around them. When patriotism starts to cash in it is enough to sicken anyone."²⁵

Six weeks after The Plough riots O'Casey discovered that Juno and the Paycock had won the Hawthornden Prize, an award for the best work of the previous year by a new writer. He went to London to accept the award and there met such men as Bernard Shaw and Augustus John. In April he took up residence in London in order to escape the turbulent situation in Ireland.

When O'Casey left for London on March 5, 1926, he did not intend to leave Dublin forever. In London, however, he fell in love with a beautiful Irish actress, Eileen Carey, and married her in 1927. During that same year he wrote The Silver Tassie and sent it to the Abbey Theatre in 1928. It was rejected, and O'Casey was bitterly disappointed. In 1929 he had a bitter fight with the Abbey about the

²⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

²⁶ Armstrong, p. 18.

²⁷ Cowan-Jones, p. 88.

performing rights of Juno and The Plough in Ireland. He then separated himself from all Irish national movements, and from that point on he regarded himself "as 'a voluntary and settled exile from every creed, from every party, and from every literary clique' in his native land."²⁶

V. THE SILVER TASSIE CONTROVERSY

The widely publicized controversy over the rejection of O'Casey's first expressionist play was perhaps the most crucial factor influencing his development as a dramatist. Some of the most important factors in O'Casey's early success as a dramatist were his acute insight into his characters, a first-hand knowledge and detestation of the Dublin slums, and the determination to be a great dramatist. O'Casey's strongest point in his early career was characterization. Cowasjee cites the following from a letter which O'Casey wrote to Lady Gregory:

I owe a great deal to you and Mr. Yeats and Mr. Robinson, but to you above all. You gave me encouragement. And it was you who said to me upstairs in the office--I could show you the very spot where you stood--"Mr. Casey, your gift is characterization." And so I threw over my theories and worked at characters and this is the result.²⁷

²⁶ Armstrong, p. 18.

²⁷ Cowasjee, p. 88.

After O'Casey exiled himself, he lost contact with those characters among whom he had lived, and whose portrayal made him famous. It would seem, therefore, that he may have lost some of his force as a highly personal writer. If he had stayed with the Abbey, he would probably have continued writing the slum plays which brought him his initial fame.

The chief significance of the Tassie's rejection was that after O'Casey's break, the Abbey went into a decline from which it never recovered, and O'Casey became an experimental playwright. The first two acts of the Tassie were evidently good, but the last two were not. Perhaps the best way to show how the Abbey directors felt about the play is to quote the following statement from Yeats' letter of rejection.

I read the first act with admiration, I thought it was the best first act you had written, and told a friend you had surpassed yourself. The next night I read the second and third acts, and tonight I have read the fourth. I am sad and discouraged; you have no subject. . . . there is no dominating character, no dominating action, neither psychological unity nor unity of action.²⁸

²⁸ Robert Goode Hogan, The Experiments of Sean O'Casey (New York), p. 188.

Yeats' rejection caused the greatest literary uproar of the year. O'Casey took the play to producer C. B. Cochran; it was staged brilliantly and made a handsome profit by the uproar. O'Casey wrote a blistering personal reply to Yeats. He defended his play by giving good counter-points of his own.

Lady Gregory was perhaps the only one of the Abbey directors to sympathize with O'Casey. Starkie, the Trinity College professor who was the government representative on the Board, gave this belated report of his opinion:

In The Silver Tassie the characters seem to come from a shadow world; they are not beings of flesh and blood. . . I feel that the author had a great idea at the back of his mind and fugitive symbols presented themselves to him but he was not able to create as he did before, living men and women. The play seems to me to decline act by act from the beginning. . . . In spite of all this I feel that the author is experimenting in a new world of drama; for this reason I feel strongly that the Abbey Theatre should produce the play. Sean O'Casey has given us so many fine works that we ought to leave the final decision with the audience that has laughed and wept with him. He is groping after a new drama outside the conventional stage; at any moment he may make a new discovery.²⁹

The dispute aroused the attention of George Bernard Shaw, who wrote to Lady Gregory:

²⁹ Ibid., p. 197.

Why do you and W. B. Y. treat O'Casey as a baby? Starkie was right, you should have done the play anyhow. Sean is now hors concours. It is literally a hell of a play; but it will clearly force its way on to the stage and Yeats should have submitted to it as a clamity imposed on him by the Act of God, if he could not welcome it as another Juno.³⁰

The basic conflict underlying the controversy was Yeats' experiments with new forms of drama. From its beginning the Abbey Theatre was conceived as an experimental art theatre. Yeats expressed such in a statement of principles drawn up in 1898.

We propose to have performed in Dublin, in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed.³¹

Only partially in accord with these principles, Yeats discovered the Japanese ritualistic Noh play, a ceremonial

³⁰ Ibid., p. 198.

³¹ Krause, p. 95.

³² Ibid., p. 97.

³³ Ibid., p. 96.

form of drama of religious rituals originally performed by young nobles and princes in honor of Shinto shrines. He began experimenting with this form and regretted he had not discovered it sooner. Yeats said,

My blunder has been that I did not discover in my youth that my theatre must be the ancient theatre that can be made by unrolling a carpet or marking out a place with a stick, or setting a scene against a wall.³²

Yeats had created his own private vision of theatre. In 1899, in an essay called "The Theatre," he had written:

We must make a theatre for ourselves and our friends; and for a few simple people who understand from sheer simplicity what we understand from scholarship and thought. We have planned the Irish Literary Theatre with this hospitable emotion, and that the right people may find out about us, we hope to act a play or two in the spring of every year; and that the right people may escape the stupefying memory of the theatre of commerce which clings even to them, our plays will be for the most part, remote, spiritual, and ideal.³³

The Noh plays were performed before small court audiences and were as remote, spiritual, and ideal as any art form could be. They consisted of formalized diction, symbolic gestures, masks, dances, choruses, and music of primitive string and percussion instruments.

³² Ibid., p. 97.

³³ Ibid., p. 96.

In the light of this experiment Yeats rejected O'Casey. Apparently Yeats found it difficult to accept O'Casey's use of expressionism, since for Yeats the Noh play had become the accepted form of drama.

. . . he [Yeats] appeared to be offering O'Casey an alternative: he could go on writing realistic plays like his first three works; or, if he must experiment with new forms, he could do so providing he wrote plays that were 'remote, spiritual, and ideal.' But O'Casey was not content to repeat the mixture as before, and Noh drama was not his porridge.³⁴

O'Casey was familiar with the expressionistic plays of Strindberg, Toller, and O'Neill, and he used a symbolic method of projecting a battleground on the stage. O'Casey was confident that he had written a universal anti-war play in a new, exciting, experimental technique. When it was rejected, he felt that the Abbey was denying him his right to experiment. This seemed especially ironic since Yeats was experimenting. Lennox Robinson, an Abbey director, wrote Lady Gregory, "I'm glad he's groping towards a new manner. . . he couldn't go on writing slum plays forever and ever."³⁵ Robinson had one important reservation, however;

³⁴ Ibid., p. 98.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 100.

I don't think the mixture of the two manners--the realism of the first act and the unrealism of the second--succeeds, the characters who were Dublin slum in the beginning of the play end by being of nowhere.³⁶

The rejection was unfortunate, especially since Yeats' talent was mainly lyrical and not dramatic. None of the directors, for that matter, were really competent to judge. Starkie, for example, had never even written a play. After the break with the Abbey, O'Casey went on to use expressionism and symbolism in Within The Gates. He used such techniques in his later plays, although he never used any dramatic form exclusively.

Through the years since the rejection of The Silver Tassie, O'Casey moved with a changing world and went on to exciting if not always successful experiments with each new play, but the Abbey marked time as a conservative national theatre, disinclined to experiment with new techniques of writing and staging and acting, content to go on producing mediocre plays in the worn-out mould of kitchen-comedy realism.³⁷

VI. OTHER WORKS BY O'CASEY

Other plays written by O'Casey include The Star Turns

³⁶ Ibid., p. 100.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 123.

Red (1940), Red Roses For Me (1943), Purple Dust (1945),
Oak Leaves and Lavender (1946), Cock-a-doodle Dandy (1949),
The Bishop's Bonfire (1958), and The Drums of Father Ned
 (1958).³⁸

After the plays, O'Casey's most important writings are six autobiographical volumes published between 1939 and 1954. The first four autobiographies, I Knock at the Door, Pictures in the Hallway, Drums Under the Windows, and Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well tell of his personal struggle as well as Ireland's struggle for liberation. In these writings some source material is found for The Shadow of a Gunman, Nannie's Night Out, Juno and the Paycock, The Plough and the Stars, The End of the Beginning, Red Roses for Me, Hall of Healing, Oak Leaves and Lavender, and Time to Go. In Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well there is an account of O'Casey's "lost" plays: The Frost in the Flower, The Harvest Festival, The Crimson in the Tricolour, and The Robe of Rosheen.³⁹

The last two autobiographies, Rose and Crown, and

³⁸ Robinson, p. 121.

³⁹ Armstrong, p. 32.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Sunset and Evening Star, deal with his life and ideas after he settled in England. Sunset and Evening Star was written ten years before he died at the age of eighty-four in a Torquay nursing-home on September 20, 1964. As he lived, so he died. O'Casey says of himself,

"Here, with whitened hair, desires failing, strength ebbing out of him, with the sun gone down, and with only the serenity and the calm warning of the evening star left to him, he drank to Life, to all it had been, to what it was, to what it would be. Hurrah!"⁴⁰

O'Casey also affirmed that he was essentially an Irishman, even though he had left his native land. In The Green Crow he said,

"I know the mind of Ireland because I am within it; I know the heart of Ireland because I am one of its corners; I know the five senses of Ireland because I am within them and they are within me; they bid me look, and when I look, I see; they bid me listen, and when I listen, I hear."⁴¹

As Armstrong aptly put it:

Living intensely in an age of cataclysmic destruction, O'Casey sought a principle of hope and joy, and his quest succeeded most when it was directed by intuitions of Ireland's needs and Ireland's better self.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 34.

⁴² Ibid., p. 34.

It was mentioned above that O'Casey developed an intolerance for the Catholic Church while he was still a boy. This intolerance is revealed in satiric attacks against the Church in the four late comedies which this thesis will treat. The four comedies also reveal varying types of comedy treatment. In these four late comedies, Purple Dust, Cock-a-doodle Dandy, The Bishop's Bonfire, and The Drums of Father Ned, O'Casey used a wide range of dramatic modes, including farce, fantasy, melodrama, and symbolism. His early tragi-comedies used a form of anti-heroic irony to mock national faults while affirming a faith in the Irish people. In his late comedies he used satire and fantasy for protest against the Church in particular and traditions in general. Krause states that,

Now he had set out to unify a variety of comic experiences--comedy of humours and errors, comedy of satire and the music hall, comedy of fantasy and the circus. These diverse elements of the comic spirit are brilliantly united in Purple Dust and Cock-a-doodle Dandy, and they are handled with varying degrees of success in the other two plays. All the plays take place in "imaginary" Irish villages, but, to paraphrase Marianne Moore, they are imaginary villages with real toads in them.⁴³

In all four comedies O'Casey attempts to overthrow old ways

⁴³ Krause, p. 176.

of living, through characters representing the joy of new life. The following chapters will treat these and other related features of O'Casey's late comedies.

I. ACTION OF THE PLAY

Purple Dust, though written in 1943, was not produced until 1945. It contains some penetrating topical satire in the portrayal of two English businessmen who have moved themselves and their mistresses into an Irish country house in order to escape air raids on England and to return to nature. The Englishmen prove to be humbling fools, and the Irish workers prove to be simple, intelligent folk. The workers succeed in wrecking the old mansion, and the two Englishmen lose their mistresses to two Irish workmen at the end of the play. The old mansion is also destroyed by a flood, and the Englishmen are left with nothing.

The action of the play contains a number of political overtones.

