

THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
ABDERRAHMANE MIRA UNIVERSITY, BEJAIA
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



The Representation of War in
The Plough and the Stars, Heartbreak House,
and Serjeant Musgrave's Dance

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Magister in English Literature and Civilization

Supervisor:

Prof. Si Abderrahmane ARAB

Candidate:

Mr. Farid KACI

Panel of Examiners:

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| - Chair: Dr. Hocine MAOUI | University of Annaba |
| - Rapporteur: Professor Si Abderrahmane ARAB | University of Boumerdes |
| - Examiner: Dr. M. Yazid BENDJEDDOU | University of Annaba |

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ABSTRACT

The present dissertation examines the theme of war and its varying stage representations in Sean O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), George Bernard Shaw’s *Heartbreak House* (1919), and John Arden’s *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* (1959). The plays are – in this order – dramatisations of the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland, the First World War as experienced in Great Britain, and the aftermath of colonial wars from the perspective of the 1950s Britain.

O’Casey, Shaw, and Arden lived throughout periods of war and violent upheavals, and have vehement opinions about Britain’s militarist and imperialist practices. Through their pacifist plays, they rendered on stage the savagery of war as it affected both soldiers and civilians. Thus, the theatre becomes the dramatists’ medium in the task of raising social and political consciousness, and advocating social change.

Focusing on the contextual and the textual study of the above-mentioned plays, my research attempts to analyse the ways in which the plays’ thematic concerns have been effectively expressed by the playwrights through stylistic and dramatic devices. The aim is to show that each playwright uses the dramatic conventions of his time while incorporating innovative theatrical devices. O’Casey resorts to the Realistic / Naturalistic mode, and even the Expressionistic one in *The Plough and the Stars*. Shaw borrows his rhetoric from Ibsen and launches the “drama of ideas”, while Arden breaks away from Naturalism fairly decisively in *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* and moves towards a new, Brechtian mode, known as “Epic Theatre”.

This dissertation consists of four chapters: the first chapter provides the socio-political events from which the playwrights draw their subject-matter, as well as the theatrical background to the playwrights’ works. The second chapter deals with the thematic and the technical examination of O’Casey’s play. The focus will be on the Easter Week 1916 and its cruel aftermath, together with the props that O’Casey uses to stage the Easter Rising action. The third chapter examines the tremors and traumas raised by the First World War. The focus is first on Shaw’s representing of the initial tremors, then on O’Casey’s Expressionistic special effects in *The Silver Tassie’s* staging of the traumatic consequences of WWI. The last chapter is about the aftermath of colonial wars. It is an attempt to explore Arden’s anti-war profession of faith, the immorality of imperialism, capitalism, and colonial practices. Particular attention will be paid to Arden’s Brechtian devices. Finally, the conclusion examines the extent to which O’Casey, Shaw, and Arden succeed in treating the theme of war in their plays, while highlighting the mutual interdependence of content and form. This sheds more light on the playwrights’ ability to combine message with medium and strike a balance between entertainment and didacticism.

Declaration

I hereby declare that all the ideas contained and developed throughout this dissertation are mine. All the sources and references to the work of other researchers are faithfully acknowledged and are provided at the end of each chapter of the present work.

June, 2011

Farid KACI

Dedication

I dedicate this modest work to:

The memory of my mother, (God bless her soul),

My dear father,

My brothers and sisters,

All my friends.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to my supervisor Professor Si Abderrahmane ARAB without whom this work would never have got underway.

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INTRODUCTION

War has been the theme and background of countless works of literature and the object of countless history books. Men have always fought wars and seem to be fascinated by them. The causes of the conflicts may be diverse, but the outcomes are generally, if not always, horrific. Wilfred Owen (1893-1918), an English poet-soldier who joined the First World War and died in 1918, stated that his subject was “War, and the pity of war.”¹ War may be, and indeed is, pitiful: it kills, maims, and cripples those who take part in it and even those who look at it from the sidelines.

In modern times, say, from the dawn of the twentieth up to the twenty-first century, the world has witnessed increasing hostilities within and between nations; hostilities that have led to worthless, senseless and sometimes meaningless conflicts. Civil wars fought in Ireland, Russia, Spain, — to name only a few —, colonial wars in Cyprus, Algeria, Kenya, Vietnam, religious wars in Bosnia, Yugoslavia — as in the Thirty Years’ War² — during which towns and cities were casually turned into battlefields, atrocities committed in the name of religion, and ordinary people suddenly made soldiers through the mere accident of residence. Yet, two armed conflicts between inter-capitalist nations could be considered the bloodiest and the most destructive the world has ever seen: the First and the Second World Wars.

The First World War — also the ‘Great War’ as it was romantically called, or again ‘the war to end all wars’ — “inaugurated the manufacture of mass death that the Second [World War] brought to a pitiless consummation.”³ The use of machine guns, lethal bombs, and rapid-firing artillery caused millions to die in an unprecedented spectacle of horror and bloodshed. People suddenly realised that scientific advancement and the course of progress had also led to brutal and senseless slaughter.

