The genesis of Sean O'Casey's later plays.

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THE GENESIS OF SEAN O'CASEY'S LATER PLAYS

BY

KEVIN C. McHUGH

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the
Department of English in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
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ABSTRACT

The majority of the criticism of Sean O'Casey's plays assumes a realistic or an expressionistic bias. This is especially true of the critics who appreciate the earlier plays—The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars—for their realism, and who disregard the later plays for their lack of it. The truth is, however, that Sean O'Casey was never strictly a realist. Even his early works contain embryonic expressionistic devices and techniques. Therefore, The Silver Tassie, with its highly expressionistic second act, is not the break from a "realistic" tradition that is supposed.

Sean O'Casey's later plays combine both realism and expressionism, just as they combine tragedy and comedy. Moreover, O'Casey's later dramas incorporate Dionysian themes and allusions to Celtic mythology. The use of myth complements the generalized themes and stylized characters of expressionism, so that the final plays of Sean O'Casey are really quite complex mixtures of realism, expressionism, myth, and allegory, of a tragicomic nature. This is in contrast to the early Dublin plays or the later socialist works of the 1940's.

Sean O'Casey left Ireland and the Abbey Theatre prior to The Silver Tassie incident. Realistically prejudiced
critics point to this event at the beginning of O'Casey's decline. This discounts the expressionism of the later plays and ignores the fact that O'Casey's departure was just a matter of time, hardly an "exile". He had become progressively alienated by forces at work both in Ireland and in the Abbey Theatre. There was no cataclysmic "moment of truth" that left no other course of action open to him.

When Sean O'Casey left the Abbey, the theatre lost an innovative playwright; the author lost a theatre. The Abbey declined shortly after—but not necessarily because of—O'Casey's exit. O'Casey, however, declined only in the eyes of those critics who demanded realism, for he continued to experiment for the rest of his career.
PREFACE

It is, I think, necessary to clarify at the beginning of this thesis, my usage of the terms "realism" and "expressionism." Such expressions are, of course, horribly broad and general. It is not the intention of this work to put forth rigid definitions of these terms. It is, rather, the aim of this thesis to consider these terms only within the spectrum of Sean O'Casey's dramas--The Shadow of a Gunman representing the realistic extreme, and Within the Gates, the expressionistic. Discussions of the other dramas will be in relation to this qualification.

I felt it worthwhile in discussing the genesis of Sean O'Casey's later plays to include in Chapter III, "Thematic and Subject Matter Development," a discussion of O'Casey's early "Dublin" plays. This is not due to any particular embryonic relationship between these works and those of the later "Oisin" phase--a point which can be made regarding the "Larkin" plays. Instead, I felt that the rather detailed investigation of the style of the earlier plays in Chapter II called for at least a cursory examination of their subject matter and their themes. Anything less would be to reduce the study of these dramas to an undesirably clinical level, with the style antiseptically removed from the other elements of the plays.
Finally, from a technical point of view, Sean O'Casey's use of brackets is quite confusing in a study such as mine which also employs such devices. Therefore, parentheses have been substituted for brackets in quotations from O'Casey's plays.
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THE GENESIS OF SEAN O'CASEY'S LATER PLAYS

I. THE CRITICAL MILIEU

Critical approaches to the works of Sean O'Casey have, in the past, been too often characterized by certain a priori prejudices. Though there have been exceptions to this allegation—notably Ronald Ayling's introduction to a collection of essays entitled O'Casey,1 in which he discusses the entire range of O'Casey criticism, Alec Reid in "The Legend of the Green Crow",2 and for the most part David Krause in Sean O'Casey; the Man and his Work,3 to name a few—these unprejudiced analyses seem too few in number to counterbalance the bulk of opinionated or "subjective" criticism of O'Casey's plays.

This subjective method of analysis consists principally in the socio-historic and the dramaturgic approaches. The former reads all of O'Casey in view of biographical and autobiographical details, as well as historical, sociological and economic conditions which influenced both O'Casey as man and author. Saros Cowasjee, for example, undertakes a

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3 See David Krause, Sean O'Casey; the Man and his Work (New York, 1960).
biographical approach in Sean O'Casey; the Man Behind the Plays. Similarly, Patricia Esslinger's "Sean O'Casey and the Lockout of 1913" and "The Dublin Materia Poetica of Sean O'Casey" reflect this first method.

Critics utilizing the approach here referred to as dramaturgic too often illustrate their own particular preference for either realism or expressionism. Those who regard O'Casey as first a realistic dramatist balk at the expressionistic experiments of his later plays. A. E. Malone is one such. In "O'Casey's Photographic Realism" he discounts the later plays for not maintaining the realistic standards of Juno and the Paycock or The Shadow of a Gunman. Gerard Fay echoes this preference and for largely the same reason. Even the perceptive playwright Denis Johnston suffers from this prejudice at times.

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4 See Saros Cowasjee, Sean O'Casey; the Man Behind the Plays (Edinburgh, 1963).


recognized this error and criticized the Abbey Theatre Di-
rector, Dr. Walter Starkie, for it:

In his official criticism Dr. Starkie said that 'in
order to prepare his mind for The Silver Tassie he
read over again the three published plays of Sean
O'Casey /i.e., the three 'realistic plays: Shadow
of a Gunman, Juno, and Plough and the Stars/.'
He read over three old plays in order to prepare his
mind for a new one. . . . . he paints his criticism
with incapacity by criticizing the new departure
. . . by the old manner, the old art, the old tech-
nique of the old plays.\textsuperscript{10}

And O'Casey goes on to say:

Again /Quoting from Dr. Starkie's criticism /'The
excellent 1st act, which suggests Juno and the
Paycock.' Excellent, mind you, because it reminds
him of Juno and the Paycock; the rest of the play
is not so good because it is not like the old ones.
\textsuperscript{11}

On the other hand, George Bernard Shaw\textsuperscript{12} is typical of those
critics who, like G. Wilson Knight,\textsuperscript{13} chooses to champion
the expressionistic techniques of The Silver Tassie and
subsequent works.

In an effort to remain clear of the prejudices that
envelop O'Casey and his plays, this thesis will not only
synthesize existing, valid critical thought, but will endeavor to interpret those very prejudices which have hampered

\textsuperscript{10} Sean O'Casey, "The Silver Tassie", in Blasts and
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 105.
\textsuperscript{12} See George Bernard Shaw, "Letter to the Producer of
The Silver Tassie", in Ayling, ed. cit., p. 91.
\textsuperscript{13} See G. Wilson Knight, "Over a Fighter: The Drums of
Father Ned", in Ayling, ed. cit., pp. 177-82.
some of the previous attempts at understanding O'Casey and his work. To this end, Sean O'Casey's relations with the Abbey Theatre have been chosen as a vehicle for the investigation.

O'Casey's association with the Abbey Theatre provides not only a starting point, but also a vantage point from which to view his development as a dramatist, particularly because so many of the critical fallacies regarding his plays stem from this relationship. This is especially true with respect to the controversy over *The Silver Tassie* and its ultimate rejection. The same critics who demand realism from O'Casey often regard the Tassie controversy as transitional in his stylistic movement from realism to expressionism. They frequently take the Tassie ordeal as the reason for O'Casey's "exile" and his later attacks on Ireland. However, the degree that this confrontation can be taken as transitional is not at once evident, though there is again, a disagreement on the subject. P. S. O'Hegarty reacted to O'Casey's departure from the Abbey with an attitude typical of many critics of that time. He assumed that O'Casey's strength lay in his intimacy with the people of Dublin, and that once that intimacy was severed, his drama would automatically deteriorate. Evidently he presupposed that O'Casey was, and could only function as, a realistic dramatist. This is also the case with A. E. Malone who wrote in 1929,

the year after the Tassie rejection:

That his work since Juno (i.e., The Silver Tassie) has shown no advance, and that he is disposed to change his locale to London, is disquieting. His success is attributable entirely to his intimate knowledge of his native city, and it is there that his future must be decided. He is a realist of the most uncompromising kind ... He has accepted the realist tradition of the Abbey Theatre ... 15

This attitude perhaps explains why O'Casey's later, less realistic plays, were accepted so coolly in Dublin. This reaction also reveals the dramatic prejudice for realism with which O'Casey had to contend. Before O'Hegarty, Lennox Robinson, Lady Gregory, and W. B. Yeats, directors of the Abbey, reacted adversely to The Silver Tassie. There is a possibility that they did so because of the same stylistic predisposition for realism in O'Casey's drama.

O'Casey not only had difficulty with the Abbey directors with respect to style and technique, he had problems with them and the Abbey players over political, ethical, and religious themes in his plays. And this is not to forget the audience and the famous riot over The Plough and the Stars. As with technique, the suspicion lingers that the directors, the players, and the audience had preconceived notions as to what the content of O'Casey's plays should be.

Using the Abbey Theatre connection as a glass with which to view O'Casey's dramatic art, it will become clear that Sean O'Casey, as a playwright, was neither a strict

15 A. E. Malone, "O'Casey's Photographic Realism", in Ayling, ed. cit., p. 75.
realist nor an expressionist—though he did write plays in each form—but both. An attempt will be made to criticize his plays within the scope of the style in which they were written. To criticize the stylized characters of *Within the Gates*, for example, by the standards of *Juno and the Paycock*, seems inordinately unjust. Margaret C. O'Riley avoids this error. She views O'Casey as progressing from realism to expressionism and symbolism. Robert Hogan, on the other hand, makes note that O'Casey's early one-act play, *Kathleen Listens In*, foreshadows in fantasy the expressionistic style of the later works. Yet another critic, Vincent De Baun, contends in "Sean O'Casey and the Road to Expressionism" that it was not *The Silver Tassie* which proved transitional in the artist's direction, but rather *The Plough and the Stars*, heavily laden with symbolism. Vivian Mercier has little to say of Sean O'Casey as either realist or expressionist. He feels the first three "realistic" plays to be as poorly done as the later ones. They merit attention, he feels, solely as examples of the tragicomic form.

The utilitarian value of the Abbey approach, used as

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the springboard for this study of Sean O'Casey's development, rests in its syncretism. It serves as a focal point from which the diverse, if not conflicting opinions regarding O'Casey seem to diverge. In particular, this thesis will deal with three aspects of Sean O'Casey and his plays which are as yet unresolved.

First, was *The Silver Tassie* the turning point in O'Casey's change from realism to expressionism? Was there actually any transition at all? If there was, did it begin with *Kathleen Listens In* as Robert Hogan intimates; or was it in *The Plough and the Stars* as Vincent DeBaun suggests? Certainly the controversy over *The Silver Tassie* has been chronicled, but did it perhaps serve as a catalyst in whatever "transformation" may have taken place? And what significance did O'Casey's relations with the Abbey Theatre and its directors have in his development? Were his plays misinterpreted and misread by these directors, such as Dr. Starkie? These are questions that shall be answered in the second chapter of this thesis.

The third chapter will deal with the thematic and subject matter development of O'Casey's plays. Is there a similarity between it and the stylistic development? Is there a progression in theme and subject matter comparable to that which might have taken place in O'Casey's style? What connection is there between the early and the later plays, if any? Or, can the plays be neatly divided into the "realistic" Dublin dramas—*Shadow of a Gummman*, *Juno*, and *The
Plough and the Stars, and tenuously The Silver Tassie—and the later "expressionistic" plays which deal first with socialism—The Star Turns Red, Oak Leaves and Lavender, Red Roses for Me—and the second group consisting of Within the Gates and the later Dionysian, joie de vivre themes—Cock-a-Doodle Dandy, Purple Dust, The Bishop's Bonfire, and The Drums of Father Ned? What is the value of such categorization? Is this or any other such classification legitimate? Already there appears to be a connection between style and theme. One may ask what is the nature of such a connection? Possible answers to these questions and others regarding the themes and subject matter of O'Casey's plays will be the subject of the third chapter.

The fourth chapter will discuss the question of O'Casey's exile. Was his departure from Ireland an exile? Or was it simply a matter of economics, or of artistic freedom? Was Sean O'Casey "banished" as some critics maintain, or was he driven to "self-exile" through antagonism with the Abbey's directors, players, and audience? In other words, what effect did the Abbey Theatre have on O'Casey the man that might have contributed to, or detracted from, his writings?

Finally, this thesis will endeavor to speculate as to what the possible outcome of O'Casey's disassociation from the Abbey had on both him and that theatre. Was the decline of the Abbey Theatre the result of O'Casey's departure—post quod ergo propter quod? And what difference did it make to O'Casey to be a playwright without an outlet for actual stage
experiment, without a workshop, as it were, in which to attempt and perfect new procedures and techniques?

It will be the intent of this study to be included among those approaches to O'Casey which attempt to discuss his plays with a degree of objectivity. That there are unresolved questions regarding the development of Sean O'Casey is obvious. It is not, however, the business of this thesis to portray Sean O'Casey as either a realist or an expressionist, or as an outspoken champion of artistic freedom exiled from his native Ireland, but simply as a dramatist. And this study openly admits this prejudice.

Whatever Sean O'Casey's experiments may have been, successful or not, can only be judged as theatre, whether realistic or expressionistic. As a playwright, he:

... makes one unalterable demand, namely, the right to let the play alternate between fact and fancy, ... without regard to literary consistency. The only consistency he accepts is theatrical consistency. ... theatre is theatre and neither life nor a photograph of life?

With this attitude acknowledged, then, first the stylistic techniques of Sean O'Casey will be studied.

20 John Gassner, "The Prodigality of Sean O'Casey", in Ayling, ed. cit., p. 117.
II. STYLISTIC GENESIS

A. Prerumblings

Almost ten years before Sean O’Casey presented the Abbey Theatre with his The Shadow of a Gunman, he published in James Larkin’s newspaper, The Plain People, a short play entitled Roisin’s Robe, of which little is known. But O’Casey himself refers to it as being written “in his later manner.” Of his next three plays, all of which were unsuccessfully submitted to the Abbey, two are realistic in technique, The Frost in the Flower and The Harvest Festival. Of the third, however, The Crimson in the Tri-Colour, O’Casey remarked in a letter to Abbey Director Lennox Robinson:

I sincerely hope, now, that I shall have the happiness of seeing it performed at the Abbey. It is essentially a Futurist work, evolving from the passions, ideas & activities of the present.

From the very beginning, therefore, it appears that O’Casey was inclined toward dramatic experiment. But what was the

1 There is no known copy of this play in existence. It is sometimes referred to as Rosheen’s Robe.


3 David Krause, Sean O’Casey; the Man and his Work (New York, 1960), p. 34. There are, as in the case of Roisin’s Robe, no copies of these three early plays.