The strong Marxist impulse in O'Casey's satire at this time is shown by Pogue's eagerness to reap large dividends from his shares in a cement company, which will obviously become highly profitable as the bombing of England gets worse. . . . The life-force in this play is represented by a young Irish Marxist, O'Killigain, who sings a song of liberation when a

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flood forces Stoke and Poges to flee from the house.⁴⁴

For the most part, however, Purple Dust is a satire of pastoral affectations which also covers a variety of human shortcomings. The action of the play concerns the feeble attempt of the two "very English" Englishmen, Basil Stoke and Cyril Poges, to reconstruct a crumbling old Tudor mansion for themselves and their mistresses, Souhaun and Avril. The sub-plot concerns a dual love triangle between Poges, Souhaun, and the second workman, and Stoke, Avril, and O'Killigain. Stoke and Poges have illusions about the glories of the Elizabethan age and plan to live as dashing country squires among Irish peasants. There is much conflict throughout between the two Englishmen and the Irish peasants. At the beginning of the play Poges states,

. . . All the Irish are the same. Bit backward perhaps, like all primitive peoples, especially now, for they're missing the example and influence of the gentry, but delightful people all the same. They need control though; oh yes, they need it badly.⁴⁵

The third Workman gives an insight into the characters of Basil and Cyril when he says, "It's what but they're thryin'

⁴⁴ Krause, p. 176.

⁴⁵ Sean O'Casey, Purple Dust (London), p. 23.

to be something else beside themselves."⁴⁶ The main action of the play concerns contrasts between certain English and Irish points of view and behavior.

O'Casey adds elements of musical comedy to the play. At the beginning, while the Irish workmen are attempting to rebuild the old mansion, Stoke and Poges enter with their mistresses and servants, singing and dancing.

(Mr. Cyril Poges, Souhaun, and Barney come in by one entrance at the back; Avril, Basil Stoke, and Cloyne from the other; they dance in what they think to be a country style, and meet in the centre, throwing their legs about while they sing. Avril has a garland of moonfaced daisies round her neck and carries a dainty little shepherd's crook in her hand; Cyril Poges, a little wooden rake with a gaily-coloured handle; Souhaun has a little hoe, garlanded with ribbons; Cloyne, a dainty little hayfork; Barney, a little reaping-hook; and Basil Stoke, a slim-handled little spade. Each wears a white smock having on it the stylized picture of an animal; on Poges's, a pig; on Basil's, a hen; on Souhaun's, a cow; on Avril's, a duck; on Cloyne's, a sheep; on Barney's, a cock.)⁴⁷

This is a burlesque scene which establishes the tone of the play. The characters wear ridiculous country costumes and dance in what they believe to be the manner of a country dance; however, they know nothing whatsoever about what

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

they are doing. This first scene presents a grotesquely comic picture of the characters that is carried through the entire play.

The men and their mistresses sing what they believe to be a country ditty. Avril sings,

By poor little man the town was made,
To degrade
Man and maid;

God's green thought in a little green shade
Made the bosky countrie!⁴⁸

Here O'Casey alludes to Marvell's "Thoughts in a Garden,"

in which the poet retreats from the city's turmoil to nature's peace--"Annihilating all that's made/To a green thought in

a green shade."⁴⁹ Other musical comedy elements are added in Act I, Scene 2, as Stoke and Poges, with their mistresses and servants dressed in rural costumes, enter dancing and singing:

Rural scenes are now our joy:

Farmer's boy,

Milkmaid coy,

Each like a newly-painted toy,

In the bosky countrie!

Our music, now, is the cow's sweet moo,

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁹ Krause, p. 179.

⁵¹ O'Casey, *Purple Dust*, p. 56.

⁵² Ibid., p. 59.

The pigeon's coo,
 The lark's song, too,
 And the cock's shrill cock-a-doodle doo,
 In the bosky countrie!⁵⁰

O'Casey named the two Englishmen after the churchyard in Gray's "Elegy"--Stoke Poges. Such references to genuine pastoral aspects, in contrast to the Englishmen's affectations of pastoral life, reinforce the theme of the comic failure of city folk to make a success of living in and understanding "the bosky countrie." O'Casey also satirizes the English city folk in their fear when confronted by a real cow. They think it is a bull and barricade themselves in their room.

Poges (half dead with panic). My God, woman, you can't shove bullocks about! (Shouting) Souhaun, there's a wild bull in the house! Help, O'Killigain, help. (To Barney) Run, run, man, and get Mr. Stoke to bring down the gun. Oh, go quick, man! An' keep well out of range. (Barney runs off. Shouting) O'Killigain, help! Can't you let me go girl?⁵¹

When Poges finds out it is a cow, he gets back his nerve and replies, "Fainting, shouting, screaming, and running about for nothing! No nerves, no nerves, no spirit; no coolness in a crisis."⁵²

⁵⁰ Hogan, p. 104.

⁵¹ O'Casey, Purple Dust, p. 56.

⁵² Ibid., p. 59.

The Irish peasants are continually mocking the English. Philib O'Dempsey, the second Workman, easily makes a shambles of the pseudo-learning of the Englishmen. The workmen make much sport of the Englishmen's ignorance, especially with a telephone that will not work. Finally in exasperation Poges calls O'Dempsey a fool, and O'Dempsey makes the following reply:

Hammerin' out handsome golden ornaments for flowin' cloak and tidy tunic we were, while you were busy gatherin' dhried grass, an' dyin' it blue to hide the consternation of your middle parts; decoratin' eminent books with glowin' colour an' audacious beauty were we, as O'Killigain himself will tell you, when you were still a hundhred score o' years away from even hearin' of the alphabet. (Beside the entrance) Fool? It's yourself's the fool, I'm sayin,' settlin' down in a place that's only fit for the housin' o' dead men! Settin' here, are you? Wait till God sends the heavy rain, and the floods come!⁵³

This prophetic remark about the floods foreshadows the ending of the play.

The fun-loving Irishmen carry on mischievously throughout the play. The scenes have "the distinct flavour of what Synge called Boucicault's 'careless Irish humour.'"⁵⁴ While

flood. "The heavy rains have begun, the Englishmen are

⁵³ Krause, p. 180.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 181.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 182.

Poges tries to deal with the disconnected phone, Stoke orders horses for a ride with Avril. His horse throws him, and he returns bruised and muddy. Stoke then makes the remark that Avril "naked and unashamed" rode away with O'Killigain. He means this figuratively, but the workmen seize the chance for more fun.

At the beginning of Act II the realities and inconveniences of rustic life are catching up with the two Englishmen. They are shivering in the tomb-like mansion without heat, plumbing, or a telephone, and they have not been able to sleep because of country noises. Stoke is still sore from being thrown by the horse. Each time they try to make light of their troubles, new ones appear. Poges is confronted by the "wild bull" in the above-mentioned scene, and Avril and Souhaun are frightened into breaking some of Poges's "antique" treasures. Determined to do something constructive, Poges tries to level the lawn with a huge roller, but winds up by knocking a tremendous hole in the wall of the house.

The last act fulfills O'Dempsey's prophecy of the flood. "The heavy rains have begun, the Englishmen are hanging on grimly, and the workmen are cheerfully wrecking the house."⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 184.

In a slapstick scene the workmen ram Poges's quattroceto desk through a narrow door, tearing down the door's supporting columns and wrecking the desk.

Poges. Oh, look at the bureau and look at the entrance!

1st Workman(confidently). Oh, a spot o' cement an' a lick o' white pain'll make th' entrance look as young as ever again.⁵⁶

O'Killigain and O'Dempsey add insult to injury when they steal Avril and Souhaun from the Englishmen. O'Dempsey calls to Souhaun:

Come, then, an' abide with the men o' th' wide wathers, who can go off in a tiny curragh o' thought to the New Island with th' outgoin' tide, an' come back be th' same tide sweepin' in again. . . . With firm-fed men an' comely, cordial women there'll be laughter round a red fire when the mists are risin, ' when th' roads an' fields are frosty, an' when th' nights is still.⁵⁷

O'Killigain pleads with Avril:

An' you, young girl, sweet bud of an out-spreading tree, graft yourself on to the living, and don't stay hidden here any longer. 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

⁵⁶ O'Casey, Purple Dust, p. 100.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 105.

⁵⁸ O'Casey, Purple Dust, p. 115.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 115.

awaken again, an' spread its fragrance around us.
 Spit out what's here, an' come where love is fierce
 an' fond an' fruitful. Come, lass, where there's things
 to say an' things to do an' love at the endings.⁵⁸

Krause states that "In both of these speeches O'Casey seems to be echoing the visions of Synge's poetic tramps and playboys."⁵⁹ The girls are at first reluctant to go, but they finally give in and ride off.

Defeated by the workmen and deserted by their mistresses, Stoke and Poges are left alone in the house with a Postmaster who does not want to be bothered with night calls. The stage darkens, and a fantastic black-clothed Figure appears. "The Figure seems to look like the spirit of the turbulent waters of the rising river."⁶⁰ The Figure announces that the Deluge has come; he says, "Those who have lifted their eyes unto the hills are firm of foot, for in the hills is safety."⁶¹ On this note of prophetic fantasy the play ends, with O'Killigain and his friends heading for the hills, and Stoke and Poges bemoaning their fate "as the green waters tumble into the room."

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 106.

⁵⁹ Krause, p. 185.

⁶⁰ O'Casey, Purple Dust, p. 115.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 115.

II. THEMATIC DEVELOPMENTS

O'Casey called Purple Dust "a wayward comedy."

The "wayward" is apt because the play resists a conventional label, but John Gassner is probably close when he calls it "a poetic and symbolic farce."⁶²

There are several major differences between comedy and farce. The first concerns theme. In comedy the theme is integral; farce has only a token theme, such as "Honesty is the best policy." Secondly, real character is satirically treated in comedy; farce contains pseudo-characters, such as the stock pompous man or idiot. Besides these stock themes and characters, farce has stock situations such as the lover hid in a closet, or an overheard conversation. The most notable quality of farce is its action. Hogan quotes Diderot concerning farce:

"You cannot put too much action and movement into a farce. . . . Less in gay comedy, still less in serious comedy, and almost none at all in tragedy.

The less true to life a type is, the easier the task of making it rapid in action and "warm." You have heat at the expense of truth and what is beautiful in human nature. The most tedious thing imaginable is a burlesque and cold play."⁶³

⁶² Hogan, p. 99.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 100.

The characteristics of farce concern Purple Dust, since it contains caricature and a large number of farcical situations; however, it is different from a pure farce in that it has a serious purpose--to satirize the British character. The structure of the play is balanced between situations of farce for farce's sake and situations of farce for satire's sake.

O'Casey contrasts the English character with the Irish in order to satirize the English. In order to accomplish his purpose, he lays special emphasis on some of the important traits of the Irish, such as their imagination and passion for the past, which are not the same as the Englishmen's blind reverence for tradition. The following scene concerning the quality of the hens Poges wants to buy illustrates the Irish workmen's colorful imagination as they have some sport with Poges.

Poges. Go away; when I want poultry, I'll get into touch with the experts in the Department of Agriculture.

1st Workman(horrified--partly to Poges and partly to Souhaun). Oh, listen to that, now! Didja hear that, ma'am? The Department of Agriculture, is it? Wisha, God help your innocence, sir. Sure, it's only a tiny time ago that the same Department sent down a special sthrong covey o' cocks to improve the sthrain, an' only afther a short probation, didn't they give the hins hysterics.

Poges. Hysterics? Good God!

3rd Workman. Ay, an' hadn't the frightened farmers to bring guns to bear on the cocks when they found their hins scatthered over hill an' dale, lyin' on their backs with their legs in the air, givin' their last gasp, an' glad to get outa the world they knew so well! The few mighty ones who survived were that stunned that there wasn't an egg in th' place for years!⁶⁴

Through satire, O'Casey obviously wanted to "scourge the ridiculour [English] apes and liberate the worthy Celts."⁶⁵ He attempted to resolve "the time's deformity" through satire and farce. Satire is obvious in the picturing of the English clowns in contrast to canny, imaginative Irish rustics. Stoke is a complete fool who does not say a single sensible thing throughout the play. "O'Casey has bestowed upon him an Oxford degree, in order to have fun at Oxford's expense."⁶⁶ Poges is equally ignorant, but ridicules Stoke's education. "After ridiculing Oxford education in several scenes of the play, O'Casey sums up his own impression of the University through O'Killigain: 'The city of dissolute might!'"⁶⁷

⁶⁴ O'Casey, Purple Dust, p. 33.

