

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

SEAN O'CASEY'S "BRIDGE OF VISION":
REALISTIC AND SYMBOLIC STRUCTURE IN RED ROSES FOR ME

by

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ABSTRACT

Among Sean O'Casey's "experimental" plays Red Roses for Me poses a unique problem. Although considered by Robert Hogan as "perhaps the most popular play of what has been called O'Casey's 'barren years,'" Red Roses has often been strongly criticized and is rarely performed. When it is produced--often apparently by those whose enthusiasm for the play would have matched O'Casey's own--the result, too often, is disaster. Those who like the play refer to it as "romantic tragedy" and to its "hero," Ayamonn, as a noble and idealistic young man. On stage, however, the total effect, more and more frequently, is one of romantic rhapsodizings and sentimental outpourings of a "message" which is out of date.

Thus the play brings to a sharp focus the lack of consensus which is common when any of the later plays are discussed. Moreover, Red Roses for Me also exhibits, as does the entire O'Casey canon, an alarming tendency to fall apart in the middle and reveal a break in the stylistic unity of O'Casey's work. The first two acts are repeatedly described by critics as a return to the brilliance of O'Casey's "early manner" and to the "realism" of the Dublin "masterpieces," whereas the last two acts are most often described as didactic and "expressionistic," an example of O'Casey's "later manner." Those critics who like the play but who cannot overlook the problems of stylistic and thematic unity posed

by the "new expressionism" tend to think of Red Roses as a "failed" masterpiece, a category in which a great many of O'Casey's plays have, unfortunately, been pigeon-holed.

The first half of the play, like Juno and the Paycock and The Plough and the Stars, actually contains symbolic and expressionistic elements which have too long been ignored. These carefully prepare for the expressionism of the third act which, conversely, has strong elements of realism that prevent the act from becoming unreal, mere "stage magic," as Hogan claims. This juxtaposition and blending of the techniques of realism and expressionism, far from destroying the play's unity, allows O'Casey to achieve a new kind of unity, one in which he is able to realize effects which go far beyond the limitations of each technique used individually. The statue of Our Lady of Eblana, for example, as well as being part of the realistic structure, is also part of the expressionism of the first two acts. Though the statue itself disappears at the end of Act II, Our Lady of Eblana reappears in many forms in the expressionism of the second half of the play. And when she does reappear she speaks of ideals which are no longer external and ineffective, but which are in the process of becoming an essential and meaningful part of the lives of the Dublin poor. The transfiguration which Our Lady of Eblana undergoes is, in fact, an integral part of the many transformations occurring in Red Roses for Me--transformations expressed through colour symbolism, imagery of light and darkness, clothes imagery. Such transformations result finally in the play itself

becoming a modern miracle play.

Red Roses for Me, despite its complicated and perplexing structure, defines its own organic form and creates its own principles of unity. In doing so, it illustrates the kind of realistic and symbolic structures that O'Casey, throughout his life, delighted in building. In showing how the play is unified both stylistically and thematically, the thesis demonstrates that the play itself is a "bridge of vision" between O'Casey's early "realistic" plays and his later "experimental" ones.

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CHAPTER I

THE ROLE OF THE PLAYWRIGHT

Having recently seen Peter O'Toole's fine performance as Didi in Beckett's Waiting for Godot at the Abbey, David Krause was outraged to overhear two "professional scholar-critics" condemn the production on the grounds that "Beckett's 'message' about man's grim fate could not penetrate all that laughter in the theater."¹ This failure of insight which leads to a confusion of moral with aesthetic values is also reflected, Krause thinks, in the frequent dismissal of Sean O'Casey's middle and later plays. O'Casey's "message" has no trouble penetrating the laughter, but, alas, it is the wrong message!

Krause also finds it ironic that the latest book to champion O'Casey² does so, not on aesthetic grounds, but out of an appreciation of the political and sociological backgrounds of the plays--those very elements which evoke the charge of didacticism. That the scope of Maureen Malone's

¹David Krause, "The Playwright as Entertainer," Modern Drama, XIII (December, 1970), 338.

²Maureen Malone, The Plays of Sean O'Casey (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969).

"thesis-type"³ book is too narrow to include a consideration of the playwright as "entertainer" is symptomatic of what is wrong with present-day drama criticism:

she has little or nothing to tell us about [O'Casey's] tragicomic view of art, the variety of his comic strategies and conceits, his mastery of the traditions and techniques of knockabout farce, his original methods of dramatic symbolism and anti-naturalism, his uses of the Irish idiom and mythology, the paradox of his communist and religious commitments, the artistic problems that accompanied his emerging didacticism, the writers and playwrights who influenced him and his place among his contemporaries, and over all his instinctive knowledge of stagecraft and his evolving concept of an experimental and radical theater.

There is nothing original or imaginative in this book. It will do little to encourage interest in the dramatic art of O'Casey, and this is what is so disappointing for anyone concerned about the continuing neglect of his middle and later plays.⁴

Though Krause is unfair to a book which does, in fact, offer some insights into O'Casey's craftsmanship, the main tenor of his complaint is sound enough. Furthermore, his conclusions arise from a clearly defined sense of how the student of drama can benefit from an active involvement with theatre, rather than from a too-passive preoccupation with drama as literature and with those scholarly critics who mainly provide both moral edification and endless amounts of background information. In setting forth the standards which should be met in the study of drama, Krause writes:

There is not enough room for the element of sheer pleasure in the academic industry, and the study of drama is, with the best of motives, consigned to the classroom not the theater, to the examining of texts not the watching of live actors on a stage. In such

³Krause, "Playwright," p. 339.

⁴Ibid.

a closet atmosphere the concept of the playwright as an entertainer is gradually undermined. This does not mean that the study of playscripts should be discouraged, but that a performing art like the drama must be experienced directly in a theater before it can be enjoyed and understood. The performance should precede and encourage the study, the enjoyment should precede and help release the understanding: the mind will send down deep roots if the adrenalin flows.⁵

The logical outcome of such an approach, as Krause sees it, is that "thesis topics must be chosen with less stress on secondary sources and backgrounds and a more compelling sense of how the theatrical experience transforms as well as interprets the dramatic text."⁶

Ideally, perhaps, such conditions could be met, though the "thesis" on a particular play might then be in the form of the production itself. In the meantime, the continuing failure of commercial theatre, whose "product" is "entertainment," to put on the middle or late O'Casey plays suggests that possibly the producers are waiting for some "instinctive scholar" (a phrase Krause coins) to come along and tell them what is so entertaining about O'Casey's work. Even the small, experimental theatres neglect his plays in favour of the Theatre of the Absurd, a theatre which may well owe a debt to O'Casey himself. And whenever one does hear of an O'Casey play being put on in the commercial theatre it is,

⁵Ibid., p. 337.

⁶Ibid.

inevitably, either Juno or The Plough.⁷

Red Roses for Me, though it has been produced at the Théâtre National Populaire in Paris, and not surprisingly, in Communist Estonia, has had little more than a handful of productions in the English-speaking world.⁸ When the play, together with The Silver Tassie and Purple Dust, was reprinted in a paperback edition the year after O'Casey's death, J.C. Trewin's eulogistic introduction described it as "the most generally applauded" of the three plays. Yet now, as then, this applause is heard more often in "the theatre of the imagination"⁹ than in the live theatre.

However, despite the fact that it is rarely possible to see the play on stage, the effectiveness of what few productions there have been can be gauged from whatever

⁷The January 29th, 1973 edition of Time [Canada] reviews the Lincoln Center Repertory Theatre's revival of The Plough, noting that "what goes wrong . . . is that O'Casey's people are ineluctably Irish, and this cast, with one exception, play-acts at being Irish" (p. 52). Ironically, however, when Irish director Sean Kenny drew together both Irish and Irish-Canadian actors to create an Irish Arts Theatre in Toronto, their production of Juno in January, 1973, was relegated from the projected 590-seat playhouse right in the center of the city to a high school auditorium at the corner of Bloor and Dundas. The Globe and Mail [Toronto], January 16, 1973, p. 15.

⁸Ronald Ayling, ed., Sean O'Casey (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 32; see also E.H. Mikhail, Sean O'Casey: A Bibliography of Criticism (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), pp. 110-15.

⁹J.C. Trewin, ed., Three More Plays by Sean O'Casey: The Silver Tassie, Purple Dust, Red Roses for Me (London: Macmillan, 1965), p. x.

reviews are available. In the recent publication, by E.H. Mikhail, of a comprehensive bibliography of O'Casey, reviews of particular plays are listed in chronological order.¹⁰ A sampling of these reviews shows that, though the play is often warmly praised, there are many problems in production which, rightly or wrongly, have been attributed to flaws in the structure of the play.

Red Roses for Me was first produced at the Olympia Theatre in Dublin on March 15, 1943. The impression the play made is recorded in Theatre Arts:

The first two acts are "straight Dublin realism after the fashion of the author's two most famous dramas" but with "a fine undercurrent of poetry" which in the third act rises to "some of the most beautiful and stirring writing O'Casey has ever done". The transition from realism to symbolism is abrupt and the fourth act falls short.¹¹

Though the tone of the review is one of praise, especially of O'Casey's language--a matter on which later reviewers violently disagreed--the main criticism implied is that the play lacks unity.

Reviews of the spring, 1946, production of the play at the Embassy Theatre in London ranged from James Redfern's "an undoubtedly successful and moving play"¹² to

¹⁰Mikhail, Bibliography, pp. 77-134.

¹¹"Red Roses for Me: Olympia Theatre, Dublin," Theatre Arts, XXVII (October, 1943), 586. The reviewer is quoting Richard Watts, Jr., who wrote from Dublin for the New York Herald Tribune.

¹²James Redfern, "Red Roses for Me: At the Embassy Theatre," The Spectator, CLXXVI (March 8, 1946), 244.

Sewell Stokes' "not . . . the masterpiece one lives in the hope of getting from the only author alive who appears capable of producing it."¹³ Redfern thought O'Casey "able to put the language of Shakespeare into the mouths of his Dublin workers [with] a rare combination of eloquence, passionate sincerity and intelligent humour,"¹⁴ whereas Stokes described O'Casey's language as "high-flown rhetoric."¹⁵ This latter view was maintained by Robert Aickman, who wrote that the "poetical" language "submerges everything in a golden flood"¹⁶ to give an effect of "incantation" and "phantasmagoria."¹⁷ "The third act," he concluded, "ends in a rousing ecstasy of confusion."¹⁸

The New York production at the Booth Theatre, which opened on September 28, 1955, also received praise and dispraise, though the reviews generally became much more critical both of the structure of the play and of "the

¹³Sewell Stokes, "New Plays at Last: The English Spotlight: Red Roses for Me," Theatre Arts, XXX (June, 1946), 356.

¹⁴Redfern, "Red Roses: At Embassy," p. 244.

¹⁵Stokes, "New Plays," p. 355.

¹⁶Robert Fordyce Aickmann, "Mr. Sean O'Casey and the Striker. Red Roses for Me: Embassy, Swiss Cottage," The Nineteenth Century, CXXXIX (April, 1946), 172.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 173.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 175.

euphoria of far-flung words for a word's sake."¹⁹ Disunity is suggested by such comments as "abruptly . . . he forsakes reality"²⁰ (after the realism of the first half of the play), and especially by the description of the play as a "diffuse mixture of proletarian melodrama and lyric mysticism."²¹ Moreover, the third act of the play, which O'Casey clearly intends to be the very heart of his drama, continues to falter badly in production. Henry Hewes' comments suggest that no one--neither actor, nor producer, nor audience--knows what to make of this part of the play:

Act III, despite the gloriously lit cobbled set of a Dublin bridge Howard Bay has designed, begins with the same lack of vitality as did Act I. Shabby street-vendors mumble rich lines like "A gold-speckled candle white as snow was Dublin once, yellowish now, leanin' sideways an' guttherin' down to a last shaky glimmer in the wind o' life [sic]." Making matters more obscure are the frequent references to names and events which presuppose a familiarity with Irish history and folklore. Suddenly the dingy scene is transfigured into an ecstatic vision, a Fenian rainbow with beggars dancing in gaily colored robes and the city glowing like Xanadu around them. This spontaneous joy is magical theatre, but Anna Sokalowa's expert choreography makes us conscious that the interlude is as contrived as a piece of musical comedy and it is overlong in the bargain.

The final act in the churchyard is also over-extended, and instead of devoting itself to a quick winding-up of matters, takes the liberty of bringing in fresh characters and plot, and all for the purpose

¹⁹"Huzzas for O'Casey: Red Roses for Me: Produced by Gordon W. Pollock. Directed by John O'Shaughnessy," Newsweek, XLVII (January 9, 1956), 45.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹"Red Roses for Me. December 28, 1955. Booth Theatre," Theatre Arts, XL (March, 1956), 15.

of allowing Ayamonn's friendly Protestant rector a chance to exhibit a bit of bravery against the stupidity that man commits in God's name.²²

It is clear that the audience feels cheated: the transformation scene is a piece of trickery, and no one is buying O'Casey's "vision." And, without the vision of the third act, the last act is also meaningless.

Hewes' complaint that the production lacks vitality is echoed in Harold Clurman's review of the same date and possibly of the very same performance:

The rhythm of Irish speech--at least in O'Casey--is restless, uneven, desultory, with sudden surges of feeling, not portentous, solemnly measured, or lugubriously dignified like a Low Church hymn. The play is sad enough, heaven knows, but it is ebullient and full of a heedless, erratic freedom in its sadness. This is what the production most misses. The result is that what must at all times be loose-limbed, fluid and almost "cheerful"--and sadder for all that--often seems heavy and morose.²³

If rich lines are being mumbled and speeches are slow and leaden, then what this suggests is that attempts are being made to follow the stage directions, but without any clear understanding of the expressionistic effects O'Casey intended. That John O'Shaughnessy did, indeed, find some stage directions puzzling is confirmed by Eric Bentley, who notes, "The 'blocking' of a scene in which a girl writhes on the ground in her death agonies while the actors

²²Henry Hewes, "Sean O'Casey's One-Shilling Opera," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIX (January 14, 1956), 20.

²³Harold Clurman, "Red Roses for Me," Nation, CLXXXII (January 14, 1956), 39-40. Reprinted in Lies Like Truth (New York: Macmillan, 1958) pp. 122-24.

look on from a distance has the awkwardness of a beginning directors' class at Yale."²⁴ Moreover, not only is the expressionism being handled awkwardly, but also O'Casey's intention has become distorted: Finnoola is injured, certainly, but there is no indication in the text that she is dying.

Clurman is the only critic who claims to find the play unified, and this claim is made despite the fact that he finds the structure of the play faulty:

There is hardly a proper story structure to the play--it is extremely primitive in this respect. There is barely a central character: in fact all the characters are rough sketches. Unity is given it by the melancholy sweet-and-sour mood in which everything is enveloped. Therefore we are not shocked--as we so often are in some of O'Casey's other work--when a scene of acrid folk farce alternates with a formal approach verging on grandiloquence. The truth and style here are not that of objective fact but of an atmosphere, at once misty and penetrating, in which sentiment and image mingle as in a kind of awful but cherished nightmare.²⁵

What is interesting here is the impression of unity--though it remains an impression and is not explained in any very logical way--and the fact that the impression managed to come through a production which Clurman describes as inadequate, blemished and filled with the wrong kind of poetry, "a sort of academic Anglo-American theatrical rhetoric."²⁶

²⁴Eric Bentley, What Is Theatre? Incorporating The Dramatic Event and other Reviews, 1944-1967 (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 268.

²⁵Clurman, "Red Roses for Me," Lies Like Truth, pp. 122-23.

²⁶Ibid., p. 123.

In the fall of 1962 Red Roses for Me was performed at the Mermaid Theatre O'Casey Festival in London and again received a mixture of blame and praise. Headings gleaned from the various newspaper reviews of the production show that there is still no consensus regarding the play--such titles as "Just a Golden Stream of Irish Words," "Red Roses Gets No Bouquet," "O'Casey Play Problems Unsolved" contrast strangely with "O'Casey Brought to Shining Life," "Garlands of Beautiful Words," and "Mermaid Score."²⁷ There are, it seems, those who like the play and those who do not.

Moreover, as we have seen, those who admire the play sometimes seem to do so despite its apparent faults, whereas those, like Bamber Gascoigne, who are among the play's detractors, sometimes bring in criteria which do not properly belong in the field of dramatic criticism. In the September 14, 1962, edition of The Spectator, Gascoigne writes impatiently:

Heroics are out of fashion at the moment and there is one particularly crass-seeming scene where the hero's rhetoric stirs a bunch of beggars (brought on for the occasion) into hope and energy. The message--that people will rise to greatness at the first whiff of a leader--sits astride the scene like a blanket of lead, but a friend who saw the original production in London assured me that it worked then.²⁸

²⁷Mikhail, Bibliography, pp. 114-15.

²⁸Bamber Gascoigne, "Meccano Drama: Red Roses for Me (Mermaid)," Spectator, CCIX (September 14, 1962), 364.

Though Gascoigne is willing to praise O'Casey's "real brilliance, visible in the first half of [the] play," he goes on to condemn further the rhetoric of lovers and idealists which lapses into "the jaded old images of Romanticism."²⁹ What is most significant here is that, with all the discussion concerning O'Casey's use of "poetical" language, the possibility of his having used at least some of these "jaded old images of Romanticism" quite deliberately, and with ironic intent, never comes into question.

On the other hand, the repeated failure of the third act to achieve the effect that O'Casey intended points to a basic problem, either in the structure of the play, or in the interpretation of that structure on stage, which cannot be overlooked. And what becomes increasingly apparent from the final scathing criticism of Roger Gellet, drama critic for the New Statesman, is that the problem of the language cannot be divorced from the central problem of the success or failure of the third and fourth acts.

Again, the usual distinction is made:

The play's first half . . . is lively and engaging in O'Casey's early manner But the second half goes overboard in a wallow of choric invocation by the Liffey and tear-jerking rhetoric on the steps of a church. Every note is false, the syntax dripping with phoney grandeur, the sentimentality ugly as a plaster Madonna.³⁰

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Roger Gellet, "Cold Fry," New Statesman, LXIV (September 14, 1962), 334.

Once more, the implication is that effects are being obtained cheaply. Moreover, what this, in turn, suggests is that the "poetical" language and the expressionism of the play are not understood and are probably being badly overplayed.

After the largely discouraging reviews the Mermaid Festival performance was accorded, there were no major productions of Red Roses for Me until July, 1967, when the Abbey Theatre staged the play for the first time. The reception which that production received was again discouraging and is best summarized by two querulous headlines appearing in the Irish press: "Red Roses at Abbey Falls Flat" and "What Happened to O'Casey?"³¹ In 1956 Hewes had ended his criticism of the Booth Theatre production on a note of hope. He felt that, despite the very real difficulties the play affords the producer, it should continue to be staged: "Perhaps in this way," he wrote, "'Red Roses for Me' and other O'Casey plays will find directors who can make his word-music as effective in the theatre as it seems on the

³¹Mikhail, Bibliography, p. 115.

printed page."³² Unfortunately, this hope seems farther from realization than ever.

But if the theatrical history of Red Roses for Me does not show any appreciable gain in the ability of the producers to realize the play successfully on stage, then what is obviously needed--despite the absence of the ideal "laboratory" conditions Krause describes--is a study which can help the producer understand the play as literature and which can suggest what effects he should strive for. John Gassner takes this more moderate approach in his article "The Prodigality of Sean O'Casey":

We need to understand O'Casey's genius better before we feel confident that we can cope with it in the theatre. In appraising O'Casey we too often alternate between a study of 'the political and social aspects of his plays', the main concern of Jules Koslow's The Green and the Red, and numerous other writers' able if random enthusiastic appreciations of O'Casey's humor and sympathy. Neither approach is to be deplored, for the social scene is indubitably important in his work and his spirited writing is conducive to enthusiasm in anyone who does not wear sheet-metal over his heart. But the effect of either approach is not altogether helpful.

A nebulous enthusiasm merely makes well-intentioned producers hope to stage his plays but does not lead to a production. Neither the producers nor his backers know what to make of most of the later plays once it is necessary to go beyond the initial pleasant state of admiration.³³

Since 1951, when Gassner defined the problem which has kept O'Casey off the boards while other, often lesser,

³²Hewes, "One-Shilling Opera," p. 20.

³³John Gassner, "The Prodigality of Sean O'Casey," Sean O'Casey, ed. Ronald Ayling (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 113-14.

dramatists entertain us, there have been several book-length studies of O'Casey, notably David Krause's Sean O'Casey: The Man and his Work³⁴ and Robert Hogan's The Experiments of Sean O'Casey.³⁵ The former is the most authoritative book on O'Casey to date, but because of the scope of the work, as indicated by the title, the analysis of separate plays is, of necessity, rather brief. Krause deals with Red Roses for Me, in a chapter entitled "The Playwright as Prophet," with an enthusiasm which suggests that the play--the third act in particular--should be one of the most exciting and soul-stirring of dramas. Nor is there any mention whatsoever of the difficulties that the producer might meet with in staging the play. In the latter book, Hogan, who is intent on placing the lively and protesting O'Casey into the Procrustean bed of traditional and formal structures, states categorically that the play has no unity "other than the thin thread of the poorly told, grotesquely proportioned story of Ayamonn."³⁶ Oddly enough, despite the fact that Hogan thinks the play is unsuccessful, he implies that it could be a success on stage: "if O'Casey ha [s] not created 'theater,' he ha[s] given stimulus to a set designer to create stage magic."³⁷ The analysis of

³⁴David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and his Work (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1960).

³⁵Robert Hogan, The Experiments of Sean O'Casey (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960).

³⁶Ibid., p. 93.

³⁷Ibid., p. 97.

Red Roses which Hogan gives, however, would hardly encourage even the most ambitious of producers to tackle the play.