This war, which Britain joined for imperialist / capitalist interests, came as a ‘relief’ after a period of long tensions and diplomatic stalemate. A wave of national pride and optimism suddenly overrode all the divisions of political and social life. People did not realise that under the glorious patriotic surface lay a much more sinister, horrific side of war. The soldiers had to endure the harsh weather conditions and live in man-made trenches which were plagued with various diseases. Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, and many others, were among the poets who wrote about the realities of war, not the glamorous façade. In the preface to his book *Poems*, Owen stated that “All the poet can do to-day is to warn; that is why the true poets must be truthful.”⁴ These poet-soldiers knew the real conditions of the front-line, and described with shocking images the senseless bloodletting and maiming.

Men still at home were faced with various propaganda means which persuaded them to join the army. It was taken for granted that every able-bodied man should join and those who did not were cowards. Besides, masses of the poorer — like many Irishmen — enlisted too because they knew that they would get a smart uniform and a regular salary.

In addition to the Great War, numerous bloody conflicts – though on a narrower scale – were witnessed in the first half of the last century. In Easter Week 1916, Irish nationalist rebels launched an insurrection to free Ireland from British rule. Likewise, in the late 1950s the Greek Cypriots succeeded in regaining control of much of the island of Cyprus from colonial Britain. Though the Irish Rising was unsuccessful, it led to the War of Independence between British forces and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during the years 1919 and 1921, which in turn resulted in the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 and the establishment of the Irish Free State. The Anglo-Irish war, as all wars indeed, engendered

too many casualties on both sides of the conflict, though the Irish were those who suffered most for the least they gained.

If the theme of modern war, as already highlighted, has been the subject-matter of numerous poems, particularly those written by participant soldiers who stressed ‘the pity of war’, what about the theatre? Is it possible to bring those cataclysmic events and paroxysmal conflicts onto the English⁵ stage? If it is so, how? In other words, what specificities of the dramatic genre were made use of in order to convey ‘the pity of war’ to an *audience* – not to a solitary *reader*?

The present dissertation will, therefore, focus on the theme of war and its varying representations in some plays belonging to twentieth-century drama. The corpus chosen for this study consists of Sean O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) and *The Silver Tassie*⁶ (1928), George Bernard Shaw’s *Heartbreak House* (1919), together with John Arden’s *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* (1959).

Through the contextual and the textual study of the plays, my research attempts to examine the interaction of “content” and “form”. In other words, my endeavour is to analyse how the plays’ thematic concerns have been effectively expressed or rather represented through stylistic and dramatic devices.

The choice of these three playwrights (O’Casey, Shaw, and Arden) for the discussion of this issue is pertinent because all of them lived throughout periods of war, and forcefully voiced opinions about Britain’s militarist and imperialist practices. Besides, whatever cultural or ideological background they may belong to, these playwrights look at war as an ugly enterprise which runs contrary to all human values. They attempt to raise the audience’s awareness of the huge economic, social, political as well as moral

repercussions of war, turning —in the process— the stage into a serious medium for representing social reality, and advocating social change.

The importance of this research work lies in that it deals with a burning issue: the current wars which are being waged in the Middle East or in Africa bear witness of it. Moreover, several Arab nations are being ‘shaken’ by an unprecedented movement of public discontent —and even violent uprisings— through which the protesters demand the overthrow of their dictatorial regimes, and the setting up of more democratic rules.

Though the thematic in the selected plays is quite clear, the emphases change according to each playwright’s preoccupations, as well as to the perspective from which each playwright probes his subject.

In *The Plough and the Stars*, O’Casey portrays the events of the 1916 Easter Rising as experienced by a group of Dublin slum-dwellers. The tragic consequences of the Rising, as depicted throughout the play, indicate that this was a wrong war for the tenement dwellers. In his re-creation of the Rising, O’Casey leveled his criticism at the Nationalist leaders who resorted to such an ill-fated and fruitless rebellion instead of defending the Labourites’ cause — in true Communist fashion.

Ben Barnes, who directed *The Plough and the Stars* at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin in 2002, when asked about its relevance for today, said: “this is an antiwar play, and the world is obsessed about whether or not there will be a war in Iraq and the consequences for the Middle East.”⁷ The suffering of civilians, death and injury, as reflected in O’Casey’s play anticipates the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and the suffering of the Palestinians everyday in Gaza and in the West Bank. Moreover, Sean O’Casey was writing his play

with hindsight and with the realisation that the outcome was not worth the sacrifice and effort.

Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House* can be regarded as an attempt to explain the causes of the First World War, and to lay the blame on the British leisured classes' practices before the war. The 'House' of the title, in which the play is set, resembles a ship; it has been built "so as to resemble the [aft] part of an old-fashioned high-pooped ship with a stern gallery."⁸ This ship may symbolize the imperial British ship of state or even the old Europe which "was stifling its soul."⁹ The ship of state is drifting into the rocks and will forever be changed by the impending catastrophe.

