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SEAN O'CASEY'S COLD WAR

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of Sean O'Casey's protest against war, the chaos and madness it generates in the Dublin slums, and the ultimately adverse consequences it levies on the tenement dwellers by destroying their families and causing the deaths of noncombatants. His anger and anguish manifest itself most effectively in the form of drama, particularly in those plays comprising the Irish trilogy: The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars. In each play, an Irish conflict is both back-drop and catalyst to the action. Each work depicts the Dublin tenements as the setting and as the metaphor for the ravages of war. And in each play, the main characters reflect the insanity and disintegration caused by forces over which they have no control.

While many books and articles have been written on O'Casey's political beliefs, such as B. L. Smith's O'Casey's Satiric Vision, David Krause's Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Works, and William Armstrong's "History, Autobiography, and The Shadow of a Gunman," none of them has focused on this particular thematic approach. The material for this study was attained at The University of Tennessee Main Library.

Sean O'Casey's refusal to glorify and romanticize those who died for Ireland is clearly reflected in his treatment of

these topical events—The Sinn Fein-Black and Tan Conflict, the Civil War, and the Easter Rising of 1916—, settings based on his life in the tenements, and characters who are fictionalizations of people he knew. These effectively provide the background necessary to reveal the turmoil that disrupts the lives of the people in the Dublin slums.

Through his characters, O'Casey not only voices his views of Ireland, but he also illustrates the devastating effects war has on them. His characters are divided into three groups which relate to the theme about war; his young idealistic men—some who actually become involved in the fighting—are revealed to be cowards; his older men either ignore the war or maintain their distance from it; and his women display incredible strength and courage when danger is imminent. Even though O'Casey's method of waging war through his drama lacked the glory associated with the wars, his Irish trilogy rudely awakened the Irish public to the real tragedy in Ireland, that of the people of the tenements.

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CHAPTER I

SEAN O'CASEY

I. EARLY LIFE

Sean O'Casey began writing drama because of his disillusionment with and disappointment in what he believed to be the misguided efforts of the Irish Nationalist movement. He believed that there was a better way to fight for the freedom of Ireland, and the first step in his quest was to awaken the people of Ireland to the tragedy occurring in their own backyards: the people of the Dublin slums were needlessly and unwillingly suffering as victims of the wars that seemed to rage continually in Ireland. In an attempt to alert his country to the pain and grief that the poor were being forced to endure, O'Casey wrote three plays—The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars—which dealt with three different Irish conflicts that inevitably disrupted life in the tenements.

In this Irish trilogy, O'Casey questioned the heroism of the bloodthirsty gunmen and instead, focused on the defenseless people of the slums who were supposed to be saved by the wars but were actually their victims. Typically, his male characters speak loudly and boldly of their unshakeable courage—which, in the face of danger, quickly disappears—

while his female characters display an inner strength that gives them the courage to rise above their tragedies and to deal with potentially explosive situations. His sharp contrast between the male and female characters, combined with both his use of an Irish conflict as the backdrop of each play and his use of the tenement as the setting, create the illusion of chaos and suffering that he believed was imperative in successfully alerting the Irish public to the pain and suffering inflicted on their own people.

O'Casey's own life in the Dublin slums and his personal experiences with the continual intrusion of war into the tenements made him particularly sensitive to and empathetic with the suffering the poor had to tolerate. His exposure to the slums was reflected not only in his plays but also in the first three volumes of his autobiography. In I Knock at the Door, O'Casey described his own birth which he said occurred "sometime in the early eighties, on the last day of the month of March";¹ actually, he entered the world on March 31, 1880. He was the last of thirteen children born to Susan and Michael O'Casey, the third John born into the family, and one of only five who lived to adulthood. Though the O'Casey family moved several times, they always remained in the Dublin slums. They experienced the hardships normally

¹Sean O'Casey, I Knock at the Door (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1939), p. 1.

associated with poverty, but the loss of Michael O'Casey at a relatively young age settled the family deeper into poverty. For some time, the O'Casey family was supported by Sean's two older brothers, Michael and Tom; but after they joined the army, the support of the O'Casey's was relegated to Sean's third brother, Archie. Archie, however, received only thirteen shillings a week, which was certainly not sufficient money to feed the remaining three members of the family; in fact, many of their meals consisted of nothing but dry bread and tea.

Despite the obvious hardships O'Casey had to endure while growing up in the "putrid Dublin slums," he maintained a caring and positive attitude towards life. He developed an acute awareness of the struggle of the tenement dwellers just to remain alive and simultaneously to salvage some dignity. O'Casey's picture of the tenements was that of an isolated world set in a chaotic and mad universe.² When the insanity of this universe, which was generated by the War of Independence, the Civil War, and the Easter Rising of 1916, penetrated the boundaries of the tenements, the civilians ultimately suffered. As Seumas Shields in The Shadow of a Gunman explains: "When there's an ambush they don't know

²B. L. Smith, O'Casey's Satiric Vision (Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1978), p. 17.

where to run. Shot in the back to save the British Empire, an' shot in the breast to save the soul of Ireland."³

O'Casey's objection to the idealistic view that the Irish should be willing to sacrifice themselves to "save the soul of Ireland" was heavily influenced by his involvement with such Irish organizations as the Gaelic League, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and the Irish Citizen Army. When he became involved with the Brotherhood, O'Casey was a laborer who formerly believed in the causes of the common man. Soon, however, he discovered that the leaders, though brave and sincere, were not alive to the problems of the poor, and that they paid little heed to the rough energy and splendor of the working class.⁴ After he unsuccessfully tried to convince the leaders that they must bring labor into the movement, he left the Republicans and joined the Irish Citizen Army, which the famed leader, Jim Larkin, helped to form. But after a dispute with the Countess Markievicz, the treasurer of the Army, he also quit that organization.⁵ After leaving the Army, and after refusing to participate in

³Sean O'Casey, Collected Plays (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1950), p. 132. All quotes from the plays The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars will be from this edition, with the appropriate page numbers annotated in the text of the thesis.

⁴Saros Cowasjee, Sean O'Casey: The Man Behind the Plays (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), p. 13.

⁵Ibid., p. 17.

the Easter Rising, O'Casey moved from one job to another. He began to fill his free time with writing articles for various Irish publications. In 1918 he wrote a small prose tract on the patriot Thomas Ashe, which he followed with The Story of the Irish Citizen Army, published in 1919. When his prose writings met with small success, he turned to the theatre.

O'Casey was not new to drama; while he was growing up, he read voraciously and eventually built a respectable library that boasted works by Dickens, Ruskin, Scott, Darwin, Cooper, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and most importantly, the Globe Edition of Shakespeare. Of all the books he read, Shakespeare made the strongest impression upon him;⁶ and in later years, when he became involved with the "Townshend Dramatic Society," formed by his brother Archie and his friend Tommie Talton, the young O'Casey even played scenes from Shakespeare. Though his dramatic interests were aroused at a relatively young age, he did not begin to write plays until he was nearly forty years old.

All of his earlier plays, including those which were rejected by the Abbey, such as The Harvest Festival, The Frost in the Flower, The Crimson in the Tri-Colour, and The Seamless Coat of Kathleen, were concerned with some aspect of Ireland's political states, whether they dealt with Sinn Fein and the

⁶Ibid., p. 6.

Labor movement or with a turbulent period in Ireland's history. The plays in his Irish trilogy fall into the latter category. When O'Casey wrote The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars, he used the setting of the tenements and the backdrop of an Irish conflict as the basis for the plays. And against this background, his characters, who range from articulate cowards and idealistic soldiers to unexpectedly courageous women, gave impetus to his controversial and revealing plays. Through his characters, O'Casey essentially waged his own war against the Nationalistic rhetoric that ignored the indiscriminate slaughtering occurring in the tenements; instead of the patriots at the barricades, he audaciously made the people of the slums—the noncombatants—his main concern.⁷

O'Casey's noncombatants, consisting of both men and women, can initially be divided into two basic groups: the men and the women. The men are generally characterized as sharing the illusion of the glory of war and the romantic past, while the women have in common a down-to-earth attitude towards life. Though the men speak frequently and boldly of their courage and strength, when they are actually confronted by a crisis, the pressure proves to be too much, and

⁷David Krause, "Sean O'Casey and the higher nationalism: the desecration of Ireland's household gods," in Theatre and nationalism in twentieth-century Ireland, ed. Robert O'Driscoll (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p.126.

ultimately they reveal their cowardice. On the other hand, the women, who speak mostly of the folly of the men and are concerned primarily with preserving their families, exhibit unexpected inner strength and bravery when the occasion demands it.

These basic groups of O'Casey's characters, however, can be broken down into even finer divisions. Four of the six men to be discussed in this thesis are fairly young, and in one way or another they all become involved with the fighting. When compared with the two older characters, Fluther Good and Captain Jack Boyle, the youth of these four men proves to be instrumental in their inability to adapt to the stresses of war. Initially, Johnny Boyle and Jack Clitheroe enthusiastically offer to fight for their country; but eventually the stark reality and ugliness of the battle both destroy their desire to support Ireland's struggle for freedom and reduce them to cowards who, out of fear, remain and die in the fighting. The other two young men, Seumas Shields and Donal Davoren, hold more of an idealistic view of themselves in relation to Ireland than they do of Ireland herself. Seumas refuses to be a gun-toting Republican—though he once believed in the principles of the Nationalists—and spends the majority of his time analyzing the present state of Ireland, while Donal, the poet, espouses a lofty philosophy and enjoys his masquerade as a gunman. Both men, however, are involuntarily

drawn into the skirmish with the Black and Tans, and just as Johnny Boyle and Jack Clitheroe are revealed to be cowards, Donal and Seumas become immobilized with fear and fail to react bravely. The four men's lack of experience and knowledge of the world colors their concept of the "real" world and hinders their ability to exercise courage during a time of danger.