During the last dozen years or so, there have also been a number of articles on O'Casey which suggest, not only a critical reevaluation of his work, but also--by implication--a solution to the apparent impasse at which the production of O'Casey's plays has arrived. One such article is Errol Durbach's "Peacocks and Mothers: Theme and Dramatic Metaphor in O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock."³⁸ Here Durbach discusses Juno in the light of

a reading of the plays which suggests a far closer stylistic unity between the realism of the Abbey plays and the later expressionism than had previously been acknowledged. His symbolism and incipient expressionistic methods have revealed a stylistic bridge over the gulf between the two general areas of O'Casey's career; and the oversimplified view of the early O'Casey as a rude proletarian realist is yielding now to the recognition of dramatic qualities in the Abbey plays inconsistent with "slice-of-life" drama and the "photographic realism" with which he has frequently been (dis-) credited [sic].³⁹

³⁸Errol Durbach, "Peacocks and Mothers: Theme and Dramatic Metaphor in O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock," Modern Drama, XV (May, 1972), 15-25. See also Vincent C. De Baun, "Sean O'Casey and the Road to Expressionism," Modern Drama, IV (December, 1961), 254-59, a study of expressionistic elements in The Plough and the Stars; and Katherine J. Worth, "O'Casey's Dramatic Symbolism," Modern Drama, IV (December, 1961), 260-67, in which the symbolism of the early, as well as of the later, plays is discussed. The latter article is reprinted in Sean O'Casey, ed. Ronald Ayling (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 183-91.

³⁹Durbach, "Peacocks and Mothers," p. 15.

This kind of approach, which insists upon both the stylistic unity of the plays and also upon their inherent dramatic qualities, should provide encouragement for the producer. Perhaps the plays since The Silver Tassie are not such "wild" breaks from tradition and from the kind of realism that, apparently, a large part of the modern-day theatre audience still demands. Perhaps the genius of O'Casey did not dry up with exile--a controversy which hopefully has been laid to rest with the publication of Robert Hogan's latest book, After the Irish Renaissance.⁴⁰ Those Irish critics who wished to disassociate the early plays from the later did so, Hogan feels, because they needed to accept the early "masterpieces" and yet reject those later plays which depicted an Ireland that was not to their liking.

But if O'Casey's genius took new channels, these channels flowed naturally from the old, and if his so-called "realism" contained all along elements of the new expressionism, then possibly the more overt expressionism which seems to clash so strangely with the realism of the later plays can be found, not to destroy the structural unity of the plays, but to provide a new kind of unity. As long ago as 1926, Denis Johnston was able to discern the direction O'Casey's genius was taking and to welcome it:

⁴⁰Robert Hogan, After the Irish Renaissance: A Critical History of the Irish Drama since "The Plough and the Stars" (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967).

It is becoming more and more clear that as a realist he is an imposter. He will tell you the name and address of the person who made each individual speech in any of his plays, but we are not deceived by his protestations. 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.⁴²

But there were far too many critics who lacked Johnston's perceptiveness, and who, from the time The Silver Tassie was published in 1928, deplored the new expressionism in O'Casey's work, urging that he return to "first principles,"⁴³ the "realism" of the early plays.

In his "Foreword" to The Green Crow, a collection of previously published articles and stories, O'Casey cawed yet another cryptic defiance to all those who refuse to understand that "his first play ever to appear in print was in his later manner."⁴⁴ The aptness of his new persona is also made evident by the mischievous and sometimes raucous way in which he voiced his objections to what William Archer called "verisimilitude--the genius of the commonplace":

⁴²Quoted in De Baun, "Road to Expressionism," p. 259.

⁴³Sean O'Casey, "Tender Tears for Poor O'Casey," The Green Crow (London: W.H. Allen, 1957), p. 161.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 15. The play O'Casey is referring to is Roisin's Robe, printed in The Plain People years before The Shadow of a Gunman appeared. He also cites Cathleen Listens In, the satirical fantasy that appeared in the same year as Shadow of a Gunman.

This rage for real, real life on the stage has taken all the life out of the drama. If everything on the stage is to be a fake exact imitation (for fake realism it can only be), where is the chance for the original and imaginative artist? Less chance for him than there was for Jonah in the whale's belly. The beauty, fire, and poetry of drama have perished in the storm of fake realism. Let real birds fly through the air . . . real animals roam through the jungle, real fish swim in the sea; but let us have the make-believe of the artist and the child in the theatre. Less of what the critics call "life," and more of symbolism; for even in the most commonplace of realistic plays the symbol can never be absent. A house on a stage can never be a house, and that which represents it must always be a symbol. A room in a realistic play must always be a symbol for a room. There can never be any important actuality on the stage, except an actuality that is unnecessary and out of place. An actor representing a cavalier may come on the stage mounted on a real horse, but the horse will always look only a little less ridiculous than the "cavalier."⁴⁵ The horse can have nothing to do with the drama.

Here, the paradox involved in the use of the term "realism" as applied to the theatre is revealed. We are not so much interested in the raw stuff of reality as in the imaginative transformation of that reality by the skilled hand of the dramatic craftsman. Yet so long as critics praise O'Casey for his "realism" or, conversely, condemn his work as an example of the inadequacies of naturalism, then the real artistry of his work remains hidden.

Raymond Williams' book Drama from Ibsen to Eliot, published in 1952, relegates O'Casey to a "Note" at the end of a chapter on Synge and condemns O'Casey's superficial use of "colour"--colour of language, of costume, of setting--all of which Williams thinks of (though he does

⁴⁵O'Casey, "The Green Goddess of Realism," The Green Crow, p. 83.

not use the phrase) as a kind of "local colour" which is purely external. He singles out Red Roses for Me--the transformation scene in particular--as an example of this "mechanical habit, this repetition of the names of colours, and particularly of vivid colours,"⁴⁵ and he sees the use of fancy dress in the rehearsals for the Shakespeare performance and minstrel show as but the same process in "theatrical terms."⁴⁶ Moreover, in the revised edition, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, published some sixteen years later, Williams maintains, in the face of a growing critical reevaluation of O'Casey's work, what is essentially the same position. Red Roses is again dismissed, this time as "a replay of the Abbey work, with the mannerism of colour--the external colour of names and sashes--intense."⁴⁷

Actually, the persistence of such an attitude towards O'Casey's work is a kind of back-handed compliment to his skill as a dramatist. The "art which conceals art" is so perfected in the early plays that symbolism masquerades as realism, and what allows the surface reality

⁴⁵Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952), p. 173.

⁴⁶Ibid. This same superficial viewing of O'Casey's artistry is reflected in Aickman's comment, "Notably we open on the hero dressed in Shakespearean remnants simply in order to make a bang at the outset." "Mr. Sean O'Casey and the Striker," The Nineteenth Century, CXXXIX (April, 1946), 174.

⁴⁷Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), p. 153.

of his work to grow luminous is not immediately apparent. Yet even with the evidence of plays like The Silver Tassie and Red Roses for Me, in which symbolic and expressionistic elements are much more pronounced, the strongly realistic element which is always present in O'Casey's work is apparently evidence enough for Williams to maintain his view of O'Casey, whom he had earlier characterized as a dramatist working essentially "within the normal naturalist tradition."⁴⁸ Although Ronald Ayling in his introduction to Sean O'Casey,⁴⁹ points out the limitations of any such view of the dramatist's work, what is more significant, perhaps, is the fact that such a viewpoint can be maintained. In other words, O'Casey's symbolism and expressionism never interfere with the strong impression one has of the reality of the world he is portraying.

Those expressionistic techniques which O'Casey borrowed from the German Expressionists were carefully chosen and were grounded firmly on the touchstone of reality so that there is never any sense of his work becoming abstract. In World Drama, Allardyce Nicoll describes some of the many variations in expressionistic techniques used by Strindberg and others (modifications of which can be recognized in Red Roses for Me):

⁴⁸Williams, Ibsen to Eliot, p. 169.

⁴⁹Ayling, ed., Sean O'Casey, pp. 17-21.

Short scenes took the place of longer acts; dialogue was made abrupt and given a 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 positions where they became representative of forces larger than themselves.⁵⁰

Another prominent characteristic of Expressionist writing, which Nicoll does not mention here, but which is also evident in O'Casey's plays, is the use of "strange visions, ecstasies . . . and dreams."⁵¹ Variations of all these non-realistic techniques are mingled and juxtaposed with reality and, more unusual still, with the comedy which is never absent from O'Casey's work.

Here, a useful distinction can perhaps be made between expressionism as a dramatic technique and Expressionism as a reflection of an entire ideology. O'Casey shared certain beliefs with the Expressionists, notably a hatred of war and a basically optimistic viewing of mankind which looks forward to the realization of a Utopian society. His concern with social and political reform was a characteristic also of the Activists, a branch of European Expressionism,⁵² and his idealism, though never "other-worldly," was obviously part and parcel of the Expressionist creed. On the other hand, the intensely serious tone of the

⁵⁰Allardyce Nicoll, World Drama (London: Harrap, 1949), p. 795.

⁵¹Richard Samuel and R. Hinton Thomas, Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1939), p. 8.

⁵²Ibid., p. 13.

Expressionists was totally antithetical to O'Casey's comic vision.

O'Casey's attitude to man and society would probably have been what it was whether or not Expressionism, as a movement, ever existed. Yet once O'Casey grew interested in an experimental theatre and in the new Expressionism as a dramatic technique, he saw at once the potential for comedy which Expressionism offered. For example, there is a down-to-earth vantage point from which man's struggle towards the infinite seems neither noble nor romantic, but merely absurd. And, in fact, it is when we forget this viewing of ourselves that we are most in danger of becoming totally ridiculous. Yet man cannot live without his dreams, and in his reaching towards the stars, he expresses something noble within himself, something truly godlike. Thus, in the overt juxtaposition of the expressionistic technique with the realistic technique, O'Casey found, while writing Red Roses for Me, a new vehicle with which to explore further the tragi-comic vision of man which informs the early plays.

In the plays from The Silver Tassie onwards it is the same old O'Casey we see at work--or, rather, at play--though at first we may fail to recognize him. Each of the plays uses in a somewhat different way what has been labelled, far too loosely, as "Expressionism." (Eric Bentley has pointed out that the label was stuck on O'Casey as a term of disapprobation meant to suggest

"that he read books by foreign authors or spent his holidays beyond the Rhine," as well as to "intimat[e] that his later style was not his own.")⁵³ The "expressionism" of Within the Gates, for example, could better be described as a unique blend of morality play and musical comedy. And the so-called "expressionism" of Cock-a-Doodle Dandy could far more accurately be called a blend of fantasy and farce. In fact, O'Casey's use of expressionism is such as to alter the meaning of the word when used in relation to his work. Questioned about his use of expressionism, O'Casey replied, "I've often heard of, & read about, 'naturalism' & 'expressionism,' but God's truth, I don't know rightly what either means."⁵⁴

The Silver Tassie and Red Roses for Me are possibly the only two of O'Casey's plays in which the term "expressionism" is more of a help than it is a hindrance. And this is because these two plays, not only employ quite deliberately some of the techniques of Expressionism, but also relate thematically to Expressionism as an ideology. The anti-war theme of The Tassie implicit in the horrified recognition that both church and state condone the sacrifice of youth is a reflection of the disillusionment both during and after World War I which

⁵³Bentley, What Is Theatre?, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁴Quoted in De Baun, "Sean O'Casey and the Road to Expressionism," Modern Drama, p. 254. O'Casey's letter to De Baun was written on April 17, 1949.

brought about the breakdown of Expressionism as a coherent movement. Similarly, in Red Roses, the idealism of the youthful hero intent on bettering the condition of the masses, and sacrificing himself to make the world a better place in which to live, has obvious ideological affinities with Expressionism. This affinity becomes even more apparent in the use of Christian symbolism and the ritual of sacrifice (a common feature of both plays) since Expressionist writings so often employ especially the figure of the Cross and the Christ-like figure who takes upon himself the sufferings of the world.⁵⁵ In addition, the structure of both plays is similar: one overtly expressionist act plus three acts in which generally unrecognized elements of expressionism mingle strangely with the realistic technique. Act II of The Tassie is, of course, a demonic vision, whereas Act III of Red Roses culminates in a heavenly vision of Dublin as the New Jerusalem.

Of the two plays, however, Red Roses is unique insofar as it uses expressionism as a metaphor for man's conscious striving after the ideal, but an ideal which is difficult, if not impossible, to incorporate into real life. Initially O'Casey plays with various techniques of expressionism in a way which is intended to be humorous, a way which is intended to poke fun at man's sometimes

⁵⁵Samuel and Thomas, Expressionism, p. 127.

audacious and perhaps impertinent ambitions to make himself better than he is. The use of expressionism in the second act is more ironic, especially as it is used to draw attention to the plight of the Dublin poor, whose lives are so terribly remote from the beauty and grandeur of the ideals which are supposedly meant to sustain them. In Act III, the expressionism, as well as conflicting with reality, is finally mingled and fused with it in the ecstatic vision of Dublin transfigured. The expressionism of the final act suggests an ironic acceptance of the remoteness of the ideal, though, at the same time, it speaks defiantly of the necessity of man keeping within his own heart the aspirations which lead him to struggle towards that far-off goal.

Eric Bentley makes an apt distinction between what he calls "continental expressionism" and the "homemade expressionism of Sean O'Casey."⁵⁶ If this latter term is used it is easy to keep in mind the curious O'Casey temperament in which, as Clurman says, "there is a drive toward cosmic grandeur and a persistent village homeliness."⁵⁷ Nor is it possible to forget that such a cosmically comic vision could only view the unrelieved seriousness of the German Expressionists, despite certain affinities in outlook, with obvious reservations. There is a sense in which Red Roses for Me can be read as a statement of

⁵⁶Bentley, What Is Theatre?, p. 346.

⁵⁷Clurman, Lies Like Truth, p. 123.

O'Casey's aesthetic, and this statement makes plain that O'Casey's expressionism, like his christianity and his communism, should not be capitalized.

In a passage from The Green Crow, O'Casey further defines the aesthetic which underlies the play:

In my opinion, the time has passed for a drama to devote its expression to one aspect of life alone, and to consider that aspect of life as dominant for the time the play takes to unfold itself; that in one play one aspect of life must be the beginning, the middle, and the end of it. Consistency of mood and of manner isn't always, indeed, not even often, found in life, and should it then be demanded in a play? This new aspect of playwrighting which puzzled audiences here in 1929--and some of the critics too--is now puzzling the Dublin critics in 1947, and provoking them to anger and tears. What angers most of them, however, is that it hasn't been altogether a failure. A jewel moved about in the hand shows many flashes of light and colour; and the human life, moved about by circumstances of tragedy and comedy, shows more than many flashes of diversity in the unity of its many-sided human nature. Of course, a great play may be written around one aspect of life, but it doesn't follow that this must be the one way forever in which dramatists are to show life on the stage to those interested in the theatre. Not of course that a fine play, or even a great play, may not again be written by a newer dramatist in the "realistic" manner; but it will need to be a fine one to lift itself from the sameness of the tens of thousands of realistic or naturalistic plays that have gone before it Dramatists cannot go on imitating themselves, and, when they get tired of that, imitating others. They must change, must experiment, must develop their power, or try to, if the drama is to live.⁵⁸

The study of Red Roses for Me which follows attempts to discern, within the realistic and symbolic structure, the imaginative patterns that give the play its organic form. As these patterns unfold, the diversity of character and

⁵⁸O'Casey, "Tender Tears for Poor O'Casey," The Green Crow, pp. 164-65.

scene, of mood and manner, dazzles the eye with "many flashes of light and colour." Yet O'Casey's colours, like the colours of the rainbow, form themselves into a structure which is all the more pleasing because it is unified. The problems of interpretation suggested by the reviews can be resolved once O'Casey's use of symbolism and expressionism is understood and once their contribution to the complex unity of the play as a whole is recognized. Though Hogan could not see it, what he said of the last plays is true also of Red Roses for Me:

What critics call O'Casey's formlessness is not the aimless sprawling of a talented amateur, but experiments with form and . . . experiments in synthesis, in the juxtaposition of techniques from different genres. O'Casey's later plays have not lack of form, but . . . tremendous formal complexity.⁵⁹

Red Roses for Me is itself a "bridge of vision" from which we can look backward to the early "realistic" plays and ahead to the last plays, such plays as Cock-a-Doodle Dandy, which O'Casey was right in liking best since it is the most complete expression of his fiercely joyous, comic spirit.

⁵⁹Hogan, Experiments, p. 7.

CHAPTER II

THE IMPRACTICAL DREAMER

From the moment the curtain rises on the first act of Red Roses for Me the audience is presented with a series of contrasts: light with darkness, hushed calm with bustling movement, grandiloquent poetry with raucous prose. These contrasts speak to the eye as well as to the ear, telling of conflicts which impel each character into life, and which at times threaten--wildly and grotesquely--to propel each to his death. Yet, as we laugh, we become aware of a strange sense of kinship moving through the laughter, and a sense of gratitude at being released from the despair and anguish which these vibrant and gesticulating characters must, of necessity, confront. To tell the story he has to tell, O'Casey meticulously chooses every detail of lighting and costuming, every colour, every article of furniture, every door and window, as well as every word and gesture.

The story seems to be a simple one, but if it is oversimplified it is no longer the story O'Casey is telling. Robert Hogan writes:

The major plot traces Ayamonn's successful efforts to divest himself of all relationships that hinder his desire to help the worker. This action shows Ayamonn denying the pleas of his sweetheart, the pleas of his mother, and his attachment to art, so that he may selflessly help in the protest strike.¹

¹Hogan, Experiments, p. 88.

Such a description takes into account only the external realities of Ayamonn's situation and leads Hogan to condemn as undramatic and disunified what is, paradoxically, "perhaps the most popular play of what has been called O'Casey's 'barren years.'"² Moreover, such a description overstates Ayamonn's selflessness and dedication to the cause of the strikers so that there is no awareness of the way in which his character develops within the first two acts of the play. Nor is there any awareness of the crucial change which sweeps over Ayamonn in Act III as he is himself inspired by the vision of a transfigured Dublin and, with the strength of this vision, rushes forth to battle. The sense of Ayamonn being impulsively swept along by a series of events over which he has no control is also lost, and therefore the irony which O'Casey wants us to see in Ayamonn's death is not realized.

A much better description of what is going on in the play is given by David Krause, who takes into account, not only external action, but symbolic action as well. Krause sees Ayamonn as

a practical Dreamer And like Johnny Casside-- in the Autobiography--Ayamonn is active in the labour movement and spends his spare time 'sketchin', readin', makin' songs, an' learnin' Shakespeare'. Ayamonn's song, 'Red Roses for Me', serves a function similar to The Silver Tassie[sic] in the earlier work--it foreshadows the symbolic action of the play:

A sober black shawl hides her body entirely,
Touch'd by th' sun and th' salt spray of the sea;

²Ibid., pp. 87-88.

But down in th' darkness a slim hand, so lovely,
Carries a rich bunch of red roses for me.

.

The black-shawled woman of this ballad is Ireland, a Kathleen ni Houlihan of the Dublin slums offering her red roses as the token of a new life for her people. Ayamonn creates this vision of her in his song as in a dream; and the action of the play grows out of his struggle to merge the real and the ideal Kathleen.³

The conflict which Krause sees is certainly much nearer to the central action of the play than that described by Hogan. Moreover, it gives us an insight into the structure of the play which allows the jumble of confused characters and events that Hogan sees to develop a meaningful pattern.

To substantiate his own position, Hogan quotes Eric Bentley:

To be fair, the "expressionism" of Red Roses goes beyond the portrait of a single man. Accused in his early days of merely stringing scenes and skits and songs together, as in a revue, O'Casey tries in the later plays to build the music, dancing, and incidental fun, into the structure of the whole--to the point, indeed, where these elements impose and are the structure, and it is the narrative which is incidental. I do not know whether such an attempt, in the drama, could ever succeed; plot, says Aristotle, is the soul of the drama.⁴

But Hogan has already made up his mind that the structure O'Casey attempts in Red Roses cannot possibly succeed.

Hogan comments:

Bentley's statement is to the point, but it would have greater force if the most important bit of the play to

³Krause, O'Casey: The Man and his Work, p. 165.

⁴Hogan, Experiments, p. 92. The source of the quoted passage is not given, but a nearly identical passage can be found in What Is Theatre?, p. 267.

O'Casey were not Ayamonn and his struggle. Hence, there is a contradiction and a division of purpose. There is a desire for the broadness of the structure of character and for the singleness and force of the single protagonist and single main action of the structure of action. The two structures are mutually exclusive; the two desires are incompatible.⁵

But perhaps the two structures are not "mutually exclusive" since Ayamonn's struggle can only be fully understood in relation to all the diverse struggles of all the other characters in the play. Ayamonn, it is true, is the central character, but since his broad humanity, as it is shown to develop throughout the play, encompasses the conflicting humanities of those around him, he becomes finally a figure of Everyman (Ay-a-monn), and, since he dies a sacrificial death, he becomes a Christ-like figure, as well. This more universal or symbolic action must be recognized as the true structural basis along which the play develops, or else the play must be dismissed as an even worse play than Hogan--who is basically sympathetic to O'Casey's "experiments"--would care to admit.

The stage setting has been identified by many critics, with a sigh of relief, as a return to the familiar and "realistic" milieu of O'Casey's early plays.⁶ Moreover, the autobiographical elements contribute to the realism of the scene: the flowers, the old horsehair sofa like the one O'Casey's mother slept on--all have been carefully

⁵Hogan, Experiments, p. 92.

⁶See above, pp. 5, 11.

documented by Maureen Malone.⁷ At the same time, however, what we should see is actually every bit as symbolic as the stage setting of The Silver Tassie, of which Winifred Smith, in his article, "The Dying God in the Modern Theatre," writes:

. . . a second glance is more revealing, for it falls on the object in the middle of the room, a table covered with a purple cloth, like an altar, on which are displayed various gold and silver medals won by Harry; behind it a window opens towards the sea, showing a mast in the form of a cross, with a starry light at its top.⁸

Similarly, in Red Roses for Me, the sacrificial motif is present from the very beginning of the play in the cross formed by "the top of a railway signal, with transverse arms, showing green and red lights" which can be seen through "the large, tall window, nearly reaching the ceiling."⁹ As the

⁷Malone, The Plays, p. 102.

⁸Quoted in Saros Cowasjee, O'Casey (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), p. 50. For a fuller discussion of the symbolism and ritual which is embedded in Act I of The Silver Tassie, see Ronald G. Rollin's article, "O'Casey's The Silver Tassie," The Explicator, XX (April, 1962), n. 62. Rollin's article is based on Smith's "The Dying God in the Modern Theatre," The Review of Religion, V (March, 1941), 264-75. Rollins quotes part of a letter received from O'Casey: "Yes, The Silver Tassie is concerned with the futile sacrifice of a young hero in war, and the symbols, the chanted poetry and the ritual of sacrifice are embedded in the drama."