4 David Krause, Self Portrait of the Artist as a Man; Sean O’Casey’s Letters (Dublin, 1968), pp. 10-11.
nature of this "later manner" and this "Futurist work" of which he speaks? Was he perhaps referring to expressionism? The suspicion is that this was indeed the case, as later facts will suggest.\(^5\)

It is of interest to note at this point that after reading The Crimson in the Tri-Colour Lady Gregory encouraged the aspiring O'Casey with: "I believe there is something in you and your strong point is characterization."\(^6\) First, this remark indicates a possible preference for realism on Lady Gregory's part if, in fact, The Crimson in the Tri-Colour was a "Futurist"--expressionist--play. Lady Gregory had asked to see the drama produced so that O'Casey might gain practical experience from seeing it performed.\(^7\) And, though Sean agreed with this rejection of the play at the time, he later came to believe that this early play, though somewhat primitive, was as good as those then being produced at the Abbey Theatre.\(^8\) This same preference might also have affected W. B. Yeats' judgement of his early work. It was Yeats who refused Lady Gregory's request, but this possibility will be discussed subsequently and at greater length.

Lady Gregory's advice to O'Casey may have had even

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\(^5\) It is interesting to point out that James Larkin called O'Casey's attention to the plays--some of which are expressionistic in style--of Eugene O'Neill as early as 1913.


\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^8\) Herbert Coston, "Sean O'Casey: Prelude to Playwriting", in Ayling, ed. cit., p. 53.
greater implications. The eager and no so young writer—he was already in his forties—anxious to see his efforts staged at the famous Abbey Theatre "threw over . . . His theories and worked at characters . . . " as Lady Gregory had suggested. Were these theories the same as his "later manner", namely those of expressionism? He added that The Shadow of a Gunman, a realistic melodrama, "is the result," O'Casey admits, then, that the play was constructed with Lady Gregory's advice in mind. This question of early expressionistic theories and experiments comes more into focus when the often overlooked one-act Kathleen Listens In is considered.

Kathleen Listens In appeared in 1923, the same year which saw The Shadow of a Gunman. This once unavailable one-act play is the clearest evidence that Sean O'Casey's earliest efforts were those which contained at least elements of expressionism. This play was performed as a nightly sequel to G. B. Shaw's Arms and the Man. That it was produced at all may be attributable to the fact that O'Casey's Gunman had made for him a reputation, of which it is hardly naive to imagine the Abbey directors were aware. In fact, the theatre had the great pleasure of turning people away from its doors during the final performances of the Gunman.

Kathleen Listens In is a fantasy play much like the

9 Lady Gregory's Journals, p. 775.
10 Ibid.
later Cock-a-Doodle Dandy or Purple Dust. It is also allegorical like the two aforementioned works and The Bishop's Bonfire and The Drums of Father Ned. Its stylized characters—the Free Stater, the Man with the Big Drum, the Farmer, to name but a few—foreshadow those of, for example, Within the Gates—the Young Woman, the Dreamer, or the Man Wearing the Trilby Hat—a play which was not published until 1933, ten years later. Kathleen Listens In precedes O'Casey's so-called "transition" play, The Silver Tassie, by five years; and, it is in fact in a preface to a later publication of Kathleen Listens In that the playwright himself denies that the Tassie served as a turning point:

The one interest Kathleen Listens In has for me is that it is a "phantasy," done after my first play at the Abbey, showing this form was active in my mind before the "major" realistic plays Juno and the Paycock and The Plough and the Stars were written, the most critics maintain that phantasy began after I left Dublin. This, of course, is what they want to believe... 12

Robert Hogan, consequently, is right in describing Kathleen Listens In as expressionistic, but the evidence is quite strong to support an argument that O'Casey's interest in this dramatic style began even prior to this play.

Kathleen Listens In is an allegory concerning Ireland, like Cock-a-Doodle Dandy or The Drums of Father Ned. The stage directions call for an Irish tri-colour to fly above the garden of Kathleen, daughter of O'Houlihan. The equation is obvious, and it is reinforced by dialogue, as when

12 Sean O'Casey, "Kathleen Listens In", Tulane Drama Review, V (June 1961), p. 36.
Kathleen rebuffs the First Man, a Gaelic-revivalist:

Oh, for God's sake go away, an' done by annoyin' me. I have to practice me Fox Trots and Jazzin' so as to be the lady-like when I make me deboo into the League o' Nations.13

The use of dance and colour symbolism, which recurs in O'Casey's later plays, makes its debut in Kathleen Listens In as well. In the preceding excerpt, O'Casey's Kathleen is far more interested in dancing than in Gaelic. In The Drums of Father Ned the doors and window-boxes are painted in bright colours as a celebration of life. In this earlier endeavor when Miceawl O'Houlihan paints his door from red to green, it carries the political overtones of 1923 Ireland, the shedding of the royal red for Irish green. And the satire is just as biting in this play as in any of the later ones. O'Casey also uses an often to be repeated choral technique in which, however unrealistic though effective, the rival Republican, FreeStater, Farmer, and Business Man reassure Kathleen's mother: "Never fear, Mrs. O'Houlihan, never fear, we all love little Kathleen too much to do anything that 'ud go agen her."14 These are the forces which, at the time the play was performed, were at odds with one another during Ireland's "Troubles."

As a final note to Kathleen Listens In, Robert Hogan comments:

It is instructive and depressing to note that the adverse criticism of "Kathleen" is precisely the

13 O'Casey, loc. cit., p. 40.
14 Ibid., p. 47.
same kind of stuff with which the Irish critics would greet O’Casey’s mature fantasies like The Bishop’s Bonfire and Cock-a-Doodle Dandy.15

And it also anticipates the reception of The Silver Tassie.

Sean O’Casey’s next major work, Juno and the Paycock, is like The Shadow of a Gunman, according to the Lady Gregory’s realistic prescription. It is the tragicomic tradition which is so clearly O’Casey’s trademark. In a sense, the components of tragicomedy which often include the two extremes of farce and melodrama, are not strictly realistic. However, the blending of the two often succeeds whereas each fails individually. For example, Chekhov in his tragicomedy Uncle Vanya portrays life that is neither purely tragedy or comedy.16 In this respect, Juno and the Paycock, The Shadow of a Gunman, and The Plough and the Stars are realistic plays. It is not the purpose of this study to discuss the tragicomic nature of O’Casey’s drama. But it is useful to point out that O’Casey’s plays often run the risk that such a combination entails; that is, of leaning too far toward the one extreme or the other, toward farce or melodrama.

The failure of his The Shadow of a Gunman is due to an over-indulgence in the melodramatic; and, in general, O’Casey’s plays tend more toward melodrama than farce. The question

15 Hogan, "O’Casey’s Apprenticeship", loc. cit., p. 250.

becomes, not whether tragicomedy is an asset or a defect, since the arguments over this bastard form still go on, but rather how successful the actual fusion has been. Part of O'Casey's incompatibility with Yeats may have stemmed from the latter's distaste for O'Casey's formula. Yeats was at this time interested in the highly ritualistic and ceremonial Japanese Noh plays. This serves to illustrate the differences between the two men, a consideration that will be dealt with subsequently.

Even *Juno*, nevertheless, contains a germ of expressionism. In Act II Mrs. Tancred laments the loss of her son with the words:

Mother o' God, Mother o' God, have pity on the pair of us! ... O Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets! ... Sacred Heart of the Crucified Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone ... an' give us hearts o' flesh! ... Take away this murderin' hate ... an' give us Thine own eternal love!17

In Act III Juno Boyle says practically the same thing, grieving for her own son, Johnny:

Mother o' God, Mother o' God, have pity on us all! Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets? Sacred Heart o' Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone, and give us hearts o' flesh! Take away this murderin' hate, and give us Thine own eternal love!18

Though Juno is consciously recalling Mrs. Tancred's words, such repetition can hardly be termed realistic. And though it is melodramatic, the device is not gratuitous. It equates


18 *Juno*, p. 87.
Mrs. Tancred's sufferings with Juno's, and theirs with that of mankind, a fact which Juno recognizes:

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 Diehard or a Stater, but only a poor dead son! 19

Such speech patterning is common in expressionism. Here, the repetition serves more than its literary purpose. It becomes an expressionistic device; and, though it might possibly be explained as coincidence, it is more reasonably explained as expressionism.

O'Casey wrote another one-act play, Nannie's Night Out, in 1924, which was introduced between the productions of Juno and The Plough and the Stars; and, though it has been described as "of the same family as O'Casey's three great early dramas", 20 it contains elements similar to those used later.

A ballad is sung at the very beginning of the play, which Ronald Ayling points out, is very like the opening "Fremumble" of The Drums of Father Ned, but which is in the former more symbolic than in the subsequent play. 21 Also the heroine, Nannie, has the symbolic importance comparable to that of Lorleen in Cook-a-Doodle Dandy or of Jannice in Within the Gates, as a life force. Her dying lines are al-

19 Juno, p. 87.
most a word-for-word parallel of Jannice's dying speech; both will die dancing and game—"I'll die game, I'll die game!", Nannie cries.\(^{22}\) The dance for O'Casey is a symbol of life and vitality, and it is used in almost every major play from *The Silver Tassie* on. Ronald Ayling further sees Nannie's dying speech as a closing prayer which much resembles Bessie Burgess' final prayer in *The Plough and the Stars*.\(^{23}\) In addition, Robert Hogan feels that the litany that the mourners chant upon Nannie's death prefigures the chants used in *The Silver Tassie* and *Within the Gates*.\(^{24}\)

What Hogan demonstrates about *Kathleen Listens In* Ayling demonstrates about *Nannie's Night Out*; that is, he succeeds in "showing in particular the play as a link between O'Casey's earlier and later plays."\(^{25}\) The symbolic importance of characters, their stylization, their dialogue, the use of song, chant, and dance are all typical of expressionism. And they are all found in the later plays of Sean O'Casey.

By the time he wrote *The Plough and the Stars* in 1926, Sean O'Casey was not the realist that was and is generally assumed. Certainly his two greatest triumphs, *The Shadow of a Gunman* and *Juno and the Paycock* implied that O'Casey was a realistic dramatist. *The Plough and the Stars* was hailed as


\(^{23}\) Ayling, "'Nannie's Night Out'"., p. 161.

\(^{24}\) Hogan, *O'Casey's Apprenticeship*, p. 252.

\(^{25}\) Ayling, "'Nannie's Night Out'", p. 154.
another achievement of O'Casey's photographic realism. But the Plough is somehow taken too neatly as the culmination of the trilogy of Dublin social realism. Like Juno, the Plough is largely realistic and successful in the tragicomic method. Unlike Juno, however, it does utilize expressionistic techniques in a more deliberate manner, as Vincent De Baun contends. But De Baun makes the same mistake as Robert Hogan. The Plough no more marks the birth of expressionism in O'Casey's plays than does Kathleen Listens In.26

The shadowy figure of Act II is the most striking example of expressionism in The Plough and the Stars.27 His silhouette and voice are not constant as they might be in reality; they fade in and out at specific times throughout the course of the act. The speaker represents more than a single politician. He is the symbol of the holy war of national liberation which in O'Casey's mind is doomed to failure in Ireland. His speech is a compilation of fragments of a number of speeches delivered by Padraig Pearse, one of the 1916 martyrs and president of the short-lived Provisional Government of the Irish Republic. The extracts contain references to a notion of blood sacrifice, and allusions to the

26 Hogan does make the stronger case, and in doing so he disproves De Baun's contention. Kathleen Listens In clearly makes use of expressionism, though I feel it explains O'Casey's earlier efforts of which there is no record, e.g., Roisin's Robe.

sacrifice of the Mass.\textsuperscript{28} The moments when O'Casey permits the speaker's voice to be heard inside the public house and his figure to be silhouetted on the window are deliberately chosen for ironic contrast and satire. For example, the first time the speaker is heard, the prostitute, Rosie Redmond, is complaining about a business slump due to the political meeting being held. And there is a satirical purpose in her being named Redmond. At the time of the Easter Rebellion John Redmond was endeavoring to secure an Irish Home Rule Bill from the British government. There is a probable pun in the first words that the speaker utters: "It is a glorious thing to see arms in the hands of Irishmen".\textsuperscript{29} Rosie no doubt is worried over the scarcity of Irishmen who share her "arms".

Vincent De Baun proposes that the evenness of characterization on The Plough and the Stars, with the possible exception of Bessie Burgess, indicates the gradual movement toward the stylized characterization of expressionism.\textsuperscript{30} He says:

\ldots although each character is an individual, he is still subservient to the author's purpose in the creation of a total effect—i.e., the author's interpreted and shaped "facts"—so that we must view the play as a total work of art where no single character can legitimately draw our attention from the playwright's tragic purpose. \ldots It is this "levelness" of characterization which

\textsuperscript{28} De Baun, "Road to Expressionism", p. 256.


\textsuperscript{30} De Baun, "Road to Expressionism", p. 255.
indicates a part of his first leaning toward expressionism.31

Finally, in the last act the stage directions call for "voices in a lilting chant" which cry "Red Cr . . . oss, Red Cr . . . oss! . . . Ambu . . . lance, Ambu . . . lance!" 32

Once again the use of highly stylized chant recurs, and it is repeated four more times during the last act. This technique will be repeated in The Silver Tassie and Within the Gates. Vincent De Baun takes this chant, the prayers, and the concluding song as exemplifying the exceptional aural quality of the entire act—all of which contributes to an air of unreality. In a letter to De Baun O’Casey himself remarks:

"You are right in your idea of what you call impressionism appearing in the Plough; where you say, and in the outside calls for Ambulance, Ambulance, Red Cross, Red Cross." 33

It appears, therefore, that the "rigidly" realistic masterpiece, The Plough and the Stars, is not quite so realistic as some critics would prefer to believe.

By 1926, Sean O’Casey, whose reputation rested on his "realistic" Dublin trilogy, The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars, was not the realist that critics by and large imagined. That his departure from this "tradition" came as a surprise not only to the

31 De Baun, "Road to Expressionism", p. 255.
33 De Baun, "Road to Expressionism", p. 257.
Dublin critics but also to the Abbey directors reflects not so much a change on O'Casey's part, but rather an inability on their side to perceive the direction his drama was taking. One critic, and later playwright, Denis Johnston was not blind to this as were so many of his contemporaries when in 1926 he perceived:

As for her Dublin's new prophet, it is becoming more and more clear that as a realist he is an imposter. . . . His dialogue is becoming a series of word-poems in dialect; his plots are disappearing and giving place to a form of undisguised expressionism under the stress of a genius that is much too insistent and far too pregnant with meaning to be bound by the four dismal walls of orthodox realism. It will be interesting to see how long in the future he will try to keep up so outrageous a pretense. 34

But who was maintaining the pretense--O'Casey or the critics and directors?