In contrast to these young men are Fluther Good and Captain Jack Boyle; both are older and are not as susceptible to the fever of Nationalism. Although Fluther is momentarily mesmerized by the potent rhetoric of the Speaker in the second act, he holds no illusions about glory and bloodshed, and he does not involve himself voluntarily in Ireland's struggle for freedom. Unlike the four younger men, Fluther is able to disregard his own safety and act heroically and compassionately on two different occasions, and thus saves the life of at least one person. Captain Jack Boyle, however, not only refuses to be influenced by the idealism rampant in Ireland, but he also totally shuns the war. Essentially, Boyle insulates himself from the world by indulging in his bottle of stout with his "butty" Joxer Daly. Although Fluther also occasionally resorts to the soothing powers of alcohol to ease the stresses of war, he copes with the proximity of the battle by ensuring both his safety and that of his neighbors. Consequently, both of these older men stay alive because of their more realistic view of and grasp on life.

The women can also be further divided into two different categories, with Juno Boyle and Nora Clitheroe in one and Bessie Burgess and Minnie Powell in the other. While the difference between generations does influence their attitudes and reactions to the war, age is not the predominant feature of the two groups of women. Juno's interest in the war is similar to that of Nora: Juno has a son involved in Ireland's struggle, and Nora's husband is a Captain who is also fighting for his country. Both women speak disparagingly of the insistence of the men in upholding a "principle" or an ideal, while they are interested only in safeguarding their families. Juno, however, because of her wisdom and the inner strength she has acquired through the years, is able to withstand the tragedy that destroys her family; she is able to maintain a positive outlook and to build a new life for herself and her daughter, Mary. Nora is not quite so fortunate. Even though she momentarily demonstrates some courage and resolution, she cannot effectively handle the combination of both the death of her husband and her premature baby, and ultimately she loses her sanity.

For Bessie Burgess and Minnie Powell, the effects of the war are somewhat more tragic. They inadvertently become involved in the fighting, primarily because they are intent on protecting others; as a result of their selflessness, they are shot and killed by the British. Minnie performs her

heroic deed because she believes that Donal is a gunman: she will do whatever she must to save his life. Essentially, it is her innocence and naiveté which precipitates her death. Bessie, however, is basically a cynical, emotionally hardened woman who, in her awakening to the suffering of her neighbors, discovers that she still has some compassion for her fellow human beings. She rises to the occasion by caring for and comforting Nora; and when Nora recklessly exposes herself to danger, Bessie rushes to protect her, losing her life in the process.

All of the aforementioned characters are the dominating personalities in their respective plays. In all three plays, these men and women embody a different aspect of O'Casey's vision of Ireland. With the exception of Jack Boyle, who is completely indifferent to Ireland and her troubles, and Fluther Good, who is atypical of most of O'Casey's men and is a quietly heroic man, the male characters in O'Casey's plays blindly adhere to the romantic idealism of the Irish Nationalists. Through these characterizations, he exposes and denounces the folly of the men who insist on pursuing their elusive dreams. In every play, and in every case, the women sharply contrast with the men by possessing all the qualities the men obviously lack—common sense, strength, courage. There are, of course, lesser male and female characters who exhibit elements of the qualities and traits

demonstrated in the main characters, but these main characters best exemplify both O'Casey's concept of Ireland and his concern for the people of the slums who he believed were the true victims and heroes of the wars.

II. THE IRISH TRILOGY

The first play which manifested O'Casey's concern for the tenement dwellers was The Shadow of a Gunman, produced in 1923. With the Dublin slums as the setting and the conflict between the Sinn Feiners and the Black and Tans as the backdrop, O'Casey made his initial attempt to depict the insanity that disrupts the tenements when the war penetrates its boundaries. Through his characters Seumas Shields and Donal Davoren, he voices his disbelief and anguish at the Nationalists who are insensitive to the suffering and pain they are inflicting on the poor. Though it is Seumas Shields, "a scamp on the grand scale,"⁸ who particularly verbalizes O'Casey's disillusionment with the Nationalist movement, both Seumas and Donal are characterized by their boasting and bragging of their fearlessness.

But in his characterization of Minnie Powell, he depicts the admirable virtue of courage. Ironically, Minnie is the only one who is able to live up to her illusion—that is, her belief that Donal is a gunman. And because of her illusion

⁸Cowasjee, p. 66.

about and love for him, she willingly sacrifices her own life to save him. O'Casey's characterization of the brave but rash Minnie reflects both his deep respect for women and his belief that women must bear the brunt of the tragedy in the tenements. As George Russell observes:

The women in his plays alone keep some incorruptible spiritual atom of pity or love in their hearts, the men are all lost souls blighted by weakness of will, or infected by God knows what spiritual disease through environment or heredity.⁹

Simply, The Shadow of a Gunman is O'Casey's expression of bewilderment and horror at one section of the community trying to murder and kill the other. The senseless death of Minnie Powell, who symbolizes the victimized civilians "shot in the back to save the British Empire" and "shot in the breast to save the soul of Ireland" (p. 132), exemplifies O'Casey's abhorrence of war. Though this same hatred of war also appears in Juno and the Paycock, and the tenements remain as the setting, the backdrop changes to the Civil War of 1922. In Juno and the Paycock, which was first produced in 1924, the war directly invades the Boyle home only once; indirectly, however, the war initiates the final degeneration of the Boyle family. Their supposed inheritance, the wooing and seduction

⁹Ibid., p. 53. Russell's opinion was first printed in the 7 March 1925 issue of The Irish Statesman.

of Mary Boyle, Johnny Boyle's death, and the ever present war combine and act almost simultaneously to destroy the Boyles.

As in The Shadow of a Gunman, the male characters of Juno and the Paycock are cowardly and offer no support to their family. Captain Jack Boyle, Juno's lazy, drunken husband, not only refuses to accept responsibility for his family but also denies the existence of the war. His son Johnny is, however, deeply involved in fighting for Ireland—that is, until a shattered hip and the loss of an arm finally drain him of all his courage and reveal him to be a coward. In contrast to the Captain and Johnny is Juno Boyle, the real "hero" of the play. She is the only prop of the Boyle family and is also the sole support, both emotionally and financially, of her family. Only Juno is able to rise above her tragic situation—which climaxes with Johnny's death—and, at the same time, her limitations. She is, as Andrew E. Malone calls her, "the greatest mother in drama, even though her influence be limited to two rooms in a Dublin slum."¹⁰

In the last play of his Irish trilogy, The Plough and the Stars, O'Casey's characterizations of the cowardly men and brave women became even more defined and ultimately evoked an emotional outburst from the Dublin public, especially the Irish Nationalists. Once again the tenement

¹⁰Cowasjee, p. 49.

remains as the setting, but the backdrop of the play switches to another period of turbulent Irish history—the Easter Rising of 1916. Unlike The Shadow of a Gunman and Juno and the Paycock, the war controls the action of the last two acts of the play, where the noise, confusion, and death are contained within the walls of the tenement, and its residents are unwillingly drawn into the fighting. This intrusion of war into the slums, combined with O'Casey's on-stage exposé of the Irish trinity of taboos—sex, religion, and patriotism¹¹—incited riots equalling the fierceness of those at The Playboy of the Western World. When he brought the "sacred" Republican flag into a pub, portrayed an Irish girl as a prostitute, and defended the victims—the women and children—he pricked a sensitive nerve in the Nationalist movement; he pointedly ignored the fighting patriots.

With some variations, O'Casey's characterizations in The Plough and the Stars follow the same pattern in his previous two plays. Fluther Good, one of O'Casey's finest comic creations, is a combination of "arrogant courage" and "jovial determination." He sharply contrasts with the serious, die-hard Republican Jack Clitheroe, whose wife Nora is against war and is concerned solely with maintaining some degree of normality in her life. It is Bessie Burgess,

¹¹David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), p. 39.

however, who totally embodies the "earthy, shrewd, laughing" woman of the tenement. Her invective and continual flow of abuse runs throughout the entire play. But her martyrdom, which occurs at the end, is sincere, although accidental;¹² she forfeits her life to save that of Nora Clitheroe, her favorite target of abuse.

As O'Casey once commented about his own work:

All . . . have gone down into the limbo of forgotten things. But I often wish that they were alive again, for buried in them are a wild joy and savage bitterness that I shall never know again.¹³

Such characters as Jack Boyle and Fluther Good personify this wild joy, and the savage bitterness erupts with the deaths of Minnie Powell, Johnny Boyle, and Bessie Burgess. These two emotions combine and become the pulse of his earlier plays. By incorporating his personal experience with life in the Dublin slums, and by capitalizing on the pathos created by the three Irish conflicts, O'Casey produces an anguished outcry against the insensitivity Ireland shows for the suffering of the poor—the people who are the backbone of Ireland.

¹²Bernard Benstock, Paycocks and Others: Sean O'Casey's World (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1976), p. 87.

¹³Robert Hogan, Feathers from the Green Cow (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1962), p. viii.

CHAPTER II

THE SHADOW OF A GUNMAN

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The atmosphere in Dublin in 1920, the time of the War of Independence, was the background O'Casey chose for the first play in his Irish trilogy, The Shadow of a Gunman. The War of Independence, also known as the Anglo-Irish war, lasted from early 1919 to July 1921. It was actually a continuation of the Easter Rising, only this time the whole country became involved in the struggle for Irish freedom. There were basically four events which led up to this war. The first event, the execution of the leaders of the 1916 Rising, initiated widespread public sympathy. The public's horror at the brutality of the executions was kept alive by the second event, the imprisonment of hundreds of Irish men and women who were suspected of being involved in the Rising. The third event that helped to keep anti-English sentiment high was the appointment of Lord French, who had previously been commander-in-chief of the British forces in France, as the Viceroy in May 1918. He not only had patriots such as Maud Gonne, Arthur Griffith, and Countess Markievicz arrested and deported to jails in England, but he also issued a decree suppressing Sinn Fein, the Volunteers, and the Gaelic League.