⁶⁵ Krause, p. 186.

⁶⁶ Cowasjee, p. 159.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 160.

In the two ring-leaders of the peasants, Jack O'Killigain and Philib O'Dempsey, O'Casey creates a pair of shrewd Celtic foils for the English buffoons. O'Killigain and O'Dempsey are primitive playboys, high-spirited rustics who provide a norm of genuine pastoral life. Stoke and Poges are so hopelessly carried away by their absurd obsession for old relics and old customs, neither of which they even vaguely understand, that their pastoral utopia never becomes more than a heap of 'purple dust.' In contrast, O'Killigain and O'Dempsey have a wise and mystical understanding of the traditions and values of the old Celtic heroes; and when they ride off into the hills with the girls in the fantastic conclusion, they go to seek a pastoral utopia which offers a new vision of an old way of life.⁶⁸

Despite O'Casey's accomplishment in effectively satirizing the British character, his depiction of the two Englishmen is flawed. While his Irishmen are living, full of imagination, and displaying many characteristics of the Irish people, his two Englishmen are nothing but pompous fools who lose their women to the Irish workers.

There is no complexity in the Englishmen; they are puppets whose plight gets worse as the play proceeds to its weak climax; the flight of their mistresses with the workmen.⁶⁹

O'Casey cannot make a fair comparison between the English

⁶⁸ Krause, p. 178.

⁶⁹ Cowasjee, p. 157.

and his own Irish people. Poges and Stoke are physically and mentally pictured from the very first as fools. This results in an incompatibility of characterization and blurs the play's purpose. The play's satiric comments are heard not so much as cleverness on the part of the Irish as ridicule of helpless morons, which occasions a feeling of pity for the Englishmen.

III. SYMBOLISM

There are not many symbols in this play, the most important and dominant symbols being those which concern the weather. At the beginning of Act III O'Casey uses the sounds of rain and winds to symbolize the approaching doom of the house. "Before the room appears, the sounds of falling rain and swishing winds are heard. . . ." ⁷⁰ In contrast to the calm weather which prevailed in the first two acts, this is a symbolic foreshadowing. The rain and wind are also symbolic of the forces of joy and new life overcoming those of sadness and old ways. An example occurs in the following scene with the Canon.

⁷⁰ O'Casey, Purple Dust, p. 83.

Canon. With all its frills, its frivolities, its two studied ceremonial, however gaily-coloured its leisure may have been, the past had in it the core of virtue; while the present swirl of young life, I'm saying, with its feverish sthрут of pretended bravery, its tawdry carelessness about the relation and rule of religion to man, with all its frantic sthretching of pleasure into every second of life, contains within it a tawny core of fear that is turning darker with every chime of the passing hours!

(The rain and wind are plainly heard.)⁷¹

The rain and wind are the elements which finally destroy the house and its old ways, and in this scene, therefore, these two elements represent the growing protest of freedom against binding tradition. The rain and wind are a recurring symbol.

Canon(rising and going over close to Poges--intensely).
An' like Eden, sir, we've a snake in our garden, too!

Poges. Oh!

Canon. O'Killigain!

Poges. Ah!! (The wind and the rain are plainly heard.)⁷²

Another symbolic use of rain occurs as Avril goes to meet O'Killigain in the rain. Poges and Stoke feel it is bad weather; however, Avril wishes to go. She is a living

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 86.

⁷² Ibid., p. 87.

symbol of joy and freedom, as she breaks away from the two Englishmen, going into the rain, which is here a correlative symbol of freedom as it destroys the house.

The elements of the weather are the dominant symbol of Act III, as indeed they are of the entire play. As the workmen attempt to shove Poges's quattrociento through the door, they ruin both the desk and the door. This is a foreshadowing of the ruin of the entire house by the flood. The stage directions for this scene are:

(Poges rushes in with some cushions in his arms. He is frantic when he sees what the men are doing. As he rushes in he is accompanied by a peal of thunder, louder than the last, but still fairly faint. As he comes to a halt near the bureau the peal ends.)⁷³

The thunder in this scene underscores the destruction of the quattrociento and the impending destruction of the house.

Perhaps one of the clearest symbols of foreshadowing by the weather is in the following scene:

Poges(imperatively). . . . The bobtag and ragtail must be made to keep their free-and-easy manners at a distance. Dignity reigns here.
(A louder peal of thunder is heard in the distance, and the room darkens a little.)

O'Killigain. It's raining.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 98.

Poges. Eh?

O'Killigain. It's raining hard.

Souhaun(shivering) And growing cold.

O'Killigain. And old things are perishing.⁷⁴

The play ends very symbolically with waters engulfing the house. The previously-mentioned Figure appears.

(The room has darkened; the wind rises; the one light in the room flickers. The Postmaster and Poges watch it. Then the Postmaster turns to go, but halts when a Figure of a man is seen standing at the entrance leading to the hall. He is dressed from head to foot in gleaming black oilskins, hooded over his head, just giving a glimpse of a blue mask, all illumined by the rays of flickering lightning, so that The Figure seems to look like the spirit of the turbulent waters of the rising river. The Postmaster goes back, startled, till he is beside Poges, and the two men stand and stare at the ominous Figure. Basil, Barney, and Cloyne appear at the entrances at back, each holding a lighted lantern in his or her hand. They are very frightened. They too hold up their lanterns and stare at the Figure.)

Basil. The river is rising!

Barney. Risin' high!

Cloyne. An' will overwhelm us all!

The Figure(in a deep voice). The river has broken her banks and is rising high; high enough to come tumbling in on top of you. Cattle, sheep, and swine are moaning in the whirling flood. Trees of an ancient heritage, that looked down on all below them, are torn from the power of the place they were born in,

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 115.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 104.

⁷⁷ Coward, p. 115.

and are tossing about in the foaming energy of the waters. Those who have lifted their eyes unto the hills are firm of foot, for in the hills is safety; but a trembling perch in the highest place on the highest house shall be the portion of those who dwell in the valleys below!⁷⁵

At the end the flood washes through the house and destroys it.

Poges (going out). My poor little quattroceto, the waters are about to cover thee! My comfort's gone, and my house of pride is straining towards a fall. Would to God I were in England, now that winter's here!

(He disappears down the passage as the green waters tumble into the room through the entrance from the hall.)⁷⁶

The purpose of the play is symbolized in the flood.

The river is the river of time that overwhelms a dead past to which it is futile and impossible to return. . . . This symbolism is open to more imaginative interpretations. The river that floods the house and forces the rich Englishmen to seek shelter on the roof may be taken to mean the end of British influence in Ireland, or a warning to the Irish to look to the future and not to venerate the past. But it is best not to stretch the symbolic meaning too far.⁷⁷

Some of the persons of the play may also be regarded as symbols. O'Killigain, for example, may have been intended as a symbol of the new, good life. Similarly, Stoke and

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 115.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

⁷⁷ Cowasjee, p. 166.

Poges could perhaps be regarded as symbols of the stifling tradition which smothers the good life. O'Killigain's viewpoint of the good life is revealed in the following speeches:

Avril. Where is the real world to be found, then?

O'Killigain. Where I have found it often, an' seek to find it still.

Avril. And where's that place to be found?

O'Killigain. With the bitterness an' joy blendin' in a pretty woman's hand; with the pity in her breast; in th' battlin' beauty of her claspin' arms; an' rest beside her when th' heart is tired.⁷⁸

In contrast to this, Poges feels that the real world is to be found in the past.

Poges. Nonsense; O'Killigain's an intelligent man, and is only too glad to learn a little about the finer things of life; and to think of great things past and gone is good--isn't that so?

O'Killigain. Occasionally, perhaps, but not to live among them. Life as it is, and will be, moves me more.

Poges. Come, come, we mustn't be always brooding upon the present and the future.⁷⁹

Through Poges and O'Killigain the conflict between the old and the new is revealed. The Canon also represents old

⁷⁸ O'Casey, Purple Dust, p. 18.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

ways. With Stoke and Poges he fails to grasp the joy, freedom, and wisdom in the land.

O'Killigain sings a song of triumph over the forces of old ways at the end of the play:

Come from the dyin' an' fly from the dead,
Far away O!
An' now, with th' quick, make your home an' your bed,
With a will an' a way, away O!

Then away, love, away,
Far away O!
To live any life that is looming ahead.
With a will an' a way, away O!

Away from all mouldherin' ashes we row,
Far away O!
Takin' th' splendour of livin' in tow,
With a will an' a way, away, O!

Then away, love, away,
Far away, O!
Where th' lightning of life flashes vivid we go,
With a will an' a way, away O!⁸⁰

O'Casey includes a supernatural link between the past and present through the legendary heroes of Ireland. For example, Finn symbolizes the spirit of Ireland. Philib O'Dempsey, the 2nd Workman, says,

. . . That was in the days o' Finn MacCoole, before
his hair was scarred with a hint o' grey; the mighty
Finn, I'm sayin,' who stood as still as a stone in

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 119.

th' heart of a hill to hear the cry of a curlew
 over th' cliffs o' Erris, the song of the black-
 bird, the cry o' the hounds hotfoot afther a boundin'
 deer, the steady wail o' the waves tumblin' in on
 a lonely shore; the mighty Finn who'd surrendher
 an emperor's pomp for a place with the bards, and
 the gold o' the King o' Greece for a night asleep
 be the sthream of Assaroe!

Poges(solemnly). A great man, a great man, surely;
 a great man gone for ever.

2nd Workman(sharply). He's here for ever! His halloo
 can be heard on the hills outside; his spear can be
 seen with its point in the stars but not with an eye
 that can see no further than the well-fashioned edge
 of a golden coin.⁸¹

Philib goes on to say that he sees Wolfe Tone and Parnell
 in the hills.

O'Killigain(very softly). And there are others.

2nd Workman(with a glance at O'Killigain). They came
 later, an' haven't wandhered fully back to where
 they cleared a way for a gropin' people, but they
 will come, an' stare us into the will to take our
 own again.

Poges(detaching himself from the spell). And do none
 other of those you know, good man, see the things
 that you see?

2nd Workman. Barrin' a few an' O'Killigain there, they
 see these things only as a little cloud o' purple
 dust blown before the wind.⁸²

This is a symbolic statement, using legendary figures as

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 69.

⁸² Ibid., p. 71.

the spirit of Ireland, that some day the Irish will again rise to greatness. The "cloud o' purple dust" symbolizes the blindness of non-sensitive people like Poges. O'Casey issues a call to Ireland's spirit in this symbol; it is a powerfully patriotic call. An interesting side note, though it is not symbolic, is the prophetic statement of O'Killigain: ". . . in a generation or so the English Empire will be remembered only as a half-forgotten nursery rhyme!"⁸³

The downfall of the English and their old ways could well be symbolically foreshadowed in the incident of the horse ride where Basil is thrown. At the beginning of the ride Basil is dressed in what he feels should be appropriate riding dress for an English gentleman; his clothes are immaculate. After he is thrown, the stage directions read:

(They come in supporting Basil by the arm, followed by the 2nd Workman, holding Basil's coat-tail. Basil is pale, and has a frightened look on his face. His lovely coat is spattered with mud and, in some places, torn. The 1st Workman is carrying the tall hat, now looking like a battered concertina.)⁸⁴

It is noteworthy that an English coat was spattered by Irish mud. Perhaps this is reading in too much, but it does fit

⁸³ Ibid., p. 74.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

the outcome of the play.

Another noteworthy item is that O'Casey uses a cock in this play to signify the start of life in a new day. "Outside a cock crows loudly."⁸⁵ Although it is a natural event, the crowing of the cock seems to symbolize the forthcoming Cock in Cock-a-doodle Dandy; both birds are symbols of a good life. There will be other similarities discovered between Dust and Cock.

While Purple Dust has a fairly simple and clear line of action, illustrating the ignominious failure of two romantically inclined Englishmen to find pastoral and erotic happiness in rural Ireland, Cock-a-doodle Dandy has no consistently developed line of action. The central cohesive element of the play is the monstrous, fantastic rooster, together with its symbolic meanings that relate in various ways with the character and behavior of the human creatures of the play. Whereas in Purple Dust we are mainly in a world of the improbabilities and exaggerations of conventional facts, in the Cock we are in a world of the preposterous impossibilities of fantasy--of mischievous miracle, fantastic Irish pagan mythology.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 48.