B. The Silver Tassie, Again

It is the custom of the myth-making critics, those seeking either to eulogize Sean O'Casey's departure from the Abbey Theatre and Ireland, or those defending the integrity of the Abbey and its directors, to raise the rejection of The Silver Tassie to an unjustified emotional level. The former are the critics who speak of O'Casey's exile. The latter, especially numerous among the Irish critics, talk of O'Casey's "lost art"--that of his three realistic and therefore successful Dublin plays. But rather than become

entangled in this rhetorical jungle, it would be better to consider the Tassie incident as does Alec Reid in "The Legend of the Green Crow":

... perhaps it is as well to recognize that this break with the Abbey was inevitable and not to make a sentimental issue of it.35

That this rupture was, indeed, inevitable will be the topic of the third chapter of this study, as will a discussion of those sentimental elements which are necessarily involved in the per se question of exile. It is the intention at this time, however, to examine the extent that O'Casey's tendency toward expressionism played in this business.

The suggestion has already been made that Lady Gregory's preference was for realism, at least in her appraisal of Sean O'Casey's drama. Her advice regarding characterization is incompatible with the stylized characterization of expressionism, with the characterization that O'Casey's constant courtship with expressionistic techniques was bound to produce. This was the case in her decision on The Silver Tassie. In her journal Lady Gregory recorded:

But reading it [The Silver Tassie] again it seems, after the first act, weaker than before, and I thought this especially when looking at the triumphant progress of the Plough, every character so clean-cut, an etching of life caught up in tragedy. In the Tassie the characters, equally vivid in the first act, become lay figures, lantern slides, showing the horror of war. ... He [Sean] always gave me credit for his first success because of my words, "Your strong point is characterization." I wish he would continue to respect those words.36

35 Alec Reid, "Legend of the Green Crow", p. 156.

Lady Gregory is correct in her observation of the first act. It is the most realistic act in the play. The second act, entirely expressionistic, and the less realistic third and fourth acts which follow, succeed or fail only within the context of the form in which they are written. The "lantern slide" characters are so because they are expressionistic, not because they fail as realistic figures. Their success or failure depends upon preliminary acceptance of O'Casey's dramatic license— to use either realism or expressionism, or as he does here, both.

In the preceding excerpt Lady Gregory also reveals the same critical faux pas that hampered Dr. Starkie. She compares the Tassie with the Plough, an invalid comparison since the former is more clearly written in a different manner. Her conclusion could conceivably be valid. That is, The Silver Tassie may in fact be inferior to The Plough and the Stars, but not because it is not as realistic as she implies. Instead, the Plough may succeed as a realistic play whereas the Tassie may fail as expressionism. But the supposition that, simply because the latter is not like the former it is therefore inferior, is incorrect.

O'Casey's opinion of Dr. Starkie's criticism of The Silver Tassie has already been mentioned. As a recapitulation of the prejudice from which Starkie, and to some extent Lady Gregory, suffered, the following comment by O'Casey serves well:

37 O'Casey, Blasts and Benedictions, p. 106.
... the fact that Stavkie read over again the three old 'well-made plays' in order to prepare his mind for The Silver Tassie, and the fright that the new dramatic values of this play gave him, show that it is the critic rather than the dramatist that is dominated by the well-made play. 37

O'Casey's statement rightly objects to such criticism.

In her reactions to The Silver Tassie Lady Gregory inferred a criterion for evaluation which Lennox Robinson took up. Robinson thought highly of the second, expressionistic act, but he took exception to O'Casey's incorporation of both realism and expressionism in the one play. As David Krause notes:

Robinson, however, had one important reservation about O'Casey's new manner upon which he based his rejection: 'I don't think the mixture of the two manners--the realism of the first act and the unrealism of the second--succeeds, the characters who were Dublin slum in the beginning of the play end by being nowhere.' 38

This presents a dramatic dilemma which, much like the tragi-comic mode, has not yet been resolved. There are factors supporting each point of view. But disregarding the problem of the validity of mixture, the immediate question is whether the mixture of the two has been successful. Up to and including The Silver Tassie Sean O'Casey has consistently used both expressionistic and realistic techniques in his plays, even in the box-office successes of Juno and the Plough. Whereas these two plays are primarily realistic, supported occasionally by expressionism, The Silver Tassie is notice-

37 O'Casey, Blasés and Benedictions, p. 106.

38 Krause, Sean O'Casey: Man and Work, p. 100.
ably more expressionistic supported by realism. The Tassie, too, is a success. G. B. Shaw immediately recognized the play's merit; and, in retrospect, Lady Gregory, Walter Starkie, and Lennox Robinson regretted their decision not to produce it.\textsuperscript{39} Robinson naively remarked years later:

> In all these years the Directors had made surprisingly few mistakes in their choice of plays and players. The rejections of John Bull's Other Island and Sean O'Casey's The Silver Tassie were doubtless errors of judgement, but in both cases subsequent productions made belated amends.\textsuperscript{40}

These "belated amends" could do nothing to erase the ill feeling that the mishandling of the Tassie affair created. It is evident that the realistic prejudice of the Abbey directors was a determining factor in the rejection of The Silver Tassie.

The director most influential in the Abbey Theatre's decision not to produce The Silver Tassie was W. B. Yeats. He, like Dr. Starkie and Lady Gregory, appears to have preferred O'Casey's successful "realistic" formula. In his letter of rejection to O'Casey, Yeats states that:

> ... you have no subject. You were interested in the Irish Civil War, and at every moment of those plays wrote out of your own amusement with life or

\textsuperscript{39} Eileen O'Casey includes a letter from G. B. Shaw in Sean (London, 1971), pp. 84-85. This is supported by Lady Gregory in her journals, pp. 110-11. Lady Gregory's changed opinion of the play is recorded in a letter to O'Casey in Sean, p. 103. Regarding Lady Gregory's and Starkie's attitudes see Krause, Sean O'Casey, Man and Work, pp. 126, 100, respectively. For Robinson's opinion see the following footnote.

your sense of its tragedy; you were excited . . . by what you had seen or heard, as a man is by what happens under his window . . . {41

And with this preliminary realistic bias, Yeats concludes by criticising precisely those aspects of the play which cannot justifiably be denigrated according to the principles of realism. Thus, Yeats says:

You illustrate those opinions by a series of almost unrelated scenes, as you might in a leading article; there is no dominating character, no dominating action, neither psychological unity nor unity of action; and your great power of the past has been the creation of some unique character who dominated all about him and was himself a main impulse in some action that filled the play from beginning to end. {42

But there is unity of idea and form in The Silver Tassie. The play is an anti-war drama, dealing with the First World War, and particularly its effects on Harry Heegan. In this respect, there is a central character, although he does become progressively more stylized during the course of the play.

In The Silver Tassie Sean O'Casey incorporates many of the techniques used previously, but he uses them more and with greater confidence. In the primarily realistic first act the symbols of sacrifice are introduced. The silver tassie parallels the chalice of the sacrifice of the Mass. There is a direct reference made to a blood sacrifice in the beginning of the second act. The Croucher alludes to the valley of the dry bones of the Old Testament while from the


{42 Ibid., p. 741.
shattered monastery comes the sound of Gregorian chant:

And he said unto me, Son of man, can this exceeding
great army become a valley of dry bones?
(The music ceases, and a voice, in the part of the
monastery left standing, intones: Kyr . . . Is . .
eleison, followed by the answer: Christe . . .
eleison. /182/43

This is a deliberate juxtaposition of the religious with the
sacriligious, a contrast between Christianity and the battle-
field. But it is also a paradox in that the battle is what
Christianity has wrought. Such sacrificial symbolism has
already been used in The Plough and the Stars. The victim
in this play is Harry Heegan, who unlike the Irish Nannie of
Nannie's Night Out cannot die dancing because he is so
crippled. As in Nannie's Night Out, so also in The Silver
Tassie dancing is a life symbol. The wounded Harry is not
able to dance, and is likewise unable to participate in life.
His condition is represented by the bent and twisted tassie.

Chanting is used in The Silver Tassie, especially in
the second act. Character grouping and choral responses
reflect a further refinement on those of Kathleen Listens In.
And, as in this latter play the characters are generalized:
the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Soldiers, the Croucher,
the Visitor, or the Staff Wallah. The Croucher is definitely
symbolic. The playwright describes him:

The croucher's make-up should come as close as
possible to a death's head, a skull; and his
hands should show like those of a skeleton's.
He should sit somewhere above the group of.

43 Sean O'Casey, The Silver Tassie, in Collected Plays,
Soldiers; preferably to one side, on the left, from the viewpoint of the audience, so as to overlook the Soldiers. He should look languid, as if very tired of life.\textsuperscript{44}

Similarly, O’Casey specifies the grouping of the characters of the second act:

The group of Soldiers--Act Two--should enter in a close mass, as if each was keeping the other from falling, utterly weary and tired out. They should appear as if they were almost locked together.\textsuperscript{45}

Such arrangement of characters if often considered an expressionistic device.

In \textit{The Silver Tassie}, O’Casey is quite explicit in his stage directions. The battlefield described in Act II is typical, rather than realistic. The shattered monastery, the broken "Princeps pacis", the decimated crucifix, and the stained glass window are deliberately contrasted with the squat black howitzer which stands in the ruined archway of the monastery. Coloured lights are used to indicate battle; "Only flashes are seen; no noise is heard."\textsuperscript{46}

It is easy to see how consistent the \textit{Tassie} is with Alldryce Nicoll's summary of expressionistic techniques:

Short scenes took the place of longer acts; dialogue was made abrupt and given staccato effect; symbolic (almost morality-type) forms were substituted for 'real' characters; realistic scenery was abandoned, and in its place the use of light was freely substituted; frequently choral, or mass, effects were preferred to the employment of single figures, or else single figures were elevated into

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{The Silver Tassie}, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 56.
positions where they became representative of forces larger than themselves.47

Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* is, then, expressionistic in form, and though these techniques occur predominantly in the second act, they do include those used in earlier plays. Consequently, *The Silver Tassie* takes its place in O'Casey's progression toward expressionistic drama.

In criticizing these expressionistic traits, Yeats was himself criticizing expressionism as a dramatic form. He reacted to the *Tassie* in much the same way as the Irish drama critics:

> The play is all anti-war propaganda to the exclusion of plot and character... Of course if we had played his play, his fame was so great that we would have had full house for a time, but we hoped to turn him to a different path.48

Yeats, as Lady Gregory and Dr. Starkie, felt O'Casey's strength lay in this "different path", realism; although, it is clear that O'Casey was never strictly a realistic dramatist.

David Krause suggests a factor, mentioned briefly before, which may have contributed to W. B. Yeats' stylistic rejection of the *Tassie*. He contends that Yeats' own experiments with the highly ritualized and spiritual Noh plays influenced him to such a degree that he had in mind only two alternatives for O'Casey—he could either write plays in the

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Juno or in the Noh traditions. As it was pointed out earlier in this study, Yeats' preoccupation with the Noh form indicates, at the very least, the vast cultural and social differences between the two men, the subject, in part, of the fourth chapter. However, Yeats' interest in Noh drama may have prejudiced his opinion of The Silver Tassie's expressionistic style, and for this reason it is included at this time.

The reaction of the Abbey Theatre directors to Sean O'Casey's The Silver Tassie as expressionism was, unfortunately, not an isolated incident. Krause points out that shortly after the Tassie rejection, another expressionistic play written by Denis Johnston was turned down. The Silver Tassie may have been a turning point not so much for O'Casey, at least in so far as his style is concerned, but for the Abbey Theatre. In her biography of Lady Gregory, Elizabeth Coxhead implies as much:

One is still puzzled to explain this myopia regarding The Silver Tassie that simultaneously afflicted herself [Lady Gregory], Yeats and Lennox Robinson who between them had championed so much that was new, difficult or disquieting.

This hypothesis will be subjected to further scrutiny.

Sean O'Casey's The Silver Tassie is clearly within an earlier tradition. It did not signal a revolutionary

49 Krause, Man and Work, pp. 97-98.
50 Ibid., pp.126-7.
departure, though it more clearly demonstrates O'Casey's interest in the expressionistic form. That the Abbey Theatre was unprepared for the style of the Tassie stems more from their apparent inability to reconcile this play with his earlier "realistic" plays—a fault not on O'Casey's part, since his plays to this point clearly indicated his expressionistic evolution, but on the inability of the Abbey Theatre directors to perceive and accept such evolution.

C. After the Tassie: Within the Gates and the Later Plays

Even before Sean O'Casey received notice that The Silver Tassie was not destined for Abbey Theatre production, he had begun work on his first full-length, entirely expressionistic experiment, Within the Gates. This play was originally and curiously (the year is 1928) intended as a film. It was completed five years later, in 1933.

Within the Gates contains the expressionistic techniques of O'Casey's previous dramas. The characters are stylized. They include: the Young Woman, the Dreamer, the Atheist, the First and Second Evangelists, the Young Salvation Army Offi-

52 Eileen O'Casey, Sean, p. 81. Of Within the Gates Mrs. O'Casey comments: "Originally he had imagined it as a film in which everything from flower-beds to uniforms would be stylized... it would be geometrical and emotional, the emotions of living characters to be shown against their own patterns and the patterns of the park". Having got so far, he wrote to Alfred Hitchcock, and... Hitchcock... dined with us. Sean explained his ideas to an apparently responsible hearer. Hitchcock and he talked excitedly... but of the film he never heard again from Hitchcock. Thereupon, Within the Gates became an entire play."
cer, a Man Wearing a Bowler Hat, and a Man Wearing a Trilby Hat. Their names indicate to some degree their symbolic significance. The play also incorporates choral and chanting techniques, used extensively in The Silver Tassie and prefigured in Kathleen Loves In. Here, the chorus consists of the “Down and Outs”. Structurally, Within the Gates consists of four scenes, each of which represents one of the four seasons, starting with spring. The seasons also parallel the lives of the characters in the play, especially Jannice, the Young Woman.