⁹Sean O'Casey, Red Roses for Me: A Play in Four Acts, Collected Plays (London: Macmillan, 1951), Vol. III, p. 127. All subsequent references to this edition will be made parenthetically in the typescript. Stage directions and names of speakers, italicized in this edition of the text, are not underlined in the typescript. Instead, only those particular parts of the text which I wish to draw attention to are underlined. Names of speakers are capitalized.

action develops, the symbolic potential of the signal should be gradually realized, for it becomes a constant reminder of the Transport and General Workers' Union strike, the cause for which Ayamonn will give up his life, the personal cross which he chooses to carry, and on which, finally, he is crucified.¹⁰ On the roughly made bench beneath the window stand three biscuit tins containing crimson, gold and purple flowers which "give a regal tint to the poor room" (p. 128). Here, on the "altar" of life tended so lovingly by Mrs. Breydon, are the symbolic colours of Easter which will transfigure the city of Dublin in the crimson, gold and purple rays of the setting sun in Act III and which will predominate in the stage setting of Act IV, the churchyard of St. Burnopus on the Vigil of Easter.

The fact that O'Casey chose to portray the clash between the railway strikers and the soldiers as occurring on the Vigil of Easter is no mere coincidence. The historic battle on O'Connell Street in 1913 actually took place, not at Easter time, but on August 31, yet most critics persist in tying the play as closely to the historical event as if this discrepancy in dates did not exist.¹¹ Since the play

¹⁰There is a picture of the stage setting of the spring, 1943, production at the Olympia Theatre in Dublin in Theatre Arts, XXVII, (October, 1943), 586. Through the window a bright sky contrasts with the roofs of dark buildings, but there is no transport signal visible. The omission is significant since it indicates that O'Casey's stage directions are not being followed.

¹¹Maureen Malone, "Red Roses for Me: Fact and Symbol," Modern Drama, IX (September, 1966), 149. This article forms the basis of Mrs. Malone's study of the play in her book, The Plays of Sean O'Casey. Mrs. Malone notes

was first published in 1942, and O'Casey himself sets the time of the play as "a little while ago" (p. 126), there can be no doubt that he intended the play to be seen in a more universal context, rather than in the narrow historical context in which it is too often viewed. The Easter Rising of 1916, which occasioned the martyrdom of such heroes as Pearse and Connolly, was also undoubtedly in O'Casey's mind as he wrote. Yet the broadest perspective which the play invites, and which, as we shall see, is validated by its symbolic structure, is that of a miracle play or Passion Play.

Though this may seem like a strange claim to make on behalf of a work which is usually referred to as one of O'Casey's "Red" plays, and which is always included in any discussion of O'Casey's avowed Communism, the fact is, as Saros Cowasjee points out in his discussion of The Star Turns Red, O'Casey brings "Communism and Christianity so close that the two seem one."¹² In other words, O'Casey's broad humanity leads him to see in what is really his own idealistic interpretation of Communism (and has little to do with Marx, Lenin, Stalin or Russia) an expression of Christian brotherhood which is often far truer than that being currently dispensed by the churches--Catholic and Protestant alike.

the date of the battle in O'Connell Street, but overlooks the significance of the fact that O'Casey alters the date of the battle to coincide with the Vigil of Easter.

¹²Cowasjee, O'Casey, p. 75.

"Communism," to O'Casey, means "communion," and the bread it gives to the worker is also the bread of the Eucharist.

In Act I of Red Roses for Me, the sacrificial motif which is hinted at in the stage setting is carried mainly by the symbolic imagery of red roses and thorns which springs so naturally to Ayamonn's lips when he is talking to Sheila, the girl he loves and idealizes. Significantly, he is telling her not to be afraid, for Ayamonn is nothing if he is not courageous; and since he is not afraid to die, neither is he afraid to live:

We live together now; live in the light of the burning bush. I tell you life is not one thing, but many things, a wide branching flame, grand and good to see and feel, dazzling to the eye of no-one loving it. I am not one to carry fear about with me as a priest carries the Host. Let the timid tiptoe through the way where the paler blossoms grow; my feet shall be where the redder roses grow, though they bear long thorns, sharp and piercing, thick among them!

(p. 143)

And yet in the song Ayamonn has written envisioning the red roses his beloved will give him, there is no mention of thorns, for, as Krause has pointed out, it is the ideal Kathleen ni Houlihan that Ayamonn has created "in his song as in a dream." Nonetheless, the thorns of conflict which Ayamonn has omitted from his song are everywhere strewn plentifully about, and because Ayamonn does not fear them, neither can he avoid being pierced by them. Moreover, it is only as his vision is resisted that it grows stronger, only as Sheila opposes being made into "a spark in a mere illusion" (p. 143), that Ayamonn sets out courageously on

that course of action which leads, inevitably, to his death.

Thus the entire first act (as well as the second) shows the painful growth of Ayamonn from "impractical Dreamer" to the "practical Dreamer" Krause describes, and the context in which we first see Ayamonn as the curtain rises on Act I is deliberately chosen by O'Casey to suggest how impractical his romantic and idealistic young hero is. Surely Ayamonn could not have found a more inappropriate play to present in the Temperance Hall to raise money for the strikers than Shakespeare's Richard III. Nor could he have cast himself in a less likely role than that of the villainous Gloucester in the act of slaying his King.¹³ Yet both Ayamonn and his mother are so caught up in the world of "make-believe" that the door of their usually hospitable home is shut fast on the "real" world of neighbours and friends who are intent on breaking in. The scene on stage must be terribly funny: the blue and silver cloak so awkwardly transfiguring the dark clothing of Mrs. Breydon, the bright-green silk doublet and crimson cloak with its immense padded hump so grotesquely transforming Ayamonn, the labourer, into a would-be King.

The deformity itself suggests that Ayamonn's heroic

¹³The lines are from Henry VI, Part 3, but were traditionally used to begin Richard III. As Krause mentions, "it is the scene that Johnny Casside and his brother Archie once played." O'Casey: The Man and his Work, p. 166. It was Johnny, however, who played the part of Henry VI, and Archie, the part of Gloucester. See Sean O'Casey, Pictures in the Hallway, Mirror in My House (New York: Macmillan, 1956), Vol. I, p. 201.

attempts to bring colour and beauty into the lives of the poor Dubliners he lives among are being ironically mis-directed. The kind of transformation which Ayamonn seeks is, in effect, a false transformation and therefore one which he will eventually have to give up. On the other hand, like the parallel transformation of the statue of the Virgin which takes place in Act II, the regal beauty of colour which momentarily adorns the dreary tenement is, at the same time, a foreshadowing of the truly miraculous transformation which occurs in Act III, though it is a transformation which clings stubbornly to its ironic context.

When "real" life does finally manage to break into the tenement home of the Breydon's, it does so with a force which is irresistible and which, as it grows to a climax in Act II, finally sweeps away Ayamonn's well-meaning, yet ineffective, dedication to the world of art symbolized by his helping to arrange the Minstrel Show and by his acting in the Shakespeare play. In other words, he steps out of the role of villain in the "play within the play" and into the role of "hero" on the stage of life. Paradoxically-- and perhaps O'Casey was thinking of Yeats here--Ayamonn's whole life now becomes a work of art.

Moreover, the red rose, symbol of the House of Lancaster (p. 131) and suggestive of the conflict which results in the sacrificial death of its King, prepares for the growing awareness on the part of Ayamonn that the red roses of his song cannot be brought forth out of the darkness of the

Dublin slums without a struggle, without his coming to terms with that darkness. In fact, it is a struggle even to get the song on stage, for Ayamonn, perversely intent on practising his villainous role, has himself been shutting out "oul' Brennan o' the Moor," forgetting that Brennan is bringing the music for the song. And when this initial difficulty has been overcome, there is still a struggle to get young Sammy, "shy as a field-mouse" (p. 148), to come into the room and sing before so many people, some of whom do not want to hear him anyway. Even after Sammy begins to sing, there are constant quarrels and interruptions, culminating in Mulcanny's noisy entrance as "a mocker of sacred things" (p. 126). The beauty of the song, and its strength, lie in the simple, almost homely, phrases which yet give grace and charm to the romantic and idealistic sentiments that are expressed. However, juxtaposed with the ideal world that the song envisions is the "real" world of the lover's quarrel and the religious and political strife which is just beginning to be suggested by the bickering of Ayamonn's friends.

To draw attention to the song and to the illusoriness of the ideal it embodies, O'Casey employs one of the techniques of expressionism, though in such a modified form that it is apparently not recognized as such. The "pale and mask-like" face of the singer together with the brilliant colours of his costume have the effect of setting him apart from the real world so that, for the moment, he appears unreal and quite remote from the bustle and hurly-burly of

life around him.¹⁴ As he sings, the words, too, should have a remote and dream-like quality since, as O'Casey's stage directions make quite plain, the face of the singer is "mask-like in its expression of resignation to the world," and "even when he shows he's shy, the mask-like features do not alter" (p. 148). Moreover, he keeps turning farther and farther away from his audience until both song and singer seem about to disappear at any moment. The interruptions also threaten to extinguish the song, and though Sammy does manage to finish it, there is absolutely no effect of either singer or audience having been transformed by the magic of song and music. Thus, the song, like the Shakespeare play, is hopelessly out of touch with the lives of the people whom it is intended to reach, and the ideal continues to be remote and unattainable despite the best efforts of both Ayamonn and Brennan.

The fact that Ayamonn is preparing a concert to gather funds for a strike which he naively believes will not take place serves to emphasize how unrealistic Ayamonn's attitude is. At this point in the play his commitment to the world of art is perhaps best expressed by the phrase "art for art's sake," though he thinks

¹⁴There is a picture of Sammy as he appeared in the September, 1955, production at the Booth Theatre on Broadway in Theatre Arts, XL (March, 1956), 15. A spotlight on Sammy would further heighten the intended contrast between the ideal world of light and song and the real world of the darkening tenement. It would also heighten our awareness of O'Casey's intentional juxtaposition of the techniques of expressionism and realism.

he is placing his art in the service of life, and will, in fact, end his life in the service of that harmonious vision of life which art has given him. Even Mrs. Breydon (modelled on O'Casey's own mother and a more sensitive and imaginative version of the practical Juno) is able to see that Shakespeare is not likely to "go well with a Minstrel Show" (p. 131), though her good advice falls on deaf ears. Nor are Ayamonn's artistic ambitions always equal to his talent: "What kid was it sketched th' angel on th' wall?" Roory asks, and Ayamonn (like O'Casey himself) admits, "I'd give anything to be a painter" (p. 157).

Similarly, Ayamonn's language, though often truly poetic as in the song he has written, is sometimes absurdly rhetorical, as in the "gold canoe" speeches (pp. 135, 170). Though O'Casey has frequently been blamed for the empty, rhetorical language in Red Roses for Me,¹⁵ the fact is that the effect aimed for here is quite deliberate. O'Casey is characterizing Ayamonn as a self-conscious and sometimes "bad" poet, much as he characterized Davoren, that other, earlier, and more sharply satirical portrait of a younger

¹⁵See Krause, O'Casey: The Man and his Work, p. 173. Kenneth Tynan's review of the September, 1962, production of Red Roses at the Mermaid Theatre in London also dismissed the play because of the effect of the language: "In any event, the text is too picturesque to be taken seriously. Writing as lush as this can conjure up stylized eccentrics and sentimental folk-heroes; but nothing in between." "Theatre. Second Lap: Red Roses for Me (Mermaid)," Observer [London], September 9, 1962, p. 22. See also above, pp. 6-7, 10-12.

self in Shadow of a Gunman. The language invites criticism, not of O'Casey, but of Ayamonn, and of Ayamonn only as a poet and an "impractical Dreamer," for the noble and idealized sentiments speak through the rhetoric as a true expression of that part of Ayamonn's nature which will reveal itself, in the last half of the play, to be truly noble. Moreover, the gold canoe speeches are linked, by their imagery, to the transformation scene in Act III and are, all unwittingly on Ayamonn's part, a foreshadowing of his death.

Once O'Casey's attitude to his "romantic" hero is clarified, it is possible to understand the rest of the "poetical" language in the play as well. When the characters in Red Roses speak in prose they are, in general, being very practical and "realistic" in their attitudes; when they speak in "poetry" they often seem to do so either under the direct influence of Ayamonn's presence or else because they, too, for the moment, are caught up in the pursuit of an ideal. Often, as is usual with O'Casey, the language has the authentic ring of the Dublin streets, or of some other individual region, and the characteristic speech rhythms combine with the homely, at times wildly exaggerated, metaphor to make the language both rich and intrinsically humorous. Sometimes, too, the effect of "literary" language gives added dimensions to a more local idiom as, for example, in Mrs. Breydon's, "Dodge about how we may, we come to th' same end" (p. 179). Here the irony

is multiplied by the odd echo of Shakespearean tragedy.

But if Ayamonn's limitations as an artist are much in evidence, at this point in the play, so also are his limitations as a person: his impractical and idealistic nature leads him to blunder in life as well as in art. Ironically, as he plays the part of Shakespeare's "noble" villain, he behaves villainously towards his friends, his sweetheart and his poor neighbours. And, even more ironically, he has his kind and generous-hearted mother do the same. His selfishness when in the service of art or in the pursuit of an ideal leads him to perverse and self-contradictory behaviour on other occasions as well. He berates his mother for helping him bar the door to Brennan and for failing to tell him sooner that Brennan has the music to his song. He objects to his mother going out in the rain to help a sick neighbour, yet he practically pushes her out the door as soon as his sweetheart arrives and he wants to be alone with her. Caught up in his vision of Sheila he denies her charge that "you think more of your poor painting, your poor oul' Ireland, your songs, and your workers' union than you think of Sheila" (p. 144). He tells her, "You're part of them all, in them all, and through them all; joyous, graceful, and a dearer vision; a bonnie rose, delectable and red," and, for the moment, what he says is true. The song should be heard by Sheila, for she is in the song, but Ayamonn has not yet found the right words to make her understand. As Sheila so reluctantly listens with her back to the singer, and Sammy so shyly

sings with his back to the audience, the real and the ideal are but a few paces apart, yet no one but Ayamonn understands, and he is powerless to do anything about it. At this point in the play, Ayamonn's present helplessness in fusing the idealized world he imagines with the dissonant reality about him contrasts sharply with the miraculous transformation which he is able to evoke in Act III.

In the meantime, Ayamonn is a man divided against himself. When his mother protests that he is wearing himself out "sketchin', readin', makin' songs, an' learnin' Shakespeare," Ayamonn replies quite sincerely, "They are lovely, and my life needs them all" (p. 132). Yet, even as he struggles to bring beauty into his own life and into the lives of those around him, those very qualities which make him feel the need to create beauty make him, at times, behave in an impossibly idealistic and impractical way, so that, rather than enriching the lives of those he loves, he ends up by harming them, and himself. It is this struggle which will result in the growth of Ayamonn's character, and which, as we shall see, will finally lead to his decision to leave the world of art behind and do what he can, as a person, to transform the "real" world.

This internal conflict finds its expression in the "lovers' quarrel" which punctuates the first two acts of the play. In it Sheila repeatedly asks Ayamonn to "be serious," for she is concerned with finding a practical solution to those barriers which are dividing them. Significantly, though she is Roman Catholic and Ayamonn is Protestant, Sheila seems

prepared to disregard the warnings of her parents. The focus of her main concern is merely hinted at in Act I: "We must look well ahead on the road to the future. You lead your life through too many paths instead of treading the one way of making it possible for us to live together" (p. 143). But Ayamonn is so caught up in the ideal vision he has of Sheila as the black-shawled Kathleen ni Houlihan of his song that he cannot understand what she is saying. Though they talk at some length in Act I, they are not communicating with each other, and the interruptions which Sheila complains of so bitterly are themselves proof of what she has been telling him. Her refusal to meet Ayamonn the next day at "the bridge of vision" (p. 153) stems more from her awareness of the impossibility of their ever being united than it does from any real sense of devotion to the Daughters of St. Frigid. Probably she would defy her parents' demands here, too, if only she felt there was any possibility of a future with Ayamonn.

In Act I, then, the total failure of the lovers to come to any kind of agreement is itself symptomatic of the divisive forces at work everywhere in Ireland. Unlike the terribly stable (though socially corrupt) society reflected in The Way of the World, in which Millamant and Mirabell are nevertheless able to write their own marriage contract and retain their own freedom, the religious, political and economic schisms at work in Ireland prevent any such private workings out of personal destinies. Mrs. Breydon sees this and warns her son, "The bigger half of Ireland would say

that a man's way with a maid must be regulated by his faith an' hers, an' the other half by the way her father makes his livin'"(p. 134). The lives of the lovers are so bound up in the religious, political and economic issues which divide the country that there is really no way the threads can be untangled.

Similarly, each of Ayamonn's friends represents a thread of the tangled fabric which is Ireland rent by discord, and the quarreling which punctuates the first two acts is the "speaking image" of Ireland divided. Each friend, too, provides a colourful and comic contrast to the other so that the combined effect is that of an irrepressible vitality spilling onto the stage. At the same time, each character is given a "speech tag" (a device which O'Casey must surely have learned from Ibsen)¹⁶ which tends, for the moment, to turn character into caricature and to suggest that narrowing of humanity which results when one's viewing of the world is too single-minded. The "zealous Irish Irlander" Roory can "roar" as loudly as he likes about the "Sword of Light;" the fact remains he is blind to all but a narrow spectrum of the world's colours, and when, in Act III, he hurries off from the bridge of vision it is into the darkness of his own mind. The atheist Mulcanny, triumphantly waving Haeckel's Riddle of the Universe, is so intent on his own absurd viewing of the cosmos, which transforms Adam and Eve into a couple of

¹⁶Krause, O'Casey: The Man and his Work, p. 36. O'Casey, in a letter to Krause, admits to having known Ibsen "faintly."

monkeys, that he does not foresee the dark and primitive forces which he has unleashed and which will be directed against him in Act II. Brennan, though the most enlightened of the three, frequently allows his obsession for the safety of his money in "The Bank of Ireland" to darken his usually humane and sympathetic nature. That he, like Ayamonn, has a dual nature is suggested by his names: Mr. Brennan Moore, the tenement landlord who wants more and more money, and Brennan o' the Moor, who, like his legendary namesake of the Irish ballad, gives money to those who are in need. However, he is really a caricature of the usual Robin Hood figure since he is accused of robbing, not the rich, but the poor.

With Brennan, then, there is an ironic elaboration of the motif of theft, a motif which is first brought into the play with Roory's gift to Ayamonn of "th' Irish magazines I got me friend to pinch for you" (p. 149). At the end of Act I the strange disappearance of the statue of the Virgin, "Our Lady of Eblana," is thought to be either the work of Brennan, who has so often spoken out against the worship of "idols that have eyes an' see not, ears, an' hear not; an' have hands that handle not" (p. 154), or a result of the iniquitous pronouncements of Mulcanny with his "grand discovery" that "God is dead" (p. 151). In any case, whoever is to blame, there is a growing sense, conveyed largely by the despair of the poor Dubliners and the distracted and fearful voices of the women, that the divisive forces at work in Ireland are responsible for robbing the people of whatever wealth, either physical or

spiritual, they might once have had.

Here, we begin to see the important role reserved for the poor people of Dublin in Act III, though the fullest implications of that role can only be understood in relation to the symbolic part which Our Lady of Eblana plays in Acts I and II. This relationship will be examined in the following chapter where the "miraculous" return of the "transfigured" statue is discussed.

In the meantime, Ayamonn's broad humanity opposes the strangely ominous note voiced by the crowd. It is a humanity broad enough to contain and resolve all the wildly splintered fragments that constitute the narrow humanities of his friends. He defends Brennan, gently silences the mocking Mulcanny, and promises to surrender his night's sleep in order to look for the lost statue. He is as generous now to the poor people who have come, uninvited, into his home as he was selfish before to all those who, at the beginning of the act, he would not admit. The transformation is a magical one and is paralleled by the gradual shedding of the deformed noble-villain self symbolized by the colourful hunch-backed cape of Gloucester (p. 135) and the green doublet (p. 156), and by the donning of the drab oilskin leggings, coat, and sou'wester (p. 157), which is the "costume" in which he must face the dark and rainy work-a-day world.

Previously, his mother had made a similar transformation, shedding the rich blue velvet cloak with its silver lace, "lest it give me gorgeous notions" (p. 135), for the thin shawl in which she goes to minister to the

needs of a sick Catholic neighbour. Ironically, while robed in the royal blue and silver--colours symbolic, not only of nobility, but also of the Virgin--she has been behaving ignobly and selfishly, whereas, in the "costume" which she wears everyday, her true or inner nature as the black-shawled Kathleen is revealed. Ayamonn had spoken irritably of her then as "an imitation sister of charity" (p. 138), forgetful for the moment, that beneath the darkness of her shawl are hidden qualities of true nobility, compassion and self-sacrifice, those very qualities which the red roses of his song suggest.

However, despite the strong suggestion (conveyed to a large extent by the ingenious use of costumes and by the clothing imagery) that the ideal world is actually hidden within the darkness of the everyday world, the juxtaposition of the world of "reality" with the world of the illusory ideal, emphasized throughout the first act of the play, is returned to in the sharp vignette of the final scene. Ayamonn, dressed now in the practical garb of the "real" world shines the light of the shunter's lantern on a passage from Ruskin's Crown of Wild Olives:

Listen a second, man! Ruskin, speakin' to the business men, says: "Your ideal of life is a pleasant and undulating world, with iron and coal everywhere beneath it. On each pleasant bank of this world is to be a beautiful mansion; stables and coach-houses; a park and hot-houses; carriage-drives and shrubberies; and here are to live the votaries of the Goddess of Getting-on --the English gentle-man--"

(p. 158)

As hopelessly out of touch with everything about them as

the "ideal" described by Ruskin is, it is typical that Roory sees only one thing that is inappropriate--Ruskin is talking about an English gentleman! Here, as opposed to the "false" ideal of the Scotsman, Roory's dream of the "Sword of Light" is presented as the true ideal, and, though Ayamonn links it with the Catholic Faith, it is an ideal which the broad-minded Ayamonn can also believe in. Even within this broader context, however, the Fenian song with which the act ends remains but a partial "vision of salvation,"¹⁷ though the courage with which Danger will be faced and the battle for Freedom fought looks forward to the action of the last two acts of the play.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 167.