The Silver Tassie is another play by O'Casey throughout which he depicts the futility of war as well as its traumatic consequences. The play exposes the devastating effects of the Great War on a soldier and football hero who lost his body strength after a front-line experience. His fate may resemble that of many soldiers on service now in many war zones in the world.

John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is largely an exploration of the aftermath of colonial wars. The emphasis is laid on the place of violence in society and the varying responses to it. Although the setting of the play is nineteenth-century England, the contemporary relevance of Arden's theme is obvious since violence is accepted as an inescapable mode of political expression. What has been witnessed in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and various Gulf nations this year is most illustrative.

Another reason why I have thought of embarking on this study is the extensiveness which characterises the main topic of the present research. It is, in fact, the universality and timelessness of the theme of war and violence which make the study, to my mind,

worthwhile and interesting in every respect. Moreover, the theme is relevant even to the Algerian society where violence and conflicts have, now and then, erupted from independence up to the present day.

A considerable amount of research has been undertaken on Sean O'Casey, on George Bernard Shaw, and others on John Arden¹⁰, but no study, to my knowledge, has touched upon the present topic so far. In other words, no previous research has attempted to put *The Plough and the Stars*, *Heartbreak House*, *The Silver Tassie*, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, as well as some poems dealing with the First World War together in the same piece of research with reference to the theme of war. This study, therefore, is an attempt to contribute to a research track insufficiently explored as yet.

In my present study, I aim to investigate, alongside the plays' thematic concerns, the theatrical modes, devices, and techniques employed by the playwrights to put the theme of war on stage. On the other hand, I shall show how the theatre becomes the dramatists' medium in the task of consciousness-raising. What has been noticed in the critical works cited in an endnote to this Introduction (endnote n° 10, p.12), and to which I shall refer throughout this dissertation, is that more emphasis was put on the "theme" or the "content" of the plays, while the text proper and the performance have not received sufficient critical attention. My endeavour is, therefore, to place each play in its historical and theatrical contexts, highlighting in the process any particular dramatic theory that O'Casey, Shaw, or Arden may have been influenced by. On the other hand, each play will be analysed, whenever necessary, in parallel with other literary work(s) having similar thematic and / or formal concerns.

Sean O'Casey opts for Realism and Naturalism (and even Expressionism) in *The Plough and the Stars*, and later skilfully blends Realism and Symbolism with

Expressionism, particularly in *The Silver Tassie*. Bernard Shaw's play is basically realistic, and at times acquires even a symbolic import. *Heartbreak House* and its preface will be analysed as concrete realisations of the arguments Shaw advanced in his anti-war pamphlet *Common Sense About the War* (1914). Besides, Shaw's *Heartbreak House* and *Common Sense About the War* constitute a sort of counter-discourse to the propagandist war poems delivered by such stridently Anglo-centrist and patriotic poets as Rupert Brooke and Jessie Pope. In my dealing with the First World War, I shall first highlight the tremors announcing its outbreak, and then move towards the appraisal of its subsequent traumas as depicted in O'Casey's play *The Silver Tassie* and in some pacifist poems written by Wilfred Owen. John Arden for his part eschews Naturalism in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and decisively moves towards the Brechtian mode known as "Epic Theatre". When examining Arden's play, I shall refer to Brecht's anti-war, anti-capitalist play *Mother Courage and her Children* (1941) and attempt a comparative analysis between the two. This, I will endeavour to show in the chapters that follow. But before charting my progress in this task, I should first clarify my methodological bearings.

From the 1930s to the 1960s, New Criticism was the dominant approach to literary analysis in British and American universities. To the New Critics, the interpretative process should be focussed on the text itself rather than on historical, authorial, or reader concerns.¹¹ The literary text was thus analysed as an object essentially independent of its author and its historical context. The writer as a social being, however, is affected, consciously or unconsciously, by the conditions under which he conceives and writes, by his social and economic status as a playwright for instance, by his personal background, by his religious or political position, and even by his purpose in writing. Thus, the literary work, to my mind, cannot be analysed by discarding the general background which surrounds its conception. It seems important to read the text in the light of the context; as

René Wellek and Austin Warren tell us, “nobody can deny that much light has been thrown on literature by a proper knowledge of the conditions under which it has been produced.”¹² Hence, the present research will be based on both the textual and the contextual study, taking into consideration the theatrical background, as well as the social, historical, and political events that form the backdrop of O’Casey’s, Shaw’s, and Arden’s works.

Since Marxist critics view literature within a socio-historical context, and that literature is inseparable from history and society, it could be helpful to espouse a Marxian approach in the present research, without however being dogmatically Marxist. I shall seek help from such works as Terry Eagleton’s *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, as well as from one of the leading leftist intellectual of the second half of the twentieth century, Raymond Williams, who calls his Marxian theoretical approach “Cultural Materialism.”