And finally, the last event, which ultimately initiated the start of the war, was the general election of December 1918. This particular election was a triumph for Sinn Fein who won seventy-three seats as opposed to the Unionists and the Irish Parliament with their combined total of thirty-two seats.¹ On January 21, 1919, Sinn Fein established itself as the Dáil Éirann, which, in turn, pledged itself to the Irish Republic. On the same day that the Dáil Éirann met for the first time in Dublin, a British explosives convoy was attacked and two men were killed, thus ending three years of nonviolence.

During the next two years, the Sinn Fein movement became very active and aggressive, and because of their increased activity, the British resorted to drastic measures by introducing the Black and Tans into Ireland. The oddly attired Black and Tans, who were clothed in khaki tunics and trousers and wore dark green caps—or vice versa—quickly began their satanic reign of terror in Ireland, shooting, looting, burning, and torturing throughout the country.² They were mostly men who were in search of adventure; they were hard drinkers, ruthless, and accustomed to danger. Naturally, Sinn Feiners clashed often, and viciously, with the Black and

¹Margaret MacCurtain and Mark Tierney, The Birth of Modern Ireland (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Limited, 1969), p. 139.

²Ibid., p. 142.

Tans; but frequently it was the uninvolved civilians in the city who were subjected to the cruel, needless searches of their houses. Following is a description of Dublin in 1920, which is very much a description of the Dublin in O'Casey's play The Shadow of a Gunman:

Military cordons drawn around sections of the city with barbed wire, military lorries and tanks in attendance were a familiar sight. At night searchlights played on the house fronts, while the rumble of lorries shook the streets. The stopping of a lorry outside was the signal to open the door, in the hope of being in time to prevent its being broken in. Then followed the rush of armed men upstairs and into every room, attic and cellar, swinging revolvers and shouting threats, the bursting open of cupboards, tearing up of floor boards and ripping of mattresses. If, as frequently happened, the raiders were drunk, or in a savage temper as the result of a recent ambush, shots would be fired through the walls and ceilings and breakables smashed. Any man found on the premises was in danger of being shot out of hand. Those taken away in lorries were sometimes shot dead and reported as "shot while attempting to escape."³

The war continued until it climaxed on November 21, 1920—also known as Bloody Sunday. Earlier in the day, eleven British Intelligence officers, who were in Dublin acting as spies, were shot to death in their homes or hotels; the British took revenge by executing three prisoners and by having the Black and Tans fire on a crowd at a match in Croke Park. Finally, efforts towards establishing a truce were begun, with the major action being the institution of the

³Dorothy Macardle, The Irish Republic (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965), p. 355.

Government of Ireland Act of 1920, which authorized two separate elections, one in the North and the other in the rest of Ireland. This move temporarily appeased both sides, and on July 11, 1921, a cease-fire was declared.

II. ACTION OF THE PLAY

The action of The Shadow of a Gunman revolves around a poet, Donal Davoren, who is continually frustrated in his attempt to compose verses by the other residents of the tenement. He shares a room with his pedlar friend, Seumas Shields, who at the beginning of the play is asleep. When Seumas finally rouses himself from his bed, a discussion of sorts takes place between the two friends: the subjects range from Shelley's poetry to a pair of braces that Seumas avows would "do Cuchullain, they're so strong" (p. 98). This observation is interrupted by the entrance of his friend Maguire, who tells Seumas that he cannot accompany him today and, after leaving a bag in the corner of the room, he departs hastily. Seumas leaves to sell his wares, and Donal settles down to write some poetry. However, his writing is interrupted several times by various people such as Minnie Powell, a young girl who is in love with Donal and believes he is a gunman.

The first act ends after a tired and frustrated poet exchanges a quick kiss with Minnie, and the second act begins

in the evening of that same day. Once again, Donal is trying to write while Seumas sleepily tries to converse with him. Donal becomes exasperated with his friend, extinguishes the light, and goes to bed. Seumas, however, continues airing his opinions, which encompass the subjects of Minnie Powell and the country "gone mad." Soon, shots are heard coming from the street. Frightened by the possibility of a Black and Tan raid, the two men decide to look in the bag left by Maguire, and much to their horror they discover that it is full of bombs. Minnie rushes into their room, discovers why the two are panicking, and without hesitation, grabs the bag of bombs and takes it into her room. Almost immediately, the Black and Tans raid the house. Nothing is found in Donal and Seumas' room, but Minnie Powell is not quite so fortunate, for she is taken prisoner; and while attempting to escape, she is shot dead.

In The Shadow of a Gunman, there is no conventional plot. Instead, there are primarily a string of incidents, which are often not well connected.⁴ The plot barely exists as the vehicle for the theme of war and its effect on the residents of the tenements. The thematic development of the play occurs in two phases. In the first phase, which parallels the first act, O'Casey alludes to the war through

⁴Saros Cowasjee, Sean O'Casey: The Man Behind the Plays (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), p. 32.

his characters, and in this manner he sets the scene for the second act, when the war makes its presence felt. O'Casey's first indication of war appears in the person of Maguire, who is, as the audience discovers at the end of the act, a real gunman. The second indication surfaces in a discussion between Donal and Seumas when the first mention is made of the Black and Tans and the fear they evoke in the people of the slums. However, O'Casey's most effectively and subtly employed indication of war appears in the form of a character—Donal Davoren. Donal is mistakenly labelled a gunman, and in indulging his vanity, he persists in his pretension as a gunman. For Minnie Powell, Donal's masquerade as a gunman proves to be fatal.

In the second phase, which encompasses the second act, the war remains in the background for the first half of the act. Soon, however, the sound of shots begins to penetrate the walls of the tenement houses, thus signalling the actual physical intrusion of the war into the slums and initiating the escalation of fear among the residents. The sudden entrance of the Black and Tans also foreshadows the most crucial and tragic event of the play, Minnie Powell's death. Her death, which is the focal point of the play, embodies O'Casey's impassioned outcry against the insanity and senselessness of the war that encroaches upon the tenements. And in the words of Mrs. Grigson, O'Casey probably best sums up his own anguish and bewilderment: "Poor little Minnie, poor

little Minnie Powell, to think of you full of life a few minutes ago, an' now she's dead!" (p. 156).

III. KEY CHARACTERS

Because of the war, the lives of the tenement dwellers are inevitably disrupted by the madness that tears its way into the slums of Dublin. The "brave" Seumas Shields and Donal Davoren are reduced to quivering, barely conscious cowards, while Minnie Powell, the woman to whom Seumas does not want to entrust his life, courageously tries to protect these two men, inadvertently placing her life in the hands of the marauding Black and Tans. Consequently, as the war affects each individual, they react in a manner that mirrors the chaos and suffering that is the trademark of war—especially O'Casey's vision of war and its atrocities.

Seumas Shields, one of O'Casey's more articulate characters, voices many of O'Casey's opinions concerning Ireland and her "protectors'" use of guns and bombs to obtain freedom. In discussing the war with Donal, Seumas exposes the danger of fanatical patriotism:

I wish to God it was all over. The country is gone mad. Instead of counting their beads now they're countin' bullets; their Hail Marys and paternosters are burstin' bombs—burstin' bombs, an' the rattle of machine guns; petrol is their holy water; their Mass is a burnin' buildin'; their De Profundis is "The Soldiers' Song"; an' their creed is, I believe in the gun almighty, maker of heaven an' earth—an' it's all for "the glory o' God an' the honour o' Ireland." (p. 131)

When Donal comments that he remembers a time when Seumas also believed in the gun, Seumas justifies his past loyalty and present horror with the best of all replies:⁵

Ay, when there wasn't a gun in the country; I've a different opinion now when there's nothin' but guns in the country—An' you daren't open your mouth, for Kathleen ni Houlihan is very different now to the woman who used to play the harp an' sing "Weep on, weep on, your hour is past," for she's a ragin' divil now, an' if you only look crooked at her you're sure of a punch in th' eye. (pp. 131-32)

Through Seumas, O'Casey takes a crooked look at Kathleen ni Houlihan; the romantic and sentimental woman with the harp has been transformed into an angry and righteous woman with a gun who demands absolute loyalty and hits out savagely at anyone who doubts her ruthless methods.⁶ But the bold Seumas goes even farther and questions the heroism of the bloodthirsty gunmen:

It's the civilians that suffer; when there's an ambush they don't know where to run. Shot in the back to save the British Empire, an' shot in the breast to save the soul of Ireland. I'm a Nationalist meself, right enough—a Nationalist right enough, but all the same—I'm a Nationalist right enough; I believe in the freedom of Ireland, an' that England has no right to be here, but I draw the line when I hear the gunman blowin' about dyin' for the people, when it's the people that are

⁵David Krause, "Sean O'Casey and the higher nationalism: the desecration of Ireland's household gods," in Theatre and nationalism in twentieth-century Ireland, ed. Robert O'Driscoll (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p.126.