The entire visible action of Cock-a-doodle Dandy takes

CHAPTER III

COCK-A-DOODLE DANDY

I. ACTION OF THE PLAY

Cock-a-doodle Dandy resembles Purple Dust in that both plays combine light comedy and farce with satire of serious purpose. The plays differ substantially, however, in matters of structure and in kinds of departures from realism. While Purple Dust has a fairly simple and clear line of action, illustrating the ignominious failure of two romantically inclined Englishmen to find pastoral and erotic happiness in rural Ireland, Cock-a-doodle Dandy has no consistently developed line of action. The central cohesive element of the play is the monstrous, fantastic rooster, together with its symbolic meanings that relate in various ways with the character and behavior of the human creatures of the play. Whereas in Purple Dust we are mainly in a world of the improbabilities and exaggerations of conventional farce, in the Cock we are in a world of the preposterous impossibilities of fantasy--of mischievous miracle, fantastic Irish folk lore, and pagan mythology.

The entire visible action of Cock-a-doodle Dandy takes

place in a garden fronting the house of Michael Marthraun, owner of a local turf bog, and at the opening, before anyone is on stage, the Cock enters and weaves a spell by merrily dancing around the garden. The Cock is described as follows:

He is of deep black plumage, fitted to his agile and slender body like a glove on a lady's hand; yellow feet and ankles, bright-green flaps like wings, and a stiff cloak falling like a tail behind him. A big crimson crest flowers over his head, and crimson flaps hang from his jaws. His face has the look of a cynical jester.⁸⁶

From this fantastic beginning, the action of the play, presented in three Scenes rather than Acts, proceeds ramblingly through many situations and events--some of them related only loosely to a meaningful conclusion.

As soon as the Cock disappears, Marthraun and his friend, Sailor Mahan, enter discussing the evil and "sinishther signs appearin' everywhere" in Marthraun's house. Marthraun believes the three women in the house--Lorna, his wife, Loreleen, his daughter by a previous marriage, and Marion, the maid--have been bewitched by an evil spirit. It is noteworthy that Marion and the Messenger, Robin

⁸⁶ Cowasjee, p. 208.

Adair, who enters later as a reinforcement of the symbolic meaning of the Cock, are lovers. In both name and behavior, Robin Adair suggests the Robin Hood legend. Hogan states that O'Casey's use of the Messenger "seems to be a harkening back to the Robin Hood story mixed with the old ballad, 'Robin Adair.'" In Loreleen, O'Casey points up, through her rebelliousness which parallels that of the Cock, the drab repressiveness of the village. She is asked what she is doing there, and replies, "Seeking happiness, an' failing to find it."⁸⁷

Since Marthraun owns the local turf bog and Mahan owns the lorries that transport the turf to town, both men engage in a running argument over who should pay an extra shilling to the striking turf workers. As Marthraun and Mahan talk, old Shanaar, a religious pilgrim, enters the garden.

Purporting to be an authority on the exorcism of demons, Shanaar presents a pedantic exposition as to how to overcome evil spirits in various kinds of birds. This offends that force symbolized by the Cock, who is obviously the invisible demon that suddenly begins making a shambles of

⁸⁷ Sean O'Casey, Cock-a-doodle Dandy (London), p. 23.

Marthraun's house, at the rear of the stage. A scene of hysterical fright ensues, and significantly it is not old Shanaar, the symbol of false piety and superstition, who finally subdues the Cock, but Robin Adair. He explains to the frightened men and women who have gathered that there is no danger; that the bird is only lonely. He adds that the Cock is "a bit unruly at times, but controllable by the right persons." *Its place. When the lights come back on.* Toward the end of the first scene of the play, an event is presented that has no apparent connection with the preceding action. Lorna's sister, Julia, suffering an incurable disease, is carried into the garden on a stretcher. It develops that she is being taken to Lourdes where, it is believed, a healing miracle will be performed that will save her life. Father Domineer, the local priest, is in charge of these proceedings, and leads the prayer that expresses his faith in the healing miracle. At this point in the play a basic pattern of conflict emerges: a contest, having religious and mystical implications, between the Cock, who represents freedom, joy, and fertility, and Father Domineer, the representative of repressive religion, hypocrisy, and decadent, debilitating tradition.

In the second scene the entire village is mobilized

in search of the Cock, which performs magic events, such as collapsing chairs and bewitching a whiskey bottle that glows red-hot. A Porter delivers Marthraun's new tall hat with a bullet hole in it, and a Police Sergeant enters to explain that he shot at the Cock, which thereupon changed itself into the hat. As the men stare at the hat, the garden is plunged into darkness, the hat disappears, and the Cock stands in its place. When the lights come back on, both the hat and the Cock are gone.

While the men are still recovering from the shock of the hat, the women enter and drink from the "bewitched" bottle. The men then drink, Robin plays the accordian, and the men and women strike up a dance. When the dance is in full swing, Father Domineer enters and, with the command, "Stop that devil's dance," abruptly brings the merriment to an end. Father Domineer then turns on Jack, a lorry driver, and orders him to stop living in sin with a woman. When Jack refuses, Father Domineer strikes him dead.

Father Domineer(to the others). Yous all saw what happened. I just touched him, an' he fell. I'd no intention of hurting him--only to administer a rebuke.

Sergeant(consolingly). Sure, we know that, Father-- it was a pure accident.

Father Domineer. I murmured an act of contrition into
th' poor man's ear.

Messenger(playing very softly). It would have been far
fitt⁸⁸her, Father, if you'd murmured one into your
own.

The second scene closes with this act of brutal violence, which constitutes a second turning away from playful fantasy to a mood of solemnity--the first instance being the situation of the dying girl's journey to Lourdes, at the close of Scene One. To the question why O'Casey in these instances shatters the prevailing mood of playfully satiric fantasy, this writer cannot supply a conclusive answer. Perhaps the Lorry Driver incident was included because such an event had actually occurred in Ireland, and O'Casey wished by portraying it here to shame the Catholic Clergy. The incident concerning the dying girl would appear to be a demonstration of O'Casey's scorn of religious claims to miraculous healing powers. In any case, regarding the question of dramatic justification for the dying-girl episode (including the girl's return, uncured, from Lourdes), Cowasjee states:

That the incident has little to do with the main theme is not so annoying as the inconsistency of the whole

episode when it is fastened to the play. From the setting, the main story and the haggling of the two misers over the price to be paid for moving the turf it would appear that the action of the play takes place in a single day. How, then, we may ask, is it possible for a sick woman to leave a remote rural town in southern Ireland for Lourdes in the morning and return the same evening?⁸⁹

In the last scene puritanical zealots terrorize the entire countryside in search of the Cock. After a few burlesque situations in which Domineer and his assistant attempt to exorcise demons in the house and a great wind blows everyone around the garden, Loreleen is caught and beaten by the townspeople. Domineer banishes her from the country; Loreleen goes, but she says to Domineer, "When you condemn a fair face, you sneer at God's good handiwork. You are layin' your curse, sir, not upon a sin, but upon a joy." Lorna, Marion, and Robin follow her into exile to seek love, freedom, and joy. Julia, uncured and alone, returns in despair from Lourdes. Marthraun asks Robin what he should do, and Robin replies, "Die. There is little else left for the like of you to do." This is a bitterly sad ending to a very funny play. The somber character of these concluding events constitute an unusual departure from the kind of ending to be expected of a play developed almost throughout as

⁸⁹ Cowasjee, p. 206.

farcical fantasy. Krause states that,

This is not a very joyous conclusion for a play about joy because O'Casey is too uncompromising a satirist to succumb to rosy optimism. He refused to soften the point of his parable because he wanted to warn his audience that the free and joyous life cannot be won cheaply. His funniest play is also his bitterest play. . . .⁹⁰

Harold Clurman, reviewing the play for Nation, also saw bitterness in the satire.

. . . the play is a poem and a harangue, a bitterly sad farce, a tender fantasy, and a savage parody. It sings and preaches, it guffaws and curses. There appears to be much outright anger in it, and while one is inclined in a certain mood to find its indignation fully justified, one cannot be altogether certain that its anger, if articulated in the proper vein, could not be turned into a beautifully, wry melancholy, a heart-broken sweetness. . . .⁹¹

"So the enchanted Cock's dance of life is a comic ritual for all men who would be free. O'Casey's merry fantasy is a parable and an entertainment--a catharsis and a carnival."⁹²

II. THEMATIC DEVELOPMENTS

It has been noted that in all four of his late comedies,

⁹⁰ Krause, p. 199.

⁹¹ Harold Clurman, "_____", Nation, 187, (November 29, 1958), p. 416.

⁹² Kruase, p. 202.

O'Casey is concerned with the general thematic purpose of extolling the native spirit of joy and freedom in Ireland, and condemning opposing forces of false religious piety, repression, and corrupting tradition. An important difference, however, may be noted between the manner of this thematic development in two of the late comedies and the manner of its development in the two remaining comedies. Purple Dust and The Drums of Father Ned portray the forces of good as victorious, while Cock-a-doodle Dandy and The Bishop's Bonfire conclude with the triumph, at least temporarily, of the forces that O'Casey has clearly portrayed as evil. As stated earlier, the action of the Cock does not end on the note of utter despair that we shall find to be true of The Bishop's Bonfire. Despite the routing of the Cock and what he stands for, we are left with the sense of a still vigorously defiant spirit of those who stand with the Cock for the goodness that seems now to be shut out of Ireland. O'Casey may be intimating a loss of faith in the future of Ireland. It is possible that the followers of the Cock who leave in defiance at the end of the play are meant to suggest that the followers of joy must leave Ireland to find a full life. Cowasjee states that,

O'Casey may be seeing in the escape of these characters

the story of his own exile. He too had fled from a land that seemed to have closed round him. . . . One notices in O'Casey's plays that the more he ages and mellows, the more he sings of joy and ecstasy and the keener is the edge of his attack against the clergy. . . . the satire reaching its climax in Cock-a-doodle Dandy and The Bishop's Bonfire.⁹³

More specifically, Cock-a-doodle Dandy contains at least four themes relating to the general theme of the late comedies already noted. These themes may be summarized as (1) the excessively repressive domination of the Church, (2) the sham piety of conventional religious practice, (3) fatuous superstition intermingled with religious belief, and (4) the corruption and greed found in an insidiously combined political, social, and religious behavior.

The first of these themes is most emphatically represented by Father Domineer, whose very name is a satirical jibe at the Irish clergy. The view and power of the church with respect to the Irish spirit of joy and freedom are well illustrated in the denunciatory harangue of Father Domineer as he puts a stop to the merry dance, referred to above, in Scene Two.

Stop that devil's dance! How often have yous been warned that th' avowed enemies of Christianity are

⁹³ Cowasjee, p. 211.

on th' march everywhere! An' I find yous dancin'!! How often have yous been told that pagan poison is floodin' th' world, an' that Ireland is dhrinkin' in generous doses through films, plays, an' books! An' yet I come here to find yous dancin'!! Dancin'!! an' with th' Kylelock, Le Coq, Gallus, th' Cock rampant in th' disthriect, desthroyin' desire for prayer, desire for work, an' weakenin' th' authority of th' pastors an' masters of your souls! Th' empire of Satan's pushin' out its foundations everywhere, an' I find yous dancin'!! . . .⁹⁴

It is meaningful that the followers of the Cock who are banished at the end of the play consist chiefly of beautiful young women and vigorous young men. Relevant to this, Krause states that Cock-a-doodle Dandy . . .

. . . is more than an "Irish" play, for it is a comic morality with universal theme for men of all countries. At a time when so much of moern literature has been obsessed with Original Sin, O'Casey expressed his faith in what might be called Original Joy.⁹⁵

The goodness that O'Casey consistently champions in all his late comedies includes fleshly joys--of dance, song, love, and laughter.