CHAPTER III

ART FOR LIFE'S SAKE

In Act II the imaginative patterns which we have seen developed in the first act of Red Roses for Me become fully articulate. The motif of theft poses the question of what has really been stolen and from whom. The image of Ireland divided becomes finally an image of Ireland warring against herself and demands to know who is the real enemy and what are the real battle lines to be drawn. And the problem of saving Ireland leads to the further question of what can save Ireland, and who will her "saviour" be. The seriousness of such enigmatic matters when translated into the little lives of the common people of the Dublin tenements occasions laughter, rather than tears, on the part of the audience. But for the characters within the play itself there is no laughter; from their vantage point, until the transformation scene in Act III, there is nothing to laugh about.

The opening scene, in which Ayamonn counts out, penny by penny, the shillings which he is saving to buy a Constable reproduction, shows Ayamonn dealing, for once in a practical way, with the importance of money. The scene itself is an ironic answer to Brennan's outraged question, "Who is it daren't think of what money can buy?" (p. 146).

At the same time, however, a basic contradiction between the practical and romantic sides of Ayamonn's nature is again revealed, since what he wants to buy with "the extra shilling the men are demandin'" (p. 161) is a world of light, the "new world" (p. 225) which the inner eye of the imagination can discern in the dark world around us. Naively, Ayamonn is still assuming that there will be no strike, that the men will get what they are demanding, and that the new world of light will come out of that world of darkness without a struggle.

The motif of theft is reintroduced in Ayamonn's reference to having stolen a book of Shakespeare (much as the young Johnny Casside stole a copy of Milton)¹ and in the revelation that it was, in fact, Brennan who "stole" the statue of Our Lady of Eblana. The fact that Brennan took the statue in order to have it repainted points, not only to a contradiction in Brennan's nature similar to that in Ayamonn's, but also to that inescapable duality which is the very basis of our humanity, and which is carried throughout the play in the conflicting and intermingling imagery of light and darkness. The good and the bad are inextricably

¹Sean O'Casey, Pictures in the Hallway, Mirror in My House (New York: Macmillan, 1956), Vol. I, pp. 193-94. Johnny, too, had been anticipating a raise of a shilling a week and planned to buy the book for which he had been saving so long. Instead, he is fined two shillings for insubordination and, in a rage, rushes out to steal the book--Paradise Lost: "the book dazzled him, gleaming like a precious stone from a heap of rubbish, almost asking him, for God's sake, to come and take it."

mingled in any human action, and Brennan has no way of reconciling the conflicting emotions which the beautiful statue evokes in him. From an aesthetic point of view, Brennan can admire the statue for its beauty; from the broadly humanitarian view which he is frequently able to realize, he can delight in the pleasure he thinks little Ursula will take in the regilded statue; but, from a narrowly Protestant viewpoint, he reviles it as a graven image and feels guilty about what he has done.

The narrow viewpoints of Brennan, Roory and Mullcanny conflict even more strongly here than in Act I until the image of Ireland divided culminates in an image of Ireland at war. Protestant clashes with Catholic and both clash with Atheist. The Poor clash with the Rich-- and what a strange representative of the "rich" capitalist O'Casey provides us with in Brennan--and the Irish Nationalist clashes with the Royalist from Ulster. Alliances are formed and are dissolved in the twinkling of an eye depending upon which enemy is foremost. The stage erupts in angry verbal duels in which each defends his own beliefs and maintains his own viewing of the world against all others. And throughout, the calm voice of Ayamonn strives to make itself heard in defence of yet more ideals--Truth and Freedom! "I'll stand by any honest man seekin' the truth, though his way isn't my way" (p. 165), he tells Brennan, and soon Ayamonn will have to prove his words. Ironically, at the same time he speaks for truth and freedom, he speaks also

for peace, and the imagery of the palm branch recalls the figure of the Prince of Peace, even as it opposes the imagery of whip and axe, symbols of violence and domination:

If we give no room to men of our time to question many things, all things, ay, life itself, then freedom's but a paper flower, a star of tinsel, a dead lass with gay ribbons at her breast an' a gold comb in her hair. Let us bring freedom here, not with sounding brass an' tinkling cymbal, but with silver trumpets blowing, with a song all men can sing, with a palm branch in our hand, rather than with a whip at our belt, and a headsman's axe on our shoulders.

(p. 169)

The kind of freedom which Ayamonn envisages here is far more revolutionary than that understood by Roory with his fanatic wish to free the Irish from English domination. It is a spiritual freedom, based on economic liberation and encompassing all other freedoms so that all men can be united peaceably in a communion of brotherhood.

But Ayamonn as peacemaker is hopelessly ineffective, partly because his idealism clouds his judgment and makes him unaware of the pent-up violence within the people. He demonstrates this limitation in his nature by his naive belief that Mullcanny is in no real danger despite the persistence with which he proclaims his heretical views. When the inevitable riot does erupt off stage, and the outraged Catholics kick and stone Mullcanny, the violence of conflicting beliefs outside parallels the climax of Sheila's quarrel with Ayamonn and the violence each is unwittingly perpetrating on the other. As David Krause so aptly puts it, Ayamonn "is having a difficult time trying

to bring off his 'miracle' of Kathleen of the Red Roses."² Sheila rejects the vision Ayamonn has of her: "Now, really, isn't it comical I'd look if I were to go about in a scanty petticoat, covered in a sober black shawl, and my poor feet here! (Mocking) Wouldn't I look well that way!" (p. 171). There is stubborn determination, as well as pathos, in Ayamonn's quiet reply, "With red roses in your hand, you'd look beautiful" (p. 172). But the transformation cannot be brought about so easily, and the entrance of the frightened Mullcanny, dishevelled and bleeding, followed by the crash of breaking glass, marks the entry into the play of a violence which can no longer be contained by words alone.

Ayamonn deals with both situations courageously, since, in both, he is standing by those ideals of community and brotherhood in which he so strongly believes. When Sheila tells him the strike is to take place and that he will likely be made a foreman if he will divide himself from "the foolish men" (p. 172), she is really asking him to sell his soul. It takes less courage for Ayamonn to seize the hurley and rush out to quell the rioters in the street than it takes for him to oppose the lure of his beautiful, but false, Kathleen:

D'ye know what you're asking me to do, woman? To be a blackleg; to blast with th' black frost of desertion the gay hopes of my comrades. Whatever you may think them to be, they are my comrades. Whatever they may say or do they remain my brothers and sisters. Go to hell, girl, I have a soul to save as well as you. (With a catch in his voice) Oh, Sheila, you shouldn't

²Krause, O'Casey: The Man and his Work, p. 167.

have asked me to do this thing!

(p. 172)

In a situation which is a tragic reversal of Jerry Devine's renunciation of Mary in Juno and the Paycock, it is the broadness of Ayamonn's humanity, the truly "divine" part of his nature, that forces him to reject the girl he loves. The pathos of the scene stems from our awareness that the love is genuine enough, yet, because of Sheila's too narrow humanity, the lovers are irreconcilably divided; the irony of the scene stems from our awareness that Sheila, by Ayamonn's own definition, is one of the "comrades" who "whatever they may say or do . . . remain my brothers and sisters." And this irony is underlined as Ayamonn rushes out into the streets to fight his comrades and to quell, in the name of humanity, "man's inhumanity to man." Then, lest we despair totally, O'Casey sets the whole in an uproariously comic scene in which the divine nature of man wars with the dark and bestial side. As Brennan, Roory and Mullcanny crawl around on their hands and knees to avoid the stones crashing through the windows, their "monkeyshines" culminate in what must be one of the funniest commentaries ever written to describe the irony of the human conditions:

MULLCANNY (pityingly). Bullied be books--eternal facts--aw! Yous are all scared stiff at the manifestation of a truth or two. D'ye know that the contraction of catharrah, apoplexy, consumption, and cataract of the eye is common to the monkeys? Knowledge you have now that you hadn't before; and a lot of them even like beer.

ROORY. Well, that's something sensible, at last.

BRENNAN (fiercely). Did they get their likin' for beer

from us, or did we get our likin' of beer from them?
Answer me that, you, now; answer me that!

ROORY. Answer him that. We're not Terra Del Fooaygeans,
but sensible, sane, an' civilised souls.

MULLCANNY (gleefully). Time's promoted reptiles--that's
all; yous can't do away with the os coccyges!

BRENNAN. Ladies present, ladies present.

ROORY (creeping over rapidly till his face is close to
that of Mullcanny's--fiercely). We stand on the earth,
firm, upright, heads cocked, lookin' all men in th'
face, afraid o' nothin'; men o' goodwill we are, abloom
with th' blessin' o' charity, showin' in th' dust we're
made of, th' diamond-core of an everlastin' divinity!

(p. 175)

It is of this scene that Robert Hogan writes:

The irony of Brennan, Roory, and Mullcanny, cowering
on the floor and arguing over Darwinism while stones
crash through the windows, is a fine comic touch,
reminiscent of the best of the structure-of-character
plays. The fine scene, however, has no connection with
the previous or the following scenes and certainly none
with the main action.³

Hogan, of course, is talking about the external action of the
play, whereas the "action" which O'Casey is primarily con-
cerned with is inner or symbolic action. As in the comic scene
which ends Juno, the "state o' chassis" in which man continually
finds himself is quite real, suggesting as it does both the
disintegration of a personal world, and, reflected in it, the
disintegration of a world order. However, on the most
universal level, the "state o' chassis" is even more exact:
it is that dark, primordial chaos out of which creation

³Hogan, Experiments, p. 91.

first sprang and into which it is always threatening to return. Mullcanny, we are told, "would rip up the floor of Heaven to see what was beneath" (p. 169), and what is beneath surprises even Mullcanny.

In Red Roses for Me, then, it is Ayamonn's struggle with the powers of darkness that is the central conflict of the play. At first he is the "impractical Dreamer" who thinks he can transform the world with a song, but what he learns is that reality has a perverse way of resisting both the dream and the dreamer. Try as he may to deal with the world on his terms, the world is forever breaking in upon him and insisting that he meet it face to face. Far from being able to transform the world by his art, it is his unsuccessful struggle to do so which results finally in his own transformation to the practical Dreamer that we see by the end of Act II. Ayamonn has come a long way from his position in Act I where he tells his mother that he has little to do with the strike: "I'm with the men, spoke at a meeting in favour of the demand, and that's all" (p. 132). Now his commitment to the strike is absolute: symbolically, he burns the "warrant of warning" sent by the Authorities and promises the Railwaymen that he will address the strikers. From Sheila's point of view (it is the point of view of Nora in The Plough) Ayamonn is still being impractical, but the Rector, though he can see the danger and warns the strikers of it, gives Ayamonn his blessing. The Rector's viewpoint is the most objective in the play (it is perhaps O'Casey's own): "Who am I to say that God's against it? You

are too young by a thousand years to know the mind of God. If they be his brothers, he does well among them" (p. 183).

Moreover, the fact that the Catholic workers will be led by the Protestant Ayamonn, and that the strike itself has the blessing of the Protestant minister suggests that the division between Catholic and Protestant is not the real issue at stake. Earlier in the act Mullcanny had tried to make Brennan and Roory see that it is in the interests of a strong Church to have a strong opposition:

You pair of damned fools, don't you know that the Pope wanted King Billy to win, and that the Vatican was ablaze with lights of joy afther King James's defeat over the wathers of the Boyne?

(p. 166)

The implication, introduced here and developed in the last half of the play, is that the real enemy is neither Catholic nor Protestant, but the nameless and mindless Authority wielded in the name of both Churches, and of the State as well. It is in the selfish interests of an unenlightened Authority that the poor be kept poor. So long as Catholic and Protestant fight their skirmishes on the grounds either of a dogmatic religious faith or of an equally blind patriotism, then the real battle against those who refuse economic--and spiritual--liberation to the poor will never be fought.

Similarly, on the personal level, the significance of the fact that the real issue which divides Sheila and Ayamonn is not a religious but an economic one becomes apparent. Sheila has already defied her parents and the

Pope, but she will not--at this point in the play--defy the Inspector. The real choice she offers Ayamonn is couched in the practical language of the work-a-day world: "You will either have to make good, or lose me" (p. 172). In describing the first two acts of the play as "static"⁴ Hogan fails to see that Ayamonn's character does develop and that the quarrel between Ayamonn and Sheila does not appear "in exactly the same terms in Act II:"⁵ the grounds of their dispute, which Ayamonn himself had assumed to be based on their religious differences, has subtly shifted until, under the impetus of the coming strike, it is at last clearly defined. It is this painful choice which Ayamonn must make that precipitates the growth of his character so that the practical and romantic sides of his nature are no longer divided. Disillusioned with the possibility of achieving, by words alone, the vision of the world in which he believes, he resolves to answer the pleas of the Railwaymen to lead the strikers. In this way he will attempt to gain, in the world of action, what art and love have made him long for, but without any hope of realization.

The plight of the Railwaymen is evident, not only in the words in which they appeal to Ayamonn, but also in their physical appearance. And here O'Casey makes use, once more, of a modified form of expressionism. The stage directions do not serve to individualize the men, who are designated by

⁴Ibid., p. 91.

⁵Ibid., p. 89.

numbers rather than by names, but serve instead to suggest their role as anonymous representatives of the downtrodden working class:

They are dressed drably as the other men are, but their peaked railway uniform caps (which they keep on their heads) have vivid scarlet bands around them. Their faces, too, are like the others, and stonily stare in front of them. They stand stock still when they see the Rector.

(p. 181)

The "other men" referred to are the representatives of the Dublin poor who have appeared up until now, at intervals, whenever the statue of Our Lady of Eblana has appeared on stage. Thus O'Casey intends to link the plight of the working class to the general plight of the Dublin poor, an association which is realized in the symbolic colours of their dress, as well as in their stony and expressionless stares and motionless bearing. Since the Dublin poor play a much larger role in the play than is generally recognized, and since this role is defined, within the first two acts, by their relationship to Our Lady of Eblana, we must now turn to a more detailed consideration of the part played by the statue itself. This, in turn, involves a more complete examination of the technique of expressionism within the symbolic structure of Red Roses for Me.

The almost whimsical use made of the statue of Our Lady of Eblana as part of the realistic structure of the play has tended to obscure its more important function as dramatic symbol. This is particularly true when the scenes in which the statue appears on stage are presented

too realistically, as reviews of various productions have suggested.⁶ Other reviews have also indicated, as we have seen, that O'Casey's stage directions are either not being followed or, at any rate, are not achieving the desired effect.⁷ And O'Casey's stage directions must be followed, for they contain the key to what the statue means:

Dympna is carrying a statue of the Blessed Virgin, more than two feet high, in her arms. The figure was once a glory of purest white, sparkling blue, and luscious gilding; but the colours have faded, the gilt is gone, save for a spot or two of dull gold still lingering on the crown. She is wearing a crown that, instead of being domed, is castellated like a city's tower, resembling those of Dublin; and the pale face of the Virgin is sadly soiled by the grime of the house.

(p. 137)

Here O'Casey links the statue of the Virgin, with its "castellated" crown, to the city of Dublin in a way which-- to the reader at least -- cannot possibly be overlooked.⁸ Yet Maureen Malone, writing in The Plays of Sean O'Casey, is the first critic to begin to realize the implications of this association: "The bedraggled figure, the 'Lady of

⁶See above p. 5, where the reviewer comments on the "abrupt" transition from realism to symbolism after the "straight Dublin realism" of the first two acts.

See also Eric Bentley, What Is Theatre?, pp. 266-67. "Utterly charming is the tale of the Protestant who steals the Virgin's statue with the result that a miracle is proclaimed by his Catholic neighbours when he returns her, washed and shining, to her niche." Not only does Bentley miss the expressionism and the symbolism, but also the humour of the scene. The idea of giving "the Blessed Virgin a bit of a wash" (p. 137) is surely meant to be funny.

⁷Cf. above, pp. 8-9 and footnote 9, pp. 32-33.

⁸Certainly it would not be overlooked by those who are aware that "Eblana" is an ancient name for Dublin.

Eblana's poor,' is in fact Dublin herself, before the transformation which takes place during the vision of the second [i.e., third] act."⁹ Moreover,

the men and women who venerated the statue are as pale and inanimate as the statue itself, their mask-like faces still wearing a frozen look of resignation. Their qualities also have to be developed, like the beauty of the statue. Yet no such easy transformation is possible for Eblana's poor as has come by kindly subterfuge to their lady; the great transformation which forms the peak of the play has to be fought and died for before it can take place, a miracle is wrought, not by trickery but by human effort and endurance.¹⁰

The credibility of Mrs. Malone's interpretation is borne out by a passage from the autobiography in which Sean wanders through the grimy Dublin streets, his head filled with thoughts of how the poor must rise up against those whose respect for the Church and other institutions of money and power keeps the poor in bondage:

Frequently he wandered, hurt with anger, through these cancerous streets that were incensed into resigned woe by the rotting houses, a desperate and dying humanity, garbage and shit in the roadway, where all the worst diseases were the only nobility present; where the ruddy pictures of the Sacred Heart faded into a dead dullness by the slimy damp of the walls oozing through them; the few little holy images they had, worn, faded, and desperate as the people were themselves; as if the images shared the poverty and the pain of them who did them reverence [italics mine]. Many times, as he wandered there, the tears of rage would flow into his eyes, and thoughts of bitter astonishment made him wonder why the poor worm-eaten souls there wouldn't rise in furious activity, and tear the guts out of those who kept them as they were.¹¹

⁹Malone, The Plays, p. 107.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 107-108.

¹¹O'Casey, Inishfallen Fare Thee Well, Mirror in My House, Vol. II, p. 219.

Clearly, then, the pathetic condition of the statue in Act I is intended to represent, not only the city of Dublin herself--colourless, and with all her past glories faded--but also the poor people of the Dublin tenements. Of course, the problem, for the producer, is to find a way of suggesting this connection to his audience, most of whom will not have read (or remembered) the stage directions or the autobiography. And the solution O'Casey provides, if the producer will follow it, is a visual one: the men and women who accompany the statue are dressed in drab browns and chill greys with "each suit or dress having a patch of faded blue, red, green or purple somewhere about them" (p. 137). Moreover, the faded colours of the patches, like the faded colours of the statue, are meant to convey more than just physical poverty; taken in conjunction with the pale and apathetic faces, they convey a strong sense of spiritual poverty as well.

Here, again, the stage directions provide the key to O'Casey's meaning, for whenever the statue appears on stage, it is borne in what amounts to a ritualistic procession. The three Catholic women who concern themselves with the statue, although they have names and speak, at times, as characters on the realistic plane of action, are also used by O'Casey as chorus characters and, as such, function symbolically. The three men who are purposely not individualized by names reinforce, and should draw attention to, the symbolism and expressionism of the scenes in which they appear:

The three women come a little way into the room; the men stay around the door. All their faces are stiff and mask-like, holding tight an expression of dumb resignation; and are traversed with seams of poverty and a hard life. The face of Eeada is that of an old woman, that of Dympna, one coming up to middle age, and that of Finoola, one of a young girl. Each shows the difference of age by more or less furrows, but each has the same expressionless stare out on life.

(p. 136)

The hard life which the women have endured makes them old before their time: there is no joy even in the young woman's face, and this, to O'Casey, is the most chilling indictment of the life these people are forced to lead. The only child in the play is little Ursula, and she is most unchildlike and joyless in her obsession to save her pennies to pay for the regilding and repainting of the statue. The very joylessness of the procession, then, is what should strike the reader or the theatre audience most strongly, a joylessness which should call attention to the fact that the statue of the Blessed Virgin (first and foremost a religious symbol, after all), though intimately connected with the lives of the people--she is "Our Lady of Eblana's poor"-- is totally ineffective as the source of help and solace which she is meant to be.

Thus there is a certain amount of dramatic irony inherent in O'Casey's use of the statue of the Virgin, as there is in his use of religious icons in other of his plays. Errol Durbach, writing in the May, 1972, issue of Modern Drama,¹² points out how, in Juno and the Paycock, the symbol

¹²Durbach, "Peacocks and Mothers," Modern Drama, pp. 19-20.

of the Virgin as a source of comfort is used ironically. Johnny, in terror for his life, cries out despairingly to the "Mother o' God," turns despairingly again and again to the picture of the Virgin before which he keeps a votive light burning, but the only mother who answers his cry, who tries as best she can to bring some comfort, is Juno. Similarly, in Red Roses for Me, it is even more ironic that, while the Catholic women tend to the washing and caring of the statue, the Protestant Mrs. Breydon braves the wind and the rain to care for and comfort a dying Catholic neighbour.

Moreover, not only does the statue of Our Lady of Eblana, as a symbol of religious faith, fail to give either comfort or joy to the people, but its loss brings a terrible sense of fear and nemesis descending: "An' dear knows what woe'll fall on our poor house now" (p. 154). Suspicion of the Protestants in the house is voiced, much to Brennan's disgust, and, although the intensive search which follows is ostensibly occasioned by the love the people feel for their "sweet Lady of Eblana" (p. 154), there is also a strong sense of fear and dismay motivating the searchers.

Stranger still is the reaction of the people in Act II when the statue is found, freshly gilded and painted, her coronation robes like new, returned mysteriously to her niche in the hall:

A murmur of song has been heard while Ayamonn was speaking, and now Eeada, Dymrna, Finnoola, and the Men appear at the door--now wide open--half backing into the room singing part of a hymn softly, their pale faces still wearing the frozen look of resignation; staring at the image shining bright and gorgeous as Brennan has made it for them, standing in a niche in the wall,

directly opposite the door.

(p. 176)

Again, what is most noticeable is the "frozen look of resignation," the joylessness which is the strange accompaniment to what should be an occasion for celebration.¹³ The song which is evoked is neither a hymn of joy nor a hymn of praise, but is a mournful appeal to the Virgin "To show through the darkness, descending, /A cheerier way to die" (p. 177), a plea which will form its own ironic commentary in the context of the play as a whole.¹⁴

The description of the "miraculous" return of the transfigured statue, which the audience knows to have been wrought by "trickery" but which the Catholic poor have apparently accepted as a true miracle can be seen, then, as yet another typically O'Caseyan juxtaposition of pathos and irony:

EEADA (coming forward a little). She came back to
Her poor again, in raiment rich. She came back; of
Her own accord. She came to abide with Her people.