⁶Ibid., p. 127.

dyin' for the gunmen! With all due respect to the gunmen, I don't want them to die for me. (p. 132)

Seumas' skepticism is O'Casey's humanistic attempt to measure the cost of freedom.⁷

However, Seumas' sincere and painfully accurate observations of Ireland are overshadowed when his fear begins to become evident. Previously, he had cloaked his cowardice in his faith, for as he tells Donal:

Thanks be to God I'm a daily communicant. There's a great comfort in religion; it makes a man strong in time of trouble an' brave in time of danger. No man need be afraid with a crowd of angels round him; thanks to God for His Holy religion! (p. 133)

But after a volley of shots is heard in the lane, Seumas' crowd of angels obviously begins to disperse, for he nervously observes that

. . . this is a dangerous spot to be in with them windows; you couldn't tell the minute a bullet ud come in through one of them, an' hit the—hit the— an' hit the (p. 133)

His fear becomes even more apparent when he suddenly begins to speculate about the "peculiar noises" which emit from the stable at the back of the house at night—noises which he eventually identifies with the manufacturing of bombs.

Later, when he and Donal discover that Maguire's bag is filled with bombs, he panics, almost faints, and prays fervently. He swears that "if we come through this I'll never miss a Mass again! If it's the Tommies it won't be so

⁷Ibid., p. 128.

bad, but if it's the Tans, we're goin' to have a terrible time" (p. 146). While he is being questioned by a member of the Black and Tans, he literally quakes with fear. His rash and careless boasting is replaced by cowardly pleading and blatant lying; he is afraid to tell his real name and swears he has never had a gun in his hand. For a few moments, Seumas is denuded, and his fear is exposed. But despite his frightening experience and his failure to display any courage, he quickly resumes his posture of arrogance and matches Mr. Grigson's fictitious story of bravery and defiance with one of his own.

That's the best way to take them; it only makes things worse to show that you've got the wind up. "Any ammunition here?" says the fellow that came in here. "I don't think so," says I, "but you better have a look!" "No back talk," says he, "or you might get plugged." "I don't know of any clause," says I, "in the British Constitution that makes it a crime for a man to speak in his own room,"—with that, he just had a look around, an' off he went. (p. 155)

Obviously, since Seumas so easily reverts back to his former self, he learns nothing from his brush with danger. He quickly detaches himself from the action of the war and denies any responsibility for Minnie Powell's death; he cannot and will not accept that she died because he was a "dastardly coward." Although Seumas entertains no illusions about the romantic Kathleen ni Houlihan, he does delude himself about his own virtues, particularly his courage. Seumas is momentarily affected by the intrusion of the war,

but he is by no means a tragic victim nor does he suffer unduly. He copes by once again donning his mantle of faith, which he believes will make him "strong in time of trouble and brave in time of danger" (p. 133).

Donal Davoren is another of O'Casey's characters who speaks fine rhetoric and lays claim to an invincible courage; but Donal speaks as O'Casey the poet rather than O'Casey the disenchanted Nationalist. He is, at best, O'Casey's embryonic poet, gifted with clarity of vision, but little else; he lacks the essential ingredient of the artist—experience in life.⁸ When Seumas tells him that "it doesn't pay a working man to write poetry" (p. 127), and that a poet's claim to greatness "depends upon his power to put passion in the common people" (p. 127), Donal vehemently replies:

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

⁸B. L. Smith, O'Casey's Satiric Vision (Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1978), p. 23.

and through necessities; the poet views creeds, customs, and necessities through life. (p. 127)

Thus, Donal isolates himself from human experience, seeks solitude, and believes the poet to be a scapegoat-saviour who can save the people only by being scorned or destroyed by them.⁹

Just as Seumas' outlook on Ireland is overshadowed by his cowardice, Donal's lofty view of the Irish people is darkened by both his hypocritical charade as a gunman and his eventual display of cowardice. Donal does not intentionally try to project the image of a gunman, for it is his neighbors who decide he is a gunman on the run. But once he discovers that everyone, especially Minnie, believes he is a gunman, he persists in his masquerade. Initially, when the charming young Minnie disturbs Donal, he is eager to have her leave so that he may resume his writing. But as they talk, he becomes susceptible to her attractiveness and responds to her flirtatious manner. Minnie's obvious admiration for Donal strongly appeals to his vanity, so he continues in his imposture. He plays the role completely by casually admitting to Minnie that

one does be a little nervous at first, but a fellow gets used to it after a bit, till, at last, a gunman throws a bomb as carelessly as a schoolboy throws a snowball. (p. 110)

⁹Ibid.

But he follows this glib comment with one that foreshadows the tragic denouement of the play: "And what danger can there be in being the shadow of a gunman?" (p. 124).

The danger for Minnie is her romantic illusion about Donal as a gunman. Donal's self-importance and vanity blind him to his responsibility towards Minnie, and when the Black and Tan raid takes place, his creed that it is philosophy that makes men brave fails him and consequently leads to Minnie's death. Donal differs somewhat from Seumas in that he does recognize that he and his roommate are "dastardly cowards" and that he is a "poet and poltroon"; thus, he admits his own complicity in Minnie's death.

O'Casey's characterization of Donal conveys the reaction of a vain and sensitive poet to the grim conditions of war.¹⁰ Donal not only tries to escape the war but he also tries to flee from life by seeking solitude. Even though he turns to poetry to shield himself from present realities, he still remains a tenement dweller.¹¹ When the madness of the war invades the slum and reveals him to be a coward, he is shocked by his inability to take action to protect both himself and Minnie. He painfully acknowledges his responsibility in her death:

¹⁰Cowasjee, p. 35.

¹¹Ibid.

Ah, me, alas! pain, pain, pain ever, for ever!
 It's terrible to think that little Minnie is dead,
 but it's still more terrible to think that Davoren
 and Shields are alive! Oh, Donal Davoren, shame is
 your portion now till the silver cord is loosened
 and the golden bowl be broken. Oh, Davoren, Donal
 Davoren, poet and poltroon, poltroon and poet!
 (p. 157)

But his remorse cannot erase his crime of fulfilling the image of a gunman, for he is clearly accountable for Minnie's romantic commitment to a false idea, for her arrest, and for her death.¹²

In comparison to Seumas Shields and Donal Davoren, Minnie Powell does not speak fine words nor does she voice great thoughts; but she is endowed with something finer—courage.¹³ She is one of O'Casey's heroines who unexpectedly demonstrate tremendous fearlessness and concern for others. As O'Casey describes her:

Minnie Powell enters with an easy confidence one would not expect her to possess from her gentle way of knocking. She is a girl of twenty-three, but the fact of being forced to earn her living, and to take care of herself, on account of her parents' early death, has given her a force and assurance beyond her years. She has lost the sense of fear (she does not know this), and, consequently, she is at ease in all places and before all persons, even those of a superior education, so long as she meets them in the atmosphere that surrounds the members of her own class. (p. 105)

Though she does not spend much time on the stage, the vital force she exerts in the play is not diminished.

¹²Smith, p. 23.

¹³Ibid., p. 21.

Her entrance into the action of the play is positive and confident, and her person radiates an aura of independence and assurance. Even Donal, who comments that she is "very pretty, but very ignorant," is intrigued by the fresh, young Minnie. When Minnie suggests that she help Donal tidy his room, propriety comes first and he nervously rebukes her offer. Minnie, however, states:

An' do you think Minnie Powell cares whether they'll talk or no? She's had to push her way through life up to this without help from any one, an' she's not goin' to ask their leave, now, to do what she wants to do. (p. 111)

Donal intuitively senses her courage and exclaims: "Lovely little Minnie, and brave as well; brave little Minnie, and lovely as well!" (p. 111).

However, not everyone appreciates Minnie's independence and innocence. Donal's obvious liking for Minnie evokes from Seumas an emotional, cynical outburst:

A Helen of Troy come to live in a tenement! You think a lot about her simply because she thinks a lot about you, an' she thinks a lot about you because she looks upon you as a hero—a kind o' Paris. . . . She'd give the world an' all to be gaddin' about with a gunman. An' what ecstasy it ud give her if after a bit you were shot or hanged; she'd be able to go about then—like a good many more—singin' "I do not mourn me darlin' lost for he fell in his Jacket Green." An' then, for a year an' a day, all around her hat she'd wear the Tri-Coloured Ribbon O, till she'd pick up an' marry someone else—possibly a British Tommy with a Mons Star. An' as for being brave, it's easy to be that when you've no cause for cowardice; I wouldn't care to have me life dependin' on brave little Minnie Powell—she wouldn't sacrifice a jazz dance to save it. (p. 130)

Seumas fails to recognize the merits of Minnie's character, and his rather derisive statement concerning Minnie's bravery has an ironic twist, for it is Seumas and Donal who abandon their fine words of courage and become ingratiating cowards. When confronted in reality by that which they so easily manage in their rhetoric, they crumble.¹⁴ It is Minnie, who speaks little of being brave, who acts quickly and decisively in the moment of danger.

Minnie's fearless decision to hide the bombs in her room is a preview of Bessie Burgess' selflessness. Neither woman stops to calculate the risk she is taking when she moves to protect a friend or friends. When Minnie takes the bombs, she comments that if they search her room, "they won't harm a girl" (p. 146). Unfortunately for Minnie, she is wrong, for she is taken prisoner by the Black and Tans. And as she attempts to escape, defiantly shouting "Up the Republic," she is shot to death. Thus, Minnie heralds the first of a parade of young women of unusual strength, who eclipse the men, their counterparts. And her death, a tragic example of the many unnecessary deaths that occurred frequently when the war invaded the tenements, becomes the first of O'Casey's impassioned statements against the suffering the war inflicts on the residents of the Dublin slums.

¹⁴Smith, p. 21.