The theme of sham piety, as illustrated by O'Casey in the incident, referred to above, of Father Domineer's brutal killing of the Lorry Driver, becomes virtually a direct

⁹⁴ O'Casey, Cock-a-doodle Dandy, p. 64.

⁹⁵ Krause, p. 188.

accusation of the Clergy by O'Casey, in the accusing words of the Messenger to Domineer: "It would have been far fittther, Father, if you'd murmured [an act of contrition] into your own [ear]."

O'Casey devotes considerable time to development of the theme of quasi-religious superstition, through the scenes involving old Shanaar. For instance,

Shanaar(shoving his face closer to Mahan's). Ah, me friend, for years an' years I've thravelled over hollow lands an' hilly lands, an' I know. Big powers of evil, with their little powers, an' them with their littler ones, an' them with their littlest ones, are everywhere. You might meet a bee that wasn't a bee; a bird that wasn't a bird; or a beautiful woman who wasn't a woman at all.

Michael(excitedly). I'm tellin' him that, I'm tellin' him that all along!

Shanaar(looking round cautiously, then speaking in a tense whisper). A sure sign, if only you can get an all-round glimpse of them. (He looks round him again.) Daemones posterior non habent--they have no behinds!

Michael(frightened a lot). My God, what an awe-inspiring, expiring experience.

Mahan(frightened too, but trying to appear brave). That may be, but I wouldn't put innocent birds or bees in that category.

Shanaar(full of pitying scorn for ignorance). You wouldn't! Innocent birds! Listen all! There was a cuckoo once that led a holy brother to damnation. Th' cuckoo's call enticed th' brother to a silent glade where th' poor man saw a lovely woman, near naked, bathin' her legs in a pool, an' in an instant th' holy man was taken with desire. Lost!

She told him he was handsome, but he must have money, if he wanted to get her. Th' brother entered a noble's house, an' demanded a hundrhd crowns for his convent; but the noble was a wise old bird, an' said he'd have to see the prior first. Thereupon, th' brother up with an axe, hidden undher his gown, an' cleft th' noble from skull to chin; robbed th' noble, dhressed himself in rare velvets, an' searched out all th' rosy totteness of sin with th' damsel till th' money was gone. Then they caught him. Then they hanged him, an' mind you (the three heads come closer together), while this poor brother sobbed on the scaffold, everyone heard th' mocking laughter of a girl and th' calling of a cuckoo!

(As Ahanaar is speaking the last three things, the mocking laughter of a girl is heard, the call of a cuckoo, and a young man's sobbing, one after the other, at first, then they blend together for a few minutes, and cease. Shanaar stands as stiff as his bent back will allow and the other two rise slowly from their chairs, stiff, too, and frightened.)

Shanaar(in a tense whisper). Say nothing; take no notice. Sit down. Thry to continue as if yous hadn't heard.

Mahan(after a pause). Ay, a cuckoo, maybe; but that's a foreign bird; no set harbour or home. No genuine Irish bird would do a thing like that on a man.⁹⁶

Shanaar goes on to explain how his Latin will destroy a hen that has become demon-possessed.

In developing the theme of greed and corruption, O'Casey may have had in mind not only greediness and ex-

⁹⁶ O'Casey, Cock-a-doodle Dandy, p. 18.

plottiveness in general, as illustrated by Marthraun and Mahan in their selfish attitude toward their workmen. He may also, in the situations involving the "tall hat," have been satirizing certain highly topical political and social circumstances. Regarding this possibility, Krause conjectures as follows:

In this burlesque of the tall-hat O'Casey has aimed his satire at the masquerade of bourgeois Irish politicians. As the local Councilor, gombeen man, and Knight of St. Columbanus, Marthraun has his formal hat ready for an audience with the President of Ireland. Himself a proud wearer of the working-man's cloth cap, O'Casey says in Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well that 'the terrible beauty of the tall-hat is born to Ireland.' In this book he describes catholic-bourgeois-capitalists like Marthraun as the new power in the country-- 'the new Irish aristocracy--the devalerians.' He sees modern Ireland as a theocratic state, an alliance between the "purple biretta" of the Roman Catholic Church and the "tall hat" of the De Valera politicians, and he echoes Joyce's warning that 'Christ and Casesar are hand and glove.'⁹⁷

III. SYMBOLISM

The symbols of the play include, first and foremost, the Cock; virtually all of the persons of the play, two of whom are, as previously noted, human correlates of the Cock; the setting and related physical properties used in the

⁹⁷ Krause, p. 196.

100 O'Casey, Cock-a-Needle Danda, p. 70.

action; and finally, various incidental symbolic effects, notably--as in Purple Dust--those concerned with the weather.

The Cock, chief symbol associated with sexual love, laughter, and the arts of music, poetry, and dancing, has frequently been used as a symbol of sexual fertility.

D. H. Lawrence's use of the cock in The Man Who Died is primarily symbolic of male fertility. O'Casey's use of the cock is also symbolic of this fertility as well as what he terms the "active spirit of life." It stands for joy, courage, love, sexual ecstasy and vibrant living. To the bigoted, superstition-soaked, middle-aged philistines of a provincial town it is a demon cock (in some folk-lore the cock was supposed to have been created in opposition to demons and wizards) creating havoc, but to minds that are clear and fearless it is a friendly bird.⁹⁸

The connection of a cock with fertility or new life is an old one, perhaps arising from the cock's proverbial crow at the dawn of a new day.

The play itself chiefly seems to be a conflict between a morality which is symbolized by the cock and a view of life which is promulgated by Father Domineer and acceded to by most of the men in the play.⁹⁹

An important line concerning the Cock is given by Marion when she says, "Th' place'll lose its brightness if th' Cock's killed."¹⁰⁰ It is noteworthy that the Cock does

⁹⁸ Cowasjee, p. 207.

⁹⁹ Hogan, p. 118.

¹⁰⁰ O'Casey, Cock-a-doodle Dandy, p. 70.

not bother the village after the women and Robin leave; joy has been banished from a town that will soon die, along with Michael.

In general, O'Casey leads us to judge the human characters of the play according to their attitude toward the Cock and its effects upon them. Two persons, however--Loreleen and Robin Adair--serve as correlates of the Cock.

Loreleen is the key-character of the play; her crest-like hat associates her with the Cock as soon as she enters: she loves dancing and literature: she reconciles the Dionysian force symbolized by the Cock with Christianity in such passages as the one in which she warns Marthraun and Mahan against "laying up treasures on earth." Those who fear the Cock try to kill him, but only succeed in making themselves ridiculous; Father Domineer gets a black eye and a Civic Guard loses his trousers.¹⁰¹

Loreleen and the Cock appear alternately on the stage but never together, the reason being that they are essentially the same. "Each represents the other."¹⁰²

The Messenger, Robin Adair, is the male counterpart of Loreleen; he symbolizes good life, freedom, and joy. He has a pair of scarlet wings on his coat and is also closely associated with the Cock, as evidenced in the stage directions

¹⁰¹ Armstrong, p. 27.

¹⁰² Cowasjee, p. 208.

after Robin enters the bewitched house:

(The Cock's head is as suddenly withdrawn, and a louder commotion is heard to be going on in the house; the Messenger shouting, a Woman's squeal. Then silence for a few moments as puffs of blue-black smoke jet out through the window. When the smoke has gone, the Messenger comes from the house into the garden. His cap is awry on his head, his face is a little flushed, and his mouth is smiling. He carries in his right hand what might have been a broomstick, but is now a silver staff, topped with a rosette of green and red ribbons. He is followed out by the Cock whom he is leading by a green ribbon, the other end circling the Cock's neck. The Cock follows the Messenger meekly, stopping when he stops, and moving when the Messenger moves.)¹⁰³

Julia, the dying girl, may be regarded as symbolic of the victims of false religious faith. As she is being taken to Lourdes, Father Domineer enthusiastically proclaims, "Julia will bring us back a miracle, a glorious miracle."¹⁰⁴ Through no fault of her own, she fails and significantly, there is no one to greet her on her return. She says,

. . . (after a long look at Michael). He, poor man, is dyin' too. No-one left, an' th' stir there was when I was goin'--th' band playin'; Father Domineer spoutin' his blessin'; an' oul' Shanaar busy sayin' somersaultin' prayers; because they all thought I would bring a sweet miracle back. (She pauses) There was no miracle, Robin; she didn't cure me, she didn't cure me, Robin. I've come back, without even a gloamin' thought of hope. . . .¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ O'Casey, Cock-a-doodle Dandy, p. 23.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 100.

The most emphatically symbolic feature of the setting of the play is the stone wall surrounding the garden. As the action develops we are made to feel that the wall has special efficacy in shutting out joy and life. It also magically protects Shanaar, Michael, and Mahan, the symbols of repression, from the Cock inside the garden.

The house, on the other hand, appears to be a symbol of the magical powers of the Cock. The walls are painted black, the windows red--a coloring that corresponds with the black plumage and red crest of the Cock. The house itself and the people in it, especially Loreleen, seem to be under the spell of the Cock.

Michael (looking suspiciously at the porch, then at the window above it, and drawing Mahan farther away from the house). Looka, Sailor Mahan (he speaks furtively) there's always a stern commotion among th' holy objects of th' house, when that one, Loreleen, goes sailin' by; an' invisible wind blows th' pictures out, an' turns their frenzied faces to th' wall; once I seen the statue of St. Crankarius standin' on his head to circumvent th' lurin' quality of her presence; an' another time, I seen th' image of our own St. Pathrick makin' a skelp at her with his crozier, fallin' flat on his face, stunned, when he missed!¹⁰⁶

The tall hat--used to satirize "bourgeois Irish

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

politicians" as was mentioned above--is a recurring symbol. It is first mentioned by Mahan when he speaks to Michael about Loreleen. A Porter soon enters, carrying a new tall

. . . . Talk about Loreleen castin' a spell! Th' whole disthrikt'll be paralysed in a spell when your top-hat comes out to meet the president's top-hat, th' two poor things tryin' to keep people from noticin' what's undher them!¹⁰⁷

This is a foreshadowing of the spell that is cast by the tall hat when the Cock changes into it.

The second occurrence is in the scene where Lorna tells Michael that the Cock pecked his new tall hat to pieces.

Michael(enraged). Is it me new hat he's desthroyed?

Shanaar(pulling Michael's arm in warning). Dammit, man, take no notice!

Michael(turning indignantly on Shanaar). How'd you like your sumptous, silken hat to be mangled into a monstrosity!

Marion(who has been looking at the Cock with admiration). Sure, he's harmless when you know him.

Messenger(stroking its back). 'Course he is! Just a gay bird, that's all. A bit unruly at times, but conthrollable be th' right persons. (To the Cock) Go on, comrade, lift up th' head an' clap th' wings, black cock, an' crow!¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

The third occurrence is in the Porter scene. Marthraun ordered a new tall hat after the Cock pecked the old one ot pieces. A Porter soon enters, carrying a new tall hat, which is, in reality, an enchanted hat. A Sergeant witnessed the Cock changing into the same hat, and the hat changes back into the Cock.

(The garden is suddenly enveloped in darkness for a few moments. A fierce flash of lightning shoots through the darkness; the hat has disappeared, and where it stood now stands the Cock. While the lightning flashes, the Cock crows lustily. Then the lights as suddenly comes back to the garden, and shows that the Cock and the hat have gone. Michael and Mahan are seen to be lying on the ground, and the Sergeant is on his knees, as if in prayer.¹⁰⁹

After this scene Marion brings out an ordinary top hat, the one which Michael had actually ordered.

The symbolism of the Cock's transformation into the hat, and vice versa, is somewhat vague. Apparently, the Cock, enraged at the hypocrisy of Irish politicians, destroyed the symbol of such politicians--Marthraun's tall hat.

Perhaps the Cock transformed himself into a similar hat to vividly demonstrate that the good things of life will overcome the evils of religious, social, and political hypocrisy

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 52.

and repressiveness. The meaning of the Cock's metamorphosis is at best a matter of conjecture, since O'Casey nowhere states the meaning explicitly.