Terry Eagleton, one of Marxism’s most prominent contemporary critics, declares that the “Marxist [critic] analyses literature in terms of the historical conditions which produce it; and [he] needs, similarly, to be aware of its own historical conditions.”¹³ Besides, owing to the relationship existing between man and society, between society and literature, this general background or *historical context*, shows how literature relates also to history. History, as claimed by Cultural Materialism practitioners, “can no longer be viewed simply as ‘background’ information for textual analysis but is an essential element in the interpretive process instead.”¹⁴ Just as literature ‘reflects’ history, history may as well be regarded as literature, as a ‘narrative’:

As in literature or any other narrative discourse, history must be viewed as a language that can never be fully articulated or completely explained. From this perspective, history and literature are nearly synonymous, both being narrative discourses that interact with their historical situations, their authors, their readers, and their present-day cultures.¹⁵

This is in fact what was advanced by Raymond Williams in his “Cultural Materialism.” The following definition sheds more light on Williams’s theoretical approach,

Cultural Materialism, which emerged in Britain in the 1980s, is seen as a critical approach to literature, which understood and read literary texts as the material products of specific historical and political conditions. Its central concerns are in the ways in which literature relates to history, and what interpretations of a literary text might result from analyses which privileged historical contexts as the key to understanding the meanings and functions of literature. An important realization of cultural materialism is that texts produce different meanings and interpretations when read in different times and in different locations.¹⁶

Through what he calls ‘the estrangement effect’, Bertolt Brecht aimed at inciting spectators to actively engage in their worlds, and to claim their own roles in the shaping of society. “I wanted to take the [Marxist] principle”, Brecht once declared, “that it was not just a matter of interpreting the world but of changing it, and apply that to the theatre.”¹⁷

Terry Eagleton in his *Marxism and Literary Criticism* highlighted the role ascribed to the Brechtian theatre. He notes:

The task of the [Epic] theatre is not to “reflect” a fixed reality, but to demonstrate how character and action are historically produced, and so how they could have been, and still can be, different. The play itself, therefore, becomes a model of the process of that production; it is less a reflection *of*, than a reflection *on*, social reality.¹⁸

The play is to be seen as an *interpretation of reality* instead of a mere *reflection of* it. Hence, by breaking the conventional ‘dramatic illusion’ and by creating a picture of social relationships and historical processes, the present — including the stage performance itself becomes part and parcel of a history in the making.

To implement this orientation on my present research, I shall rely on a four-chapter outline. The first chapter is concerned with supplying the historical as well as the dramatic background for Sean O’Casey’s, Bernard Shaw’s, and John Arden’s plays. In the first section, I shall consider the social and / or political events from which the playwrights under study drew their subject-matter. The second section will deal with the changes that

were taking place in the theatre during the first half of the 20th century. The focus will be laid on the development of the various staging styles— Realism and Naturalism, Expressionism and the Epic Theatre that the three playwrights have made use of in their plays to convey the theme of war.

The second chapter will be devoted to the thematic and the theatrical study of *The Plough and the Stars*, representing the Irish Easter Rising 1916. My endeavour in the first section is to examine O’Casey’s depiction of the futility of the Rising together with his critique, from a Socialist standpoint, of the Easter Rising leaders who opted for Irish nationalism rather than proletarian internationalism. In the second section, I shall investigate some of the dramatic devices and techniques which Sean O’Casey makes use of to stage the Easter Rising.

The third chapter will deal with the representation of the First World War, from its tremors to its traumas. I shall start with an analysis of Bernard Shaw’s *Heartbreak House* as a pre-war play, and a sort of dramatisation of Shaw’s ideas as contained in his *Common Sense About the War* (1914) and in the play’s Preface. I shall try to present Shaw’s discussion and exposition of the English ruling class’s irresponsible drifting into war and self-destruction. Being a Fabian socialist, Shaw stood naturally against the chauvinistic and propagandist war discourse poured out by such poets as Rupert Brooke and the likes of him. The second section will be devoted to the analysis of Sean O’Casey’s *The Silver Tassie*, a play, which as I said earlier, focuses on the maiming and disabling engendered by the Great War. I shall show how O’Casey expresses through Expressionistic devices the same feelings as those expressed by such pacifist poets as Wilfred Owen and many others. To this end, I shall focus particularly on the second act, set in a war zone.

The fourth and last chapter will deal with the aftermath of colonial wars as represented by John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. The first section will be devoted to the thematic concern(s) of the play. I shall show how Arden, with a Marxist bent, makes a general statement about war, the immorality of imperialism, capitalism, and colonial practices. The emphasis will be laid on the centrality of violence in society and the varying responses to it by the different social conflicting groups. Besides, I shall point out—following Arden, how the use of violence to end violence only triggers off more violence. The second section will be concerned with stagecraft. I shall examine, in particular, how Arden draws inspirations from the Brechtian Epic Theatre.