CHAPTER III

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The second play of O'Casey's trilogy, Juno and the Paycock, had for its background the Civil War of 1922, which almost immediately followed the War of Independence. After a truce had been declared to end the War of Independence, efforts were made to get the English and Irish together to discuss an agreement. A delegation of six men, all members of the Dáil Éirann, journeyed to London to read the treaty drawn up by the British. There were three issues that they wanted the delegates to agree on: (1) that Ireland should belong to the Empire, (2) that all Irishmen should swear allegiance to the King of England, (3) that Ireland should provide defense facilities for England in time of war. Essentially, Ireland would not be a full-fledged republic, but she would be the Irish Free State.¹ The delegates signed the treaty and returned to Ireland so that the Dáil Éirann could vote on whether or not to accept it. The Dáil was sharply divided, but the final vote reflected that sixty-four

¹Margaret MacCurtain and Mark Tierney, The Birth of Modern Ireland (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Limited, 1969), pp. 152-53.

members were in favor of accepting the treaty whereas fifty-seven voted negatively. Ultimately, the people of Ireland wanted peace and were ready to rebuild their country.

Those who rejected the treaty were known as the Republicans, and when it was agreed that the boycott of goods from North to South and the persecution of the Catholics in Belfast were to end, they organized a series of raids across the border. They wore the uniforms of the Irish Republican Army, indicating to the North and to the English that the Dáil had authorized the raids. Several other incidents, such as the attack on Clonmel Barracks, the delay in holding a general election, and the banning by the Free State government of the Army convention, only contributed to the growing tensions between the Republicans and the Free Staters. On June 22, 1922, Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson was assassinated by two Irish Republican men. Since the British felt certain that the order to kill Wilson came from the Four Courts Garrison, they presented the Dáil with an ultimatum—either the occupation of the Four Courts ends or the British government would regard the treaty as formally violated. In turn, the Dáil sent an ultimatum to the garrison demanding that the Republicans quit the garrison by June 28, 1922, which they did not do; thus, the Civil War between the Republicans and the Free Staters began. The war continued for nearly a year, until a cease-fire was declared on May 24, 1923.

II. ACTION OF THE PLAY

The plot of Juno and the Paycock, woven against the background of the Civil War between the Free Staters and the Republicans, is more closely knit than O'Casey's other plays and consists of three plot lines: the Boyle's elusive inheritance, Mary's unfortunate love affair, and Johnny's treachery. Though neither of the former two has any relation to the last, and their connection with each other is slender,² the three plot lines sufficiently balance each other to reflect vividly how the everyday tragedies of the Dublin slums become paramount when highlighted by the violence and senselessness of war.

The play takes place in the Boyle's two-room apartment. Juno Boyle is the only one working; hence, she is the sole support of the family. Her daughter Mary is at home on strike; her son Johnny, who has been invalided by both the Easter Rising and the Civil War, wanders aimlessly between the two rooms; and her husband, Captain Jack Boyle, spends most of his time drinking stout with his "butty" Joxer Daly and nimbly sidestepping all opportunities to take a job. The first act is punctuated by the entrances of Jerry Devine, Mary's rejected lover; of Charlie Bentham, Mary's new

²Saros Cowasjee, Sean O'Casey: The Man Behind the Plays (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1962), p. 48. This is a comment made by Milton Waldman in the February 1926 issue of The London Mercury.

lover and the bearer of the news of the Boyle's inheritance; of Joxer Daly; and finally, of the Captain himself. Essentially, the foundation for the development of the first two plot lines—the inheritance and Mary's ill-fated love affair—is laid in the first act, while Johnny's abrupt reaction to the details of Robbie Tancred's murder only vaguely alludes to his subsequently unveiled treachery.

During the second act, which takes place two days later, the effect of the Boyle's inheritance has quickly manifested itself in the form of cheap paper festoons and glaring, vulgar furniture. The Captain is languidly stretched out on the couch entertaining his friends by spinning yarns about his "adventures" at sea. With the exception of Johnny, the family is, in general, enjoying their unexpected wealth. Johnny's distress increases, and after seeing the ghost of Robbie Tancred, the connection between Johnny's emotional, distracted state and Robbie's death becomes clearer.

The Boyle's good fortune, however, does not last long, for in the third act, which takes place two months later, tragedy disrupts the Boyle family. Bentham has fled to England, and Mary, after a trip to the doctor, discovers she is pregnant with his child. Bentham's flight to England is explained when the Boyles receive the news that due to the vague wording of the will they cannot claim the money. Shortly after the information about Mary's pregnancy and the

"washed out" will has been revealed, two men, both Irregulars, arrive at the Boyle's and drag Johnny from the apartment; within the hour, Juno receives the news that Johnny is dead. Juno and Mary leave the house forever, and the play closes as the drunken Captain, unmindful of his loss, enters the apartment proclaiming that "th' whole worl's . . . in a terr . . . ible state o' . . . chassis!" (p. 89).

The Captain's last comment in the play succinctly defines the theme and purpose of Juno and the Paycock, which is to illustrate the chaos and suffering that results when war indiscriminately invades the tenements and intensifies the everyday tragedies of the slums. Only Johnny's treachery is directly related to the war, while the inheritance and Mary's pregnancy occur independently of the war. The latter two serve primarily to foreshadow and heighten the suffering and grief Juno must endure when she learns that her son is dead.

Once again, as the presence of war comes closer to the tenements, the chaos in the Boyle's world increases. In the first act, war is clearly referred to only twice and then only as explanations of Johnny's crippled hip and his loss of an arm. During the second act, the reference to the fighting becomes more explicit when Mrs. Tancred mourns for her dead son. But it is in the last act that the war suddenly surfaces and explodes with its terrible force, thus shattering

the already badly shaken Boyle family. Therefore, Johnny's death and Juno's grief at the loss of her son epitomize the poignant and heart-breaking tragedy that occurs when the war enters the neutral zone of the slums and quickly reduces it to a microcosm of the turmoil that exists in the world outside the tenement walls.

III. KEY CHARACTERS

In Juno and the Paycock, O'Casey's three major characters are Juno Boyle, her son Johnny, and her husband, Captain Jack Boyle. The two men represent two extremes: Johnny fiercely believes in upholding his "principles" and the Captain totally ignores the war that his son feels is extremely important. Both are irresponsible, for each is so immured in his own world that he is incapable of contributing to the family in either an emotional or financial capacity. Juno strikes a balance between the men and supplies the only down-to-earth philosophy evident in the play. In addition to lending emotional support to her family, she ensures that they have food to eat. She is the only one who substantially interacts with everyone. Johnny does not really communicate with either his father or his sister, and the Captain is concerned only about himself and is quick to condemn everyone in his family.

In his characterization of Captain Boyle, O'Casey depicts a man who not only is not entranced by the romantic

illusion of Kathleen ni Houlihan, but who also ignores and denies the war. As he tells Juno, "We've nothin' to do with these things, one way or t'other. That's the Government's business, an' let them do what we're payin' them for doin'" (p. 56). Though he is a braggart, he dwells more on his "adventures" at sea than on the virtue of courage—a subject that preoccupies Seumas and Donal. He insulates himself from reality by drinking stout in the snugs with Joxer Daly, and into his safe, secure world he successfully escapes.

Since the Boyle's inheritance further enables the Captain to satisfy his hedonistic tendencies and to maintain his unemployed status, he is able to keep his sheltered world intact. After being informed of his inheritance, Boyle launches into an extravagant spending spree in which he purchases, borrows, and promises to indulge his every whim and fancy. He decorates the apartment in cheap ornaments and ostentatious furniture and even goes so far as to buy a gramophone. Fortunately for Boyle, the will temporarily appeases Juno, for she restrains herself from pestering her husband to get a job. Normally, Jack refuses to seek any type of employment, placing on Juno the onus of supporting the family. His excuse is always the same: he suddenly experiences a "terrible twinge" of pain in his legs, which "incapacitates" him. Juno, of course, sees through his sham immediately, for she drily notes:

Oh, it won't be very long now till it travels into your left wan. It's miraculous that whenever he scents a job in front of him, his legs begin to fail him! (p. 16)

Soon, however, the Boyles' world begins to fall apart, into a "state o' chassis"—a state to which the Captain makes a sizeable contribution. The family loses the inheritance and, along with it, all their possessions. Mary's pregnancy is revealed, and she is cruelly rejected by her selfish father who is concerned only with what the neighbors might think. An argument between Juno and the Captain ensues, and essentially it precipitates the permanent departure of Juno and Mary. Boyle, who previously refused to show any kindness or understanding towards his son, is totally unaware that his son is dead when he and Joxer, both in an intoxicated state, return to the Boyles' completely empty apartment. In a drunken stupor, never realizing that he has lost his entire family, the Captain repeats his edict that the world is in a "terrible state o' chassis."

For a man who wants nothing to do with the war, Captain Boyle is, along with Juno, tremendously affected by the havoc the war wreaks. But unlike Juno, he is not capable of recognizing that his life has been inadvertently altered by the turmoil and madness generated by the Civil War. Jack Boyle's tragedy is that even though he is somehow aware that the world is in a perpetual state of confusion, he is too

blind and too drunk to understand that this same "state o' chassis" has robbed him of his family and belongings.

For Johnny Boyle, however, the war and its terrible power are very real. Unlike his father, Johnny deeply believes in a "principle" and is willing to fight for it, as evidenced by his shattered hip and missing arm. As he comments to his mother: "Ireland only half free'll never be at peace while she has a son left to pull a trigger" (p. 31). Johnny's involvement, though, with first the Easter Rising and then the Civil War, eventually reduces him to an extremely frightened man who gives in to his fears. As all O'Casey's idealistic male characters discover, belief in a "principle" cannot indefinitely sustain them while the destruction and purposelessness of war rage around them.

From the beginning of the play, Johnny Boyle is a haunting, restless presence in the Boyle apartment, who moves about the two rooms lighting candles, hiding, and making selfish demands on others. He does not say much except to defend his principles or to react in a frightened manner to an allusion to Robbie Tancred's death. Fairly early in the play, it becomes apparent that Johnny is harboring much anxiety about something, for when there is a knock at the door and he is told by Joxer that it is a man in a trench coat, he exclaims, "Holy Mary, Mother O' God, I" (p. 22). And later in the first act, after the Boyles

have been informed of their good fortune, he seems quite eager "to get out o' this place now, an' go somewhere we're not known" (p. 33).