¹³Typical of the casual and superficial reading this part of the play usually receives is Jules Koslow's comment, "The shiny statue, anonymously returned to its owners, makes them very happy [*italics mine*]. The word goes around that a miracle has happened." The Green and the Red: Sean O'Casey . . . the Man and his Plays (New York: Golden Griffin Books, 1950), p. 100.

¹⁴The effect of the music should be sad, even dirge-like, thus reinforcing the mood of despair. Another somewhat similar example of O'Casey's use of dirgelike music to convey despair is the chant of the Down-and-Outs in Within the Gates.

In "O'Casey's Dramatic Symbolism," (O'Casey, ed. Ayling), Katherine Worth notes, "in some plays two kinds of music are set in opposition to one another, symbolising the conflict in the play between the forces of life and death" (pp. 188-89). In Red Roses for Me, however, the music of the title song mingles the sad with the joyous to suggest

DYMPNA. From her window, little Ursula looked, and saw Her come in; in th' moonlight, along the street She came, stately. Blinded be the coloured light that shone around about Her, the child fell back, in a swoon she fell full on the floor beneath her.

1ST MAN. My eyes caught a glimpse of Her too, glidin' back to where She came from. Regal an' proud She was, an' wondrous, so that me eyes failed; me knees thrembled an' bent low, an' me heart whispered a silent prayer to itself as th' vision passed me by, an' I fancied I saw a smile on Her holy face.

(p. 177)

Though these reports are self-deceptions, at best, and lies, at worst, they show the great need the people have for something in which they can believe, a need which, if not met, will feed on superstition and ignorance. But a "vision" which results in "blindness," a trembling of the knees and a swooning away of the spirit, rather than in an ecstatic uplifting of the heart and soul, is not likely to transform the lives of the Dublin poor in any very meaningful way.

Thus the dramatic irony inherent in O'Casey's use of the statue as a religious symbol can be seen to give a new dimension to the symbolism which Mrs. Malone has pointed out. The transformation of the statue does prefigure the transformation of Dublin herself which takes place in Act III, but what is even more significant is the ironic contrast between the "vision" which the poor people experience in Act II in response to the false "miracle" wrought by "trickery" and the vision which they experience

the inextricable mingling of the forces of darkness and light in every human life. On the other hand, the quicker tempo of the Fenian song at the end of Act I and the song Brennan sings in Act III makes them more "lively," and thus they suggest an attempt to disavow the darker side of human life.

in Act III in response to the "true" miracle which occurs as the setting sun transfigures the city.

And it is only when these ironic implications are explored that the complexity of the dramatic symbol, functioning as it does on both the realistic and expressionistic planes of the play, becomes apparent. The statue of the Virgin in her role (for she is "playacting" as well)¹⁵ of Our Lady of Eblana is seen by O'Casey as the symbol, not just of Dublin, but of Ireland herself, not just of Ireland, but of an Ireland priest-ridden and impoverished by a church which provides neither comfort nor joy, which feeds the fears of the people, and which is life-destroying rather than life-giving.

Viewed in this context Hogan's dismissal of the statue of Our Lady of Eblana as part of "a small excrescent sub-plot, having no connection with the main action"¹⁶ is quite unjustified. It is true, as Hogan points out,¹⁷ that the events surrounding the statue serve, on the level of external action, to heighten the excitement, to bring the first act to an end on a note of curiosity and mystery--and this is good "theatre"--but its "dramatic" function, which is a part of the play's expressionism, can only be understood as a part of a much more complex symbolic structure and one which is definitely linked to the main action of the play.

¹⁵Since the writing of the play, Our Lady of Eblana has been given her own theatre; "The Eblana Theatre" on Store Street on the edge of the Dublin slums.

¹⁶Hogan, Experiments, p. 89.

¹⁷Ibid.

Moreover, what is so very strange about the use of the statue, even if one wishes to persist in viewing it on the realistic level alone, is something that has not bothered the critics at all: that is, the apparent total disappearance of the statue from the structure of the play at the end of the second act. Even if the statue is to be considered as part of a sub-plot, the sub-plot must have some continuity and must come to some conclusion. Since this is not the case we must look more closely to see what, in fact, does happen to the statue as dramatic symbol and what happens to the structure of the play in the controversial and expressionistic Act III.

CHAPTER IV

THE BRIDGE OF VISION

In the first half of the play, despite O'Casey's use of expressionism to call attention to the symbolic structure, the significance of the role played by the poor people of Dublin and by Our Lady of Eblana has been almost totally overlooked. Reviews of the various productions, as we have seen, indicate that the so-called "realism" of O'Casey's "early manner" has been allowed to predominate in Acts I and II and, ultimately, to distort the structure of the play as a whole. On the other hand, in Act III, the expressionism has been so over-emphasized by both critics and producers alike that the stylistic and thematic unity of the play appears to be broken, while the ironic and dramatic qualities of the act go virtually unnoticed.

The effectiveness of the act, far from depending upon mere "stage magic,"¹ far from being merely a composite of the set designer's art plus the right lighting effects, depends upon a series of striking confrontations which both clarify and intensify the basic issues which have already been presented in the first two acts of the play. The weariness and despair of the poor people of Dublin (for whom

¹Hogan, Experiments, p. 94.

Ayamonn will give up his life), previously only glimpsed at through the open doorway of the Breydon home, now occupy the forefront of the stage. The cause of despair, the grinding poverty together with the failure of either Church or State to do anything about it, is, at this point, examined clearly and dramatically. Moreover, the gradual awakening of the consciousness of the people is given a psychological reality which helps to validate the moment of vision that forms the climax of the play and prevents it from violating our sense of what is "real."

In Act III the stage setting is, for the first time in the play, out-of-doors, yet there is no accompanying sense of relief from the dilapidated and overcrowded interior of the tenements. Though the scene takes place beside a river--usually suggestive of a source of life, but here described as "black an' bitther" (p. 191) waters--and at the bridge which Ayamonn had earlier referred to as "the bridge of vision" (p. 153), all is darkness and gloom. Moreover, the gloomy immediacy of the scene is further heightened by the contrasting perspective of the bright and limitless horizon:

In the distance, where the street, leading from the bridge, ends in a point of space, to the right, soars the tapering silver spire of a church; and to the left, Nelson's Pillar, a deep red pierces the sky, with Nelson, a deep black, on its top, looking over everything that goes on around him. A gloomy grey sky is over all, so that the colours of the scene are made up of the dark houses, the brown parapets of the bridge, the grey sky, the silver spire, the red pillar, and Nelson's black figure.

(p. 185)

A few of the nameless men from the previous two acts

(recognizably the same who had been accompanying the semi-ritualistic procession carrying the statue of Our Lady of Eblana) sit and lounge about in the vicinity in various attitudes of weariness and despair. Obviously their plea to the newly regilded statue of the Virgin to "Lift up th' poor heads ever bending" (p. 177) has not yet been answered, for "their expressionless faces [are] hidden by being bent down towards their breasts" (p. 185). The three women, Eeada, Dympna and Finnoola, no longer preoccupied with caring for Our Lady of Eblana, have less idealistic pursuits in mind: the business of exchanging a few cakes, apples and rather drooping violets for enough pennies to buy some tea. They are "dressed so in black that they appear to be enveloped in the blackness of a dark night" (pp. 185-86), and even their pathetic wares appear drab and lifeless. Ironically, the setting sun, which falls on neither the people, nor the bridge, nor the houses of Dublin, lights in the background only the silver spire of the church and the black figure of Nelson atop the red pillar, the one (as we shall see) a symbol of the power and domination of the Church (both Catholic and Protestant), the other, a symbol of the power and domination of the State.²

²The most extreme attitude of the Irish Catholic towards the Nelson monument is evidenced by the fact that it no longer exists. On March 8, 1966, it was demolished by the I.R.A. Here, however, O'Casey uses the statue to suggest more than just the armed might which, in the past, had brought the Irish under English domination. In the more universal context which the play assumes (see pp. 33-34 above),

The conversation of the women reflects the mood that has already been set visually by the scene and defines, as well, the dialectic between bitter reality and equally bitter (because illusory) ideals, ideals which, though meant to sustain and encourage the people, fail to do so:

EEADA (drowsily). This spongy leaden sky's Dublin; those tomby houses is Dublin too--Dublin's scurvy body; an' we're Dublin's silver soul. (She spits vigorously into the street.) An' that's what Eeada thinks of th' city's soul an' body!

DYMPNA. You're more than right, Eeada, but I wouldn't be too harsh. (Calling out in a sing-song way) Violets, here, on'y tuppence a bunch; tuppence a bunch, th' fresh violets!

EEADA (calling out in a sing-song voice). Apples an' cakes, on'y tuppence a head here for th' cakes; ripe apples a penny apiece!

DYMPNA. Th' sun is always at a distance, an' th' chill grey is always here.

FINNOOLA. Half-mournin' skies for ever over us, frownin' out any chance of merriment that came staggerin' to us for a little support.

EEADA. That's Dublin, Finnoola an' th' sky over it. Sorrow's a slush under our feet, up to our ankles, an' th' deep drip of it constant overhead.

DYMPNA. A graveyard where th' dead are all above th' ground.

EEADA. Without a blessed blink of rest to give them hope. An' she cockin' herself up that she stands among other cities as a queen o' counsel, laden with knowledge, afire with th' song of great men, enough to overawe all livin' beyond th' salty sea, undher another sun be day, an' undher a different moon be night.

(pp. 186-87)

Here, in the colour imagery, the "silver spire" of

the monument represents the frightening power of the "Authorities" (p. 183), a concept which is Kafkaesque in its implications of terror.

the church is linked with Dublin's "silver soul," and quite unconsciously, Eeada's demonic "vision" of Dublin implies a rejection of the Church and a recognition of the fact that whatever ideals it has to offer are meaningless in the bitter context of their lives. Far from having been inspired by the "miraculous" transformation of the statue of the Virgin in Act II, a transformation which itself suggested a distancing and a remoteness ("Regal and proud She was," p. 177), Eeada, though she does not know why, is sunk more in gloom than ever. Similarly, any ideal of Dublin as a great city is rejected, and Eeada's sarcastic reference to "great men" is meant to bring to mind the black figure of Nelson atop its red pillar.

On the expressionistic plane, the three women appear like a chorus of the Three Fates in Greek tragedy, and their drowsiness suggests the dream-like or trance-like state of the oracle. When they speak they evoke a vision of hell: a Dublin which is a place of spiritual despair, a place of living death. Structurally and quite dramatically, this vision stands in stark opposition to the vision evoked towards the end of Act III, the vision of Dublin as a New Jerusalem.

At the same time, however, the expressionism of the play is rooted firmly in reality, and O'Casey makes it quite plain that the women are not merely in a trance-like state. Their drowsiness and weariness also come simply from too much hard work and too little to eat. Their attitude to life is

practical, as evidenced by their attempts to earn a few desperately needed shillings, and in this sense, they are being depicted quite realistically. Eeada's vigorous spit on to the street also shows in no uncertain terms what she thinks of her life and the life of the city around her. And this bit of realism, together with the vigorous and outspoken way in which she at times speaks, is quite deliberately juxtaposed with the trance-like state out of which she awakens and into which she falls.

Perhaps there is no better example of the way in which O'Casey both blends and juxtaposes the techniques of realism and expressionism to create a form which is itself a dramatic statement of his meaning: the two apparently conflicting forms struggle on stage even as that most basic concern of human life--the bitter struggle between the real and the ideal--engages the minds and hearts of the characters themselves. The expressionistic technique is uniquely suited to convey those glimpses of heaven or hell which seem to arise spontaneously in the external world when it is viewed by a consciousness struggling with the possibility or impossibility of achieving an ideal.

With the same kind of technical ingenuity, but in a more comic mood, the spiritual dimensions of the scene are further developed in the conversation of the men which follows. Though as weary as the women with the harshness of their lives, the men yet cling to illusion to sustain them. These two "stage Irishmen" claim to be "thru prophet[s]" in their ability to predict whether Golden Gander or Copper

Goose will win the West's Awake Steeplechase Championship (p. 187), but here the foolishness of the horses' names suggests the foolishness of the dream itself. A ticket on the winning horse would bring, not just a shilling, but five hundred guineas--a reality that would be very palatable indeed, though it could only materialize for one or two out of the thousands of Dublin poor.

The universal fascination of such a dream held out by the siren Lady Luck is corroborated by the parallel scene from O'Casey's autobiography where two Dublin workingmen hope to win the new competition in the Irish journal Answers, offering hope to all in the form of "a thousand pounds down, or two pounds a week for life."³ Even the priests carry Answers in the pockets of their soutanes, an irony which does not escape Johnny Casside and which is echoed humorously in Dympna's cryptic comment, "Th' prophets we once had are well hidden behind God be now, an' no wondher, for we put small pass on them" (p. 187). An awareness of what Irish Catholicism has lost is suggested by Dympna's words, but O'Casey makes it plain, as he does in Juno's heartfelt cry, "Ah, what can God do agen the stupidity o' men!"⁴ that the blame rests squarely on man's shoulders and not on God's.

An awareness, too, of what glories Dublin has lost

³O'Casey, Pictures in the Hallway, Mirror in My House, Vol. I, pp. 334-35, pp. 344-45. In this part of the autobiography O'Casey calls himself "Johnny Casside."

⁴O'Casey, Juno and the Paycock, Collected Plays, Vol. I, p. 86.

begins to enter Finnoola's consciousness as she struggles to awaken from the "nightmare" of Irish history: "A gold-speckled candle, white as snow, was Dublin once; yellowish now, leanin' sideways an' guttherin' down to a last shaky glimmer in th' wind o' life" (p. 187). The imagery is striking because, in the context of Irish Catholicism, it cannot but evoke a sense of religious ritual: the lighting of candles before the figure of the Virgin and the prayers for the dead or dying. Moreover, it should evoke on a subliminal level, the image of the statue of Our Lady of Eblana, "once a glory of purest white," but whose past glories, too, had faded "save for a spot or two of dull gold still lingering on the crown" (p. 137). In other words, though the plaster Madonna is no longer present on stage, it is hinted at, barely whispered about, in the imagery of the dialogue, and in a context which recalls, ironically, not its new "false" glory, but its fall from the original glory it once had.

Thus, in preparation for the awakening of the people to a heavenly vision towards the end of Act III, the movement of the first part of the act is upward: from the nightmarish vision of a ghost city of living dead to the barest stirrings of an awakened consciousness which recalls, though faintly, the glories of Ireland's past and holds, but faintly, a sense of the need for a prophet who can truly restore to the people a vision of that past glory. In the meantime, only the ironic remnants of such a vision remain:

EEADA. Well, we've got Guinness's Brewery still, givin' us a needy glimpse of a better 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' tender an' dauntless memories of the past.

(pp. 187-88)

Brian Boru was one of the mightiest of Ireland's kings, one who gave his life in battle, almost a thousand years ago, to free Ireland from the domination of the Danes. Yet Eeada herself is uncomfortably aware of the strange context in which the symbol of his sacrifice has been placed. The kind of "vision" provided on a Saturday night by the "spirit" of the past embodied in a bottle of Guinness's porter is likely to be illusory at best, as illusory as the glittering, golden world of the racetrack with its attendant hopes and disappointments. And the incongruity between the two worlds--the golden world of Irish kings and heroes and the golden world of the race track about which the two sleepy tragi-comics "prophecy" (their lethargy contrasting humorously with the lightning speed they claim for their favourites)--points to the fact that past ideals have not been incorporated into the present in any very meaningful way. In other words, the bridge of vision linking past, present and future has been broken, and the poor of Dublin exist either in a world of darkness or a world in which only the feeblest rays of light struggle to suggest a strange, illusory hope.

This struggle of light with darkness is presented through a series of dramatic confrontations: confrontations between the poor people of Dublin who are impoverished spiritually as well

as physically, and those others in the play who embody so imperfectly in the present those past ideals which had once been so vital. The two ideals which have so far been seen to dominate the lives of the Dublin poor, and which have been represented symbolically by the soaring silver spire of the church and by the even more towering black figure of Nelson atop its red pillar, have clearly lost their power to sustain and enrich the lives of the people. This fact has been made apparent, not only by the physical distancing of the spire and pillar, but also by the expressionless and mask-like faces of the people themselves. The spire and pillar, in this sense, are like the plaster Madonna of the first two acts: apparently symbolic of a source of comfort and strength, yet, in actuality, symbols of oppression. The only "vision" which they have inspired is a demonic one and one somewhat analagous to that ironic "vision" inspired by the statue of Our Lady of Eblana. With the entrance of the Rector and Inspector Finglas the reasons for the failure of Church and State are made quite plain.

Significantly, Rector Clinton and his churchwarden, Inspector Finglas, "appear at the farther end of the bridge, and come over it towards where the men and women are" (p. 188). Here, then, are the modern incarnations of Church and State appearing in the distance, as if from out of the past, as if having just stepped down from the lofty eminence of spire and pillar to mingle with the people. The splendour of their clothing is accounted for realistically by the fact that they have come from a wedding of obviously

upper-class Dublin society, but the colours of their dress serve, symbolically, to link them to the silver spire and the red pillar. Again, as with the statue of the Virgin, the symbolism is both complex and extremely ironic.

The "immaculate black" of the Rector's dress is appropriate to his calling, but it serves also to associate him with the black figure of Nelson atop the red pillar. The Rector has a political role to play in the affairs of State insofar as his sympathy with the plight of the Catholic poor makes him encourage Ayamonn to lead the strikers. Ironically, however, the colour black is also the symbol of death⁵ and suggests the struggle--which the Rector will support--against the powers of darkness. Contrasted with his black dress is a green scarf, a colour which is picked up later in the act in the vivid green slashing the bronze statues and which serves as a visual motif for "the clash of life [from which] new life is born" (p. 209). Green, to O'Casey, is always the symbol of life,⁶ but here it also suggests the colour of the Irish shamrock and the national identity of Ireland, an identity which is transfigured in the broad humanitarianism of the Rector so that it unites both Catholic and Protestant.

On the other hand, Inspector Finglas, who is both the Rector's Churchwarden and a member of the Mounted Police,

⁵Katherine Worth, "O'Casey's Dramatic Symbolism," Sean O'Casey, ed. Ronald Ayling, p. 186.

⁶Ibid.; cf. Malone, The Plays, pp. 103-104.

is clearly a representative of the Protestant church in its most militant aspect as well as an instrument of the militant arm of the State. His lack of sympathy for the poor and for the striking Catholic workers provides an obvious contrast to the Rector's humane attitude. The Inspector's predominantly blue uniform serves to link him visually with the Catholic Church, an ironic association immediately clarified by his words as he recalls his ancestry. His great-great grandfather also wore blue--a uniform with sky-blue facings--but he served under Grattan, a Protestant who helped, rather than hindered, the cause of Catholic emancipation. The irony is further intensified by the fact that it is only as an oppressive agent of the State that the Inspector does not discriminate between Catholic and Protestant: in Act IV he tells Brennan, "my men don't wait to ask the way you worship when they raise their arms to strike" (p. 226). The silver accents on the Inspector's costume, his silver sword, the silver crown and, above all, the long silver spike on his helmet are meant to suggest the silver spire of the Church and to reinforce the association between the oppressive might of Church and State. In addition, the crimson plume recalls the red pillar and anticipates the red blood of sacrifice which will be shed.⁷

The splendour of their dress (the Rector has a glossy

⁷Malone, The Plays, p. 106. Mrs. Malone sees the red roses as a symbol of sacrifice. Cf. Worth, "O'Casey's Dramatic Symbolism," Sean O'Casey, ed. Ayling, p. 186: "Red is the colour of the . . . Life Force."

tall hat and a walking stick) serves also to set the two figures apart from the crowd of Dublin poor, even as their positioning on the bridge above the heads of the people indicates a certain remoteness. Ironically, it is the Inspector who recalls Swift as well as Grattan: two past representatives of Church and State who had been able to help and inspire the poor of Dublin. The Inspector's uncomprehending attitude to such two great humanitarians underlies his own inhumanity. He sees the poor, not as people, but as things--"flotsam and jetsam" (p. 190)--and his encounter with the reality of their world in the form of an accidental spit on his shiny boot provokes an outburst of fury which is out of all proportion to the event:

INSPECTOR (springing back with an angry exclamation).
 What th' hell are you after doing, you rotten lizard!
 Looka what you've done, you mangy rat!
 (He takes hold of the lounge and shakes him sharply.)

2ND MAN (sleepily resentful). Eh, there! Wha' th' hell?

INSPECTOR (furiously). You spat on my boots, you touselled toad--my boots, boots, boots!

2ND MAN (frightened and bewildered). Boots, sir? Is it me, sir? Not me, sir. Musta been someone else, sir.

INSPECTOR (shaking him furiously). You, you, you!

2ND MAN. Me, sir? Never spit in public in me life, sir. Makin' a mistake, sir. Musta been someone else.

RECTOR. Inspector Finglas! Remember you wear the King's uniform! Quiet, quiet, man!

(p. 190)

By contrast, the Rector's confrontation with the people is sympathetic. But the impossibility of communication is underlined by the fact that he does not even

recognize the people though he passed among them as he left Ayamonn's house at the end of Act II. The distance between the Rector and the women is further indicated by the extent of their confusion as they try to sell him their apples and violets. Again, the comedy has its serious and ironic undertones, particularly in the supposedly inappropriate reference to "our radiant Lady o' Fair Dealin'" (another role the Madonna figure plays):

EEADA (whining towards them). On'y a penny each, th' rosy apples, lovely for th' chiselurs--Jasus! what am I sayin'? Lovely for th' little masters an' little mistresses, stately, in their chandeliered an' carpeted dwellin'-houses; or a cake--on'y tuppence a piece--daintily spiced, an' tastin' splendid.

DYMPNA (whining towards them). Tuppence, here, th' bunch o' violets, fit for to go with th' white an' spotless cashmere gown of our radiant Lady o' Fair Dealin'.

EEADA (deprecatingly). What are you sayin', woman? That's a Protestan' minister, indeed, gentleman, Dympna!

DYMPNA. Me mind slipped for a poor minute; but it's pity he'll have on us, an' regulate our lives with what'll bring a sudden cup o' tea within fair reach of our hands.