In the conclusion, I shall examine the extent to which Sean O'Casey, Bernard Shaw, and John Arden succeeded in representing the theme of war in their plays, while highlighting the mutual interdependence of the "content" and the "form" of representation. I shall show how the playwrights inherited the dramatic modes of their respective periods, and acted towards incorporating new theatrical models which they were influenced by. This will shed light on the pertinence of the playwrights' use of the stage as a serious medium for changing the status quo through conscience-raising as a first step towards the advent of a more humane world.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Wilfred Owen, *Poems*, available at <<http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/jimspdf.htm>; Internet accessed 20 July 2009.
- ² The Thirty Years' War (1618–48), in European history, is a series of wars fought by various nations for various reasons, including religious, dynastic, territorial, and commercial rivalries. Its destructive campaigns and battles occurred over most of Europe, and, when it ended with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the map of Europe had been irrevocably changed. Cf. "Thirty Years' War," in *Encyclopedia Britannica 2007*(CD ROM).
- ³ John Keegan, "A European Tragedy" in *The First World War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), p. 4.
- ⁴ Wilfred Owen, *Poems*, op. cit.
- ⁵ Naturally one undisputable playwright on the subject was Shakespeare. His memorable representation of the battles of Bosworth Field (*Richard III*) and Agincourt (*Henry V*) had paved the way for later dramatists; but none was to reach his stature.
- ⁶ Though not initially included in the corpus of study, I have resolved to include it in the course of my research owing to its capacity to express the traumatic experience of trench warfare during WWI.
- ⁷ "Sean O'Casey's theatre of war," available at <http://www.kalwriters.com/ASIN/ayling.htm>; Internet accessed 20 Septembre 2009.
- ⁸ George Bernard Shaw, *Heartbreak House* (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 49.
- ⁹ *Ibid.* ; p. 7.
- ¹⁰ We may refer in this context to some works written on the playwrights under study. In the case of Sean O'Casey, we may mention David Krause's book, *Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work* (1960), Ronald Ayling's selection of critical essays, *Sean O'Casey: Modern Judgements* (1969), Maureen Malone's *The Plays of Sean O'Casey* (1969), John O'Riordan's book, *A Guide to O'Casey's Plays: From the Plough to the Stars* (1984), and Heinz Kosok's *O'Casey The Dramatist* (1985), together with two unpublished Magister Dissertations, the first is Assia Kaced's *Sean O'Casey – Kateb Yacine: A Comparative Study of Their Early Plays* (2003), the second is Ahmed Hateb's, *O'Casey's The Plough and the Stars* and Dib's *Mille Hourras pour une gueuse: The Lure of Revolution* (2008).

Concerning George Bernard Shaw, we can cite Eric Bentley's, *Bernard Shaw* (1947), R. J. Kaufmann's, *G. B. Shaw: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1965), Hesketh Pearson, *Bernard Shaw* (1964), Christopher Innes's selection of critical essays, *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw* (1998), and Gareth Griffith's *Socialism and Superior Brains: The Political Thought of Bernard Shaw* (2003).

For John Arden, the following are significant studies dealing with his work: A. M. Aylwin, Notes on John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1976), R. W. Ewart's, York Notes on John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1982), Frances Gray's book, *John Arden* (1982), John Mills's critical essay "Love and Anarchy in *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance*"(1969), and Malcolm Page's "The Motives of Pacifists: John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*" (1967), together with M. W. Steinberg's "Violence in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance: A Study in Tragic Antitheses*" (1977).

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- ¹¹ Charles E. Bressler, *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, Fourth Edition (New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc., 2007), p. 212.
- ¹² René Wellek, and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 73.
- ¹³ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. xi-xii.
- ¹⁴ Charles E. Bressler, “Cultural Poetics or New Historicism”, in *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, op. cit., p. 223.
- ¹⁵ Ibid. ; p. 224.
- ¹⁶ John Brannigan “Cultural Materialism”, in Julian Wolfreys ed., *Modern British and Irish Criticism and Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2006), p. 135.
- ¹⁷ Quoted by G. J. Watson in “Shaw and Brecht: Making Us Think”, *Drama: An Introduction* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1983), p. 158.
- ¹⁸ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, op. cit., p. 60.

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND: HISTORY AND DRAMA

My aim in this first chapter is to provide the socio-political as well as the dramatic background for Sean O'Casey's, George Bernard Shaw's, and John Arden's plays, all of which constitute the corpus of the present dissertation. The first section will be devoted to the study of the social and / or political events over-shadowing the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland, the First World War as experienced in Great Britain, and finally the Cypriot war of liberation in the 1950s. These categories of conflicts, varying between wars of liberation and inter-capitalist / imperialist wars, can be regarded as fairly representative of the first half of the twentieth century. It is from specific events of these wars that the playwrights under study drew their subject-matter. The second section of this chapter will deal with the changes taking place in the theatre during the same period, that is, from the plays of Ibsen to those of Brecht. The focus will be laid on the development of various staging styles: Realism and Naturalism, Expressionism and the Epic Theatre, that the playwrights under study have chosen and made use of —separately or in combination—in their plays.