As the play progresses, Johnny's apprehension becomes even more evident, for his restlessness and irritability increase. He is quite affected by Bentham's explanation of ghosts, for he cries out:

What sort o' talk is this to be goin' on with? Is there nothin' better to be talkin' about the killin' o' people? My God, isn't it bad enough for these things to happen without talkin' about them! (p. 45)

He then hurriedly exits from the room only to be heard screaming in fright a few moments later. After he is calmed down, he reveals why he screamed:

I seen him. . . . I seen Robbie Tancred kneelin' down before the statue . . . an' the red light shinin' on him . . . an' when I went in . . . he turned an' looked at me . . . an' I seen the wounds bleedin' in his breast. . . . Oh, why did he look at me like that? . . . it wasn't my fault that he was done in. . . . Mother O' God, keep him away from me! (p. 46)

Johnny's obvious distress over Robbie's death is a clear implication of his culpability in arranging the ambush in which Robbie was killed—a death which is avenged in the last act.

Through Johnny's participation in the last two wars, he partially fulfills his principles; yet when he is put to the test for the third time, he is unable to react bravely. Hence, O'Casey depicts Johnny more as a pathetic character

than a heroic one, once more emphasizing the fact that the combatants are not the real heroes of the wars. Even though Johnny dies as a result of the war, it is not an honorable death, and it ultimately provides the final blow to Juno, his loving, patient mother, who has been endowed with an inner strength unequaled by any other character in the play.

Juno possesses all the qualities of the down-to-earth woman that O'Casey admires so much. In Rose and Crown, O'Casey has written:

Women were nearer to the earth than men; they had their feet in the soil. Men went lightly over the ground; women trod firmly. They are closer to common things, and so have a more ready and lasting knowledge of life. Men shout dogmatically, they gesture, and run here, run there; women stay more still, speak more quietly, and say more in their silence.³

Juno's courage and common sense, felt from the beginning of the play, sharply contrast with the stupid idealism and imaginative flights of fantasy from the other household members.⁴ Her outlook on life also differs from that of her family; life is more sacred than patriotic slogans, and human realities are more meaningful than fanatical abstractions, particularly when in the name of national honor the

³Sean O'Casey, Rose and Crown (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1952) pp. 292-93.

⁴Cowasjee, p. 50.

revolution devours its own children.⁵ She sees life in terms of the essential human situation—bread on the table and love in the heart. When Mary goes on strike and claims "a principle's a principle," Juno replies:

Yis; an' when I go into oul' Murphy's tomorrow, an' he gets to know that, instead o' payin' all I'm goin' to borry more, what'll he say when I tell him a principle's a principle? What'll we do if he refuses to give us any more on tick? (p. 7)

And later, when Johnny supports his principles by claiming that Ireland will never be at peace while there is still a son left to fight, Juno caustically comments, "To be sure—no bread's a lot better than half a loaf" (p. 31).

In addition to her full-time job of keeping her family within the bounds of reality, she also shoulders the burden of being the sole financial support of her husband and two children. With Mary on strike, Johnny invalided, and the Captain deftly avoiding all job opportunities, she must work. Ironically, she is the only member of the household who recognizes that her family is entirely dependent upon her: "Amn't I nicely handicapped with the whole o' yous! I don't know what any o' yous ud do without your ma" (p. 8). This statement takes on even more importance in the last act when three disastrous incidents—the loss of the inheritance, Mary's pregnancy, and Johnny's death—rapidly succeed one

⁵David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), p. 39.

another. As each misfortune overtakes her, Juno is able to rise above it and continue living her life; and in doing so she repudiates the war and the illusions that the soldiers die bravely and beautifully for their country, and that the women willingly send their men out to die⁶—an observation later made by Nora Clitheroe in The Plough and the Stars.

But Juno, Nora, and Mrs. Tancred all lose either a son or a husband to Ireland. While Mrs. Tancred is grieving for her son, Juno temporarily forgets her own son, and in a rare, unsympathetic moment she comments:

In wan way, she [Mrs Tancred] deserves all she got; for lately, she let the Die-hards make an' open house of th' place; an' for the last couple of months, either when th' sun was risin' or when th' sun was settin', you had C.I.D. men burstin' into your room, assin' you where you were born, where were you christened, where were you married, an' where would you be buried! (p. 56)

She is, however, quickly reminded that she is also a mother with a son, for Johnny also loses his life. Now she can empathize with Mrs. Tancred, and her remorse at not doing so earlier is obvious:

Maybe I didn't feel sorry enough for Mrs. Tancred when her poor son was found as Johnny's been found now—because he was a Die-hard! Ah, why didn't I remember that then he wasn't a Die-hard or Stater, but only a poor dead son! (p. 87)

As O'Casey often does with his characters, he speaks through Juno. She sees through the folly and foolishness of

⁶Ibid., p. 69.

fighting for an ideal and also realizes that essentially the war will not change the state of Ireland, except perhaps, that many innocent people will be killed and families that were unwillingly involved in the war will be destroyed. But it is in Juno's most passionate, poignant, and eloquent speech that O'Casey's anguish at the senselessness of war emerges:

What was the pain I suffered, Johnny, bringin' you into the world to carry you to your cradle, to the pains I'll suffer carryin' you out o' the world to bring you to your grave! Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets? Sacred Heart o' Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone, and give us hearts o' flesh! Take away this murderin' hate, an' give us Thine own eternal love! (p. 87)

In Juno's classic lament for the higher idealism, the sacredness of life itself, O'Casey creates his own symbol of Kathleen ni Houlihan, a black-shawled woman of the tenements who has a heart instead of a harp.⁷

⁷David Krause, "Sean O'Casey and the higher nationalism: the desecration of Ireland's household gods," in Theatre and nationalism in twentieth-century Ireland, ed. Robert O'Driscoll (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p.126.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For the last play in his Irish trilogy, The Plough and the Stars, O'Casey uses an earlier yet very turbulent period of Irish history—the Easter Rising of 1916. Prior to the Rising, there occurred several incidents which were indications of future trouble. The first event was the founding of the Irish Citizen Army in 1913. It was established as a result of the Great Transport Strike in which Jim Larkin roused the Dublin workers to strike for fair wages. When he appeared at a public meeting in O'Connell Street, the police attacked the crowd, an action which resulted in four hundred civilians being wounded. To protect the citizens from further attacks by the police, Larkin formed a Home-Guard known as the Irish Citizen Army. Shortly after the formation of the Army was the founding of the Irish Volunteers, the second event that helped to make the Rising possible. The motto of the Volunteers was "Defense not Defiance," and they were primarily preoccupied with marching and drilling, an activity that the British did not take seriously. The third event that pointed towards the Rising was the Howth gun-running incident. In 1914, arms, which had been bought in

Germany, were smuggled into the country on a private yacht. On what appeared to be a routine Sunday drill, the Volunteers marched to Howth with the intention of unloading the guns and returning with them to Dublin. Naturally, the police discovered what kind of maneuver was really taking place, and they intercepted the Volunteers on their return march and confiscated nine hundred guns and 26,000 pounds of ammunition.¹

The fourth event which helped prepare the ground for the Rising was World War I. First of all, the war delayed the introduction of the Home-Rule Bill; secondly, it divided Ireland into two factions: those who would help England fight the Germans and those who refused to cooperate in any manner. The latter group, which came under the influence of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, began to make plans for an insurrection because they believed that "England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity."² The fifth event that occurred was the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa, an old Fenian who had died in America. His body was brought back to Ireland for burial, and his funeral was almost a national occasion. Approximately six months after Rossa's funeral, the members of the Supreme Council of the Brotherhood agreed that a

¹Margaret MacCurtain and Mark Tierney, The Birth of Modern Ireland (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Limited, 1969), p. 125.

²Ibid., p. 126.

rising should take place during the Easter Holidays in 1916.

On St. Patrick's Day 1916, the Volunteers and the Army paraded in College Green, Dublin, while the police watched and took no action. They repeated this operation on several different days, hoping that when the day came for the Rising the authorities would be off guard. On April 8, Padraic Pearse arranged for mobilization; on Holy Thursday, Eoinn MacNeill, the commander-in-chief of the Volunteers, learned that the Rising was to take place on Easter Sunday. He immediately realized that the Volunteers could not face such an ordeal without further supply of arms and ammunition, so he gave orders to cancel the maneuvers for Easter Sunday. Despite MacNeill's cancellation, Pearse and James Connolly sent out couriers announcing that the Rising would take place on Easter Monday. On Easter Monday morning, after the Volunteers failed to capture Dublin Castle, Connolly took over the General Post Office and used it as Republican headquarters. Meanwhile, the remaining insurgents occupied other buildings throughout the city, though their failure to take the Dublin Telephone Exchange meant that the authorities could summon reinforcements from Curragh and also notify London. The British quickly determined that they would be able to easily overpower the Volunteers, and on Saturday morning, after repeated shellings, Pearse decided to

surrender, thus ending another poorly organized attempt of the Republicans to gain control of Ireland.