The play is a joie de vivre morality much like the later Cock-a-Doodle Dandy. Dance and song reflect the vitality of life of which the Dreamer is the manifestation. He is also the alternative solution for Jannice, for whom orthodox religion—the Bishop, the Evangelists, and the Salvation Army Officer—have proven unsuccessful. The play is summarized by the Dreamer:

Offer not as incense to God the dust of your sighing, but dance to His glory, and come before His presence with a song. 53

Within the Gates represents an inability to reconcile, on O’Casey’s part, his Dionysian credo and Christianity. He does reconcile the two in The Drums of Father Ted. This topic will be pursued in the chapter on the thematic and subject matter development of O’Casey’s plays.

Within the Gates is significant in that it represents

the culmination of O'Casey's gradual expressionistic development. In this respect it is unique, for, as The Shadow of a Gunman is the most realistic of O'Casey's plays, Within the Gates is the most expressionistic. Later plays illustrate either a combination of realism or expressionism, as in The Silver Tassie, or expressionism coupled with myth. The trend in the later plays, and most effective in the comedies--Purple Dust, Cock-a-Doodle Dandy, and The Drums of Father Red--is toward myth, both Celtic and Dionysian. This development will be analyzed in a discussion of the themes of O'Casey's dramas.

Sean O'Casey wrote seven full-length plays between 1940 and 1961. In The Star Turns Red (1940), Red Roses for Me (1942), and Oak Leaves and Lavender (1946), he continues to combine realism and expressionism. The Star Turns Red and Oak Leaves and Lavender are hampered by their obviousness; they are too didactic in their espousal of O'Casey's unique brand of Communism. And, although Red Roses for Me deals with this theme, it avoids the pedantry of the other two.

The Star Turns Red is characterized by a relatively realistic conflict between the forces of Fascism and Communism--particularly realistic in view of the world situation in 1940. O'Casey, however, chooses to deal with this conflict in an expressionistic manner. The Saffron Shirts and the Red Guards stand for these opposing ideologies. In addition, the playwright uses expressionistic stage settings to heighten and intensify the play at specific instances, in
much the same way, though more extensively, as he used the speaker in The Plough and the Stars. For example, through the windows of the home of the Old Man and the Old Woman (again the stylization of the characters is apparent) can be seen a church spire, and beside it, a large silver star. Through another window are two smoke stacks. Yet at the outset of act four, the scene is pictured thus from the Mayor's window:

Through the window on the right the church spire is farther away than it was before; and the foundry chimneys loom larger through the window on the left. The star that sone beside the church spire now shines beside the chimneys.54

The setting corresponds to the action of the play. The power of the workers has increased—hence the larger chimneys and star. Also, they have become less associated with orthodox religion—thus the diminished church spire—and have become instead increasingly socialistic; the star is nearer the chimneys. And, by the conclusion of the play the workers are victorious; the star, "The [Nova] Red Star glows and seems to grow bigger as the curtain falls."55

Red Roses for Me is very similar to The Silver Tassie in technique.56 Through the entire play there are expressionistic elements, but they are found primarily in one single act. The third act approximates the second act of The Silver

55 Ibid., p. 354.
56 See Templeton, "Sean O'Casey and Expressionism", p. 53.
Tassie. It is the scene of a metamorphosis in which the drab and desolate Liffey quays are transformed into O'Casey's vision of the new Dublin, the new world:

The scene has brightened, and bright and lovely colours are being brought to them by the caress of the setting sun. The houses on the far side of the river now bow to the visible world, decked in mauve and burnished bronze; and the men that have been lounging against them now stand stalwart, looking like fine bronze statues, slashed with scarlet.57

As before, these "statues" join in the celebration of the new Dublin in song, an affirmation of the new life to come. Ayamonn Breydon declares: "Our city's in th' grip o' God!"58

Ayamonn, like Harry Heegan, is also a sacrificial victim. Red Roses for Me ends on an optimistic, though tragic note, while The Silver Tassie is pessimistic. The former offers the vision of a new world purchased by the blood of Ayamonn Breydon's martyrdom. In Red Roses for Me O'Casey manages to combine both the man of action and the man of thought, essences traditionally antithetical in literature, and Irish literature in particular.59 As David Krause puts it, Ayamonn is "an articulate Harry Heegan".60

Oak Leaves and Lavender suffers from the same defect that flawed The Star Turns Red; it is too much of a prole-

58 Ibid., p. 200.
59 This is true, for example, in Shakespeare's Hamlet, or in Yeats' poetry, and also in O'Casey's hero from The Shadow of a Gunman, Davoren.
60 Krause, Man and Work, p. 165.
tarian propaganda play. But it does contain expressionism. J. Templeton sees the "Prelude of the Shadows" as a fusion of the real and dream worlds in the manner of The Ghost Sonata.\(^6\) Furthermore, the stage directions are the most obvious example of stylistic set design seen thus far. The panelling with its lines and ovals is to be transformed into cog wheels; the chandelier, into a gantry; the windows, columns, clock are all to be metamorphosed into a factory ushering in the ultimate triumph of socialism over fascism.

O'Casey's dramatic orientation was ordained from the outset. In these later plays there are recurrences and variations of techniques and methods which had their origins in his earliest works. His last full-length plays, Purple Dust (1940), Cock-a-Doodle Dandy (1949), The Bishop's Bonfire (1955), and The Drums of Father Ned (1960), are no great departures. In theme and subject matter they return to Ireland. In their notions of "fantasy" they are reminders of the earlier Kathleen Listens In. All are allegorical in nature with a deal of character stylization, stylized set design, and use of song and dance much like O'Casey's earlier plays. In fact, after Within the Gates there is very little innovation from a stylistic point of view. The Star Turns Red, Red Roses for Me, and Oak Leaves and Lavender were discussed because they were somewhat atypical of the last group of plays either in subject matter, or as in Red Roses for Me, in structure. In this chapter all the plays written after Within the Gates

\(^6\) Templeton, "Sean O'Casey and Expressionism", p. 55.
are of interest only in so far as they exemplify the expressionism already foreshadowed. They are also of interest in their increasing employment and creation of myth, and this shall be considered in the following section. For the present purpose, however, an examination of one of these plays, Cock-a-Doodle Dandy, will suffice since this chapter is, after all, concerned with the evolution of, and not the per se study of, these later plays.

Cock-a-Doodle Dandy is typical of Sean O'Casey's last plays. And if it is perhaps more successful than most of them it is because, as in Purple Dust, its comic nature saves it from melodrama. The play is an allegory or morality pitting the Dionysian Cock figure against the puritanism and philistinism of the Irish village of Nyadnanave, which ironically means in Gaelic, Nest of Saints.\[62\] Michael Marthraum's house has been distorted by these latter forces until the pillars supporting his porch are twisted; the framework is askew; the house, black. And above all, as in Kathleen Listens In, is the Irish tri-colour.

The old man, Shannaar, represents the reactionary forces at work in Ireland and the world. The Gaelic Shan abh means old man. The name is also a biblical allusion to Shinar, the land of confused languages where the Tower of Babel was built.\[63\] This is apropos since Shanaar speaks in supersti-

\[62\] David Krause also points out the pun contained in the name "Nyadnanave"—Nest of Knaves. See Krause, Man and Work, p. 188.

\[63\] Ibid., p. 189.
tious parables, reinforced by ridiculously incorrect Latin. He is allied with Father Domineer, the representative of an oppressive orthodox Christianity, the burden of which is suggested by his name. Father Domineer sets forth his credo in scene II when he puts a stop to a dance:

Stop that devil's dance! How often have you been warned that the avowed enemies of Christianity are on the march everywhere! I find you dancin'! How often have you been told that pagan poison is floodin' th' world, an' that Ireland is drinkin' in generous doses through films, plays, an' books! An' yet I come here to find you dancin'? Dancin', an' with the Kylecock, Le Coq, Gallus, th' Cock rampant in the district, destroyin' desire for prayer, desire for work, an' weakenin' th' authority of th' pastors and masters of your souls! Th' empire of Satan's pushin' out its foundations everywhere, an' I find you dancin', ubique ululanti cockalorum ophine ululop64.

In opposition to these forces and the "top hats" of the bureaucratic politicians is the colorful Cock, six-foot symbol of joy and life. This opposition leads to an actual confrontation. The battle is described:

The house shakes again; the flag-pole totters and falls flat; blue and red lightning flashes from the window, and a giant peel of thunder drums through the garden. Then all becomes suddenly silent.65

It is the Cock who loses; Father Domineer champions. The Cock would have brought celebration and life. Father Domineer reasserts the suppression of life. He has already struck and killed the Lorry Driver in scene two. He whispers an act of contrition into the dead man's ear, but O'Casey's theme is

65 Ibid., p. 198.
that of the messenger who replies: "It would have been far
fitter, Father, if you'd murmured one into your own."66

The play ends with the young people leaving. Lorleen,
like Jannice and the Irish Nannie, has been abused by the
reactionaries of orthodox religion and politics. She, Mar-
ion, and the Messenger leave for "a place where life resem-
bles life more than it does here."67

Cock-a-Doodle Dandy was one of O'Casey's favorite plays.
In a letter to the New York Times, he explains why:

To me what is called naturalism, or even realism,
 isn't enough. They usually show life at its mean-
est & commonest, as if life never had time for a
dance, a laugh or a song. I always thought that
life had a lot of time for these things, for each
was a part of life itself . . . But one scene
in a play as a chant or a work of musical action
and dialogue was not enough, so I set about trying
to do this in an entire play and brought forth
Cock-a-Doodle Dandy.68

Cock-a-Doodle Dandy demonstrates O'Casey's final style. It
is one in which expressionism is freely used, used with or
without realism to reinforce it or to contrast with it.

Sean O'Casey was never a complete realist, though his
early plays do indicate a greater use of that form. Similarly

66 Cock-a-Doodle Dandy, loc. cit., p. 189.
67 Ibid., p. 221.

Eileen O'Casey, Sean, p. 201. O'Casey implies here
that the Tassie was a turning point for him. But this is not
the case. He contradicts this statement in his preface to
Kathleen Liliths In. In fact he remarked to one critic that
he honestly did not know what was meant by the terms realism
and expressionism. There may be some truth in this, since he
had no idea what was meant by the latter term when he wrote,
for example, Roisin's Robe. He appears to have been unaware,
to some degree, of the expressionistic elements in his earlier
works.
the later "expressionistic" O'Casey could write a play like
Red Roses for Me which combines both styles. The conclusion
is that he did come to incorporate more and more expression-
istic techniques in the course of his dramatic development.
This progression was largely unnoticed prior to The Silver
Tassie, but it was present. They stylistic "turning point"
that took place apparently did so in the minds of the Abbey
directors and critics, rather than in O'Casey.

69 See the preceding footnote. O'Casey himself surrend-
erers at times to this fallacy regarding The Silver Tassie. He
seems to be occasionally unaware of his evolutionary tendency,
or, at the very least, what to call it.
III. THEMATIC AND SUBJECT MATTER DEVELOPMENT

A. Introduction and Phase One

Sean O'Casey's treatment of theme and subject matter is not so easily defined as is his stylistic development, simply because there are no "catch-all" terms such as realism or expressionism with which to delineate them. It is solely for facility of discussion that William Armstrong's three-fold division of O'Casey's dramas will be adopted. He divides the plays into the following categories:

In his early work, up to and including The Silver Tassie, he uses Irish characters and themes to provide a tragic and ironic commentary on mankind in general. This was followed by a phase in which he experiments with expressionistic techniques and Marxist ideas in such plays as Within the Gates and The Star Turns Red. In his latest phase he is especially concerned with the condition of Irish culture and civilisation since the establishment of the Irish Free State. . . . (He) blends a realistic satire of what is wrong with contemporary Irish civilisation with a rich variety of mytho-poetic and symbolic devices, which are chiefly used to exalt what is best in the Irish character and to prefigure the more enlightened culture of the Ireland of the future.1

These divisions are not intended as absolutes, as subsequent discussion will clarify.

Sean O'Casey's first phase will be called his Dublin

phase, and it includes the dramas of the Dublin tenements, The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars. It also includes The Silver Tassie, although its inclusion is not as obvious as the first three. O'Casey was not the first Irish playwright to portray the tenements on the stage. A. E. Malone cites A. P. Wilson's Slough, Alpha and Omega's Blight, and Daniel Corkery's The Labour Leader as precursors of O'Casey's Dublin plays. Malone also feels—and time has proven him correct—that these antecedents are inferior to their successors.

The second phase into which Armstrong classifies O'Casey's dramas will be subsequently referred to as O'Casey's Larkin plays—after the Irish Labour leader—due to their predominantly socialist bias. These works, except for Within the Gates, represent a break from the previous pacifist tradition of the Dublin phase. They are: The Star Turns Red, Red Roses for Me, and Oak Leaves and Lavender. As with the Tassie of the previous section, there is some difficulty in fitting Within the Gates within this group, though it can be done. Of these plays, Red Roses for Me and Within the Gates contain hints of a final phase.

The third phase that Armstrong lists will be called the Oisin phase, due to its highly allegorical and mythological nature. In this portion of O'Casey's plays allegory, expres-

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2 Malone, Irish Drama, p. 211.

sionism, and myth combine in such plays as Purple Dust, Cock-
a-Doodle Dandy, The Bishop's Bonfire, and The Drums of Father
Ned. This phase is of particular interest in the study of
Sean O'Casey's later plays as it illustrates an inter-rela-
tion between O'Casey's allegorical and mythical themes with
the expressionism discussed in chapter two. More important,
however, is O'Casey's final thematic realization.

It should be noted that these phases do not strictly
coincide with the chronological appearance of these plays.
There is no obvious evolution of O'Casey's treatment of
theme and subject matter. There are suggestions of the final
O'Casey product in earlier plays, but unlike the stylistic
development, it is not established until these final plays.

That there is no thematic parallel to the stylistic
development is evidenced by the fact that although several
of O'Casey's very early plays prefigure those of his later
phases, they fail to establish an uninterrupted "chain". If
Roisin's Robe is similar to the later fantasies, it might
also be similar in theme and subject matter. This is, how-
ever, pure speculation. It is more certain that the Irish
Nannie of Nannie's Night Out foreshadows Jannice of Within
the Gates; similarly, it contains the same joie de vivre
theme of the later work. In like manner, O'Casey's The
Harvest Festival seems to have been the model for the later
The Drums of Father Ned in its choice of subject matter--the

Tostal celebration—and its Dionysian theme.\textsuperscript{5} It also contains the labour union element and socialist message which typifies O'Casey's Larkin plays of the 1910's.\textsuperscript{6} Finally, Herbert Coston maintains that The Frost in the Flower shares the ironic use of a festive occasion with Juno and The Silver Tassie.\textsuperscript{7} Thus, before the intervention of the Dublin phase, O'Casey's plays already foretold to some extent the themes and subject matter of his later phases, but owing to the erratic and fragmented quality of the "prophecy" it was not possible to predict precisely the direction the playwright would choose to take.