Most British Empire historians agree that England's, or rather the Anglo-Norman's, first attempt at Empire building began with the invasion of Ireland in 1169¹. Throughout the subsequent centuries, the Anglo-Irish relationship was subject to countless struggles and risings, all aiming at freeing Ireland from British rule. The Irish people, however, had to wait for the ultimately successful movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to witness their country's — partial— independence. The Irish freedom would unfortunately come after terror, violence, and bloodshed had spread all over Ireland. It seems altogether fitting, however, that the Irish would be among the first Empire people to attempt to entirely break their links with Britain in the Easter Week Rising of 1916.

Encouraged by the action of the Irish, anti-imperial nationalists in Egypt, India, Kenya, Cyprus, and other parts of the vast British Empire launched successful independence movements.²

It is in fact the 1916 Rising that is the primary focus of Sean O’Casey’s play *The Plough and the Stars*³, first performed at Dublin’s Abbey Theatre in 1926. The play indeed presents a “realistic” portrayal of the events before and during the Easter Rising, which would eventually lead to the Anglo-Irish War of Independence of 1919-21, and the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. Taking advantage of the fact that Britain’s military attention was focused elsewhere during the First World War, both the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army (ICA)—two patriotic organisations— defied the might of the British Empire, then at the zenith of its power, during Easter Week 1916 and declared Ireland an independent Republic.

For a better understanding of O’Casey’s play, it seems, to my mind, exceedingly helpful to refer to the social and political factors that were at work in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland, and prepared the country for such a revolt. Besides, those factors were undoubtedly influential on O’Casey’s work as he lived throughout the period and witnessed the bloody events of the Anglo-Irish “troubles”. I want to stress the fact that my aim in this section is not a fully historical analysis of the social and / or political situation in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries Ireland, Great Britain, and Cyprus, but rather to give a general feel of the situation at that time. However, if I have sometimes given more importance to some specific events, this is done intentionally because I consider that such events had a direct impact on the lives of the dramatists (O’Casey, Shaw, and Arden) in general, and on the works under study more specifically.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the standards of living in the Dublin tenements— filthy, disease-ridden, overcrowded— were appalling. From the time of the

Potato Famine, in the 1840s, which devastated the rural social structure of the country, people had been leaving the rural areas, many for other countries altogether, but many others for Dublin, where they found, increasingly, little room and little work⁴. In 1880, the year Sean O'Casey was born, the death rate in Dublin was 44.8 per 1000, the worst in Europe—worse even than Calcutta, India, where the death rate was 37.0, or Alexandria, Egypt, where the death rate was 40.0⁵. By 1916, at the time *The Plough and the Stars* is set, the situation seems quite unchanged. F. S. L. Lyons provides some of the details:

About thirty per cent (87,000) of the people of Dublin lived in the slums which were for the most part the worn-out shells of Georgian mansions. Over 2,000 families lived in single room tenements which were without heat or light or water (save for a tap in a passage or backyard) or adequate sanitation. Inevitably, the death-rate was the highest in the country, while infant mortality was the worst, not just in Ireland, but in the British Isles. Disease of every kind, especially tuberculosis, was rife and malnutrition was endemic; it was hardly surprising that the poor, when they had a few pence, often spent them seeking oblivion through drink.⁶

The situation of the Dublin poor, then, made the city a natural place for socialist organising. Indeed, Socialism, as well as Nationalism, was a potent force in pre-war Ireland and militant trade unionism gained a significant influence over the emerging urban working class in both Dublin and Belfast⁷. O'Casey became a socialist early in the century. He joined the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) in 1911, serving as the Secretary of the Women and Children's Relief Fund in 1913 during the Dublin Lockout⁸. The dock strike and Dublin lockout of 1913 were characterised by violent clashes between the police and the strikers, which prompted the Union leader James Larkin and the socialist James Connolly⁹ to create the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) as a workers' defence force¹⁰. It is significant to note that playwright Sean O'Casey joined the Irish Citizen Army, drew up its constitution in 1914, and even became its First Honorary Secretary. His purpose was to fight for the welfare of the Irish working class.

In the meantime, the Irish Nationalists in the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP)¹¹ had been demanding Home Rule, or self-government, from Britain. John Redmond was the

leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party and the man responsible for getting the third Home Rule Bill¹² introduced to Parliament in 1912. The year 1913, however, saw the creation of an anti-Home Rule paramilitary group, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)¹³, followed, in response, by the National Volunteers under Redmond's control (to counter the threat of the UVF). Both groups promptly began to smuggle arms into the country.