II. ACTION OF THE PLAY

The chaos that evolved during the failed Easter Rising permeates O'Casey's third play, The Plough and the Stars. But once again, just as there was no plot (in the traditional sense) in The Shadow of a Gunman, there is none in The Plough and the Stars. The action of the play consists of four acts loosely strung together in which the first two acts prepare for the last two acts.³ The first act of the play, which takes place in the tenements during a day in November 1915, comprises primarily of discussions concerning Nora Clitheroe's extravagance in buying clothes, the Covey's belief in an economic revolution, and the rumblings of an Irish rising against England. When Jack Clitheroe enters the apartment, there is a brief love scene between him and Nora which is abruptly interrupted by the entrance of Captain Brennan. He informs Jack that he is to take command of a battalion that is to attack Dublin Castle, and Jack, disregarding the pleas of his wife, dons his uniform and leaves with Brennan. That evening, which is depicted in the second act, most of the tenement dwellers, who are in a local pub, become inflamed

³Saros Cowasjee, Sean O'Casey: The Man Behind the Plays (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), p. 13.

and mesmerized by the powerful rhetoric of the Speaker outside the bar.

When the third act begins, it is Easter Week in 1916. The Rising has begun and has already invaded the tenements. Nora Clitheroe has gone to look for her husband, and Fluther Good has gone to look for her. They return, and Bessie Burgess and Mrs. Gogan go out to engage in the looting that was very much a part of the actual Easter Rising. Jack Clitheroe and two of his companions, Captain Brennan and Lieutenant Langon, appear at the apartment to seek shelter for the injured Langon. Once again, Jack ignores Nora's pleas to stay at home with her, and he and Brennan return to their comrades. The last act, which takes place a few days later, is riddled by deaths. Against the background of Fluther, Peter, and the Covey playing cards, Mollser, Mrs. Gogan's consumptive daughter, dies; Nora loses her premature baby and her sanity; Jack Clitheroe is killed in action; and Bessie Burgess, while caring for the insane Nora, is mistaken for a sniper and shot to death.

The theme of The Plough and the Stars is very similar to that of The Shadow of a Gunman or Juno and the Paycock. In his last play, however, O'Casey reveals even more directly his antipathy towards war and its senseless shattering of

human life, especially the lives of the noncombatants.⁴ The thematic development of the play closely parallels the action of the play. The first act ends with Jack Clitheroe leaving his wife for the glory and freedom of Ireland; this naturally leads into the second act where the Speaker claims that "Bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation that regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood" (p. 193). Motivated by these words, tensions mount and ultimately precipitate the violence of the last two acts.

In the final two acts, the reality and ugly truth of war explodes. Suddenly, war is not the glorious bloodshed which the Speaker claimed; rather, it is the destruction of basic human relationships, of death, and of the madness of war which is personified in Nora at the end of the play. During the third act, O'Casey uses the external effects of the war—that is, the bullet-riddled tenement houses and the fear of the residents of the slums—to foreshadow the tragic events of the last act which climaxes with the deaths of Mollser, Jack Clitheroe, and Bessie Burgess. Not only has the bloodshed and frenzy affected the fate of these characters, as it did in the two earlier plays, but it has also controlled their destinies.

⁴B. L. Smith, O'Casey's Satiric Vision (Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1978), p. 49.

III. KEY CHARACTERS

O'Casey also expresses his hatred of war and its disastrous effects through the characters in The Plough and the Stars. Fluther Good, Bessie Burgess, and Nora Clitheroe all exhibit the courage erroneously attributed to the men at the barricades. Both Bessie and Nora dash into the midst of the fighting, completely disregarding their own safety; and Fluther Good risks his life twice to perform simple humanitarian acts for his fellow tenement dwellers, while the conspicuous absence of heroism or charity in men like Jack Clitheroe and Captain Brennan provides sharp contrast to the bravery of the noncombatants.

Fluther Good, one of O'Casey's more memorable male characters, is like all the other residents of the Dublin slums: he can easily be patriotic and enthusiastic about Ireland's fight for freedom because he never expects the war to penetrate into the tenements. While the electrifying words of the Speaker of the second act hold him spellbound and ignite his nationalistic fervor, he is not about to risk his life for his country; he is merely an avid spectator. When he and Peter Flynn rush into the bar to quench the thirst the meeting has given them, their zealous patriotism is evident in their comments, particularly Fluther's:

You couldn't feel any way else at a time like this
when th' spirit of a man is pulsin' to be out
fightin' for th' thruth with his feet thremblin'

on th' way, maybe to th' gallows, an' his ears tinglin' with th' faint, far-away sound of burstin' rifle-shots that'll maybe whip th' last little stock o' life out of him that's left lingerin' in his body! (p. 194)

And later Fluther remarks:

Jammed as I was in th' crowd, I listened to th' speeches pattherin' on th' people's head, like rain fallin' on th' corn; every derogatory thought went out o' me mind, an' I said to meself, "You can die now, Fluther, for you've seen th' shadow-dhreams of th' past leppin' to life in th' bodies of livin' men that show, if we were without a titther o' courage for centuries, we're vice versa now!" Looka here. The blood was BOILIN' in me veins! (p. 195)

Even though Fluther is obviously transfixed by the emotional idealism of the Speaker, and even though he wholeheartedly supports the idea of a glorious Irish revolution, he maintains his distance from the action by remaining in the bar. In fact, his nationalism is very shortlived. When Bessie Burgess and Mrs. Gogan come into the bar, they all forget the speech they have just been listening to and become caught up in their own petty bickering and fighting.

Soon, however, Fluther's tenement street becomes the battleground for the war. Now he is forced to deal with the madness generated by the battle, for he must protect himself and his friends from the onslaught of violence. Now, the idealistic Kathleen ni Houlihan is no longer foremost in his mind—simple survival is. He rushes into the middle of the fighting and spends the entire night searching for Nora, who is out looking for her husband. Later in the play, he again

risks his life, this time to arrange for the funeral of Mollser, Mrs. Gogan's dead daughter. The normally wild, roguish Fluther unexpectedly shows understanding and caring as he tries to soothe and reassure Nora that "nothin' derogatory'll happen to Mr. Clitheroe. You'll find, now, in th' finish up it'll be vice versa" (p. 221). He is the epitome of a dependable and quietly heroic man, and even on his way out to "thry an' save a few things from th' burnin' buildin's" (p. 226), he stops to empathize with a woman who is very scared.

Because of the war's intrusion into the slums, Fluther is impelled to adjust his lifestyle; and in doing so, he reveals a compassionate and courageous nature. Fluther Good, a typical O'Casey scoundrel who never fails to express colorfully an opinion, and who believes in the healing powers of alcohol, emerges as a sympathetic, caring man. As Mrs. Gogan expresses her thanks to Fluther, she comments:

I'll never forget what you done for me, Fluther, goin' around at th' risk of your life settlin' everything with th' undertaker an' th' cemetery people. When all me own were afraid to put their noses out, you plunged like a good one through hummin' bullets an' they knockin' fire out o' th' road, tinklin' through th' frightened windows, an' splashin' themselves to pieces on th' walls! An' you'll find, that Mollser, in th' happy place she's gone to, won't forget to whisper, now an' again, th' name o' Fluther. (p. 250)

He also exerts a strong, calming influence in the pub, and during the last two acts, he frequently is the peacemaker between his friends, who are constantly arguing.

Fluther, however, is not the only resident of the tenements who unexpectedly demonstrates a caring and courageous nature. Bessie Burgess, who, throughout the majority of the play, continually belittles Mrs. Gogan, Nora Clitheroe, and Irish Republicans in general, goes through a complete role reversal in the last two acts. Just as the war inadvertently affects Fluther, it also thrusts Bessie into a chaotic, uncertain situation where her strength is eventually needed to maintain a semblance of sanity in the slums. The emergence of Bessie's humane instinct is quite unexpected, for she is a loyalist and a Protestant and is normally at bitter odds with her neighbors. Thus, her abrasive and abusive personality is very much in evidence in the first three acts as she incessantly taunts the others with her contemptuous comments about the "glorious revolution." At one point during the second act, she even goes so far as to lament the fate of the British soldiers:

There's a storm of anger tossin' in me breast,
thinkin' of all th' poor Tommies, an' with them me
own son, dhrenched in water an' soaked in blood,
gropin' their way to a shattherin' death, in a
shower o' shells! Young men with th' sunny lust o'
life beamin' in them, layin' down their white
bodies, shredded into torn an' bloody pieces, on
th' althar that God Himself has built for th'
sacrifice of heroes. (p. 201)

Bessie's concern for the "Tommies" is eventually neutralized by the suffering of her neighbors, and she is able to extend and translate her love for her own son, who fought for the

English and was wounded, beyond the confines of her family.⁵ When Mollser needs a doctor, Bessie determinedly decides to go out for a doctor, thus displaying the strength and courage which are common among O'Casey's heroines.

Bessie's sudden change of heart towards her neighbors is further demonstrated throughout the last act. She becomes fiercely protective of Nora, who has lost both her husband and her baby. Bessie shows tender concern for Nora as she wanders about the room clad only in a nightdress, and even while she tries to get some sleep, Bessie's first thought upon waking is of Nora. But it is at the end of the play that Bessie rises to a truly heroic stature. When Nora hysterically runs to the window shouting for Jack, Bessie, without giving a second thought to the imminent danger, pulls Nora away from the window and is shot.

Just as Fluther Good is quietly heroic, Bessie Burgess also performs courageous acts without expecting the fanfare and pomp given the men at the barricades. Though Bessie is not always a likeable character, she nonetheless emerges as a caring, humane person. Like Minnie Powell, she, too, loses her life for a cause that essentially means nothing to her; and hence, she becomes one of the thousands of women

⁵Bernard Benstock, Paycocks and Others: Sean O'Casey's World (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1976), p. 89.

and children who lost their lives during one of Ireland's many conflicts with England.