In both Purple Dust and Cock-a-doodle Dandy, O'Casey makes frequent use of various aspects of weather as symbols of fate for those who violate what he regards as the good life. Almost without exception, the elements of Irish life and character that O'Casey prizes most, in his late comedies, are those which he identifies with Nature. Wind, rain, thunder, and lightning are therefore not just arbitrary symbols, as O'Casey uses them. In the several instances of their employment in Cock, they clearly symbolize warning and defiance to all those opposing the forces of nature with which the Cock is identified. When Father Domineer peremptorily stops the villagers' dance, as noted above, his words are at once followed by an angry peal of thunder. Following the Cock's destroying Michael's top hat, he "lifts up his head, claps his wings, and lets out a mighty crow, which is immediately followed by a rumbling roll of thunder." The angry flashing of lightning that accompanies the Cock's metamorphosis from the top hat, cited above, is a similar symbolic reinforcement of Nature's defiance of its enemies.

There are numerous incidental symbols in the play, such as sounds of a waltz coming from the house when Marthraun talks of Lorna's dancing; a girl's mocking laughter, a cuckoo's call, and a young man's sobbing heard after Shanaar's story of the bewitched holy brother; the "crek crek, crek crek" call of a corncrake during Shanar's story of the corncrake; "horns" growing out of Marion's and Lorna's heads, symbolic of what the men feel is the sinful life; and the bewitched whiskey bottle. All of these are used as symbolic reinforcements of important lines or moods of the play.

The Irish flag is also used as a symbol. In the play the Church and the State have merged, forming what has sometimes been called the Church-state in Ireland. The state as a separate power does not exist; the Irish Tricolor fluttering in the breeze is a mockery, and it is no accident that it is blown down. The flag's fall is a symbol of the fall of secular power in Ireland; it is also a symbol of the end of human freedom for which the Irish had fought.

In this main section of the play, there are the love affairs between Paddy Moanroe, one of Mulligan's employees, and Peggym, and between Daniel Glooneoohy, a workman, and Keelin. The romance of Daniel and Keelin is ended by

CHAPTER IV

THE BISHOP'S BONFIRE

I. ACTION OF THE PLAY

The action of The Bishop's Bonfire is built around a special occasion, as are the other three comedies. The occasion is the visit of Bishop Bill Mullarkey to his native village of Ballyoonagh. Councillor Reiligan, the richest man in town, has been made Papal Count in honor of the occasion, and his house is being redecorated by a group of bumbling workmen. The incompetent workmen are reminiscent of those in Purple Dust as they tear down the house. The official welcome for the Bishop is to be a formal night lighting of a huge bonfire which will burn "evil" literature.

Councillor Reiligan and Canon Burren, the Parish Priest, are busy preparing an enthusiastic welcome for the Bishop. Reiligan also employs his two daughters, Keelin and Foorawn, to help the workmen with the preparations. Besides this main action of the play, there are the love affairs between Manus Moanroe, one of Reiligan's employees, and Foorawn, and between Daniel Clooncoohy, a workman, and Keelin. The romance of Daniel and Keelin is ended by

Reiligan and the Canon on the grounds of class distinction. Manus, anxious to leave Ballyoonagh because he realizes Foorawn will never be allowed to marry him, enters Reiligan's drawing-room to steal some church funds. Foorawn discovers him, threatens to call the police, and Manus shoots her. Dying, she confesses her love for Manus, and writes a note admitting suicide. The play ends with two of Reiligan's employees, the Codger and the Prodigal, hurrying off with a bottle of whiskey so that they can "think of what we have to do with the woes an' wonders of the world."¹¹⁰

The main plot concerns the forces of repression and pietism versus freedom and joy. The sub-plot concerns the two love affairs, both of which are resolved unhappily on grounds closely related thematically to the main plot, since the blocking force is the girls' father's repressive false piety.

Thus it can be seen that the two plots are certainly inter-related. The trouble arises, however, at the end of the play when O'Casey moves away from the main plot and decides to resolve his theme through the secondary plot in a sudden burst of melodramatic fury. The bitterly disillusioned Manus breaks into the house

¹¹⁰ Sean O'Casey, The Bishop's Bonfire (New York), p. 120.

and steals the church funds,¹¹¹ and when Foorawn tries to stop him he shoots her.¹¹¹

Basically, there are four structural flaws which result in a loss of coherence in the Bonfire: loosely woven short scenes, scenes unrelated to the main action, implausible scenes, and inconclusive scenes. There are many scenes of only one or two pages in length, and often adjacent scenes concern unrelated facets of the play's action, causing a serious lack of coherence and loss of feeling of orderly progression.

A scene which is both unrelated to the main action and implausible is found early in Act II when Reiligan's son, the Lieutenant, enters looking for his father. He hangs his gun and holster on the wall of the room being prepared for the Bishop, chats a short time, and then leaves. Manus, at the end of Act III, uses the same gun to shoot Foorawn during their argument. It is very unlikely that the gun and holster would have been left during the rigorous housecleaning for the Bishop. Reiligan was very concerned over the incidents of kicking paint off the door and scarring of the Bishop's table, and he would have removed the gun

¹¹¹ Krause, p. 207.

which went unnoticed until it was needed. It would have been more probable to allow Manus to enter carrying a gun. Actually, the Lieutenant was not needed, there being no purpose for his scene relative to the main action of the play.

The Lieutenant chiefly appears so that O'Casey may introduce the "Jeeps be Jeeps" dialogue he had published in The New Statesman and Nation and had later included in Sunset and Evening Star.¹¹²

An example of inconclusiveness is the scene in Act III in which Reiligan succeeds in breaking up the love affair of Daniel and Keelin. Although Daniel swears that he will stand up to Keelin's father, he does not; instead, he gives in to Reiligan and the Canon and decides to peel the potatoes and pluck the plover in preparation for the Bishop's arrival. After Daniel exits to the kitchen we see no more of him. Inconclusiveness results from the fact that there is no big scene between Keelin and Daniel; they merely go their separate ways. We feel that O'Casey simply does not need the characters anymore, as indeed he does not.

This is the sort of weakness that arises when a play lacks a strong plot. A number of loose incidents and futile arguments have to be fastened on to give

¹¹² Hogan, p. 126.

the play an appropriate length and the dramatist enough scope to express himself. A play may succeed in spite of a weak plot if the incidents are immensely amusing and the scenes well handled. But it is dangerous for a dramatist to have a weak plot to work on. It was not for nothing that Aristotle described plot as the soul of the drama. Even if Aristotle were wrong, one might still say that O'Casey is too abjectly dependent on stray incidents.¹¹³

Several dramatic modes are employed in the play: fantasy in the St. Tremolo episodes, melodrama in the final scene between Manus and Foorawn, and slapstick in several scenes--for example, that in which the Codger crashes through a window with a bag of cement. Moreover, at least one characteristic of the overly obvious "well made" play is present in the use of Father Boheroe, a true friend of the people of the parish, as a *raisonneur*, or author's representative.

Father Boheroe, an eminently wise and sympathetic character, perhaps too obviously represents the author's values, as in the following exchange with the Canon:

Canon(quietly to Father Boheroe). You're clever, Father--and sincere, I hope--but your cleverness seems only to make persons more unhappy than they were. I'm afraid I cannot commend the way you try to lead my poor people towards illusions.

¹¹³ Cowasjee, p. 219.

Can't you understand that their dim eyes are able only for a little light? Damn it man, can't you see Clooncoohy can never be other than he is? You're very popular with our people, but remember that the love they may have for you doesn't come near the fear they have for Reiligan (he pauses) or the reverence they must show for their Parish Priest.

Father Boheroe (as quietly as the Canon). There's Keelin to think of as well as Clooncoohy, Canon Burren. God help us, Monsignor, for by fear, we have almost lost our love for our neighbour; even our worship is beginning to have the look of the fool's cap and the sound of the jester's bells.¹¹⁴

O'Casey resorts to the language and action of full-blown melodrama in the following depiction of the killing of Foorawn:

Manus (flinging her from him). Oh, let me go, you mournful, empty shell of womanhood!

Foorawn (running to the telephone, and whipping up the receiver). I'll get the police! I'll watch you hauled to jail; I'll have you finished in this whole district, in this whole land!

Manus. So that's your love and that's your charity, Foorawn's love and Foorawn's charity, you sounding cymbal, you hunk of tinkling brass! (Wildly, a deep menace in his voice, taking the gun from his pocket.) Get away from that! D'ye hear? Drop that phone, you bitch!

Foorawn (wildly and passionately). I'll settle you for ever, you spoiled priest! (He fires at her. She drops the telephone, seems stunned for a second.

¹¹⁴ O'Casey, The Bishop's Bonfire, p. 80.

Then she goes to the table where the ledger and the papers are, and, pressing a hand to her side, sinks down on the chair that stands there. As she staggers to the chair) You ruffian!¹¹⁵

II. THEMATIC DEVELOPMENTS

As previously stated, the main plot of The Bishop's Bonfire concerns the forces of repression and pietism versus freedom and joy, a theme also treated in the other late comedies. This general theme, together with related sub-themes regarding pretentiousness, hypocrisy, and materialism, is developed chiefly in three ways: (1) through contrasting character traits and behavior of the persons of the play; (2) through comic satire and ridicule; and (3) through explicitly thematic statements, such as those by Father Boheroe, as noted above.

With minor exceptions, the persons of the play may be divided into two clearly distinct groups--those representing the good life, as O'Casey sees it, and those who oppose the good life. Reiligan, the Canon, and Foorawn represent the pious followers of Bishop Mullarkey, whose very name suggests the "malarky" of false piety. And these characters are

¹¹⁵ Hogan, p. 128.

pitted against Father Boheroe, Manus, the Prodigal, and the Codger. The explicitness of this dichotomy lends a child-like quality to the play that certainly reduces its appeal for sophisticated audiences, but nevertheless serves O'Casey's evangelical aims.

The several scenes devoted chiefly to the bungling, mischievous, and ingenious behavior of the low comedy characters (the workmen, the Codger, and the Prodigal) nevertheless contain satire and ridicule relevant to the serious themes of the play. For instance, the workmen manifest a rowdy but healthy disrespect for Bishop Mullarkey and for the feverish readying of the house to receive him; the Prodigal and the Codger manage delightfully to frustrate the plans of Reiligan and the Canon; they get drunk on the Codger's gin, spill a bag of cement over a new carpet, wreck the furniture, and insult the statue of St. Tremolo. According to Krause, "O'Casey ridicules repression and pietism most successfully when he creates this mad world of merriment, a festival of glorious fools."¹¹⁶

Illustrative of the explicit preachments through

O'Casey, *The Bishop's Bonfire*, p. 117.

¹¹⁶ Krause, p. 212.

which O'Casey frequently impresses his themes, and in the lyrical artistry of which he evidently finds great satisfaction, is the following harrangue, spoken by Manus, cataloging the frauds through which Reiligan is victimizing his community:

The fraud of clerical forbidding drink in the dance halls, though here, in Ballyoonagh, drinkers from Reiligan's tavern go to the dance hall to dance, and dancers from Reiligan's dance hall go to Reiligan's tavern to drink: the fraud of Reiligan's town stores where there's nothing in spirit or manner to show that life's more than meat, and the body than raiment; the fraud of his mean meadows where his bunchy cattle low their woe to God for want of grass: the fraud of his shirt factory where girls work but to earn enough to leave the land, and where there's more melody in the heart of a machine than in the heart of its minder.¹¹⁷

A more playful statement, typical of the invective O'Casey likes to employ through his low comedy characters, is the Codger's summation of an argument with his friend Manus over the sharing of bricks that they are laying:

True religion isn't puffed up, you bastard, it's long-sufferin' an' kind, an' never vaunts itself like you do; true religion doesn't envy a man a brick, you rarefied bummer!

¹¹⁷ O'Casey, The Bishop's Bonfire, p. 117.