(p. 189)

Though the Rector tries to help the women, it is ironic that he does not buy their wares and save their self-respect, but, instead, flings them a shilling, "two tiny sixpences--fourpence a head" (p. 191), an amount which is simply not enough. The total ineffectiveness of even this most enlightened representative of the Church is further brought out as the Rector and Inspector Finglas leave. There is much pathos, as well as irony, in the fear and

sadness the Rector feels as he is conscious of turning away from "these sad things" who may yet have within them "the Kingdom of Heaven" (p. 191). Here the Rector's insight is based on Scriptural authority, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,"⁸ and looks forward to the awakening of that inner kingdom in the vision they will have of Dublin as a heavenly city.

In the meantime, though the intrusion of the Rector and Inspector Finglas has again left the Dublin poor sunk in gloom ("Ah, what is it all to us but a deep-written testament o' gloom," p. 191), there are further hints of a possible awakening. Despite Eeada's mournful viewing of the whole course of her life, her thoughts miraculously turn to memories of the brief joys of youth, memories which convey a sense of the glamour and richness of the past attempting to break through into the present:

EEADA (mournfully). We've dhrifted down to where there's nothin'. Younger I was when every quiet-clad evenin' carried a jaunty jewel in her bosom. Tormented with joy I was then as to whether I'd parade th' thronged sthreeets on th' arm of a 16th Lancer, his black-breasted crimson coat a sight to see, an' a black plume droopin' from his haughty helmet; or lay claim to a red-breasted Prince o' Wales's Own, th' red plume in his hat a flame over his head.

DYMPNA. It was a 15th King's Own Hussar for me, Eeada, with his rich blue coat an' its fairyland o' yellow braid, two yellow sthripes down his trousers, an' a red bag an' plume dancin' on his busby.

EEADA. Lancers for me, Dympna.

DYMPNA. Hussars for me, Eeada.

EEADA. An' what for you, Finnoola?

FINNOOLA. What would a girl, born in a wild Cork valley, among the mountains, brought up to sing the songs of

⁸Matt. 5:3.

her fathers, what would she choose but the patched coat, shaky shoes, an' white hungry face of th' Irish rebel? But their shabbiness was threaded with th' colours from the garments of Finn Mac Cool of the golden hair, Goll Mac Morna of th' big blows, Caoilte of th' flyin' feet, an' Oscar of th' invincible spear.

EEADA (nudging Dympna). That was some time ago, if y' ask me.

(pp. 191-92)

On stage the scene should momentarily spring to life as the three black-shawled women relive in their imagination the joy and excitement of the past. Ironically, however, the brilliant colours of the uniforms that the women describe suggest, not only the life and vitality of the past, but also its remoteness in relationship to the drab and colourless lives of the poor people themselves. Moreover, the striking contrast realized in the colour imagery between the dazzling uniforms worn by the British troops and the "patched coat" of the Irish rebel should recall the more immediate contrast, which has just been realized on stage, between the splendour of the Inspector's uniform and patched clothing worn by the poor men of Dublin. The idealized past, with its romance and joy and colour, is capable of nourishing the present, but, at the same time, there is a strong suggestion that it is an inseparable part of a conflict which cannot be entirely forgotten.

With Brennan's entrance, the dream of the past vanishes, and the mood changes again to one of bitterness. Resentful at being recalled to the present, the poor see Brennan, not as a kindly old man who has on occasion helped

them, but as an "oul' miser creepin' after coppers, an' some bank bulgin' with what he has in it already" (p. 192). Their hostility is summed up by the spit sent flying in his path, but Brennan ignores this unsympathetic reception, unslings his melodeon and begins to play. Though his song is about young love in the springtime, the very thing the women have just been dreaming about, they insist on interpreting his words indecently, for they cannot recognize the romantically idealized world of the song where love flourishes in a garden-like atmosphere of violets and poppies. Nor can they accept the transfiguration of the lovers who are animated by love's joyous exertions to that visionary point where

The heathery hills were all dancin' around us,
False things in th' world turn'd out to be throe.

(p. 193)

Like Nora Clitheroe's song of "happier transports to be"⁹ there is a curious naiveté about the song which makes it seem unreal. Moreover, in the "visionary" context which the song suggests we recall Brennan's earlier, and equally unsuccessful, attempt to bring happiness to the Dublin poor.

That O'Casey intends Brennan to be a modern-day saint--or, as a worker of false miracles, the parody of one--is further suggested by his "long white beard which gives him a far-away likeness to St. Jerome" (p. 144). An almost

⁹O'Casey, The Plough and the Stars, Collected Plays, Vol. I, p. 187.

always compassionate nature, hidden beneath a sometimes gruff exterior, and his concern for the poor of Dublin, also mark Brennan as a kind of spiritual father to Ayamonn. The melodeon is a constant reminder of Brennan's musical abilities and the fact that he set Ayamonn's song to music. Unlike Ayamonn, however, Brennan is unable to awaken the people, for with the best of intentions, he tries to make them believe in a world of dreams and illusions. In this sense he uses his art--the painting of the statue, the singing of songs--to lull the people into a false sense of well-being, rather than to awaken them to the possibility of a world which has in it a real and exciting potential for change.

The very fierceness with which the men and women reject him springs from the intensity of their need and from their recognition of the fact that what Brennan has to offer is a dream which is even less real than their own dreams of golden horses, youthful Hussars and rebel warriors:

1ST MAN (waking up wrathfully). Get to hell outa that,
with yoursootherin' songs o' gaudy idleness!

(p. 194)

And so Brennan is driven from the bridge of vision, a pathetic as well as a comic figure.

While Brennan has been singing, the scene has grown darker as the sun sets, but the darkness also suggests the increasing gloom into which the people, once more, are sinking. Until now, the movement of the act, which has been struggling upward out of an abyss of despair, has,

paradoxically, been given momentum by a series of confrontations which have suggested a source of hope only to have it proven false. As the people reacted with anger, their spirits rose, and quite spontaneously, their thoughts turned to whatever joyous and consoling memories of the past they may have had or to whatever illusory hopes they may have been nourishing for the future. Their hopes for a better life have seemed so remote and illusory, yet they focused instinctively on the valorous deeds of those Celtic heroes of the past in whose lives history and legend mingle.

Though the people are only dimly aware of it, another moment has arrived in which they can play a decisive role in events which may change their lives. "Time is precious here" (pp. 195 - 96) is a phrase which echoes like a strange prophecy on the lips of the men, since, to the lethargic workers, the passage of time seems meaningless. However, its relevance to Ayamonn and to the dramatic action of the play will become increasingly apparent.

In the meantime, what the people need is courage, and what holds them back is fear: fear which was first expressed by their sense of nemesis descending when they realized their Lady of Eblana had been stolen, and fear which is expressed now, quite openly, as Roory, "the zealous Irish Irelander," confronts them bluntly with the challenge to battle like the heroes of old. The songs he would have Brennan sing are songs meant to inspire courage:

Pearl of th' White Breasts, now, or Battle Song o' Munster that would pour into yous Conn's battle-fire

of th' hundhred fights. Watchman o' Tara he was, his arm reachin' over deep rivers an' high hills, to dhrag out a host o' sthrong enemies shiverin' in shelthers. Leadher of Magh Femon's Host he was, Guardian of Moinmoy, an' Vetheran of our river Liffey, flowin' through a city whose dhrinkin' goblets once were made of gold, ere wise men carried it with frankincense an' myrrh to star-lit Bethlehem.

(p. 195, O'Casey's italics)

Here, the invocation of the spirit of the fighting men of the pagan past is strangely mingled with the invocation of the spirit embodied in the birth of the "Prince of Peace." Yet the people reject Roory more in sadness than in anger, for they are unable to see themselves as part of the brave world he envisions.

At this point in the act the movement downward threatens to overwhelm everything in darkness, and the demonic vision of Dublin with which the act began floods with renewed intensity onto the stage. As the poor of Dublin seem determined to sink once again into a gloomy lethargy, content to "crave out a crust in the grey kingdom of quietness" (p. 195) rather than struggling to realize that inner Kingdom which is rightfully theirs, Ayamonn interrupts their dark reverie in words which at first seem preposterously idealistic, "Rouse yourselves, we hold a city in our hands!" (p. 196). Nor is he daunted by their bitter choral-like response (which is part of the expressionism of the play and should be chanted). Instead, he breaks through their ritualizing of pain, in words which are vigorous and realistic:

EEADA (in a very low, but bitter voice). It's a bitther city.

DYMPNA (murmuring the same way). It's a bleak, black an' bitther city.

1ST MAN. Like a batthered, tatthered whore, bullied by too long a life.

2ND MAN. An' her three gates are castles of poverty, penance, an' pain.

AYAMONN. She's what our hands have made her. We pray too much and work too little. Meanness, spite, and common patters are woven thick through all her glory; but her glory's there for open eyes to see.

(p. 196)

Here, Ayamonn's words should recall the context of the first half of the play in which the poor of Dublin appear carrying, in a sombre, ritual-like procession, the statue of Our Lady of Eblana. Moreover, in Act III, the idleness and depression of the striking workers as they lounge about the parapets of the bridge and lean against the houses is further dramatic evidence of the truth of Ayamonn's words.

By contrast, Ayamonn's courage in addressing the people at this juncture seems little short of miraculous. He has just witnessed Brennan and his song being rudely dismissed and has gently remonstrated, "he sang a merry song well and should have got a fairer greeting" (p. 195), and he has seen, as well, the fervently nationalistic Roory, with all his evocation of the valour and spirit of the Celtic warriors of the past, being rejected just as emphatically. Since these friends both speak in terms which are meaningful to Ayamonn and embody, however imperfectly, ideals which Ayamonn believes in, it is quite a dramatic instance of his courage that he speaks out now in opposition to the despair and fear which the men and women are allowing to overcome them.

Because he opposes them so courageously, Ayamonn's words affect the people strongly. In him, they see a person who is not afraid to face whatever dangers the present may hold, and so his words awaken them to the two most significant realities of their present situation: the fear of the strike and the danger Ayamonn is putting himself into in opposing the powerful agents of Church and State. On the other hand, what they also recognize in Ayamonn is a person whose vision they can trust, one who "knows things hid from us" (p. 196). Significantly, too, they remember Mrs. Breydon and her many kindnesses, and in Finnoola's description of her the imagery works to link Mrs. Breydon and Our Lady of Eblana so that the "glory" which Ayamonn claims can be discerned among the "common patters" immediately becomes a reality:

For all her tired look an' wrinkled face, a pure white candle she is, blessed this minute by St. Colmille of th' gentle manner, or be Aidan, steeped in the lore o' Heaven, or be Lausereena of th' silver voice an' snowy vestments--th' blue cloak o' Brigid be a banner over her head for ever!

(p. 197)

Without being fully aware of the import of their words, the Catholic women speak of the Protestant Mrs. Breydon as an incarnation of the help and succour they needed but did not find from the newly regilded, but quite lifeless, statue of Our Lady of Eblana.

In Mrs. Breydon, then, the Madonna figure and the

figure of Kathleen ni Houlihan¹⁰ merge to suggest an Ireland which can be both true and beautiful. That such an Ireland can be found within the hearts of the poor people of Dublin themselves is an idea which Roory cannot grasp, and, ironically, his concept of changing Ireland does not include them.

ROORY (hotly). An' d'ye think talkin' to these tattered second-hand ghosts'll bring back Heaven's grace an' Heaven's beauty to Kaithleen ni Houlihan?

AYAMONN. Roory, Roory, your Kaithleen ni Houlihan has th' bent back 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.

ROORY (disgusted). Aw, for God's sake, man!

(p. 197)

Clearly, the impatient and zealous Roory cannot understand, and as he hurries off angrily from the bridge of vision, it becomes apparent that O'Casey is dismissing the

¹⁰See pp. 47-48 above. See also William A. Armstrong, "Sean O'Casey, W.B. Yeats and the Dance of Life," Sean O'Casey, ed. Ronald Ayling, p. 134, for a discussion of "O'Casey's quest for an embodiment of Ireland, for the Cathleen ni Houlihan most characteristic of his time." Armstrong does not mention Mrs. Breydon, but the passage from the autobiography, Drums Under the Windows, which he quotes has a clear relevance to the candle imagery in Red Roses for Me. The passage describes one embodiment of Kathleen, Mild Millie (a drunken woman of the Dublin streets): "'The pure tall candle that may have stood before the Holy Rood, was sadly huddled now, and melting down into the mire of the street, beneath the British lion and unicorn' [Armstrong's italics]." Unlike Mild Millie, however, Mrs. Breydon's spirit, like that of O'Casey's own mother, is pretty well unvanquishable.

kind of rabid, "single-vision" type of nationalistic fervor which Roory represents. He is definitely not the "saviour" the Irish people need, but as a foil to Ayamonn, he helps to define (as did Brennan) the qualities which are necessary to save Ireland. And it is Ayamonn who possesses these qualities in abundance, for Ayamonn, as well as being truly courageous, also recognizes the power of a word to awaken the spirit of man, whether it is the word of God--"it was dark when the spirit of God first moved on th' face of the waters"¹¹ (p. 197)--or whether it is the word of Shakespeare--"he's part of the kingdom of heaven in the nature of everyman" (p. 131)--or whether it is the word of the political orator or of the minstrel. Here the parallel between Ayamonn and O'Casey himself is at its strongest, for the play is, among other things, a striking testament to the power of the word as wielded by the creative imagination.¹²

The success of Ayamonn's words in awakening the poor of Dublin from their despair and instilling in them the courage they so desperately need is itself a part of the

¹¹For the identification of the spirit of God with the Word, see St. John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

¹²In The Imagination of an Insurrection (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), William Irwin Thompson points out "the Irish revolutionaries lived as if they were in a work of art." Nor can history overlook the fact that "three of the executed sixteen men [in the Easter Rising] happened to be poets." Red Roses for Me makes clear that O'Casey recognizes the visionary quality of such men, though he frequently could not agree with the specific ways in which they tried to realize their visions.

"true" miracle which occurs in Act III, and it is made completely believable within the dramatic context of the play. Ayamonn speaks, not in terms of a far-off past or a far-off future, but in terms which make both past and future a part of the immediate present: he tells the people to forget Roory "an' remember ourselves, and think of what we can do to pull down th' banner from dusty bygones, an' fix it up in th' needs an' desires of today" (pp. 197-98). Oddly, however, Ayamonn's words have not been accompanied by any brightening of the stage: the growing darkness which is the visual metaphor for the gloom and despair which is stifling Dublin and her poor intensifies until the rays of the setting sun, which had been illuminating only the silver spire and the crimson pillar, now also catch and illuminate Ayamonn's head, "looking like the severed head of Dunn-Bo speaking out of the darkness" (p. 198).

The relevance of what William A. Armstrong describes as this "curiously literary stage-direction" is pointed out in his article, "Sean O'Casey, W.B. Yeats and the Dance of Life."¹³ Armstrong thinks O'Casey may have read about Dunn-Bo or Donn-bó in Eleanor Hull's Pagan Ireland:

She describes Donn-bó as a handsome youth who was famous as singer and story-teller. On the eve of a battle the warriors asked him to sing for them, but he refused, saying he would do so twenty-four hours later. In the battle he fought by the side of the King of Erin and both were killed, Donn-bó being decapitated. That evening a warrior found Donn-bó's severed head singing

¹³Armstrong, "Sean O'Casey, W.B. Yeats and the Dance of Life," Sean O'Casey, ed. Ayling, p. 140.

because it had been commanded by 'the King of the Plains of Heaven' to make music for the King of Erin. The head promised to sing for the hosts of Leinster 'when my minstrelsy here is done' and the warrior subsequently carried the head to their feasting-place, where it was set on a pillar. 'Then Donn-bó', the story goes, 'turned his face to the wall, that the darkness might be around him', and sang so sad a song that 'all the host sat weeping at the sound of it.' There are at least two parallels to the action of Red Roses here. The minstrelsy made by Donn-bó for the King of Erin corresponds to Ayamonn's song and dance in honour of Dublin when she, like the King, is in 'the grip of God'. Donn-bó's participation in the battle and his death correspond to Ayamonn's joining the strikers and dying in their struggle with the police.¹⁴

The foreshadowing of Ayamonn's death which is implicit here does not, of course, depend upon the audience being able to recall the legend of Dunn-Bo,¹⁵ but merely upon the stage technician's ability to realize the effect of a "severed head," itself an image of sacrifice. Moreover, insofar as the head is speaking after death, the scene should momentarily enhance Ayamonn's stature and give the effect of a prophet-like utterance to his words. At the same time, however, the words themselves create a curious and unexpected effect, for they cannot escape the hollow and rhetorical ring of the enthusiastic, but inexperienced young orator who declaims them:

Friend, we would that you should live a greater life; we will that all of us shall live a greater life. Our

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵See p. 7 above, where the reviewer comments, "Making matters more obscure are the frequent references to names and events which presuppose a familiarity with Irish history and folklore." Actually all we need to be aware of is that the references are to a past made golden by the heroism and sacrifice of Celtic warriors.

sthrike is yours. A step ahead for us today; another one for you tomorrow. We who have known, and know, the emptiness of life shall know its fullness. All men and women quick with life are fain to venture forward. (To Eeada) The apple grows for you to eat. (To Dympna) The violet grows for you to wear. (To Finnoola) Young maiden, another world is in your womb.

(p. 198)

Such a strange mingling of effects must approach a kind of comic grotesqueness which, nonetheless, speaks movingly of man's heroic endeavours, endeavours which seem all the more heroic because they defy our sense of the absurd. Once more, then, O'Casey is employing an expressionistic technique in a way which we might describe as playful. And it is this quality about his work which links him at least as closely to the Theatre of the Absurd as to Expressionist drama.¹⁶

The symbolic elevation of Ayamonn to the level of silver spire and crimson pillar serves also to suggest his new position of authority in the lives of the people, authority which is based, not on ideals grown meaningless, but on a sense of the rightful heritage belonging to the poor of Dublin, which Ayamonn, as "saviour," will try to restore. Though at first the women reject his words because they still fear the violence of the struggle which must come,

¹⁶It is interesting to compare the expressionistic effects achieved here with those achieved in Act II of The Plough where the rhetorical words of the "ghostly speaker" (De Baun, "Road to Expressionism," Modern Drama, IV, p. 257), his black shadow alternately appearing and disappearing outside the window of the pub, stir a patriotic fervour in Brennan, Langon, and Clitheroe.

Ayamonn, who has within himself the visionary power of the prophets of old, is finally able to sweep away their fears and dispel the darkness. As the setting sun, like a dying god, floods the scene with golden, bronze and coloured lights, Ayamonn's words grow luminous with the natural beauty of the scene before him:

AYAMONN. Don't flinch in th' first flare of a fight. (He looks away from them and gazes meditatively down the river.) Take heart of grace from your city's hidden splendour. (He points with an outstretched hand.) Oh, look! Look there! Th' sky has thrown a gleaming green mantle over her bare shoulders, bordered with crimson, an' with a hood of gentle magenta over her handsome head--look!

(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.

AYAMONN. Look! Th' vans an' lorries rattling down th' quays, turned to bronze an' purple by th' sun, look like chariots forging forward to th' battle-front.

(Eeada, rising into the light, now shows a fresh and virile face, and she is garbed in a dark-green robe, with a silvery mantle over her shoulders.

EEADA (gazing intently before her). Shy an' lovely, as well as battle-minded!

(Dympna rises now to look where Ayamonn is pointing. She is dressed like Eeada, and her face is aglow. The men have slid from the parapets of the bridge, turning, too, to look where Ayamonn is pointing. Their faces are aglow, like the women's, and they look like bronze statues, slashed with a vivid green. Finnoola rises, last, and stands a little behind the others, to look at the city showing her melody of colours. Finnoola is dressed in a skirt of a brighter green than the other two women, a white bodice slashed with black, and a flowing silvery scarf is round her waist.

FINNOOLA. She's glowin' like a song sung be Osheen

himself, with th' golden melody of his own harp helpin'!

1ST MAN (puzzled). Something funny musta happened, for, 'clare to God, I never noticed her shinin' that way before.

2ND MAN. Looka the loungers opposite have changed to sturdy men of bronze, and th' houses themselves are gay in purple an' silver!

(pp. 198-200)

Here, then, is the true miracle: the beauty of the natural world illuminating, and made luminous by, the heart and the mind of man. As Ayamonn points out the hidden beauty, which the poor Dubliners must have looked at many times before but without comprehending, he enables them to see in the common patterns of the natural world the glory which--all along--has been there "for open eyes to see" (p. 196). Coloured by what seems to be a divinely inspired nature and shaped by the human imagination, a gentle Madonna form appears, a truly Irish Madonna with

a gleaming green mantle over her bare shoulders, bordhered with crimson an' with a hood of gentle magenta over her handsome head.

She is not the plaster Lady of Eblana, nor the false Kathleen ni Houlihan, but the Kathleen of Ayamonn's song who, in order to be both true and beautiful, must also be courageous. Eeada sees her reflected in the transfigured city and exclaims, "Shy and lovely, as well as battle-minded," for the transformation which has taken place has restored both city and people to a glory which can only be won by courage.

Ayamonn's words, like those spoken at the dawn of creation, have evoked another genesis, but one which ironically anticipates from its very beginning the sacrifice which

is its very life. The rays of the dying sun, struggling to break through a dark sky densely covered with clouds, touch at first only the houses and people "on the far side of the river." Then the light sweeps across the bridge on to the forefront of the stage so that the immediacy of the transformation, not only of the city, but of the poor people themselves, is breathtakingly realized. Suddenly the stage itself has been transformed and the actors transfigured as the imagery of the spoken words are caught up and realized in the visual imagery of lighting and costuming. No longer do we have the bleak, expressionless faces of the men and women carrying, in joyless procession, the lifeless statue of Our Lady of Eblana. Instead, the stage is filled with "sturdy men of bronze"--living "statues" suggestive, not of a lifeless and dead ideal, but of a people in whose hearts has been emblazoned the image of a true Kathleen, the only Lady of Eblana who could ever awaken the spirit of Celtic warriors whose bronze "chariots forg[e] forward to the battle-front."