In Sean O'Casey's Dublin phase he is concerned with the inhabitants of the Dublin slums, and the effects that violence has upon them. In The Shadow of a Gunman the calamity of the Black and Tan War brings about the useless and accidental killing of Minnie Powell. She has allowed herself to be arrested in the place of Davoren, whom she naively imagines is an IRA gunman. Implicit in this anti-war play is O'Casey's feeling that the old romantic view of Ireland should be done away with:

\begin{quote}
Davoren. I remember the time when you yourself believed in nothing but the gun.
Seumas. Ay, when there wasn't a gun in the country; I've a different opinion now when there's noth-
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{5} Robert Hogan, "O'Casey's Apprenticeship", \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 245.


\textsuperscript{7} Herbert Coston, "Sean O'Casey: Prelude to Playwriting", in Ayling, \textit{ed. cit.}, p. 57.
in' 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 ra-gin divil now, an' if you only look crooked at her you're sure of a punch in th' eye.8

Seumas, illustrating the uselessness of the situation, continues:

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

. . . . I draw the line when I hear the gunmen blowin' about dyin' for the people, when it's the people who are dyin' for the gunmen!9

This is the theme of The Shadow of a Gunman. Although the play is written in an Irish context, it is universal in its application. The play comments sadly on the effects of warfare upon innocent civilians.

Juno and the Paycock tells of the tribulations of the tenement dweller during the Irish Civil War. Mrs. Tancred's and Juno Boyle's speeches have already been cited; they point to the agony shared by families of the "enemies" at the deaths of their own. This is the pacifist notion of Juno, though it is subordinated to the dissolution of the Boyle household. The play is summed up, and O'Casey's message is made clear, in Captain Boyle's final lines: "I'm tellin you . . . Joxer . . . th' whole worl's . . . in a terr . . . ible state o' . . . chassiss!"10

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9 Ibid., p.132.
10 Juno and the Paycock, p. 89.
O’Casey tackles the 1916 Easter Rebellion in the play, *The Plough and the Stars*. Again the play is pacifist in tone and of course Irish in subject matter. It is based somewhat on his *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army*, especially in reference to the uniforms described and worn.\(^{11}\) The heroes of *The Plough and the Stars* are not the speaker or the men who follow him to death. Nora Clitheroe undercuts the "terrible beauty" of the sacrifice:

I tell you they’re afraid to say they’re afraid! ... Oh I saw it, I saw it ... At the barricade in North King Street I saw fear glowin' in all their eyes ... An' in the middle o' th' street was somethin' huddled up in a horrible tangled heap ... His face was jammed again 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!\(^{12}\)

The heroes of the *Plough* are its women, as in *Juno*. Nora sees through the cruel game of futile patriotism. And Bessie Burgess, the loyalist, dies accidentally saving her. Nora and Bessie represent life forces in the play; nationalism, the forces of death and destruction.

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\(^{11}\) William Armstrong, "The Sources and Themes of The Plough and the Stars", *Modern Drama*, IV (1961), pp. 234-37. O’Casey withdrew from the ICA after being its secretary, due to its collaboration with the nationalist Irish Volunteers. O’Casey argued for guerilla warfare, but the ICA and other nationalist groups opted for uniforms—some of them absurd in colour and configuration. Brennan of the *Plough* is saved by changing from his uniform into civilian clothes.

\(^{12}\) *The Plough and the Stars*, pp. 221-22.
Production of The Plough and the Stars was marred by rioting at the Abbey Theatre. An attempt—unsuccessful—was even made to kidnap Barry Fitzgerald who was playing the part of Fluther Good.\textsuperscript{13} But not only was the Plough assailed from without, some of the actors and two members of the Abbey Board of Directors opposed the political tone of the play and some of its diction—in particular the words "snotty" and "bitch". They also ridiculed the "absurd" possibility that some unfortunate Irish woman might perhaps turn to prostitution for a livelihood.\textsuperscript{14} Certainly this opposition had some effect upon O'Casey. He threatened to withdraw his play rather than give in to the actors or directors.\textsuperscript{15} The riots undoubtedly made him more open to the idea of living in England. David Krause argues that the Plough riots marked O'Casey's "Day of the Rabblemment", and that it resulted in a self-exile similar to James Joyce's.\textsuperscript{16} Krause exaggerates, for there are simply too many additional factors which also contributed to O'Casey's departure: these will be the subject of the fourth chapter. However, O'Casey does record his reaction to the Plough "chassis" in Inishfallen Fare Thea

\textsuperscript{13} Lady Gregory's Journals, p. 98.

\textsuperscript{14} Krause, Man and Work, pp. 42-43. The last objection shows a cyclopaian lack of perception. Stories abound that at the turn of the century Dublin had one of the largest red light districts in the world. It served, as a matter of fact, as the source for the Night Town incidents of Joyce's Ulysses.

\textsuperscript{15} Krause, Self-Portrait—Letters, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{16} Krause, Man and Work, p. 40.
Well:

For the first time in his life Sean felt a surge of hatred for Kathleen ni Houlihan sweeping over him. He saw now that the one who had the walk of a queen could be a bitch at times . . . What an old snarly gob she could be at times; an ignorant one too.17

This remark is of interest in observing, first, O’Casey’s image of Kathleen ni Houlihan and, second, that his later Oisin plays attack Kathleen the “bitch”.

Sean O’Casey’s picture of Kathleen ni Houlihan was not that of W. B. Yeats. If nothing else, the juxtaposition of the two concepts further illustrates the gulf between the two men. The fox-trotting Kathleen of Kathleen Listens In is hardly the sentimental figure of Yeats’ The Countess Kathleen. Nor is the “ragin divil” of the Shadow the same as:

... the lady Yeats made her out to be, peasants dancing round her to the sound of tabor and drum, their homespun shirts buttoned with stars.18

Though nothing definite can be drawn from this contrast of temperaments, the suspicion is that, as in the case of O’Casey’s style, Yeats may have been prejudiced against the former’s antithetical view of Ireland.

Before discussing the final play of the first phase, The Silver Tassie, it might perhaps be appropriate to point out another bias which may have precluded an objective evaluation of the Tassie by Yeats. The play deals with the First

17 O’Casey, Inishfallen Fare Thee Well, p. 240.
World War. Yeats criticized O'Casey on this very point:
"But you are not interested in the Great War."^{19} O'Casey rebutted quite logically with: "Now how do you know I am not interested in the Great War?"^{20} David Krause draws a correlation between Yeats' arbitrary exclusion of Wilfred Owen and other war poets from the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*—which Yeats edited in 1936—and his refusal of the *Tassie*.^{21}

Yeats' own personal distaste for the World War may, as Krause theorizes, have contributed to its ultimate rejection.

In 1927, P. S. O'Hegarty commented on O'Casey's choice of subject matter:

> He has dealt with his epoch, and in the future he will have to find other subjects. I have no doubt he will find them, for clearly he has the root of the matter in him.\(^\text{22}\)

The *Silver Tassie* marks such a discovery for O'Casey, though in a limited sense. The play deals with the effects of World War I on Harry Heegan. Three acts take place in Dublin and for this reason the play is arbitrarily considered as one of the first phase. The second act, however, presents a battlefield scene on the continent. Like *Shadow*, *Juno*, and the *Plough*, the *Tassie* is a play of pacifism.

The protagonist, Harry Heegan, becomes a universal

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^{20} Ibid.

^{21} See Krause, *Man and Work*, pp. 105-6, for a discussion of this possibility.

soldier. The previous chapter emphasized the incorporation of expressionistic elements in The Silver Tassie. Correspondingly, the characterization of Harry becomes more stylized. As a result of this stylization, he assumes symbolic importance proportionate to his role as the universal soldier. In this sense the play is propaganda as Yeats contended—which served as one of the reasons for his rejection of it. But Harry's function is not didactic; it is that of a morality, and it corresponds with his expressionistic status. Yeats' criticism is valid when applied to some of the plays of the Larkin phase, but not to The Silver Tassie.

Susie Monican deserves attention as well. In the first act she mouths religious platitudes, but she has undergone a reversal by the third act. Her satirization by O'Casey suggests subsequent attacks on those who blindly adhere to orthodox religion.

It is a fallacy in discussing these Dublin works to assume that they were universally acclaimed by those Irish critics who later opposed either O'Casey's expressionism or his later allegories. Austin Clarke, for example, felt that:

Several writers of the new Irish school believe that

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23 See Krause, Man and Work, p. 110. Krause also uses this expression.

24 Yeats, Letters, p. 741.

25 See Krause, Man and Work, p. 110.

26 See footnote 39 in the preceding chapter. The play's merit was recognized, though this recognition was delayed. See also footnote 40 of this same chapter for Robinson's view.
Mr. O'Casey's work is a crude exploitation of our poorer people in the Anglo-Irish tradition that is now moribund. 27

Without a doubt, Sean O'Casey's Dublin plays were his most successful in terms of acclaim and economics—the Tassie included, if only for the notoriety it brought him. To presume, however, that O'Casey was accepted without hesitation during this phase and later rejected, is to misconstrue the actual situation. One need only recall the Plough riots, already referred to.

B. The Larkin Plays

Sean O'Casey's second Larkin phase is not of particular interest in this study of his later plays since his specifically socialist or Communist plays occur only during this period. It represents, therefore, a short-lived occasion of thematic experiment. His socialism may be taken up tangentially in the later Oisin plays, but never does it occupy O'Casey's attention so much as it does during this second phase of his thematic and subject matter development. This is, as it turns out, fortunate for O'Casey since both The Star Turns Red and Oak Leaves and Lavender are didactic to a fault. 28 Within the Gates contains the cliche "whore with the heart of gold" heroine that is, at the very least, distracting. This last play is included in the Larkin phase.

27 O'Casey, Green Crow, p. 184.
tenuously on David Krause's contention that it demonstrates the failure of capitalism and Christianity during the depression of the 1930's. 29

More significant than the socialist themes to this present investigation is the connection that two of these plays, *Within the Gates* and *Red Roses for Me*, have with the later Oisin phase of thematic and subject matter development.

*Within the Gates* has similarities with *Nannie's Night Out*. These have been pointed out already, regarding the characters of Nannie and Jannice. *Within the Gates* contains also the Dionysian *joie de vivre* theme of this earlier work. It is the same basic theme of the later Oisin plays. Furthermore, if O'Casey's criticism of orthodox religion began with Susie Monican of *The Silver Tassie*, then it is continued in *Within the Gates*. The inadequacies of the Bishop, the Evangelists, and the Salvation Army Officer are contrasted with the Dreamer's vitality. The Dreamer's criticism of the Bishop is suitable for the others as well. He advises Jannice: "Turn your back swift on the poor, purple-button'd dead-man, whose name is absent from the book of life." 30

This is appropriate advice for Cook to give Lorleen in *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* if he could. In so far as *Within the Gates* celebrates this Dionysian theme, then, it is akin to the later Oisin plays which support the *joie de vivre* theme through the use of Celtic mythology.


30 O'Casey, *Within the Gates*, p. 228.
Red Roses for Me marks the introduction of the Celtic element so characteristic of the final phase of thematic and subject matter development. The setting is Ireland. The third act, especially, combines the Dionysian element with the Celtic myth. And each of these complements and reinforces the other.

David Krause is correct in calling Sean O'Casey the "Rageous Ossean". Oisin, last of the Fenians, bard of Finn Mac Cool, debated with Saint Patrick. Their dialogue represents the clash between the free, pagan life of the Celts, and the austere life of Christianity. It is with this in mind that Krause remarks of the metamorphosis which occurs in the third act of Red Roses for me, "... that prophetic transformation scene... unites, in a golden dream, the forces of Oisin and God in a harmony of paganism and Christianity." The proletarian protagonist, Ayamonn, constructs a Celtic cross of daffodils for the Easter services of his church. And, when he dies, his body is brought to rest in the same church. In this respect Red Roses for Me reconciles Christianity and O'Casey's pagan zest for life. This is to be seen again in The Drums of Father Ned.

In Act III O'Casey invokes the "saints" of Ireland's pagan past. Eadaí, a street vendor of cakes and apples, mentions Brian Boru, and in so doing calls upon his spirit:

Well, we've got Guinness's Brewery still, given 'us

32 Ibid., p. 288.
a needy glimpse of a betther life an hour or so on
a Saturday night, though I hold me hand at praisin'
th' puttin' of Brian Boru's golden harp on every
black porter bottle, destined to give outsiders a
false impression of our pride in th' tendher anti
damntless memories of th' past. 33

Roory, the "zealous Irish Irelander", 34 intones a "litany"
to another hero of Ireland's past, Conn the "Watchman o'
Tara", the "Leadher of Magh Femon's Host, Guardian of Moin-
moy, an' Vetheran of our river Liffey". 35 And like Baaaa he
prefigures the expressionistic metamorphosis which takes
place, in his reference to "star-lit Bethlehem". 36 This
transformation is the vision of the "betther" life to come.

There are four distinct references to Oisin himself in
Act III. And there is another "litany" which includes such
giants as Finn Mac Cool, Goll Mac Morna, Caolite, and
Oscar. 37 But there is also a reference to the early heroes
of Irish Christianity: St. ColmKille, Aidan, Lausereena,
and Brigid. 38 Red Roses for Me foretells the fusion of
pagan and Christian which is to be found in The Drums of
Father Ned.

There is in Red Roses for Me a mention of Kathleen ni
Houlihan as well, which is consistent with O'Casey's vision

33 O'Casey, Red Roses for Me, pp. 187-88.
34 Ibid., p. 126.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., p. 192.
38 Ibid., p. 197.
of her that was discussed before. Agamonn is the play-
wright's mouthpiece as he talks to the zealous Roory:

Roory, Roory, your Kaithleen ni Houlihan has th' bentback of an oul' woman as well as th' walk of
a queen. We love th' ideal Kaithleen ni Houlihan,
not because she is false, but because she is
beautiful; we hate th' real Kaithleen ni Houlihan,
not because she is true, but because she is ugly.39

This passage seems to sum up the considerable differences
between the respective views of Yeats and O'Casey.