III. SYMBOLISM

Although there is considerably less symbolism as there is less fantasy, in The Bishop's Bonfire than in Cock-a-doodle Dandy, O'Casey nevertheless, in the play under discussion as in all his late comedies, exploits his penchant for symbolic representations--perhaps not always consistently with other elements of his dramaturgy. First may be noted several symbolic effects that had earlier been used in Cock-a-doodle Dandy. One of these concerns the setting--that of the first act of Bonfire being similar in kind and function to the setting of Cock. The action takes place in a walled garden, and the wall is in both plays a symbol of shutting out freedom and joy. At the end of Act I of Bonfire the Prodigal says,

Prodigal Carranaun demands a wider world, Father Boheroe; a world where man can roar his real opinions out; where night becomes a generous part of a day, where rough seas tumble in on a lovely shore. Prodigal Carranaun is far above the meanin' of Reiligan's roses and Reiligan's wall!¹¹⁸

Similarly, Reiligan's tall hat has a symbolic meaning reminiscent of the tall hat that figured prominently in Cock-a-doodle Dandy.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

The room being prepared for the Bishop evidently has symbolic meaning. O'Casey describes it as follows: "The drawing-room of Councillor Reiligan's house is a large one, and everything in it is new, except the things that are newer, and the newest that are now being added to adorn the Bishop's stay." The room is beautifully furnished and is supposed to be spotlessly clean, but it soon becomes clear that the room is also ironically symbolic of the gaudiness and shallowness of false piety. As stated by the Codger, "With all its newness, the room's musty, and with all its image and its holy picture, it smells of mercy as much as the County Court."¹¹⁹

It is in this room that Lieutenant Reiligan hangs his gun by the statue of St. Casabianca, who is Foorawn's special saint. This is the same gun that Manus uses to shoot her. It is symbolic that the instrument of Foorawn's death hangs by the object that is most sacred to her. Perhaps her religion killed her, after all.

We find a conflict between the symbol of earthly joy, the Codger's keg, and the symbol of spiritual holiness, the church tower, in the following scene between Rankin and the Prodigal.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

Prodical (firmly). It is there, isn't it? I didn't call the keg into being, did I? I haven't the power to conjure the keg into bodiless existence, have I? I can't work miracles, can I? Your likes or dislikes isn't goin' to control the progress of the world. The keg's here now, an' can't be avoided, can it? We'll have to suffer it, like it or dislike it.

Rankin. There's the church tower to think of, too.

Prodical. That's a perspective contingency; a prima facie. That other subject's a factuality of here and now.¹²⁰

The men continue arguing about the keg, and Rankin tells the Prodical that both men's guardian angels do not want the Prodical to go after the keg. Finally, the lure of the keg wins, over the church tower.

The bonfire itself is symbolic of the destruction of true and good things by false religion. In Act I Manus tells Foorawn, "And in the ashes that the fire will leave will be the ashes of our love; of mine for you, of yours for me; and Daniel's love for Keelin and hers for him." The bonfire destroyed true love as it destroyed good books.

A number of characters of this play, as is true of all the late comedies, are evidently intended by O'Casey to have the status of symbols. One manifestation of this symbolic

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 46.

intent is a grouping of characters in pairs.

Secular power in Ballyoonagh is symbolized by the wealthy Councillor Reiligan, and spiritual power by Father Burren. Keelin represents youth thwarted by the social pretensions of the elders, and her sister, Foorawn, represents youth perverted by religion. The secular symbol of the freedom and joy of life is the Codger; Father Boheroe is their spiritual symbol. Father Boheroe tells the Canon, "I'm afraid, Monsignor, God listens more eagerly to the songs of the Codger than He does to our best prayers," and he adds that he is tired "of all the gilded foolishness claimed to come so gleefully from God."

Besides Reiligan and Father Burren, Keelin and Foorawn, and the Codger and Father Boheroe, Rankin and the Prodigal may also be paired characters; the former symbolizing flawed but humble religiosity, and the latter representing false, prideful piety. The Prodigal is very aware of his shortcomings--taking "an occasional drink," for instance--but he is therefore much more human and genuine than Rankin, whose character is summed up very well in the scene where he spits in Keelin's face after she teases him.

Keelin (violently wiping her face with her handkerchief).
You dirty, evil-minded lugworm! You huckster of
hollow an' spiteful holiness! You get! (She hurries
Armstrong, p. 27.

McCree, The Bishop's Bonfire, p. 111.

to the window, turning when she gets there, to throw a few more angry words at him). Looka the fella who wants to be great with God! Christ, you'll make a commotion when you get, you get, to where you're goin'! Crawl in' to heaven the way the snake crawled outa Eden! Damn you, you God's remorse for men!¹²¹

Regarding the symbolic uses of character, Armstrong has the following reservation:

This morality pattern of character and action is not always in harmony with the fantasy, farce, and melodrama in the play. The statue of St. Tremolo with a horn at his lips is supposed to blow a blast whenever the Catholic faith is affronted, but it only does so at farcical moments, and its silence when the faith is being seriously questioned seems odd and inconsistent.¹²²

The silence of the saint is in itself symbolic, however. Father Boheore tells Foorawn,

. . . Here in the room, Foorawn, you have two saints, and neither the one here (he indicates St. Tremolo), nor that one there (he indicates St. Casabianca), opened a gob, or blew the Bookineeno, to say a word, or give a sign of help. When we have problems, Foorawn, ourselves are the saints to solve them. Our weakness--and our strength.¹²³

The songs in the play are perhaps too obviously symbolic. At the end of Act I the Codger, Daniel, and the Prodigal sing the first verse of "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean," the song being occasioned by Foorawn's brushing

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 23.

¹²² Armstrong, p. 27.

¹²³ O'Casey, The Bishop's Bonfire, p. 114.

away Manus's advances. The Codger says,

. . . The lark's a bonnie bird; our Lady's hen
singin' near all the year round. But for all her
singin', the lark has her troubles like the rest of
us. Even in love when she waits an' waits an' waits
for the mate that sometimes never comes back to the
nest. An' we're all like the birds that way; sorra
after the loved one's gone outa sight or gone from
ken. Father Boheroe there could tell you that.¹²⁴

Later, the men end the act with the above-mentioned song.

This is the first symbolic foreshadowing of Foorawn's death
and the play's tragic ending.

The second symbolic song is sung by the Codger in the
garden in Act III.

The rose that is fresh in the vase today
Will be flung away, fadin', tomorrow;
An' ev'ry song sung by a singer gay
Has in it the seed of a sorra.¹²⁵

The words "seed of a sorra" are ironically related to the
last song of the play, for neither the Codger nor the
Prodical is aware of Foorawn's death as they pass the win-
dow and sing,

Last night as I lay on me pillla, last night as
I lay on me bed
Last night as I lay on me pillla, I dreamt
Me dear Bonnie was dead.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 96.

CHAPTER V

Codger
Prodical --- (singing together)

Bring back, bring back, bring back my
Bonnie to me, to me,
Bring back, bring back, O bring back my
Bonnie to me.

(When the song has died away, Manus takes up the lantern, goes out into the garden, and replaces it on top of the bricks; then he comes back to the window, closes it, and goes slouching away out of sight; while the Bishop's Bonfire flames higher and more brightly, and the cheers are heard a little more clearly.)¹²⁶

The above scene reveals the freedom and joy of life, in the person of the Codger, being driven out of Ballyoonagh as the flames of the bonfire, which burns "piles of bad books an' evil pictures," blaze high.

The Prologue is set in an open place on the outskirts of the village of Doonavale, during a time of the bloody fighting between the Black and Tans and the Irish insurrectionists. As the scene opens, flames rising above the burning village are seen in the distance; two bedraggled Irish civilians appear, in the process of escaping from the Black and Tans. It turns out that they are two young

men, Birmingham and McGilligan, who, despite their

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 121.

season 1917, at the moment, are political and social enemies--rivals in the local government of Doonavale, of

CHAPTER V

THE DRUMS OF FATHER NED

I. ACTION OF THE PLAY

The Drums of Father Ned is written in three acts, preceded by a prologue, mischievously labeled by O'Casey as a "Prerumple." While the main action of the play takes place in the present (1958), the action of the Prerumple transpires, according to O'Casey, "thirty-four years or so ago," and neither structurally nor thematically is there an immediately apparent relevance of the Prerumple to the acts that follow.

The Prerumple is set in an open place on the outskirts of the village of Doonavale, during a time of the bloody fighting between the Black and Tans and the Irish insurrectionists. As the scene opens, flames rising above the burning village are seen in the distance; two bedraggled Irish civilians appear, in the process of escaping from the Black and Tans. It turns out that they are two young businessmen, Binnington and McGilligan, who, despite their common interest at the moment, are political and social enemies--rivals in the local government of Doonavale, of

sharply differing politics, the one being a Free Stater and the other a Republican, and each, on personal grounds, intensely distasteful to the other. *from England worthville.*

Shortly two Black and Tan officers appear and proceed to badger Binnington and McGilligan by forcing them to join each other in an effort to escape, and then, as the frightened and mortified men run side-by-side, firing shots at their feet. The scene closes rather inconclusively with the men's being spared, bruised in spirit but otherwise intact. *interpart of Binnington. It also turns out, however,*

that Despite the seriousness of the background situation, the entire scene is developed as a farcical mockery, the apparent purpose of which is not to portray the cruelty and injustice of the Black and Tans, but rather to ridicule the inglorious motives and wrong-headedness of certain elements among the Irish that survived the revolution. More *that,* specifically, the ridiculed persons, Binnington and McGilligan, are apparently intended to be regarded as typical Irish businessmen and politicians who were, in their pig-headedness, greed, and backward-looking viewpoint, not deserving of being spared by the revolution. O'Casey seems to be implying that these men--representatives of the leaders of post-revolution status quo in Ireland--betrayed the

high purposes of the revolution, or at least failed to foster those realities of Irish life that alone would have made the successful fight for freedom from England worthwhile.

This implication is reinforced as we move into the main action of the play. Thirty-four years after the scene we witnessed in the Prerumple, we find ourselves in the home of Binnington, now the affluent, bigoted, and reactionary Mayor of Doonavale. It is soon made clear that McGilligan is the Deputy Mayor, and that he is in character a counterpart of Binnington. It also turns out, however, that although they still despise and oppose one another as intensely as they had thirty-four years before, they are now, ironically--as they had been in the Prerumple--compelled, this time for business reasons, to proceed in tandem. Specifically, they are engaged, for mutual profit, in a business partnership through which they sell timber that, unknown to the community, is surreptitiously procured from a Communist country. They are assisted in their unsavory efforts by Father Fillifogue, the parish priest, who tries to impress upon the firm's laborers that working for Binnington and McGilligan is "workin' for God."

We soon learn that the situation of the two businessmen is complicated by the fact that Binnington has a son,

Michael, and McGilligan has a daughter, Nora, who love one another, although forbidden to keep company by their respective parents. Moreover, as leaders among the young and forward-looking members of the community, Michael and Nora are campaigning in the upcoming local elections for the offices held by their parents. They are assisted in their efforts, and supported in the progressive and wholesome ideals for which the young people of Doonavale stand, by Father Ned, a priest who, though never seen in the action, typifies the good religious elements of Irish life.

In the opposed groups of characters just described--the corrupt, reactionary businessmen abetted by Father Fillifogue, on the one hand, and the right-thinking young people inspired by Father Ned, on the other hand--we have the basic situation and conflict of the play. To this basic situation O'Casey has added a special occasion, the spring Tostal in Doonavale. It is through the events depicting the preparation for and the joyful, defiant celebration of this festival, that O'Casey gives The Drums of Father Ned its special charm as romantic light comedy. In contradistinction to the unhappy resolution of events in Cock and Bonfire, here the action is to the end lighthearted, and the forces of good are completely victorious. In fact,

the forces of evil are from the beginning so clearly ineffectual, and the young election campaigners and Tostal celebrants are so clearly in the ascendancy, that there is too slight a degree of suspense or struggle to provide much serious dramatic interest for spectators not aware of the controversial nature of the play stemming from its connection with the Tostal, and its implicit assault on the Church, through the unorthodox behavior of the young rebels of the play.

II. THEMATIC DEVELOPMENTS

Much controversy has surrounded this play, which was never produced in Ireland. On May 11, 1958, the second Dublin International Theatre Festival opened in Ireland, this Festival being part of Ireland's annual Tostal. On February 15 the following statement by the Dublin Tostal Council had been printed in The Irish Times:

The original announcement included the world premiere of a play, "The Drums of Father Ned," by Sean O'Casey. Negotiations with Mr. O'Casey regarding certain technical alterations were unsuccessful. It was indicated to Mr. O'Casey that his play would be acceptable only if such changes and alterations were made. He declined to give his permission, and in the circumstances withdrew his play.