Although Home Rule was approved in 1914, its implementation was postponed when the dark clouds of the First World War appeared in the horizon. On 4 August 1914, following the German invasion of Belgium, Britain declared war on Germany. Many Irishmen believed that Britain had gone to war to defend the rights of a small nation, Belgium, so logically Ireland's rights would be respected after the War¹⁴. John Redmond, perhaps deluded by the common conviction that the war would be a short-lived affair, and in the belief that Imperial Germany was the common enemy, encouraged his National Volunteers to answer the call to arms and fight for "King and Country."¹⁵ However, Ireland's involvement in the Great War resulted in the division of the Volunteers. A small but influential group took an opposite view, adhering to the old saying that "England's need is Ireland's opportunity."¹⁶ Accordingly, Eoin MacNeill led a splinter group called the Irish Volunteers. Within this Volunteer movement another faction, led by radical Nationalists like Padraic Pearse and Thomas Clarke, expressed their desire for independence and began to prepare for a revolt against British rule.

James Connolly and his socialist Irish Citizen Army, which had never been a large organisation, combined with Pearse's Volunteers to stage the 1916 Easter Rising. This union had prompted O'Casey's withdrawal from the ICA in 1914 as the latter failed to distance itself from the Irish Volunteers whose leaders put nationalist ideals before socialist ones. Though O'Casey did not take part in the Rising, he witnessed the events of

the rebellion in Dublin against the British authorities. His disillusionment with the Irish nationalist movement is best expressed in his play *The Plough and the Stars*.

The purpose of the Rising was to take control of Dublin and set up a provisional government; the “Provisional Government of the Irish Republic”. The Irish Nationalists planned to receive help from the American organisation *Clan na Gael*, whose members promised to fund the rebellion and sent Sir Roger Casement¹⁷ to help, by procuring arms from Germany¹⁸. Once the ship carrying the arms for rebellion was lost and Casement was arrested, it seemed like the plan was unlikely to proceed. Indeed, the Rising seemed ill-planned, and a series of mishaps that preceded its launch made the rebellion quite impossible to succeed. In this respect, it is interesting to note what J. Hampden Jackson, the English historian, said of the ill-fated and abortive Easter Rising. Some twenty years afterwards, he highlighted the causes of its failure:

The plan of rising in arms against the might of England seemed desperate, but there was the ghost of a chance that it would succeed. It was timed for Easter, 1916, and that spring England had her hands more than full on the Continent. Sir Roger Casement’s job was to run arms in from Germany. At the last moment he was caught and his cargo captured. The official leader of the Nationalist Movement, Eoin MacNeill, called the rising off, but Padraic Pearse was determined to go on with it. He and his six friends called themselves the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic. ‘We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland. . .’¹⁹

It might be argued that the leaders of the Rising knew that defeat was inevitable, but were willing to be martyrs for the cause. Thus, on April 24, 1916, Padraic Pearse, James Connolly, Joseph Plunkett, and several other leaders of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which was a revolutionary society within the nationalist organisation of the Irish Volunteers, went ahead with about 1560 Irish Volunteers and a 200-man contingent of the Citizen Army²⁰. Their forces seized the Dublin General Post Office and other strategic points in Dublin’s city centre, and Pearse read aloud a Proclamation²¹ announcing the birth of the Irish Republic. The next few days were marked by violent street fighting,

artillery bombardments, and fires as the number of the British troops increased to put down the rebellion. Dublin was paralysed for nearly a week, and by Saturday, April 29th, Padraic Pearse and his colleagues chose to surrender to prevent further deaths, and the Rising was then over. Against this terrible and bloody background Sean O'Casey set his third and fourth acts of *The Plough and the Stars*. Dublin is aflame, Jack Clitheroe from the ICA and Lieutenant Langon from the Irish Volunteers meet with death, while Captain Brennan — who runs away from the hopeless battle — survives the onslaught.

The cost of the Easter Rising was high: 64 rebels died in the rebellion against 132 soldiers and policemen from the British troops. Civilians fared the worst, suffering 318 killed and 2217 wounded, in addition to enduring widespread looting, disruption of employment, and destruction of property in central Dublin²². Pearse and 14 other leaders of the Rising were court-martialled and executed by the British authorities in the weeks that followed.

The Irish people's original response to the rebellion was disgust and anger, but the British government's violent and indiscriminate actions in the subsequent days and months polarised the population;

The effect on public opinion was electric, the government's actions ironically achieving the effects the insurgents had so eagerly, and vainly, sought. The movement toward Anglo-Irish reconciliation so steadily in evidence by the pre-war Home Rule campaign and wartime conditions now evaporated.²³

Even the more moderate Nationalist and some Unionists were enraged by the actions of the British government, including the executions, the implementation of martial law, and other atrocities²⁴. The Nationalists then realised that they needed to use both force and the electoral system. The new Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Army (IRA), a reincarnation of the Irish Volunteers, succeeded in establishing the Irish Free State in 1922, which later became the Republic of Ireland.