Red Roses for Me is significant in this immediate anal-
ysis in another way, in much the same manner as The Silver
Tassie. It demonstrates the co-existence of expressionism
and Celtic myth figures. In doing so, it illustrates the
"betther" life which O'Casey envisages for Ireland and the
world. This new world is the subject of the last, the Oisin
phase. The technique in this third phase is also the same;
it is a fusion of expressionism, allegory, and myth.

C. The Oisin Phase

Sean O'Casey's Oisin phase consists of the following
dramas: Purple Dust, Cock-a-Doodle Dandy, The Bishop's Bon-
fir, The Drums of Father Ned. These plays represent a con-
fiict between death forces--Christian austerity--and life
forces--pagan joie de vivre. In this respect these plays
echo the dialogues or debates between St. Patrick and Oisin.
David Krause devotes an article entitled "The R Ageous

39 O'Casey, loc. cit., p. 197.
Ossean: Patron-Hero of Synge and O'Casey to precisely this point of comparison. He says:

Patrick, the first great saint of the new religion of Ireland was . . . determined to convert the pagans, not coexist with them. And Oisin, the last of the great Fenian heroes, was equally determined to remain loyal to his vanishing heritage. . . . These two men . . . represented a clash between two irreconcilable minds, two opposing ways of life.\(41\)

In the same article Krause indicates that O'Casey shared Oisin's temperament, the "vital aspect of the Celtic imagination",\(42\) which O'Casey seemed to feel had " . . . languished in modern Ireland, especially the Ireland that finally won its freedom from England."\(43\)

Sean O'Casey's Oisin phase signals a final and complete return to Ireland in theme, setting, and subject matter. And, although the themes are general enough to be universal, they are aimed primarily at Ireland. It should be made clear at this opportunity that as Christianity is reconciled somewhat with Celtic pagan allusions in Red Roses for Me, it is also reconciled in The Drums of Father Ned. Therefore, rather than say that O'Casey's Oisin plays are plays of conflict between Christianity and paganism, it would be more correct to describe them as conflicts between Christian Philistineism and paganism.

\(40\) Krause, "Rageeous Ossean", pp. 286-91.
\(41\) Ibid., p. 270.
\(42\) Ibid., p. 269.
\(43\) Ibid.
In technique, these dramas are quite similar to *Red Roses for Me* in that they combine Celtic mythological figures and symbols with expressionistic style in order to produce highly moralistic allegories. The expressionism of these works has already been discussed in the preceding chapter. It seems that O'Casey found the stylization of this style a suitable medium for allegory since in both the characters are general rather than particular; this is also true with regard to the theme.

In an endeavor to understand this final phase in Sean O'Casey's development in theme and subject matter, three of the four plays in question will be studied: *Purple Dust*, *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, again, and *The Drums of Father Ned*.

In *Purple Dust* there are numerous, direct allusions and references to Ireland's past heroes. The play itself is a comedy satirizing two blundering Englishmen, Stoke and Poges—after Stoke Poges Church of Gray's *Elegy*—who buy a hopelessly deteriorated Tudor house in Ireland. They hope to retire to the idyllic pastoral life as country gentry. These two characters hire the local Irish, led by O'Killigain and O'Dempsey, to restore the house. In the process they become the comic butts of the entire Irish community.

Poges prepares the way, quite unwittingly, for O'Casey's invocation of Celtic mythology when he complains about the repeated solicitations of the local parish priest. His solution is:

Oh, if the misguided people would only go back to the veneration of the old Celtic gods, what
a stir we'd have here!44
Not only may he be, to some extent, speaking on behalf of
O'Casey, he is also foreshadowing the eventual outcome of
the play. Those who accept the living presence of the Celtic
past are saved from the floodwaters which destroy the Tudor
"mansion", and possibly Stoke and Poges as well. This is
because they do not understand the past. Poges blurts:

Well, what do . . . you think of the country, eh?
And the house? Better than any of your old Kings
of Tarara had, eh?45

The mispronunciation of the word "Tara" typifies Poges' his-
torical incompetence. When the second workman criticizes
him for this, his reply is given as follows:

Poges (a little nonplussed). Quite, yes, yes,
quite. Everyone tells me the place round
here is a rich storehouse of history,
legend, and myth?

2nd Workman (with a little scorn in his voice).
It's a little they know an' a little they
care about those things. But the place
has her share o' history an' her share o'
wonders.46

The same workman conjures the memories of Finn Mac Cool
and the Fianna, and the Irish heroes of the past who, to his
exaggerated way of thinking,

. . . invaded Hindostan, an' fixed as subjects the
men of all countries between our Bay o' Dublin
and the holy river that gave to holy John the holy
water to baptize our Lord.47

44 Sean O'Casey, Purple Dust, in Collected Plays, III
46 Ibid., p. 68.
47 Ibid.
Once more, Christian is combined with pagan, in a catalogue of feats that is intended was a warning to Poges who off-handedly dismisses Finn Mac Cool as a bygone memory. The workman rebukes the stuffy Poges:

(sharply) He's here for ever! His halloo can be heard on the hills outside; his spear can be seen with its point in the stars; but not with an eye that can see no further than the well-fashioned edge of a golden coin.48

This is O'Casey's theme in *Purple Dust*. The gold coin and any other thing that deprives Ireland and the world of life is as a "cloud of purple dust", obscuring and suffocating life's vitality. O'Casey also cannot let the opportunity go by in *Purple Dust* to inject his socialistic outlook. Thus, the "gold-edged coin". There is also a casual remark in the play to the effect that O'Killigain served with the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War.

The workmen, O'Dempsey and O'Killigain, not only appreciate the past, they are aware of its importance for the present and future. Opposed to this are such men as Poges, Stoke, and particularly Canon Chreshewel. O'Casey is again sparring with orthodox religion--this time represented by the Canon. It is true that the latter pays homage to the truth:

With all its frills, its frivolities, its studied ceremonial, however gaily-coloured its leisure may have been, the past had in it the core of virtue; while the present swirl of young life . . . contains within it a tawny core of fear that is

turning darker with every chime of the passing
hours. 49
But while the Canon recognizes this, he enlists the unsus-
pecting Stoke and Poges to assist him in preserving his pur-
itanical hold on the people. Once more, Poges stumbles onto
the truth without realizing its significance:

Poges (leaning towards the Canon—eagerly). We
must lengthen our arm back to the past and
pluck back some of the good things that
haven't gone away as far from us as the dead
who knew them.
Canon. A worthy enterprise, dear sir, and I hope
you and your good people will be help to us
here to bring some of the past into the reck-
less and Godless speed of the present. (He
leans over towards Poges till their heads
nearly touch.) You and yours can do much to
assist the clergy to keep a sensible check
on the lower inclinations of the people, a
work should be near to the heart of every
sensible and responsible man with a stake
in the country.
Poges. I'll do all I can. (leans back with an air
of business importance,) From a practical
point of view, how am I to help?
Canon. . . . Help us to curtail the damned activ-
ity of the devilish dance halls! 50

The role that dance plays in O'Casey's dramas has already
been suggested, and its role in Purple Dust is identical to
that in earlier works.

In the end the floodwaters sweep away the Tudor home and
and the "purple dust" which clings to and envelopes it.
O'Killigain and O'Dempsey retire to the hills where the spir-
it of Finn persists.

Cock-a-Doodle Dandy has been discussed in some detail.

49 O'Casey, loc. cit., pp. 85-86.
50 Ibid., p. 86.
The Cock figure has been suggested as a Dionysian life symbol. It has, in addition, a Celtic mythological frame of reference.

William Armstrong refers to an article in the New York Times, written by O'Casey which helps to explain the Cock symbolism of the play. At the finish of the article, O'Casey quotes from a poem by Yeats:

Lift up the head  
And clap the wings  
Red Cock, and crow.51

This is one source for the Cock. In Yeats' poems birds frequently "symbolise art and freedom of those periods in history when man frees himself from the dogma and ascetism of religious sects."52 Furthermore, according to Armstrong, the Cock has its roots in Angus, of Irish mythology.53 Legend has it that the kisses of Angus became birds that incited notions of love in Ireland's youth.

Despite its comic moments, Cook-a-Doodle Dandy concludes unhappily. The Cock is, at least for a time, subdued by the forces of life-suppression. The young people are forced to find their futures elsewhere, outside of Ireland. But this unhappy situation is altered, and a resolution is presented in The Drums of Father Ned.

Music performs the same function in The Drums of Father Ned as dance has in previous dramas. Dance is still an ele-

51 William Armstrong, "The Irish Point of View", p. 90.
52 Ibid., pp. 90-91.
53 Ibid., p. 91.
ment in the play, but it serves a subordinate purpose to music. O'Casey is not so bitter in *Drums* as he is in *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*. Father Domineer has given away to Father Fillifogue, a village priest of the town of Doonavale. Whereas the former deals in death, the latter is content to debate with the organist, Murray, over music. Their debate parallels O'Casey's conflict between austerity and vitality.

Father Fillifogue opposes the Tostal singing, and he insists that Murray and the young people of Doonavale practice the relatively boring, traditional, and musically inferior religious hymns. The following dialogue captures the spirit of the play:

*Father F.* (gripping umbrella by the stem, and banging the handle on the table). Listen to me Mr. Murray! You're not going to play on me the way you do on the piano—(banging the keys over Murray's shoulders) thump thump; or on the organ, battering the pedals. (He stamps violently on the floor.) Stamp stamp! Murray. When the mosaic says fortissimo, I press the pedals.

*Father F.* I'll nail them down, I'll nail them down, Mr. Murray.

*Murray.* I'll pull dem out, I'll pull dem out, Fader Fillifogue.

*Father F.* I'll see that you'll think more of our sacred church music than you do of Mozart. There's nothing apostolic or evangelical in the riddle-me-randy music of Mozart. Fuh!

*Murray* (shouting back). Fuh, you! (Madly sweeping his hands over the piano keys, producing a shrilling madley of notes) Listen you! When we worship Mozart, we worship God; yes, God, Fader Fillifogue! Mozart's music can be as dear murmur of a river's first flow among dear forget-me-nots an' dear meadow-sweet; as gay as a dance of boys an' girls at a fair, an' no priest present!

*Father F.* (furiously banging his umbrella on the
table). Be silent, sir; be silent!54

Murray's defense of music is similar, though without the tragic consequences of Jannice's dying resolve to dance in
Within the Gates.

The Drums of Father Ned culminates in a mixture for O'Casey, as indicated, of Christianity and his own religion of life. Father Ned—who is never seen during the play, but whose drums are heard—represents O'Casey's own brand of joyful Christianity. As a priest, Father Ned is either Anglo or Roman Catholic. He conveys, in the opinion of G. W. Knight, "the best of both Catholicism and Protestantism, the traditional authority of the one and the critical impetus of the other."55 On the one hand, Father Ned goes by the accepted orthodox title of "Father", and as a result he is identified with an organized church. On the other hand, his drums—his association with music, and thus his participation in life—signal both the opening and the closing of the play. Furthermore, Father Ned, as Knight observes, does have control over the Tostal Festival.56 It is to him, and not to Father Fillifogue, that the young people go regarding the organization of the celebration.

O'Casey has advanced from the passive Protestant minister of Red Roses for Me to the more active, though admitted-

56 Ibid.
ly incorporeal, person of Father Ned. This latter fact, Father Ned's spiritual instead of physical presence, may imply, as Knight theorizes, an admission on O'Casey's part that his final vision cannot be defined concretely. 57

O'Casey does suggest a new faith and vision for Doonvale, Ireland, and the world. Father Ned is allied with the same spirit of the Cook of Cock-a-Doodle Dandy, that of Angus. Murray mentions this spirit at the end of Act I:

Father F. . . . Mozart did you say?
Murray. . . . And Bach!
Father F. . . . Chuh! Bach, too! Let go my umbrella, Mister Murray!
Murray. . . . An' Angus, too.
Father F. (stiffening in puzzlement) Angus, too?
Murray. . . . All the great ones chosen by God to give moosic an' joy to His people. 58

G. W. Knight sees Father Ned and Angus as the two dominating characters of the play, as well as symbols of O'Casey's private theology:

One (Character) is Father Ned . . . . . .

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Our second personification is Angus the Young . . . . . a symbol of youth and enlightenment . . . . . in Greek terms we may regard him as a composite of Eros and Apollo . . . . .
Throughout Western Drama we find a continual play on these two principles which Nietzsche designated by the terms 'Dionysian' and 'Apollonian'; the one aural and mysterious (Father Ned who is never seen, but whose drums are heard) and the other visual and seraphic (Visual in the actions and speech of Murray and the young people of Doonvale). 59

57 Knight in Ayling, ed. cit., p. 179.

58 The Drums of Father Ned, pp. 581-62.

59 Knight in Ayling, pp. 178-79. Notwithstanding Knight's generally peculiar and idiosyncratic religious views, he does make a significant observation here.
Knight goes on to explain these two figures:

And yet why do we need two symbolic persons? Because as the central opposition of Within the Gates showed, there are still two positive rival powers in our western culture: Christ and Eros, Hebraic and Hellenic.60

And this is the significance of The Drums of Father Ned in the development of O'Casey's themes and subject matter. In it he manages finally to reconcile two powers which have repeatedly conflicted in his "post-Dublin" plays. There is no reconciliation in Within the Gates; the Bishop and Jannice never come to terms. O'Casey comes close to a rapprochement in Red Roses for Me., but it takes the Oisin plays to accomplish it. Nora of Drums describes the God of O'Casey's new theology:

If he didn't dance Himself, He must have watched the people at it, and, maybe, clapped His hands when they did it well. He must have often listened to the people singin', and been caught up with the rhythm of the gentle harp and psaltery, and His feet may have tapped the ground along with the gayer strrokes of the tabor and the sound of the cymbals tinkling.61

Krause believes that Oisin would have had no quarrel with such a God. 62 Nor has O'Casey.

There are still more allusions to Ireland's past and its heroes throughout The Drums of Father Ned. The play opens with a "Prerumble", or flashback, in which the Black and Tans...
offer to spare Doonavale's round tower if the two arch-
rivals Binnington and Skerighan settle their differences;
they refuse. The action takes place in the shadow of a Cel-
tic cross. That it is both Christian and Celtic predicts
the eventual union of Celtic and Christian in the play. The
antagonism of the two characters performs the same function
as the "gold coin" reference of Purple Dust. The businessman,
Binnington and Skerighan, stand with Father Fillifogue in
opposition to Father Ned. This is again reminiscent of a
similar situation in Purple Dust. Because the spirit of
Father Ned wins out in Drums, it shares the optimistic out-
look of Purple Dust, and it affords the solution that is
missing in Cock-a-Doodle Dandy.