At the height of the transfiguration scene, however, just at the point at which O'Casey himself is caught up in the power of his vision, there is yet something which holds him back. And that is the memory of the sacrifices which, since time began, have inexplicably been demanded as the price of man's redemption. Though he loves Ayamonn and admires his idealism and courage, O'Casey was too great a lover of life to acquiesce wholly in the need mankind has for martyrs, and this internal conflict finds its expression

in the juxtaposition here of romantic idealism with a grim and ironic reality. At the same time that O'Casey recognizes the need for Ayamonn's sacrifice and admires the true nobility of his death, he yet deploras the "stupidity o' men"¹⁷ which it seems can only be enlightened, and then just partially, by the example of such a sacrifice. Moreover, viewed in this light, O'Casey's attitude in Red Roses for Me is not so completely antithetical to the pacifist views so strongly expressed in his first three plays, views which had culminated, finally, in the demonic vision of war and the victims of war which we see in The Silver Tassie.

The "stage magic"¹⁸ which Hogan mildly deploras is, on one level, frankly admitted by O'Casey to be illusion ("Something funny musta happened"), but it is an illusion which is necessary to man's survival, for without a strong sense of the possibility of realizing his ideals he would never have the courage to strive towards them. Whenever the romantic idealism of the act is overplayed, as apparently has happened in some productions (and is in danger of happening in all productions), there is a resistance on the part of the audience which is best summed up by the words of one outraged reviewer:

But the second half goes overboard in a wallow of choric invocation by the Liffey and tear-jerking rhetoric on the steps of a church. Every note is false, the syntax dripping with phony grandeur, the sentimentality ugly as a

¹⁷O'Casey, Juno and the Paycock, Collected Plays, Vol. I, p. 86.

¹⁸See above, p. 70.

plaster Madonna.¹⁹

What is needed to prevent this sort of distortion of O'Casey's meaning is an awareness, on the one hand, of the "truth" of the vision and, on the other hand, of the extent to which that truth is validated by the ironic context in which it is placed. The men and women of the Dublin slums are not the only people who oppose the vision, for their opposition is meant to express the audience's opposition as well. At the same time, the awakening of their consciousness is meant by O'Casey to stir a similar awakening on the part of the audience. If this does not occur, if the vision appears false, then it must be because the dramatic irony of the act, the conflict which ultimately gives the vision its reality, has not been realized.

This conflict is maintained, for the audience, even at the moment of transfiguration, by the gentle irony implicit in the realization that the heroic spirit of the past symbolized by the living "statues" will ultimately demand a new sacrifice.²⁰ The colours "slashing" the statues are also symbolic of conflict: the scarlet of life, but of life that must be lost; and the green of life (both of a people and

¹⁹ Bamber Gascoigne, "Meccano Drama," Spectator, CCIX (September 14, 1962), 364. See above, p. 11.

²⁰ Those members of the audience familiar with the bronze statue erected in the General Post Office in Dublin to commemorate the heroes of the Easter Rising may perhaps catch a glimpse here of a resurrected Cuchulain. That such a correspondence may have been in O'Casey's mind is suggested by the several curious parallels and contrasts between Yeats's play The Death of Cuchulain and parts of Red Roses for Me.

of a nation) that will draw new strength from the blood that will be shed. Yet the emphasis of the scene as a whole is away from this dark element of sacrifice and towards a celebration of new power and strength.

As the women rise upward into the light, a sense of jubilation sweeps irresistably over the stage to find its expression in the wild dance of life that grips Finnoola and Ayamonn. Each of the women, like the "Kathleen of the Sorrows,"²¹ has "a sober black shawl hide her body entirely" (p. 150), until, transformed by her vision, the shawl slips away revealing hues of dark or lighter green mingled with silver. The ecstatic dance proclaims a time when the Kathleens of Ireland are no longer "of the Sorrows," and for the moment at least, the proclamation is believed.

The extremely complex way in which O'Casey uses costumes for symbolic effect now becomes even more apparent. In the first half of the play, costumes put on over everyday clothing symbolize a false nobility, a transfiguration which is imposed from without (like the gilding on the statue of Our Lady of Eblana);²² whereas, now, the true transfiguration of the people comes from within, as the shedding of the black shawls to reveal the silver and green (suggestive of a new and better life) makes plain.

Thus, the stage lighting and costuming, the music

²¹Krause, O'Casey: The Man and his Work, p. 168.

²²See above, pp. 47-48.

and dance, in fact, all those elements that make up the expressionism of the third act, can be seen to be a necessary part of the dramatic structure of the play. And to those critics who have said that such a transformation, realized in this way, is a sham, O'Casey might have replied that what his Dubliners see is the ever-present possibility of a world being transfigured from pain and darkness to joy and light. It is the kind of possibility that he, himself, witnessed and recorded in the parallel scene in Pictures in the Hallway, the autobiographical work published in the same year as the play.

In the autobiography Johnny Casside deliberately turns his steps homeward along the banks of the river Liffey so that he can lift up his spirits by the sight of the sun setting over Dublin. He is pushing a broken handcart filled with bundles of cheap magazines that he is delivering for Harmsworth's Agency and brooding over "rotten Dublin; lousy Dublin Poverty and pain and penance. They were its three castles."²³ His mood is bitter and his vision of Dublin a gloomy one because of an incident which has just recently threatened the part-time job he holds at Harmsworth's; his refusal to pay lip-service to the King and his willingness to argue the merits of Republicanism. Reading The Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone marked Johnny, in the eyes of his employers, as a rebellious spirit and one who perhaps quite soon

²³O'Casey, Pictures in the Hallway, Mirror in My House, Vol. I, p. 333.

would find himself without money for "the rent, the liver, and the spuds,"²⁴ much less for books or plays. Similarly, in the play, Ayamonn recognizes the very real connection between economic bondage and spiritual bondage, for he has been threatened with both, and he sees both vividly reflected in the lives of the people before him.

Then, as the sun sets over the River Liffey bathing the city in gold and coloured lights, Johnny's dark mood lifts and he feels "a rippling thrill of emotional ecstasy"²⁵ at the sight of "Dublin in the grip of God."²⁶ His response, like Ayamonn's, is to break into song, and his resolve is "to be strong; to stand out among many; to quit himself like a man."²⁷ Suddenly a dance tune fills the air: it is the music of a hurdy-gurdy, played by a man "robed with the sun as if for a religious festival,"²⁸ and a young woman spontaneously begins to dance, beckoning Johnny to join her:

The young woman caught Johnny's hand in her own, and the two of them whirled round in the bonny madness of a sundance, separating them so that she whirled into a violet shadow, while he danced into a golden pool, dancing there for a little, then changing places, he to be garbed in the hue of a purple shadow, and she to be robed in a golden light.

--Grandchildren of kings! he shouted, in the midst of the dancing; sons and daughters of princes, we are one with the race of Milesius!

--The finest colours God has in His keeping are round us now she panted.

--Th' sword of light is shining!²⁹

²⁴Ibid., p. 329.

²⁶Ibid., p. 335.

²⁸Ibid., p. 339.

²⁵Ibid., p. 336.

²⁷Ibid., p. 337.

²⁹Ibid., italics mine.

The light begins to fade and the dance gradually comes to a halt, as it does in the play, but the sense of jubilation remains. In the autobiography it is Johnny who feels praise of God "for His brightness and the will towards joy in the breasts of men, the swiftness of leg and foot in the heart of a dance, for the gift of song and laughter, for the sense of victory, and the dream that God's right hand held firm."³⁰ But, in the play, variations of these italicized lines are given to Eeada, Finnoola, and to the 1st and 2nd Men.

The final striking correspondence between autobiography and play is the leave-taking in which Ayamonn's words of parting to Finnoola echo those of Johnny to the young woman:

--You're lovely staying still, he said, and brimming over with a wilder beauty in the sprightly dance; may you marry well, and bring up children fair as Emer was, and fine as Oscar's son; and may they be young when Ireland's free, when Spanish ale foams high on every table, and wine from the royal Pope's a common dhrink!³¹

Here, expressed most succinctly in both play and autobiography, is O'Casey's wish for Ireland, a wish that realizes the need for both economic and spiritual freedom if Ireland is ever to be a place, not of fear and darkness, but of joy and light. The fusion of imagery drawn from the Celtic past and the Catholic present suggests the fusion of what is best in both worlds: the beauty, joy and bravery of an ancient, free and pagan Ireland being transformed by the true spiritual

³⁰Ibid., p. 340, italics mine.

³¹Ibid., p. 340.

nourishment which could be derived from the Catholic church if the communion wine became a "common drink."

In the autobiography, as Johnny leaves the scene of his vision of an ideal Ireland, he passes by many churches with floods of people pouring into them, all seeking salvation, all terrified of the fire and brimstone that would be the lot of the eternally damned, all squeezing out their last penny or sixpence to buy the right to admission. Two ironically juxtaposed "visions" flood before Johnny's eyes: the first, a vision of himself "fixed in, and frozen fast in fire eternal,"³² the horror of which evokes a fervent prayer on Johnny's lips that he be delivered from "the bitter pains of eternal death;"³³ the second, a vision glimpsed through the open doorway of the glory and mystery of the crucifixion and the communion, the beauty of which evokes the reverent thought that "a holy city's our city of Dublin . . . more ancient than Athens; more sacred than Rome; as holy as Zion."³⁴ Here, the two opposing visions which the church is capable of evoking parallel those which inform Red Roses for Me.

The similarities and contrasts in attitude and belief between the Johnny of the autobiography and the Ayamonn of Red Roses for Me show the extent to which Red Roses is an autobiographical play, and also the extent to which Pictures in the Hallway is autobiography in the usual sense of the

³²Ibid., p. 341.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., p. 342.

word. Johnny is much nearer to being a realistic depiction of O'Casey's youthful self than is Ayamonn, for Johnny is capable of sustaining himself with an ironic, detached, and quite Joycean vision of the world when the glory of the sunset has vanished and the music of song and dance has died away. In Ayamonn, O'Casey explores the youthful, romantic and idealistic part of himself that might have given his life for a cause in which he truly believed, that might have become engaged in a course of events which would have led him inexorably, but without his being fully aware of it, to his death. Ayamonn is the O'Casey who found himself being lined up against a stone wall for execution by an impromptu firing squad, the O'Casey who died during the Easter Week Rising. But precisely because that particular young man lived some time ago, O'Casey is able to look back upon him, not only sentimentally, as Harold Clurman suggests,³⁵ but also objectively, with an air of ironic detachment. In fact, the irony which plays about the figure of Ayamonn, even during his most glorious moments, is not unlike the irony with which Joyce engages Stephen Dedalus, for Ayamonn is O'Casey's "portrait of the artist as a young man."

Yet the Johnny of the autobiography is capable, not only of ironic detachment, but of strong sentiment, as well, and the sense of renewed faith and determination which the sunset inspires in him is expressed in a song which stresses

³⁵Clurman, "Red Roses for Me," Lies Like Truth, pp. 122-23.

the importance of work well done as a means of praising God. Similarly, in the play what Ayamonn realizes is that man has a creative role to fill in the transfiguration of the world around him: it is not enough to leave it up to the sunset, though the vision the sunset provides is an essential source of inspiration. The dramatic purpose of the "labour" song which springs spontaneously to Ayamonn's lips and which is caught up and sung by the people is to show that Ayamonn has truly inspired the people by opening their eyes to a beauty which they had almost forgotten ever existed. And once they have seen the vision of their city transfigured, they are determined to work and, if necessary, to fight for its realization.

Parts of the song, like all patriotic or nationalistic songs, like the songs of Joe Hill in the labour battles fought in America, are oddly simple and sentimental, particularly the stanzas which the people sing, the last of which is repeated at the end of the act. But simply because it is a song typical of a labour movement, there is a quality of realism about both song and singers which cannot be overlooked. The most joyous and truly visionary stanza of the song is sung by Ayamonn:

Fair city, I tell thee that children's white laughter,
An' all th' red joy of grave youth goin' gay,
Shall make of thy streets a wild harp ever sounding,
Touch'd by th' swift fingers of young ones at play!

(p. 200)

Here, the city of Dublin which Ayamonn addresses springs jubilantly into life at the promise the workers have given

to join together and build in reality the golden city which they have just glimpsed.

During the song and the dance of life which follows, the act rises to a crescendo of joy about which David Krause comments, "It is a moment of visionary glory, not unlike that ecstatic moment in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony when the choral voices finally burst into song It is O'Casey's Ode to Joy in honour of the people of Dublin, his first and only love."³⁶ The visionary joy of the people seems to transcend reality as, in a sense, all visions must, yet held within the choral and orchestral music, which perhaps Krause is right in imagining, the note of reality sounds again and again.

And it is a grim note which intrudes itself once more to the forefront of the stage as Ayamonn leaves and the act ends. The colours fade away as darkness falls, and the women feel dazed as if they had been dreaming. Yet, paradoxically, they are aware that the "dhream" had them feeling more alive, more wide-awake, more "real" than they are now in reality. In fact, now that reality has returned a strong sense of physical weariness sweeps over them again as they go back to the dreary task of peddling their wares, and the sound of marching feet is heard offstage:

1ST MAN (gloomily, but with a note of defiance in his voice). Th' thramp of marchin' soldiers out to prevent our meetin' an' to stop our sthrike.

2ND MAN (in a burst of resolution). We'll have both, in

³⁶Krause, O'Casey: The Man and his Work, p. 171.

spite of them!

(p. 203)

This newly awakened determination of the men to fight for the ideal of a truly liberated Ireland is the final striking testimony to the fact that the ideal is more than illusion: it is backed by living men of flesh and blood. The bronze statues, symbolic of the fighting spirit of Ireland's heroic past, have sprung to life--they are a bit dazed perhaps from their long sleep, but they are ready to answer the challenge to battle. The act ends with a quiet repetition of the last stanza of Ayamonn's song of economic liberation,³⁷ which is counterpointed by the "threatening sound" (p. 203) of soldiers' trampling feet. Together, both the song and its counterpoint, become a dramatic restatement of the central action of the play, holding in a moment of vibrant tension the main conflict which the play embodies:

We swear to release thee from hunger and hardship,
From things that are ugly and common and mean;
Thy people together shall build a great city,
The finest and fairest that ever was seen.

(p. 204)

³⁷Each act ends with a song--first a Fenian song, next a Catholic hymn, then a "labour" song of both economic and spiritual emancipation, and finally "a song all men can sing" (p. 169). What this progression suggests is a gradually awakening consciousness, a consciousness that begins with narrow and fragmented views and ends with a vision that includes everyman.

CHAPTER V

RED ROSES FOR ME

The mysterious disappearance of the statue of Our Lady of Eblana from the structure of the play at the end of Act II is resolved, in Act III, by her miraculous reappearance in a variety of transfigured "images." These images speak of ideals which do not have to be external and lifeless, remote and illusory, but which, as they are awakened within the human heart and within the human consciousness, are capable of being translated into the world around us.

The part the creative imagination fulfills in such an awakening demands, for its spokesman, a visionary person who is also practical, a craftsman who can shape life as a dramatist shapes his play. This kind of role, as Ayamonn discovers, has nothing to do with ivory towers--or with tenement doors fast shut--but has to do with the lives of ordinary people everywhere. In struggling to realize the ideal world of his song, Ayamonn has found himself caught up in the lives of the people around him and in the inevitable conflict which is an inescapable part of the "real" world.

Since the opening curtain this conflict has been moving inexorably towards its conclusion, and in Act IV, the stage is carefully and "realistically" set for what will become a symbolic portrayal of the resolution of this conflict.

The resolution does not occur "offstage,"¹ as Robert Hogan complains, though it is true that we see nothing of the actual clash between the strikers and the forces of Law and Order which oppose them. Instead, we have to rely on such graphic, eye-witness accounts as Eeada's: "You should ha' seen them sthrikin' at men, women, an' childher. An' me own friend, Dympna, in hospital gettin' her face laced with stitches, th' way you'd lace a shoe!" (p. 220). But with Finnoola's dramatic entrance, pale and faint from the injury she has received, the suffering which has been caused is realized on stage plainly enough to prepare for the one death which is the climax of the play. That death is, inevitably, Ayamonn's, though the Inspector, in his attempt to blunt the effect of Ayamonn's loss and so win over Sheila, tries to make himself appear blameless, and the death, an unfortunate accident:

Believe me, I did my best. I thought the charge would send them flying, but they wouldn't budge; wouldn't budge, till the soldiers fired, and he was hit. Believe me, I did my best. I tried to force my horse between them and him.

(p. 225)

At first Sheila believes what the Inspector is saying, but something within her, something which Ayamonn had struggled to teach her, finally rebels against this senseless viewing of his death. To rob the tragic ending of Ayamonn's life of all meaning is the final theft that is about to be perpetrated on the defenceless Dublin poor. To rob them of

¹Robert Hogan, Experiments, p. 95.

their "saviour" is the final villainous act that the Inspector, as representative of the militant arm of both Church and State, may very well commit. That, and the stealing away of the love which Sheila feels for the memory of Ayamonn.

The usually cold and precise language of the Inspector becomes oddly sentimental and poetic as he attempts at once to win her love before the very eyes of the men and women who had followed Ayamonn into battle. O'Casey's stage directions make clear that, though they are pretending not to notice, the focus of their attention is the interaction between the Inspector and Sheila. Ironically, as the Inspector tries to shape Sheila's viewing of what has occurred in a way which would enable her to forget Ayamonn, all that happens instead is that she is reminded of Ayamonn's vision of her as the black-shawled Kathleen of the red roses. And, in the bitter context of the lover's quarrel which divided them, she recalls Ayamonn's final challenge, "He said that roses red were never meant for me" (p. 226).

Earlier, however, the crimson roses which Sheila carries to place on Ayamonn's bier are an unspoken acknowledgement of her wish to play that role which she had previously rejected. At the same time, her sorrowing words, "Ayamonn, Ayamonn, my own poor Ayamonn!" (p. 224), are an implicit recognition of the sacrifice which has been made in order for that vision of the ideal to become a reality. Here, Sheila's threefold repetition of the name "Ayamonn" is itself the eloquent cry of a humanity whose nature is inextricably linked to suffering, but whose godhead is also undeniably affirmed

in "th' echo of [its] own shout" (p. 179).²

Sheila's violent renunciation of the Inspector--"Oh, you dusky-minded killer of more worthy men!" (p. 226)--is, at once, an emphatic rejection of the unconsciously dark and savage viewing of the world which characterizes the Inspector and a clear affirmation of her belief in the truth of Ayamonn's vision. As Sheila so loyally resists the temptation to forget Ayamonn and accept the Inspector, his true role as a kind of diabolic artisan is revealed. He defines this role and condemns himself by his own angry words as he lashes out at the poor people he so obviously despises:

What are ye doing here? Get home! Home with you, you lean rats, to your holes and haunts! D'ye think th' like o' you alone are decked with th' dark honour of trouble?

(p. 226)

The imagery makes plain that the Inspector's way of looking at the world divests it of all humanity and, ultimately, of all divinity.

²Cf. O'Casey, The Drums of Father Ned (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960), where God is spoken of as "a shout in the street" (p. 92). When asked by those in authority "what kind of a shout God could be," Michael replies, "It might be a shout for freedom, like th' shout of men on Bunker Hill; shout of th' people for bread in th' streets, as in th' French Revolution; or for th' world's ownership by th' people, as in th' Soviet Revolution; or it might just be a drunken man, unsteadily meandering his way home, shouting out Verdi's . . . 'Oh, Le-on-or-a'" (p. 92). O'Casey's debt to Joyce is obvious, and in The Drums of Father Ned, at any rate, O'Casey probably intends the literary allusion to be recognized. Cf. James Joyce, Ulysses (New York: The Modern Library, 1934), p. 35.

Throughout the play O'Casey has been careful to do more than caricature the Inspector as the "villain" of the piece, for to merely caricature him would allow us to underestimate the very real power such a person is able to wield. Unlike Foster and Dowzard, the Inspector manages to appear quite human at times. Thus, earlier, he had been able to manipulate the Rector and Sheila, and, through them, had very nearly been able to manipulate Ayamonn. At this point in the play, however, the Inspector's harsh dismissal of the Dublin poor recalls his generally unsympathetic attitude both to the poor and to Ayamonn: in Act III he tells the Rector, as he indicates the Dublin poor, "There you are, and as I've said so often, Breydon's but a neat slab of a similar slime" (p. 191). The Rector had rejected this false viewing of Ayamonn then, much as Sheila does here, but in words which recall specifically the religious symbolism of the play: "Ayamonn Breydon has within him the Kingdom of Heaven" (p. 191).

If Inspector Finglas's really satanic role of the guileful tempter--first of Ayamonn, then of Sheila--is misinterpreted, and if his sometimes apparently sympathetic words are taken to be kindly and well-intentioned advice (as he, himself, thinks they are), then the final act loses much of its strength.³ The dramatic relevance of Sheila's vacillating behaviour, for example, also becomes unclear--

³See above, p. 5, where the reviewer complains, "the fourth act falls short."

Jules Koslow thinks of her quite wrongly as "small and mean against the grandeur of Ayamonn's ideals and sacrifice"⁴-- and the significance of her decision to look at Ayamonn's death, not as the Inspector would have her view it, but as Ayamonn himself would see it, is lost. In fact, the two diametrically opposed ways of seeing the world are summed up in the conflicting views of the Inspector and Sheila:

INSPECTOR (from where he is near the tree). It wasn't a very noble thing to die for a single shilling.

SHEILA. Maybe he saw the shilling in th' shape of a new world.

(p. 225).

The symbolic role of the Inspector, then, must be recognized since, without a sense of the "worth" of the antagonist, the dynamic nature of Ayamonn's struggle--which continues even after his death--is diminished. The very ambiguity surrounding the character of the Inspector is a part of that darkness which is Ayamonn's grand adversary. Thus we suspect the Inspector's presence even in the ambiguity that shrouds the circumstances of Ayamonn's death. We do not know whether a soldier was ordered to aim deliberately at Ayamonn, or whether a random volley of shots was fired, one of which, by chance, struck Ayamonn down. The latter view is, of course, the one the Inspector would have us believe in as, blindly, he plays the role of devil's advocate. A cosmos ruled by chance, an accidental cosmos,

⁴Jules Koslow, The Green and the Red (New York: Golden Griffin Books, 1950), p. 98.

is one in which chaos is come again, but even chaos is preferable to another martyrdom which cannot be countenanced by the Authorities. Eeada's despair as she cries out against "that mad, fool Breydon" (p. 220) proclaims a loss of faith in everything that Ayamonn had stood for. But, at the same time, the shouted name--"Breydon"--echoes strangely to the ear until, faintly and far-off, comes the sound of a foolish braying. And is it really just by chance that we imagine, in the echo of an answering shout, the voice of that little donkey which, once upon a time, long ago, carried someone . . . somewhere . . . in triumph?