Jack Clitheroe is another victim of war, for he, too, loses his life; but he differs quite a bit from victims such as Minnie Powell and Bessie Burgess. They are noncombatants, and when they are unwillingly drawn into the battle, they rise to the occasion by displaying strength and courage. Jack Clitheroe, though, is, by choice, a combatant, but he is not fighting because he is brave; he is at the barricades primarily because of his idealism, vanity, and ego. Early in the play, when Fluther asks why Jack is no longer active in the Irish Citizen Army, Mrs. Gogan accurately provides the answer: "Just because he wasn't made a Captain of. He wasn't goin' to be anything where he couldn't be conspishuous" (p. 166). Thus, while no assignment of command is forthcoming, Jack is willing to accept his duty to his wife as his first priority. But when Captain Brennan informs him of his promotion, the lure of the uniform proves to be too much to resist; he retrieves his Sam Browne belt, his revolver, and his hat and marches off, leaving Nora to fend for herself.

In the third act, however, a somewhat different Jack Clitheroe is seen. He is still fighting for the Ireland that is greater than both a wife and a mother, but the incentive has worn off and is replaced by a fear that is quickly detected by his wife. When he and his two compatriots

retreat to the Clitheroe apartment to tend to the wounded Lieutenant Langon, Jack emotionally exclaims to Nora: "My Nora; my little, beautiful Nora, I wish to God I'd never left you" (p. 232). Obviously Jack has discovered that the war is not glorious but brutal and indiscriminate in inflicting pain and suffering. He is afraid to return to the streets, and Bessie Burgess recognizes that "General Clitheroe'd rather be unlacin' his wife's bodice than standin' at a barricade" (p. 233). But because of his vanity, Bessie's comment and Nora's desperate attempt to show Jack that there is no need to be ashamed of being afraid are realities that he will not accept. Even though Captain Brennan only wants Jack "to go th' way he'll have th' chance of death sthrikin' him" (p. 236), Jack is more concerned with being "unthru" to his comrades. Shortly after he returns to the war, he is shot and killed.

Jack Clitheroe, then, joins Johnny Boyle in O'Casey's cast of male characters who are charmed by the color, flash, and glory of war, and who put incredible energy into supporting elusive, idealistic "principles." Consequently, Jack and Johnny enthusiastically venture into the battle, but in the process they develop a fatal tunnel vision that ultimately prevents them from admitting that war is cruel and senseless and that they are afraid. Johnny's fear evolves into a cowardice which manifests itself when he betrays a friend,

while Jack's fear precludes him from understanding the truth in Nora's allegations that the men at the barricades are frightened. In fact, Jack is a prime example of Nora's observation that "they're [the soldiers] afraid to say they're afraid" (p. 221). O'Casey's soldiers, then, are not the real heroes in his plays because it is their idealism and vanity that motivate them to participate in the war which ultimately and adversely affects their families.

Nora Clitheroe, Jack's wife, shares with Juno Boyle the loss of a loved one; but unlike Juno, who is bolstered by an indomitable inner strength which enables her to rise above her tragedy, Nora is unable to cope with both the loss of her husband and her baby. The irreversible effects of the relentless turbulence and senseless brutality of war cause Nora to lose touch with reality and to slip into a private world of madness.

Nora's deterioration begins when she fails to prevent her husband from going to war. When she recognizes that "your vanity will be th' ruin of you an' me yet. . . . That's what's movin' you" (p. 189) and then hurls this truth at Jack, he angrily stomps out of the apartment, leaving his "little red-lipp'd Nora" to make "a companion of th' loneliness of th' night" (p. 189). As her loneliness deepens, so does her desperation to have her husband at home where he belongs. In the third act, Nora combats public opinion, the

intoxication of patriotism, and the vanity of her husband when she attempts to search for Jack and take him home.⁶

She is unsuccessful, and when Fluther brings her home, she is very weary and discouraged. She angrily comments to her neighbors:

An' there's no woman gives a son or a husband to be killed—if they say it, they're lyin', lyin', against God, Nature, an' against themselves! (p. 220)

Although Nora's endeavor to find her husband reveals a courageous element in her character, she cannot withstand the tension of the uncertainty of war. What strength she has is destroyed, and her grasp on her sanity loosens, for as she tells Mrs. Gogan, "sometimes I think I'm goin' mad!" When Jack comes to the apartment with Captain Brennan and the wounded Lieutenant Langon, he once again rejects his wife and returns to the battle. Her husband's last action proves to be the fatal blow, for now Nora becomes firmly mired in her madness.

The last act is filled with the insanity of Nora Clitheroe; her fragile nature and brief display of courage have been destroyed by both the madness of war and her husband's desertion. Her lapses into reliving the past alternate with painful, anguished outcries for her baby and her husband. Only Bessie's death is able to awaken Nora

⁶Smith, p. 52.

momentarily to the horror and insanity of the war. As the battle peaks, Nora's sanity declines, her strength fails her, and she is unable to stop the fatal and tragic effects of the war. But before Nora completely becomes a victim, O'Casey uses her, as he uses Juno Boyle, to effectively express his outrage at the folly, overt fear, and cowardice of the men at the barricades.

I tell you they're afraid to say they're afraid!
 . . . Oh, I saw it, Mrs. Gogan. . . . At th'
 barricade in North King Street I saw fear glowin'
 in all their eyes. . . . An' in th' middle o' th'
 street was somethin' huddled up in a horrible
 tangled heap. . . . His face was jammed agin th'
 stones, an' his arm was twisted round his back.
 . . . An' every twist of his body was a cry
 against the terrible thing that had happened to him.
 . . . An' I saw they were afraid to look at it.
 . . . An' some o' them laughed at me, but th'
 laugh was a frightened one. . . . An' some o'
 them shouted at me, but th' shout had in it th'
 shiver o' fear. . . . I tell you they were afraid,
 afraid, afraid! (pp. 221-22)

O'Casey's own frustration, as voiced by Nora, is evident in her angry comment, for he believed that the consuming fear of the Irish soldiers, combined with their blind idealism, placed the lives of the women and children of the tenements in jeopardy. And even though it was the noncombatants in the slums who demonstrated incredible courage, it was the men at the barricades who were heralded for their "bravery."

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars, Dublin theatregoers were made aware of the madness that methodically infringed upon and destroyed the lives of the characters portrayed on stage, for it was the same madness that raged outside the theatre itself.¹ By setting each play in the tenements and by placing each against the backdrop of an Irish conflict, O'Casey was able to illuminate the human strengths and capacities of Juno Boyle, Minnie Powell, and Bessie Burgess by juxtaposing them against the "brave" soldiers and men of his plays. Typically, his women take charge when male authority is absent or inadequate and try to restore the values of humanity, reestablish order, and respond to the needs of the moment.² Juno compensates for the deficiencies of her husband as she mourns for her dead son and cares for her living daughter, while Bessie Burgess functions as mother in caring for the needs of those around her. With her

¹B. L. Smith, O'Casey's Satiric Vision (Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1978), p. 172.

²Ibid., p. 177.

selflessness and her great concern for Nora, she does much to restore sanity in the midst of insanity.³

The audience at the Abbey Theatre, however, believed that the depicted sufferings of the poor were, at best, creative. They still thought of the Easter Rising, the War of Independence, and the Civil War as glorious events, and they believed that the sacrifices were well made.⁴ The Dublin public did not react adversely to The Shadow of a Gunman and Juno and the Paycock primarily because O'Casey's characterizations of the patriots were not overtly derogative; in fact, these two plays were so successful that they resurrected and revived the badly ailing Abbey Theatre. But when The Plough and the Stars was produced, the playgoers misinterpreted O'Casey's intent, his belief that there must be a better way to fight for Ireland that would also prevent the bloodshed of the noncombatants. Instead, they thought he was ridiculing the ideals of the Nationalists whereas he was holding up to ridicule the heroics of second rate men.⁵ As O'Casey states through Seumas Shields, "I'm a Nationalist meself, right enough," but not at the expense of the lives of hundreds of innocent people.

³Ibid.

⁴Saros Cowasjee, Sean O'Casey: The Man Behind the Plays (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), p. 83.

⁵Ibid., p. 84.

After the riots that occurred during the production of The Plough and the Stars, O'Casey attempted to defend himself against attacks made by Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington, an influential woman widowed by the Easter Rising, who not only led a group of rioters condemning the play but also challenged O'Casey to debate the issue. In a letter to the Irish Independent, she wrote:

The demonstration was not directed against the individual actor, nor was it directed to the moral aspect of the play. It was on national grounds solely, voicing a passionate indignation against the outrage of a drama staged in a supposedly national theatre, which held up to derision and obloquy the men and women of Easter Week. . . . The Ireland that remembers with tear-dimmed eyes all that Easter Week stands for, will not, and cannot, be silent in the face of such a challenge.⁶

O'Casey replied, also in the Irish Independent:

The politicians—Free State and Republican—have the platform to express themselves, and heaven knows they seem to take full advantage of it; the Drama is my place for self-expression, and I claim the liberty in Drama that they enjoy on the platform (and how they do enjoy it!), and am prepared to fight for it.⁷

O'Casey did uphold his principles, for he did not try to write about the heroes; he was interested only in writing about the life and people he knew. However, in the weeks following the riots against The Plough and the Stars, O'Casey

⁶David Krause, ed., The Letters of Sean O'Casey (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), p. 168.

⁷Ibid., p. 170.

realized that he could no longer remain in Ireland: "Write to please the Mary MacSwineys, the Countess Markievicz, the Madame Gonne-McBride! Jasus Christ, the very thought was laughable."⁸ He did not see Ireland, as she was represented in women such as Maud Gonne-McBride, as a beautiful, queenly woman; he saw only a poor old woman with a "querulous" voice that uttered bitter words against one who would not make her dying dream his own. Consequently, after he went to London to receive the Hawthornden Prize for Juno and the Paycock, he never returned to live in Ireland, the home he loved but the country which would never permit him to write freely.

⁸Sean O'Casey, Inishfallen Fare Thee Well (London: Macmillan Co., Inc., 1949), p. 245.

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VITA

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