In addition, the young people who are rehearsing for
the Tostal play are dressed in costumes of Ireland's past.
The Man of the Pike recites yet another "litany" of Ireland's
champions, which includes Angus:

I wonder why Father Ned, or Michael either, wanted
to show th' world th' kissers of th' old Irish
gods an' heroes? Com of th' Hundred Fights, with
a red face to denote battle; Brian Boru—a golden
face to denote the Thributes; Columcille, with a
white face and gold hair, to denote holiness; a
Pillar holdin' up th' head of young Dunbo—whoev-
er he was—a harp at th' pillar's butt, played be
shadoy hands, th' thin strings showin' through
th' white twinklin' fingers; am' this one I'm doin'
now; I've heard of th' others, save Dunbo, of
Guchullain, of Brian Boru, of Columcille, an' Th' Man
from God Knows Where; but who was this kid.
Angus, anyhow?

Young Tom replies: "He was th' Keltic god of youth an' lov-

63 The Drums of Father Ned, p. 582.
liness. The Pike-man's question does not go unanswered, in
dialogue, or in the total context of the play. The people of
Doonavale do not succumb to the Father Domineers or the
Father Pillifogues, the Skerighans or the Binnings. The
script to the Tostal play foreshadows the outcome of Drums.
Michael, the son of Alderman Binnington, says:

We have stood quiet in our fields, on our hills,
in our valleys; we have sat quiet in our homes,
trusting the power that held us down would show
justice; but we have found neither security nor
peace in submission; so we must strike for the
liberty we all need, the liberty we must have to
live.65

Michael's speech sings the requiem for the Doonavale which
has in the past suppressed the Murrays and the Father Neds.
This is to be no more.

Sean O'Casey's Oisin phase offers a vision of a new
"Golden Age"66 for Ireland and the world. The plays of this
final portion are allegorical; they "preach" the message of
O'Casey's new faith. In technique this allegory is accompan-
ied by use of expressionistic techniques. O'Casey seems to
have found the stylization of expressionism compatible with
the typical characters and generalized themes of allegory.
The second chapter has already discussed O'Casey's increased
use of the former--especially by the time he was in his
Oisin phase; the present chapter attempted to show a corres-

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64 The Drums of Father Ned, p. 582.
65 Ibid., p. 554.
66 See Robert Hogan, "In Sean O'Casey's Golden Days",
in Ayling, ed. cit., p. 164.
ponding use of the latter.

Sean O'Casey's final plays demonstrate a preoccupation with the future, and not, as in the Dublin phase, the past. In this respect they are plays of hope; their laughter is not quite so "bitther". His Christo-mythic outlook is his vision for Ireland and the world.
IV. A QUESTION OF EXILE

Sean O'Casey left Ireland in March of 1926 for England in order to receive the Hawthornden Prize for Juno and the Paycock which was at that time being staged in London. Of that London production he had remarked earlier, in The London Observer of Nov. 22, 1925: "If the London production is a success, I'll leave 'em for ever." O'Casey kept his word; he returned to Ireland for a short time, and thereafter moved to England. But although he had left Ireland, he had not left the Abbey Theatre. His next play, The Silver Tassie, was first offered to the Abbey. Lady Gregory's Journal substantiates this:

March 1, 1928. A letter from Sean O'Casey yesterday: "I've just finished writing and typing ... The Silver Tassie, and when I've got a couple of copies typed ... I'll send a copy to the Abbey and will send a copy to no one else till I get word that the play has been received, so that I may be able to say that the Abbey Theatre was the first to get my new effort." O'Casey's comment to the London paper evidently did not preclude the possibility of maintaining ties with the Abbey. The same remark reveals, however, that all was not well be-

1 Krause, Self-Portrait of the Artist, p. 24.
3 Lady Gregory's Journals, p. 104.
tween himself and Ireland, nor as shall be seen, between himself and the Abbey Theatre.

O'Casey had served as the secretary of the Irish Citizen Army. He left that organization when it, to his mind, abandoned its socialist principles to court the nationalists of the Irish Volunteers. He consequently viewed both the 1916 Easter Rebellion and the subsequent founding of the Irish Free State as futile efforts. Sean O'Faolain explains why:

Sean O'Casey's plays are . . . an exactly true statement of the Irish Revolution whose flag should be, not the tricolour, but the plough and the stars of the labouring classes. . . . the class that thus came to power and influence was not a labouring class; the most able among them changed their nature by changing their place in life—they graduated rapidly into petit bourgeois, middlemen, importers, small manufacturiers, thus forming a new middle class to fill the vacuum formed by the departure of depression of the alien middle class. These men, naturally, had very little education, and could have only a slight interest in the intellectuals' fight for liberty of expression. They . . . had no intention of jeopardising their mushroom-prosperity by gratuitous displays of moral courage. In any case since they were rising to sudden wealth . . . they had a vested interest in nationalism and even isolationism. The upshot of it was a new alliance between the Church, the new businessmen, and the politicians.

Such an alliance is precisely the target of O'Casey's attacks in the plays of his Oisin phase. However, it is clear

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4 See the preceding chapter, footnote 11.

5 Lindsay in Aylings, ed. cit., p. 194. It is ironic that despite their vast and numerous differences, both Yeats and O'Casey felt themselves betrayed by the political events of 1916-22. O'Casey's labour ideals and Yeats' dream of an Irish aristocracy and an enlightened peasantry were both out of step with Irish politics.
that prior to 1926 Sean O'Casey was to some degree disen-
chanted and somewhat alienated by the course of recent
events in Ireland.

The Abbey Theatre was itself the product of the Celtic
Revival, which David Krause correctly sees as the child of
the Dublin intelligentsia. O'Casey was over forty years of
age when he first successfully submitted a play to the Abbey.
He was a self-educated labourer. Gerard Fay understates the
situation when he says, "He did not at all fit in with any of
the Abbey preconceptions . . . ." And it is perhaps for
this reason—though this is simply a speculation—that the
Abbey directors treated Sean O'Casey as carelessly as they
did.

Sean O'Casey submitted The Crimson in the Tri-Colour to
the Abbey Theatre in 1921. The "slum-writer" had been pre-
viously reprimanded for submitting hand-written manuscripts
on paper of various sizes and colours. It was only with
great difficulty that O'Casey managed to come up with the
necessary materials at all—including, eventually, an old
typewriter. Lennox Robinson lost the text to The Crimson
and the Tri-Colour; he requested another copy. There was
none. Nor were there any notes from which O'Casey might have
rewritten the play. Fortunately, the play was found. It was

6 Krause, Man and Work, pp. 21-22.
7 Fay, The Abbey Theatre, p. 146.
8 See Krause, Man and Work, p. 34.
9 Hogan, "O'Casey's Apprenticeship", p. 246.
typed, and after much delay, re-read. Well over a year had passed. O’Casey had in that time written and presented another work. It was, no doubt, with frustrated patience that he inquired of Robinson: "I suppose nothing further has been done with my other play, The Crimson in the Tri-Colour?" O’Casey later heard that the play had been refused.

In the rejection of The Crimson in the Tri-Colour Lennox Robinson referred to the objections of a Reader who, unknown to O’Casey, was W. B. Yeats. The Reader addressed the playwright—who was at that time writing under the Gaelic “O’ Cathasaigh”—by the anglicized “Casey”. O’Casey wrote a letter defending his play. It was an incident which should have suggested to the Abbey directors the personality of the man who was to question their rejection of The Silver Tassie. He wrote:

... Dear Mr. Robinson ... .
... . I have re-read the work and find it as interesting as ever, in no way deserving the contemptuous dismissal it has received from the reader you quoted.
Let me say that I do not agree with his criticism. ...

This was O’Casey’s first confrontation with W. B. Yeats. It would not be his last.

10 Krause, Self-Portrait of the Artist, p. 11. Robinson soon after told O’Casey that the Reader was Yeats.
11 Ibid., p. 44.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
After his later successes with *The Shadow of a Gunman*, *Juno and the Paycock*, and *The Plough and the Stars* O'Casey for a time agreed with the critics of his earlier works. Much later, though, he came to feel that his endeavors, although inferior to his later plays, were as good as or better than those then being produced by the Abbey. Robert Hogan comments that, "... a glance at the plays that the Theatre staged in these years suggests that he was quite correct." Whether or not Hogan is right is not so significant as the fact that, from the very beginning, O'Casey's relationship with the Abbey was tenuous.

In addition, there was an element of class-conflict at work against the O'Casey-Abbey alliance. In *Inishfallen Fare Thee Well* O'Casey records the initial reaction he had to his first visit with Lady Gregory at Coole Park:

> Look at her there, with all her elegance, well at ease among the chattering crowd of common people; so why shouldn't I be steady in my mind coming to a Big House, among rare silver and the best of china, sleeping in a bounteous bed, and handling divers tools at food never seen before?

This feeling is what Elizabeth Coxhead calls his "social inferiority-complex". For example, O'Casey later recorded how ill at ease he was in the presence of Yeats:

> On Wednesday I was in the Green Room & you [Lady...]

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14 Hogan, "O'Casey's Apprenticeship", p. 246.
15 Ibid.
16 O'Casey, *Inishfallen Fare Thee Well*, p. 176.
Gregory were in the theatre, with the rather terrifying epilogue that you were accompanied by Mr. Yeats, so that I feared if I came to speak to you, I should be disturbing you & him.18

And nothing could typify the gulf between the milieu of O’Casey and that of Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats quite so well as an incident which Lady Gregory recalls in her Journals.19 She invited O’Casey to tea. He declined because, he said, he would be at work until afternoon. She asked him to come later, but he apologized and explained that as he was pouring cement that day—which took a long time to wash off—he would be unable to attend.

Lady Gregory’s Journals also contains items of a more personal nature. O’Casey could tell her things he would not have said to any other of the Abbey circle.20 He related to her one story, in particular, an incident which occurred at the time of his mother’s death.21 O’Casey had been particularly close to his mother; his father had died early in his childhood, and it is probable that he was sensitive to the events surrounding her death.22 He had written a story for which he had been promised £15. Three times he tried for his fee without success. His mother became ill, and the

18 Krause, Self-Portrait of the Artist, p. 18.

19 See Lady Gregory’s Journals, p. 74, for reference to the following incident.

20 This is generally accepted and taken without question. See, for example, Eileen O’Casey, Sean, p. 104.

21 See Lady Gregory’s Journals, pp. 77-78, for reference to the subsequent story.

22 See Eileen O’Casey, Sean, p. 194.
funds became indispensable. He went back again to get the
money; while he was gone, his mother died. He made arrange-
ments for her burial. On the day scheduled for the funeral
the undertaker demanded immediate payment—without which he
would call off the funeral. The funeral had to be postponed
until O'Casey produced the money. Of this event he said to
Lady Gregory:

I felt the treatment of the undertaker very
bitterly, he was a Labour man, I am a Labour
man, and I had helped him and worked in the
movement, worked for them all, and that is
how I was treated.23

Thus, before Krause's "Day of the Rabblemment"—the Plough
riots—and before the Tassie fiasco, there were pressures
already hard at work on Sean O'Casey which, when the time
did come for him to leave Ireland, made his departure less
climactic than is imagined.

O'Casey's relations with the Abbey Theatre were pock-
marked with difficulty—no more, perhaps than any other play-
wright—-but definitely in character for the man who was to
challenge the decision over the Tassie. The production of
the short play Nannie's Night Out was halted because O'Casey
would permit no one but Sara Allgood, who was suffering from
a throat ailment, to play the part of Nannie.24 He finally
withdrew the play with the approval of the Abbey directors
in order to develop the character of Nannie in a full-length

23 Lady Gregory's Journals, pp. 77-78.

production. Furthermore, there was disagreement over which of the three endings to the play should be used. O'Casey favored the version in which Nannie dies; the Abbey directors, another. The directors had their way.

Preparations for The Plough and the Stars were not without problems either. The actors contested certain "words". Lady Gregory mentions the occasion:

Yeats writes of "an aggravating comedy in the theatre. Miss Crowe, after consulting with her priest, refused to say words 'within the border of the Ten Commandments,' in her part, and Mc Cormick refused to say in his 'No, I will not be called 'snotty'. "... Casey writes to withdraw his play. ... .'27

The last line appears to have been an over-reaction to the incident on O'Casey's part. But this particular objection suggests only one of the difficulties that beset production. Before the controversy over the play had subsided the manager, M. J. Dolan, and also the government Director, Dr. George O'Brien, were drawn in. Dolan wrote to Lady Gregory:

At any time I would think twice before having anything to do with it. The language is--to use an Abbey phrase--"beyond the beyonds"--the song at the end of the second act, sung by the "girl-of-the-streets", is impossible.28

The song was, in fact, eventually cut from the play. Dr. O'Brien, as government representative, had control of the

25 Ayling, "Nannie's Night Out", p. 156. The full-length adaptation proved to be Within the Gates, similar in theme, ending, and even diction.


27 Lady Gregory's Journals, p. 95.

28 Ibid., p. 87.
newly instituted government subsidy for the theatre. His objections represented the first attempts, though probably unconscious at the time, by the Free State Government to dictate its desires to the Abbey Theatre. Lady Gregory would not bow to the pressure:

Yeats came on Friday evening, "important Abbey business," his telegram had said, and it is important. "Trouble with George O'Brien, the new Director," he said, and showed me the letters. He objects to The Plough and the Stars. I said at once, "Our position is clear. If we have to choose between the subsidy and our freedom, it is our freedom we choose." 29

O'Brien did finally come to terms with the directors over the Plough.

F. J. McCormick and M. J. Dolan by no means increased O'Casey's loyalty to the Abbey Theatre. David Krause narrates a confrontation between O'Casey and the two men. 30 In a discussion of the Abbey production of Shaw's Man and Superman, both men ridiculed O'Casey's place and competence in criticizing the play. O'Casey wrote the men a letter which they posted on the bulletin-board in the Green Room, in a further attempt to humiliate him even more. Later, when O'Casey tried to go backstage to the Green Room, he was prevented by one of the theatre workmen, a friend of both McCormick and Dolan. He attempted to order O'Casey from the theatre. Sean O'Casey never again tried to go either backstage or to the Green Room.