O'Casey does not force the imagination, but, like Joyce, teases it into play. Ayamonn's death occurs off-stage, not merely because it is difficult to bring real horses and real bullets and "real" death on to the stage, but because O'Casey does not wish to block the imagination with concrete facts which, in the final analysis, may prove irrelevant anyway. The kind of truth which O'Casey wishes to portray cannot be circumscribed by fact, though it can be illuminated, at least partially, by the imagination. Therefore O'Casey gives us a symbolic and imaginative portrayal of Ayamonn's death, a portrayal which allows us to see clearly the relevance of what has happened.

The stage setting, as in the first half of the play, is realistic, though everywhere there are signs of that imaginative shaping of reality which imbues the scene with symbolic overtones. As a young man, O'Casey attended the

Protestant Church of St. Barnapas, but here, as Maureen Malone points out, the name is "ironically adapted to St. Burnopus in reference to the Christian doctrine of damnation."⁵ The autobiographical elements speak of the "real" world, yet it is a world shaped both by irony and by the sense of tragedy evoked by the symbolic Easter setting. The colours of Easter are reflected, not only in the flowers, but in the "yellow robe of St. Peter and the purple robe of St. Paul" (p. 222), saints whose martyrdoms are recalled in the stained glass window of the church.⁶ The colours of the transformation scene in Act III are picked up here in the green grounds of the churchyard with their "green and golden hedge," the white flowers of the rowan tree, "the gay yellow of the laburnum and the royal purple of the lilacs," all of which provide a bright and colourful contrast to the darkness of the "poor and smoky district" (p. 205) in the background.

As the scene opens, the hymn which the Rector is singing associates the miracle of the Resurrection with the no less miraculous bravery of every man who defies death in order to oppose a foolish and dishonest authority:

As Thou didst rise from Thy grim grave,
So may we rise and stand to brave
Th' power bestow'd on fool or knave;
We beseech Thee!

(pp. 205-206)

⁵Malone, The Plays, p. 103.

⁶This window, if O'Casey's stage directions are followed, will replace the window of Acts I and II at which the cross formed by the top of the railway signal is clearly visible.

The relevance of these words to the action of the play is underlined by the Rector's comment, "we must have that as our opening hymn" (p. 206), as well as by the farcical scene which follows. The Verger, who is as long-winded as Polonius, describes the actions of Dowzard and Foster, two members of the Select Vestry of the church who soon prove themselves both fools and knaves when they attempt to act with authority. They object to the cross of daffodils made by Ayamonn since their single-vision sees it only as a "Popish Emblem" (p. 208). Opposing this rabid view, however, is the Rector's imaginative and enlightened one, a reflection of Ayamonn's own understanding:

The daffodils? But they simply signify the new life that Spring gives; and we connect them in a symbolic way, quite innocently, with our Blessed Lord's Rising, and a beautiful symbol they are; daffodils that come before the swallow dares, and take the winds of March with beauty. Shakespeare, Sam.

(p. 208)

Obviously, the charge of "Popery" brought against the Rector is unjustified, but what it indicates is that the divisiveness which exists between men on religious grounds is actually symptomatic of a much more basic split between the dark and destructive side of human nature represented by the two "Select Vestrymen" and that more enlightened and creative side of man's nature which the Rector embodies.

Through this farcical charge of Popery, then, O'Casey reveals the "sham" which is the parody of the ideal Christian-Catholic community, a community where the true spirit of brotherhood and communion among all men would prevail. And, as Mrs. Breydon points out in the following scene, "shams are

powerful things, mustherin' at their broad backs guns that shoot, big jails that hide their foes, and high gallows to choke th' young cryin' out against them when th' stones are silent" (pp. 209-10). Thus, as Mrs. Breydon and Sheila plead with the Rector to stop Ayamonn, they express a realistic appraisal of the danger which faces him, and the fear they have for his safety. Yet Mrs. Breydon is able, finally, to overcome her fear and to send Ayamonn off with her blessing. What has enabled her to act so courageously is the righteous anger which the Inspector arouses in her as he reveals himself to be a part of that sham world which Ayamonn hates:

Look at th' round world, man, an' all its wondhers, God made, flaming in it, an' what are you among them, standing here, or on a charging horse, but just a braided an' a tasselled dot!

(p. 212)

Mrs. Breydon's words recall the transfigured world of Act III, a world in which she is, instinctively, a participant, and by comparison with which the apparent splendour suggested by the Inspector's colourful uniform pales to insignificance.

That the Inspector's threats exceed the rightful extent of his authority has been suggested by his angry words: "Remember, all! When swords are drawn and horses charge, the kindly Law, so fat with hesitation, swoons away, and sees not, hears not, cares not what may happen" (p. 212). It is this basically foolish and unjust use of power--to a large extent countenanced by the Church and representing, therefore, the combined might of both Church and State--

which will be thrown against Ayamonn and the poor men and women who claim him as their spokesman.⁷

The tableau scene which follows, where the men and women in chorus claim Ayamonn as their own against all those forces which would hold him back, is a return to the expressionism of the play. Again, the stage directions make clear O'Casey's meaning:

The men and women spread along the path outside, and stay still watching those in the grounds from over the hedge. They hold themselves erect, now; their faces are still pale, but are set with seams of resolution. Each is wearing in the bosom a golden-rayed sun.

(p. 210)

The symbolic sun is intended to recall the transfiguration scene of Act III and to suggest that the strength needed to effect that transfiguration resides in the breasts of the men and women before us. Again we are reminded that these are the living "statues" whose very stillness and pallor link them--not without irony--to that eternal and ideal world

⁷Cf. Sean O'Casey, Drums Under the Windows, Mirror in My House, Vol. I, pp. 290-304, where Sean's account of the violence in O'Connell Street is followed by an imaginary scene on top of Nelson's Pillar in which Bishop Eblananus and St. Patrick (representing the viewpoint of the Church) and Admiral Nelson (representing the viewpoint of the State) carry on a fantastic dialogue. Though St. Patrick thinks the disturbance is disgraceful and takes his Bishop to task for not keeping his flock in better order, the dialogue ends with St. Patrick lashing out at Nelson for the way in which the police have acted: "'Control yourself!' shouted Patrick up at him. 'If you could, you wouldn't send your murderous polis out to maim an' desthroy poor men lookin' for no more than a decent livin'. Gah! If me crozier could only reach up to you, I'd knock your other eye out!'" This passage also confirms O'Casey's use of the Nelson Pillar as a symbol of the oppressive might of the State. See above, p. 72.

where all corporal struggle is transcended, yet who, in a short while, must struggle courageously against those who would make death the only passport into that promised land.

For the moment the conflict is a mental one: the will of the poor Dubliners pitted against the will of the Inspector. The poor are determined to realize in their own lives something of the beauty and glory of the world which has just been revealed to them. But the Inspector is equally determined to harness them with the bonds of fear and drive them back to their gloomy "holes and haunts"--a habitation which is, not only a literal reality, but also a metaphor for the dark and gloomy state from which Ayamonn had awakened them. Ayamonn has rejected the Inspector's view of the materialistic nature of their demands--a view foolishly echoed by Brennan's "money's the root of all evil" (p. 211)--in words which link the struggle for a shilling to the real struggle for spiritual enlightenment embodied in the emblem of the golden-rayed sun as a religious symbol:

A shilling's little to you, and less to many; to us it is our Shechinah,^[8] showing us God's light is near; showing the way in which our feet must go; a sun-ray on our face; the first step taken in the march of a thousand miles.

(p. 211)

As Ayamonn leaves with the men and women there is a

⁸"Shechinah" is a Hebrew word used to express the visible symbol of God's glory. "In Jewish art the Shekinah is represented by rays of light coming down from heaven." E. Royston Pike, Encyclopaedia of Religion and Religions (5th ed.; Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1964), p. 349.

strong sense of his having answered the call of a suffering and oppressed humanity, of his having allowed himself to become an instrument of a will higher than his own. As in Act III at the beginning of the transformation scene, there is a sense of Ayamonn's elevation to an almost god-like role, though, at the same time, the curious effect of this juxtaposition of realism and expressionism is to mingle the serious with the absurd. It is by this means that O'Casey confronts our inability to suspend disbelief and attempts, as it were, to defuse it completely. The expressionism here is as far from the realistic technique as it was in the Dunn-Bo scene, and the effect, which O'Casey aims at quite consciously, is to heighten our awareness of the universal, morality-type figures who masquerade beneath the modern dress of apparently realistic characters in a drama which is already a modern miracle play and which is about to become--whether we like it or not--a modern Passion Play.

The structure of action in Act IV follows the pattern of Acts I and II, where, against the broad perspective afforded us by Ayamonn's humanity, clash the splintered and fragmented opinions of those whose divided humanity would not together make up a "whole man."⁹ Here, the cross of daffodils--the living cross which is a symbol, not only of the crucifixion, but also of the resurrection--is a constant reminder of Ayamonn's role and the struggle in which he is engaged. The focus of much

⁹O'Casey, The Plough and the Stars, p. 177. Fluther Good is the "whole man."

of the conflict which occurs on stage is this cross which Ayamonn has made, but which, as it turns out, even the Verger and Brennan can see only as a symbol of "Popery, be God" (p. 214).

The other conflicts which occur arise, similarly, out of this same failure of insight which continually prevents man from realizing and maintaining his own essential humanity and the humanity of those around him. The battle between the strikers and the two "Select Vestrymen"--who are also "scabs"--results, like the earlier eruption of violence in Act II, in three arrant cowards desperately seeking shelter from a stone-throwing mob. (The parallelism here points to a use of character which is expressionistic, and explains why Roory and Mulcanny do not appear in Act IV--their remaining dramatic and symbolic function has been taken over by Foster and Dowzard.) In both acts, the violence itself occurs offstage, though in the earliest published version of the play the initial skirmish with the strikers was vividly portrayed.¹⁰ Here, however, the scene has been shortened so that the focus is not on the struggle itself, but on the kind of bigoted attitudes and opinions which lead to the battle that follows.

Among the participants in this battle are the poor men and women from the previous scenes: Eeada, Finnoola, Dympra,

¹⁰Cf. Sean O'Casey, Red Roses for Me (London: Macmillan, 1942), pp. 132-37. In general, O'Casey's rewriting of Act IV gets rid of a lot of extraneous detail that adds nothing to the play.

the Railwaymen, and the Lurchers. Though the red flag which their leader carries is usually interpreted as the flag of Communism, the song which is sung draws its inspiration more from a sense that the strikers are the instruments of a kind of Old Testament vengeance: "Th' scab's curs'd be the workers, book, candle an' bell!" (p. 215). Similarly, Foster and Dowzard, in the comic interchange which follows, see the initial skirmish which has occurred as part of a bigger battle which marks the dawn of another St. Bartholomew's Day. In other words, the spiritual basis of the apparent economic struggle is implicitly recognized, though it is ironically misinterpreted, as it has always been, as the same centuries-old struggle of "Loyola boyos" versus "King Bully" (p. 218). The fact that the Rector and Ayamonn support the Catholic strikers is taken, not as evidence that religious differences can be overcome in order that the battle for economic and spiritual emancipation may be fought, but merely as evidence of their "Popish" sympathies. The scenes are comic, but what they point to is tragic: man's inability to see who the real enemy is in a land so long divided--as it still is today--by religious and political conflict.

The trampling of the cross of daffodils (which has a "Keltic" shape to suggest its link, not with Rome, but with Ireland) is, of course, the symbolic death of Ayamonn. O'Casey rewrote this scene to introduce offstage sound effects--"a bugle call sounding the charge," "the sound of galloping horses, followed by several volleys of rifle-fire" (p. 219)--all carefully timed to suggest that Ayamonn's death

by a soldier's bullet has coincided with Foster's and Dowzard's gleeful destruction of the beautiful cross of daffodils that Ayamonn had made.¹⁰ The near hysteria of the two Select Vestrymen is absurdly comic, but the irony is intense when one realizes that they are, like the Dutch merchants described by Swift, trampling on the crucifix--a symbol which should be sacred to any Christian, Catholic and Protestant alike.

Thus, Ayamonn's life, led among the poor and among "thieves," and his working of "miracles" has suggested a parallel with Christ's life which is confirmed here by the symbolic setting of a sacrificial death. And, even as Christ was crucified among thieves, so does Ayamonn's sacrifice occur in just such an ironic context. Those, like Eeada, who have had their faith stolen away by fear, are ready to deny "that mad, fool Breydon," and the Inspector, as we have seen, is all too anxious to rob Ayamonn's death of any meaning. But Finnoola, the young woman who danced with Ayamonn at the bridge of vision, retains her belief long enough to record faithfully Ayamonn's last words:

He said this day's but a day's work done, an' it'll be begun again tomorrow. You're to keep an eye on th' oul' woman. He wants to lie in th' church tonight, sir.

(p. 221)

Ayamonn has no illusions about what he has

¹⁰Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 139-41.

accomplished, but neither does he despair. His wish to lie in the church is an honest expression of what he feels his own life, and death, to have meant. He is, as the Rector has pointed out, "a member of Christ" (p. 218), and, with the entry of his lifeless body, "a core o' darkness" (p. 225), into the dim church, there is a sense, finally, of the Church having entered once more into a meaningful role in the lives of the people. The Rector has maintained this role in defiance of all those who would deny Ayamonn's service both to the Church and to his fellowman. No longer is the Church a far-off silver spire as it was in Act III, no longer is its presence symbolized by a plaster Madonna unable to inspire and cheer those who look to it for comfort. Instead, life has flowed into the Church and around it; it has sheltered both Catholics and Protestants who have come to it in fear; and, finally, its spirit has been renewed by the act of faith to which Ayamonn's death now bears mute testimony.

That Ayamonn's death, like the death of every saint or martyr, has given new life to the Church is represented symbolically by the lights which are left on in the Church-- a light which has finally prevailed over darkness. And the song Brennan sings is Ayamonn's song which tells so movingly of all that has occurred. It is Ayamonn's voice singing from beyond the grave, the voice of the warrior-minstrel Dunn-Bo, the promise of yet another death and resurrection fulfilled.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAMPLIGHTER

Red Roses for Me is a visionary play, not only in the sense in which all great art is "visionary," but also in a special sense. Within the play itself, there are certain characters who experience a brief moment of ecstatic joy as they realize in their own lives the breathtaking loveliness of a world which is capable of being transformed from ugliness and squalor to incredible beauty and nobility. The experience of a beautiful sunset is one which most of us have shared. The heightened awareness which comes, however, when we are participants in a drama of the grandeur and magnitude of the transformation scene, is an awareness which can only be described by the word "religious."

To prevent this kind of experience from becoming mawkish and sentimental, from degenerating into

a piece of near-expressionist symbolism, with a chorus of paupers crouched by a bridge bewailing their ills and Ayamonn coming to bring them a message of hope in a patch of supernatural light descending from the sky like a benediction,¹

the third act demands an especially convincing presentation on stage. But O'Casey is careful to provide a context which

¹John Russell Taylor, "Red Roses for Me (Mermaid)," Plays and Players, X (November, 1962), 66-67.

makes such an experience possible, and that context--the only one possible for our age--is an ironic one. Bamber Gascoigne was right: heroics are out of fashion at the moment,² and so, for that matter, are religion and romance and rhetoric--the real trick is to make them "fashionable" again. And any production which takes the play too "seriously," which tries to see Ayamonn's story, in the way Brooks Atkinson does, as "in large part . . . O'Casey's own story in terms of romantic tragedy,"³ is not very likely to succeed. The evidence of the autobiography suggests that O'Casey would never have viewed his own life for very long in such inflated terms, nor does he view Ayamonn's life solely from the viewpoint of romantic tragedy.

Indeed, part of what makes the play so exciting is the deliberate juxtaposition, not only of comedy and tragedy, but also of irony and romance. Polonius' catalogue of the different kinds of drama includes what would, in fact, be a good description of Red Roses for Me: "tragical-comical-historical-pastoral," and the long-winded old man would likely have added "ironical-romantical," as well. Such a variety of juxtapositions in mood and manner is, more than anything else, O'Casey's hallmark as a dramatist.

A great deal of the excitement in Red Roses comes also from O'Casey's use of language, a use which creates

²See above, p. 10.

³Brooks Atkinson (ed.), The Sean O'Casey Reader (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), p. xvi.

imaginative patterns where we see man both juxtaposed against, and linked with, his universe. A passage which is often taken to disparage the play, and O'Casey as dramatist, is actually the best example of the kind of "metaphysical"--rather than simply rhetorical--structures that O'Casey quite consciously builds. Ayamonn is addressing his mother (after she has saved Mulcanny from the rioters) as if she were (and is she not?) a person of great nobility, "Go an' lie down, lady; you're worn out. Time's a perjured jade, an' ever he moans a man must die" (p. 179). The mistake in gender is too obvious to be anything but deliberate on O'Casey's part, yet what it shows are the very human limitations of the "romantic hero" at the exact moment when he is, all unknowingly, declaiming his own tragic destiny. That the destiny even of an ordinary man can rise above the absurdity of circumstance and be a noble and heroic one is made plain by the simple eloquence with which Ayamonn then goes on to tell of every man's aspirations:

Who through every inch of life weaves a pattrn of vigour an' elation can never taste death, but goes to sleep among th' stars, his withered arms outstretched to greet th' echo of his own shout. It will be for them left behind to sigh for an hour, an' then to sing their own odd songs, an' do their own odd dances, to give a lonely God a little company, till they, too, pass by on their bare way out. When a true man dies, he is buried in th' birth of a thousand worlds.

(p. 179)

Here, juxtaposed in the very same passage with the absurd rhetoric of "Time's a perjured jade," O'Casey's imagery speaks movingly and eloquently of crucifixion and resurrection;

of despair transfigured to joy; of death, to victory--and of those who remain.

The method by which O'Casey's creative imagination works is suggested by a passage from the last volume of the autobiography, Sunset and Evening Star. In this passage O'Casey recalls the elder tree which grew in a corner of his garden in Totnes, Devonshire, the locale in which he wrote Red Roses for Me. His imagination plays with the fact that the Latin name for the tree which gave the wood to make a cross for Christ is

Genus Sambucus, meaning, we are told, a musical instrument. How odd! Wood that can make a musical instrument can make a cross, too. Fifeing was going on round the cross today, with prelates conducting--one two three, one two three; one two three four. Happy thing that the tree was so widespread, for much wood had been needed for the martyrdom of man. Every exploitation by one man, or by a bunch of men, of other men was a crucifixion. It was still being done; to the sound of fife and drum when good dividends were declared. A man exploiting himself for the good, for the charm, for the safety of others was a noble thing; a man exploiting man for the grin of gain, was an evil thing. But the people are ending the evil. . . . In the uprising of the peoples, the Spirit of God is once more moving over the face of the waters.⁴

The thought here has obvious affinities with the informing imagery of Red Roses for Me. Moreover, the kind of ironic context which is provided by the idea of musical instruments being used as instruments of oppression is also found in the earliest published version of the play. In a passage which he cut from the final version of Act IV, O'Casey has two of the strikers appear on stage after an initial

⁴Sean O'Casey, Sunset and Evening Star, Mirror in My House, Vol. II (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 134.

skirmish with the mounted police. One has a huge brass tuba hammered down over his head, while the other is wedged tightly into a drum. And the scene which occurs between these two "crucified" members of humanity and the Rector, who is trying to extricate them, is a scene which comes close to belonging in the Theatre of the Absurd.

O'Casey's imagination at its most extravagant places him, as John Gassner rightly discerns, in the mainstream of dramatic tradition. Gassner sees O'Casey as

a baroque dramatic poet in a largely trivial and constricted theatre given over to neat construction and small-beer feeling. He is as baroque, as lavish and prodigal, as were Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, and John Webster. He belongs to the spacious days of the theatre. And since he will not make himself smaller for anything as inconsequential to him as material success, the theatre will simply have to be made larger if O'Casey is to have his rightful place."⁵

In the meantime, although the theatre has been made large enough to accommodate Beckett and other dramatists of the Absurd, O'Casey has still not been given the place which should rightfully be his. Thus the public is too often denied an entertainer who plays joyously with words and images, with symbols and techniques, who makes them perform tricks as dazzling as any circus master: "Hello, what kind of a circus is it's goin' on here?" (p. 149). "Is this a home-sweet-away-from-home hippodhrome, or what?" (p. 151). Actually what is "goin' on here" is the song "Red Roses for Me," and it is the play, and the roses are not just "Communist"

⁵John Gassner, "The Prodigality of Sean O'Casey," Sean O'Casey, ed. Ronald Ayling, p. 115.

O'Casey's red roses, nor are they just Ayamonn's roses, or Sheila's, but, as the title makes plain, they are roses for each of us who will carry them, or give them, or take them. And as for what we are to make of the roses, O'Casey tips us off about that as well:

BRENNAN: I used the term only as an allegory, man.

ROORY: Allegory man, or allegory woman, there's goin' to be no royal intrusions where the Sword o' Light is shinin'.

AYAMONN: Aw, for Christ's sake, Roory, let's hear the song!

(p. 150)

Perhaps O'Casey demands more of "the willing suspension of disbelief" than do some other playwrights, but there is no other playwright who provides such wings of laughter to help his audience along.

The two roles in which David Krause sees O'Casey-- the playwright as entertainer and the playwright as prophet-- fuse completely in Red Roses for Me. But the role of prophet could never be filled by O'Casey in other than a mock-serious guise. Thus, in Red Roses, the symbolic role in which we see O'Casey is that of lamplighter. The curtain which, in Act IV, has fallen to mark the end of Ayamonn's performance on the stage of life, rises on a scene which is almost dark until it is illuminated by the "little flower of light" (p. 222) that the lamplighter carries. He is a simple figure, full of curiosity about what has happened and full of a simple wonder at the events which have taken place: "Looka that, now! An' they're all accouthered in their best to

welcome him home, wha'? Aw, well, th' world's got to keep movin', so I must be off; so long!" (p. 223). The curiosity about life, the wonder of it, and, at last, the simple, homespun philosophy are part and parcel of a man who is, as an artist and a dramatic craftsman, able to illuminate scene after scene in play after play until, miraculously, in the process, he illuminates both the heart and the mind of man.

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