It must be emphasized that the alterations requested were concerned with production details of a technical and structural character only, and at no time was the

play ever considered by either the council or the producing company to contain anything unsuitable for presentation.¹²⁷

This statement marked the beginning of a long and bitter fight over Father Ned. It would not serve our present purpose to discuss the many details of this controversy. Suffice it to say that the Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Rev. Dr. McQuaid, disapproved of both O'Casey's play and a version of James Joyce's Ulysses, called Bloomsday, dramatized by an Ulster playwright, Alan McClelland. Because of his disapproval, the Archbishop refused to celebrate the opening Mass at the 1958 Dublin International Theatre Festival. The Archbishop, along with other influential citizens, brought so much pressure to bear on the Tostal Council that it finally withdrew both plays from the program; eventually, the entire Theatre Festival for 1958 was cancelled from the Tostal because of adverse publicity. O'Casey, in turn, banned all his plays from any type of public performance or reading in Ireland. Although the Archbishop never read the play, he objected to its "doubtful morality." Krause speculates as follows:

Could it have been this miraculous power of Father

¹²⁷ Hogan, p. 130.

Ned's drums that frightened the Dublin Tostal Council and their superiors? O'Casey's play was clearly intended as a prophecy for Ireland, and it may have offended those who felt they had something to fear from a younger generation that knew what it wanted and was determined to get it. But it was only a play, a comic fantasy, the lightest and happiest play O'Casey had written. It was truly a festival play. Sean, hovering in the background in the guise of Father Ned, had struck a drum for the new Ireland, his first and only love.¹²⁸

Let us examine more closely, then, the theme of this play which members of the clergy and the Tostal Council felt was too controversial to produce. The theme of Father Ned is rooted in the same basic pattern to be found in all of O'Casey's late comedies: a distinct alignment of the forces of good against those of evil. But in this play the good versus the evil conflict is vested throughout in a mood of festival gaiety--a fact which gives the play its chief distinction and interest.

Some modern scholars have speculated that the primitive religious festivals out of which drama arose may have included a dramatization of the change of seasons; that tragedy is a representation of the dying god--also of the dying year, winter, and, in complete contrast with the death theme, that

forces of old ways and false religion are totally defeated.

¹²⁸ Krause, p. 224.

And by celebrates of what suggests an heretical ritual. This must have been too much for the clergy to bear.

comedy is a comos, or revel, celebrating rebirth and new life. In its thematic support of youth and love over stultified age, and in its festival mood, Father Ned may be viewed as a modern comos. Father Ned is the god of spring, and the Tostal is a fertility festival, herald of a new and fruitful life which will replace the old. It was perhaps the essence of this pagan ritual that aroused the clergy against Father Ned. Clerical objections may have been intensified by the fact that in this play there is a complete triumph of youth over age and the restrictions of the Church. Binnington, McGilligan, and Father Fillifogue are completely helpless--unable at the critical turning point of the action even to rise from their chairs--against the wave of youth led by Father Ned. In contrast, Poges and Stoke, in Dust, can still scramble for safety onto the roof of their house; Father Domineer, in Cock, is still a powerful influence, and the forces of new life are banished from his domain; Reiligan and the Canon, representatives of false religion in Bonfire, continue to hold sway as the bonfire burns "evil" literature. It is only in Father Ned that the forces of old ways and false religion are totally defeated. And they are defeated by celebrants of what suggests an heretical ritual. This must have been too much for the clergy to bear.

Perhaps it is a coincidence that Father Ned deals with the preparations for a Tostal festival, but it is probable that O'Casey decided to write about a Tostal because the play was to be presented during the 1958 Tostal in Ireland. The Tostal theme certainly would have been a good vehicle for O'Casey's message to Ireland, as the beat of Father Ned's drums is a constant reminder that new life must triumph over old.

III. SYMBOLISM

In so far as The Drums of Father Ned is developed in the manner of the primitive comos it may be viewed, overall, as an allegory. Similarly, the young celebrants and lovers of the play, and their words and actions, may be regarded as supporting symbols of the allegory. The events of the play become a prophetic sweeping away of the various forms of political, economic, and religious tyranny that have held Ireland in bondage, and symbolize the ushering in of a new and happier era. According to Krause,

The form of the triumph of the young is a Dionysian revel very like that of the komos of ancient Greece; they tease, deride, and bewilder their elders as they go in procession around the village, shouting their praises of Angus, the pagan Irish love-god, invading

129. Armstrong, p. 29.

130. Sean O'Casey, The Drums of Father Ned (London), p. 12.

131. Ibid., p. 12.

the Lord Mayor's drawing-room to rehearse their songs, and even hoisting their harp-banner above the presbytery.¹²⁹

Many lines of the play seem to have symbolic implications. At one point Michael says to Binnington, "Now, Father; now, Dad, learn to take new things easy." At another point, the Man of the Pike says to McGilligan, "Mind th' way, get outa th' way! We have to get on with th' work of resuscitatin' Ireland."¹³⁰ Tom, a young celebrant who is Bernadette's lover, in a moment of doubt says to Bernadette, the Binnington's maid, "Things here have aged too long for us to try to make them young again." And he adds, "The ageing rose must fade an' th' tiring leaf must fall." But Bernadette replies, "Old fields can still bring forth new corn, says Father Ned, my Tom; an' winthry minds give place to thinking born of spring."¹³¹

The death of old ways and the birth of new ones are climactically symbolized in the closing scene of the play. During the final victory march of the forces of youth, the evil trimvirate composed of Binnington, McGilligan, and Father Fillifogue, are about to make a last desperate

¹²⁹ Armstrong, p. 29.

¹³⁰ Sean O'Casey, The Drums of Father Ned (London), p. 32.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 48.

attempt to stop the march. The scene is comically and fancifully developed as follows:

Michael. Lasses an' lads, it's time to go, for more life, more laughter; a sturdier spirit and a stronger heart. Father Ned is on the march!

Tom(triumphantly). An' we go with Father Ned--March!

Michael(to Mrs. McGilligan). Come, come and join us.

Nora(to Mrs. Binnington). You, too, dear; come with us.

Mrs. McGilligan(to Mrs. Binnington). Let's go, Elena.

(Binnington and McGilligan make violent efforts to rise out of their chairs in a semi-stupefied way. Father Fillifogue, too, makes an effort to get up, but it is no more than a rocking back and forward, up and down.)

Binnington(muttering and bewildered). I'll fight youse; fight youse! . . .

Skerighan(gently shaking Father Fillifogue's shoulder). Are ye no' gaein' tae put your fut doon? What's scaurin' ye?

Murray(loudly). Dee moosic of life is scarin' him! . . . (whipping the umbrella from Skerighan, and waving it excitedly). Come on out, man, an' let th' orange sash join dee green ones!

(A roll of drums in the distance.)

Skerighan. Th' thondher of th' dhrums! A murracle, be God! (He listens for a moment.) Now, is thot th' thonder of th' dhrums of th' North, or th' thonder of th' dhrums of Feyther Nud?

Murray(shouting triumphantly). Dee drums of Fader Ned!

Echo (very quietly but very positively). Dee dhrums of
Fader Nud.

(The music of the March goes on.)

The Play Ends.¹³²

Father Ned is the central symbolic figure of the play.
the church.

He unites what is best in Irish myth and history with what
is best in Christianity. He symbolizes good priesthood, as
does Father Boheroe in The Bishop's Bonfire, but also pagan
attributes, as does the Cock in Cock-a-doodle Dandy. Al-
though he is the central figure, Father Ned is, as stated
earlier, never seen. When asked where he is, Bernadette
replies, "Here; but he might be anywhere, though some may
think he's nowhere; again he may be everywhere; but he's
always with th' dhrums."¹³³ The drums of Father Ned, a
recurring symbol heard throughout the play, represent the
heart beat of new life.

Several minor visual symbols reinforce the play's
meanings. The Tostal flag symbolizes the unity of Ireland.
Mrs. McGilligan describes it as, the Green Flag with its Golden Harp; th' harp
the rules of any established dramatic form.

¹³² Ibid., p. 105.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 55.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 101.

that can play an Orange tune in Belfast an' a National tune in Cork, an' yet remains a thrue Harp; an' the green grass that fattens the cattle of Ulsther as well as it fattens the cattle on the plains of Meaht, still remains th' thrue grass of our Irish pastures.¹³⁴

It is significant that this symbolic flag is raised over the church.

The official robes of McGilligan and Binnington are symbolic, as they become too large for the men near the end of the play. When both men discover that Michael and Nora are attempting to run against them in the elections, they ask for their robes so that they can go to the political meeting to fight for their offices.

(Mrs. McGilligan and Mrs. Binnington have run out, and now run in again with the Mayor's and Deputy Mayor's official garments. They hurridley help the two men to put them on, but the robes seem to have become too big for them, the chains dangle down too far, and the cocked hats fall down to their eyes.)¹³⁵

IV. CONCLUSION

O'Casey was forty when he first had a play produced. His writing talents were formed, not by educational institutions nor by the theatre, but by life itself. He could not accept the rules of any established dramatic form.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 101.

Realistic group drama suited his needs in The Shadow of a Gunman, family drama in Juno and the Paycock, mass drama in The Plough and the Stars. His passion forced him to adopt expressionism in The Silver Tassie and choral drama in Within the Gates. Rather simplified drama was his natural mode in The Star Turns Red when he polarized the world into revolutionary and counter-revolutionary factions. A lyrical realism was proper to his elegiac mood when he commemorated the great Transport Strike of 1913 in Red Roses for Me. A turbulent fantasy was the inevitable choice for his desire to assert the claims of nature against cowardice in Cock-a-doodle Dandy.¹³⁶

O'Casey's artistry is pure self-expression and spins everything out of his emotion and observation. Because of his self-expression he is intense whether he feels compassion or anger. He sometimes tends to see things only in terms of right and wrong, black and white. "He is apt, like Dickens, to rely on caricature rather than portraiture, as in Purple Dust."¹³⁷ O'Casey's work is conceived in the grand manner and belongs to the great baroque and romantic tradition.

... his work is theatrical and must be given elbow-room for its fancifulness, free passion, and Rabelaisian humor. A scene such as the magical storm in Cock-a-doodle Dandy in which all the cowards and hypocrites are having their clothes blown off and barely manage to hold up their trousers has to be played for all its worth. So played, it will be seen to be what it really is, the dramatic humor of the

¹³⁶ John Gassner, The Theatre in Our Times (New York), p. 245.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 245.

Elizabethans and the novelistic humor of Fielding and Dickens. We must also understand that O'Casey makes the "theatricalist" theatre the condition of his playwrighting. When he abandons the realistic technique, he makes one unalterable demand, namely, the right to let the play alternate between fact and fancy, verisimilitude and exaggeration or intensification, without regard to literary consistency. The only¹³⁸ consistency he accepts is theatrical consistency.

O'Casey sings a song of human love and of reaching out to the beauty in the world. To this end he uses many strategies of the imagination and the stage--the chorus, the harangue, the black and white characters, the changes of light, the effect of sound and wind, the mood of the seasons, the striking symbol, and quick transitions from fact to fancy.

And so he moves back and forth, and up and down, mightily disconcerting both the lover of orderly realistic procedures and the esthetic logician and precisionist. . . . All this, combined with the compassionate and sardonic observation of character and environment which first brought him fame, makes him the not easily classifiable playwright whose large claims are made upon the total man in his audience and upon the total resources of the theatre.¹³⁹

The most important thing to remember about an O'Casey production is that a lively and buoyant spirit should permeate the presentation. All four late comedies have themes proclaiming the natural goodness of the joyful, free life,

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 246.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 248.

and these themes have deeply religious as well as social and political implications. This is not to say that O'Casey adhered to orthodox Christian precepts; the objects of his faith and inspiration seem to be human rather than divine. The "urge of life" runs throughout his religion, and "for all its lapses into the sensuous, many people might regard it as nearer to Christ than that of our Churches."¹⁴⁰

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¹⁴⁰ Cowasjee, p. 146.

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