29 Lady Gregory's Journals, p. 87.
30 Krause, Self-Portrait of the Artist, pp. 20-1.
It is little wonder, then, that O'Casey reacted as he did. The letter requesting the withdrawal of the play reads:

As I have said, these things have been deeply pondered, and under the circumstances, and to avoid further trouble, I prefer to withdraw the play altogether.\textsuperscript{31}

\textit{The Plough and the Stars} was, of course, successfully performed. But it was performed at cost to both O'Casey and the Abbey.

Gabriel Fallon, in his article, "The House on North Circular Road", mentions Lemox Robinson's awareness, at the time of the \textit{Plough}, of an increasing jealousy among the Abbey circle of the "upstart playwright from the slums".\textsuperscript{32} Robinson had to keep this in mind when casting parts for O'Casey's plays.\textsuperscript{33} If this is true, then Fallon is at least partially correct when he says:

By the time Sean O'Casey came to leave \ldots he had few friends at the Abbey. Yeats' subsequent rejection of \textit{The Silver Tassie}, despite appearances to the contrary, cut the last effective cable that held the dramatist to the Theatre. \ldots He felt he was not wanted by the theatre, and, indeed, this was true in respect to most of its players and all but one of its Directors.\textsuperscript{34}

"Gaby" Fallon supports the idea that O'Casey's estrangement from the Abbey was a gradual process.

The Tassie controversy has been mentioned throughout

\textsuperscript{31} Krause, loc. cit., p. 23.


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p.233.
this study, and at the start of the present chapter. G. Fallon is probably correct about it being the "last straw", as it were, but there is no way of ascertaining its exact effect upon O'Casey. William Armstrong contends that it was the dispute over the performing rights of Juno and the Paycock and The Plough and the Stars in Ireland in 1929 that severed O'Casey's final allegiance.35

It is important in considering the question of exile to belabour the obvious point that at the time O'Casey became embroiled with the Abbey directors over the Tassie, he was already living in England. In this respect Alec Reid's advice not to make a sentimental issue of O'Casey's departure, but instead to view it as inevitable,36 is worthwhile. Exile is, in reference to Sean O'Casey, a sentimental word. It serves no purpose other than to complicate an already complicated issue. O'Casey's "exile" was in fact a gradual disassociation, and not a cataclysmic separation, from Ireland and the Abbey Theatre. Moreover, Alec Reid raises the rather "common" though significant matter of economics. He says:

"... with the population of the Irish republic under three million, it is very difficult to see how any writer dependent as O'Casey was on his pen to make his living could hope to stay there long. It is a little hard on the Irish, however, to have their self-exiled writers consistently raising economic necessity into a matter of

36 See footnote 36, chapter two.
moral principle. 37
And this elevation of necessity to principle, economic and
otherwise, is what O'Casey himself and his critics are at
times apparently guilty of.

Ronald Aylimg seizes upon an additional factor involved
in the Tassie entanglement. He attributes a portion of the
blame for the incident to the inability of the directors, Lady
Gregory and Yeats especially, to understand O'Casey the
man. 38  Aylimg notes that none of the directors were evident-
ly aware of O'Casey's highly controversial, political and
revolutionary writings. This is also the case, he contends,
with the Abbey audiences who rioted over the Plough, little
knowing that O'Casey had been an active organizer and partic-
cipant in the Gaelic League, Liberty Hall, and the Irish
Citizen Army. Aylimg elaborates on Yeats' part in the re-
jection:

Yeats was, I feel sure, only trying to help a
still struggling writer when he suggested that
the playwright should "excuse" the Abbey's re-
jection by saying that he (O'Casey) had with-
drawn the play for "revision". 39

What was wanting in the rejection, according to Aylimg, was
tact and honesty. Tact certainly. O'Casey had already de-
monstrated his "pugnaciousness" during the productions of
Nannie's Night Out and The Plough and the Stars. Aylimg

38 Ronald Aylimg, "Feathers Finely Aflutther", Modern
39 Ibid.
summarizes the situation, admittedly with the aid of hindsight:

Today it is difficult to understand how Yeats and, in particular, Lady Gregory could have so completely misunderstood the essential nature of O'Casey's character. 40

There appears to have been little actual understanding of O'Casey, and just as little effort in trying to foresee how he might react to Yeats' condescending letter 41 of rejection. Padraic Colum's criticism of O'Casey, "Never did a dramatist motivate his departure from the scene of his productions so weakly", 42 seems overly simple and slight.

Sean O'Casey, as William Armstrong maintains, like James Joyce, never lost interest in his native Ireland. 43 Of eight full-length plays written after The Silver Tassie, six deal with Ireland. And this is despite the inclusion of some of his works by the Censorship of Publications Board among those banned from circulation or publication in Ireland. 44 The refusal of the Archbishop of Dublin to participate in the Tostal of 1958 if O'Casey's The Drums of Father Ned was performed 45 could mark the beginning of a conscious exile for

40 Ayling, loc. cit., p. 135.
41 Eileen O'Casey, Sean, p. 83.
43 Armstrong, Sean O'Casey, p. 24.
44 Ibid., p. 25.
45 Eileen Ocasey, Sean, pp. 262-63.
O' Casey. The play's rejection by the Tostal council resulted in a ban by O'Casey on all performances of his works in Ireland. The term "exile" is of little value at this point, as O'Casey had by that time completed the bulk of his writings; he died six years later, in 1964.
V. POSTRUMBINGS

A. Speculations

In considering the effects of the Tassie incident on Sean O'Casey, Jack Lindsay maintains that the period following the rejection of the play was an unproductive one for the playwright, and that this was the result of a problem of "readjustment and development" which O'Casey had yet to overcome.\(^1\) Lindsay continues:

Even if a theatre had remained available for him in Ireland, he would have found the next step no easy matter; trying to settle down in England, he had to struggle with increased difficulties. No wonder that his fifties were not a productive period and saw only one play, *Within the Gates*.\(^2\)

However, Eileen O'Casey in her recently published biography, *Sean*, reveals that the difficulties both in Ireland and England did not deter her husband from continuing work on a final version of *Within the Gates*.\(^3\) This later play was therefore begun prior to *The Silver Tassie* of 1928. But the fact that the play was not finished until five years later, in 1933, seems to indicate that Lindsay may at least be partly correct in his assumption. In the same amount of time,

\(^1\) Jack Lindsay, "Sean O'Casey as a Socialist Artist", in Ayling, *ed. cit.*, p. 196.

\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Eileen O'Casey, *Sean*, p. 89.
between 1923 and 1928, O'Casey managed to write four full-length and two one-act plays: *The Shadow of a Gunman, Kathleen Listens In, Juno, Nannie's Night Out*, the *Plough*, and the *Tassie*. Lindsay's hypothesis may still be faulted as being sweeping, however.

Homer E. Woodbridge advances an additional factor to be considered in viewing the years following the rejection of *The Silver Tassie*. Woodbridge puts forth the theory that Sean O'Casey consciously turned to prose after 1928. In 1934, the year after *Within the Gates*, O'Casey published *Windfalls*, which, although it contained two one-act plays, was for the most part a collection of essays and short stories, with some verse. 1937 saw the publication of a book of essays, *The Flying Wasp*. And finally, in 1939, Sean O'Casey produced the first of six autobiographical volumes, *I Knock at the Door*. Woodbridge does, in fact, come up with the more convincing argument of the two.

In *The Unholy Trade* Richard Findlater describes Sean O'Casey's career after 1928 as "the story of a dramatist in search of an audience". This is not quite true. It would be more accurate, perhaps, to describe O'Casey as a dramatist in search of a theatre. After 1928, that is, he had no theatre in which to experiment, develop, and polish his techniques. To this extent Raymond Williams' criticism of

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4 Homer E. Woodbridge, "Sean O'Casey", *South Atlantic Quarterly, XL* (1941), pp. 56-57.

O'Casey's later works—that they are experiments out of touch with the theatre—is valid. Actual stage rehearsal results in refinement of dialogue, stage directions, and structural modifications. Some of O'Casey's later works do contain a degree of verbiage that is unusual even for O'Casey. It is possible that these errors might have been alleviated had he had available a theatre workshop in which to experiment, in which to experience the give-and-take that director-player-playwright collaboration entails. Of course, this is speculation, but it is not without credence.

And what of the Abbey? It had been established as an experimental theatre, but by the late 1920's and the early 1930's the Abbey Theatre had become institutionally conservative—even reactionary. Elizabeth Coxhead observed this encroachment, as did Andrew Malone. As early as 1929 Malone writes:

... on the whole it would seem that the days of pioneering experiment at the Abbey Theatre have gone for ever, and the days when the Directors were prepared to stake their all against the screaming partisans are now definitely buried with the dead past. The pioneers have grown weary of pioneering, and it seems that the Abbey Theatre is to settle down to the repertory work of a State Theatre, where the 'great plays' of the Masters will be presented at suitable intervals, and the works of expatriate Irishmen, from Farguhar to Shaw, O'Neill, and Munro, will be claimed for the greater glory


8 See chapter two, footnote 51.
of Ireland.  
Malone implies here what was perhaps the most telling influence on the decline of the Abbey Theatre. The inauguration of the government subsidy in 1926 was something from which the Abbey never recovered.  

The role of the government director mushroomed from the innocent objections put forth by Dr. George O'Brien concerning O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*. This is not to imply that because O'Casey left the Abbey, it declined. O'Casey's departure was merely coincidental with a significantly transitional period in the Abbey Theatre's history. If the door to experiment was closed to him, so it was to all who followed. Gerard Fay calls Sean O'Casey the last playwright to produce original works successfully at the Abbey--at Theatre which he feels declined afterwards.  

This decline is hardly attributable to the rejection of a single playwright or play. For that matter, O'Casey could never have produced the plays he desired at the Abbey; he would have probably received the same reception as he did for the *Tassie*. Yeats became ill in the late 1920's, and he never fully recovered. Lady Gregory died in 1932. But whatever caused the stagnation and decay of the Abbey Theatre has apparently not been remedied. As late as 1957 Robert Hogan records:

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In 1957, before O’Casey banned professional productions of his plays in Ireland, the American critic Henry Hewes asked Ernest Blythe why the Abbey preferred to produce popular melodramas instead of O’Casey’s unproduced recent work. He received this curious answer: “While O’Casey’s later plays may be better than most of the ones we do, audiences here expect more from Sean O’Casey and would be disappointed to find his later plays not as good as ‘Juno and the Paycock’ or, ‘The Plough and the Stars.’ But they expect less from other writers.”

Is the policy of the Abbey Theatre, then, to perform what is "less" and established rather than that which is "new"? It seems that this is the situation since it is not now the Abbey Theatre that stages, for the most part, what is new in Irish drama, but the Gate Theatre.

There is a difficulty in the staging of all of Sean O’Casey’s plays, which should not be overlooked, and that difficulty is one of dialect. O’Casey is best performed in Ireland, or if that is not possible, by an Irish dramatic company. While "stage Irishmen" raise the level of the comic of O’Casey’s dramas, they do so at the expense of the tragic and the serious. And yet Ireland, an in particular the Abbey Theatre, is satisfied with rehashings of The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno, or the Plough. And since the later plays of Sean O’Casey are critical of Ireland, and until recently some of them were censored, it is doubtful that, in the near future, they will be performed in Ireland.

B. Conclusions

In considering the genesis of Sean O'Casey's later plays, it is evident that, in style, there is a gradual increase in the incorporation of expressionistic devices. *Kathleen Listens In* is an early indicator of O'Casey's later development. Even the more realistic plays such as *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and the Stars* contain elements of expressionism. Thus, by the time Sean O'Casey wrote his allegedly transition play, *The Silver Tassie*, he had already established an interest in, and a history of, expressionistic experiments. And, just as he combines comedy and tragedy in his dramas, so also does he combine realism with expressionism, particularly in *The Silver Tassie* and *Red Roses for Me*. Thus, his predominantly realistic work, *The Shadow of a Giant*, is as atypical of his eventual style as is the almost exclusively expressionistic *Within the Gates*. There is no evolutionary quality about the development of the themes and subject matter common to Sean O'Casey's later plays quite like that of his style. But for the purposes of discussing these aspects of the later works it is not without merit to describe O'Casey as undergoing three phases of thematic and subject matter development. The first of these divisions can be called his 'Dublin' phase which consists of four major works: *Shadow*, *Juno*, *the Plough* and *the Tassie*. The second phase consists of O'Casey's Larkin--socialist--dramas: *Within the Gates*, *The Star Turns Red*, *Oak Leaves and Lavender*, and *Red Roses for Me*. The final Oisin stage, that of the
later plays—*Purple Dust*, *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, *Bishop’s Bonfire*, and *The Drums of Father Ned*—is characterized not only by an increasing use of Celtic mythological allusions and Dionysian themes, but by an increasing employment of expressionistic devices. The allegorical, morality nature of these later works corresponds to the general themes and stylized characters of expressionism. Therefore both elements reinforce and complement one another.

The question of exile theoretically has a great deal to do with the later plays of Sean O’Casey. Those critics who belittle his expressionistic experiments often do so because of a realistic prejudice. They therefore point to O’Casey’s leaving Ireland as the beginning of his decline. In doing so, they may also imply that O’Casey was not able to write realistic dramas since he had cut himself off from the source of his realism. The fact is, however, that Sean O’Casey chose his stylistic direction. He experienced great difficulty in producing *The Silver Tassie* largely because of its expressionism; he would, no doubt, have faced similar obstacles had he chosen to remain in Ireland and continue his experiments there. Exile, in fact, has little practical application to the dramas of Sean O’Casey. His break with both the Abbey and with Ireland was just a question of time. Political developments in Ireland had alienated him prior to the *Tassie* incident. Similarly, a hostile reception by the Irish critics and audiences, by the Abbey players and directors, facilitated his eventual decision to leave Ireland.
His actual departure preceded the Tassie confrontation, but the latter event undoubtedly strengthened his resolve to stay in England.

Finally, Sean O'Casey's decision to reside outside Ireland and away from the Abbey Theatre divorced him from a theatrical "workshop" in which to perfect his techniques. For this reason his later plays may contain flaws that might have been avoided. But Sean O'Casey continued to experiment. This is not the case with the Abbey Theatre which, since approximately the time of The Silver Tassie rejection, has pursued a conservative, if not reactionary policy. It is highly probable that were O'Casey to have begun writing in the 1930's he would not have sought production on the stage of the famous Abbey Theatre. Were he writing today, he would probably have submitted his manuscripts, not the Abbey Directors, but to those of the Gate Theatre, or to some such minor and less conventional theatrical group as those connected with the Focus Theatre.
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