While the Irish people were fighting —during Easter Week 1916 and even after it— to get their rightful independence back from the British colonizer, imperialist Britain had already embarked on a world-wide conflict. The First World War, or the “Great War” as it was romantically called, was “a profoundly imperial war fought for Empire as well as for King and Country.”²⁵ The War’s early days saw a great deal of enthusiasm. Irish Home Rulers (as aforementioned), English Trade-Union leaders, and most suffragettes rallied behind the national banner²⁶. British propagandist poets such as Rupert Brooke and Jessie Pope greeted the outbreak of war with patriotic excitement, and used their writing to urge others to participate²⁷. Masses of men volunteered, often with the hope that the war would be over quickly. In fact, it dragged on for four bloody years.

The Great War began in 1914 and ended in 1918, but not before millions of men had died in an unprecedented spectacle of horror and bloodshed. The opening chapter of British historian John Keegan’s *The First World War* is properly named “A European Tragedy.” According to him, the war was:

tragic because the consequences of the first clash ended the lives of ten million human beings, tortured the emotional lives of millions more, destroyed the benevolent and optimistic culture of the European continent and left . . . a legacy of political rancour and racial hatred so intense that no explanation of the causes of the Second World War can stand without reference to those roots.²⁸

Historian John Keegan has no doubt that the Great War “inaugurated the manufacture of mass death that the Second [World War] brought to a pitiless consummation.”²⁹ He, along with many European historians, also knows it to have “damaged the rational and liberal civilisation of the European Enlightenment, permanently for the worse and, through the damage done, world civilisation also.”³⁰

Playwright George Bernard Shaw had, long before John Keegan, forcefully voiced his opinions and attitudes against Britain’s warmongering. The First World War, it might be said, could also have been the result of the decadent British society in the late Victorian and early Edwardian eras. Like O’Casey, George Bernard Shaw was a socialist and a

committed member of the Fabian Society.³¹ To the Fabians, the root evil of late-Victorian England was the unequal distribution of wealth. Though England was a very rich country, benefiting from the Industrial Revolution and the Empire, millions of labourers could barely keep body and soul together.³² For the Fabians, as Eric Bentley claimed, the scandal of Victorian Capitalism was the coexistence of the “idle rich” with the “wage slave,”³³ and that evil led to many other evils: malnourishment of the poor, lack of education, filth, disease, and prostitution. In fact, numerous workers were living thus whilst a few lucky, upper-class folk lived in idle luxury on inherited or invested money that they did nothing to earn.³⁴

The Fabians were not Marxists. Though Shaw knew Marx’s work, he disagreed with some of Marx’s major convictions.³⁵ For instance, he did not think that violent revolution was an appropriate means for the advent of social justice. The Fabians looked not to revolution, but to reform. To achieve that, they did research in the social problems, wrote pamphlets³⁶ and delivered enthusiastic speeches. They engaged in public debates, and sought to educate those who were uninformed about social reality. The Fabians believed that two things were necessary for the fulfilment of real liberty. The first was “equal income”, so as to give people the subsistence necessary to make genuine choices about their lives. And the second thing was equal work for all.³⁷ Reform in fact, if intelligently conducted, could work gradually to alleviate the evils of Capitalist society—the pure *laissez-faire* Capitalism that prevailed at the time in Britain.

Since Shaw and the Fabians were against revolutionary action, “The First World War (1914–1918)”, as Harold Bloom claims, “changed Shaw’s life and work.”³⁸ Shaw believed the War was a tragic waste of young lives. Immediately upon its outbreak, he settled down to write a lengthy pamphlet, voicing his views on the internal and international situation. The pamphlet eventually appeared as “*Common Sense About the*

War,”³⁹ an eighty-page supplement to the *New Statesman*, on 14 November 1914. Although Shaw might have predicted success for Britain, he would never have supported “the hysteria of blind patriotism then sweeping the country.”⁴⁰ Possibly his Irish origins helped, as he claimed, to keep him emotionally detached. “Until Home Rule emerges from its present suspended animation”, Shaw irritably wrote in *Common Sense*, “I shall retain my Irish capacity for criticizing England with something of the detachment of a foreigner, and perhaps with a certain slightly malicious taste for taking the conceit out of her.”⁴¹ His Irish origin also prompted him to back Ireland’s Home Rule question up in the aftermath of the Easter Rising 1916. Shaw defended the Irish rebels, and offered specific help to support the detained Sir Roger Casement.⁴² But, due to Britain’s war against Germany, Roger Casement was executed as traitor for his part in seeking German aid for the Irish patriots.

Though *Common Sense* was widely read, it was much more widely condemned. *Common Sense* proved to be a disaster for Shaw’s public image: he was treated as outcast, and there was even talk of his being tried for treason.⁴³ Shaw succeeded in writing only one major play during the war years, *Heartbreak House*⁴⁴, which projected his sadness about British politics and society. *Heartbreak House*, along with its lengthy Preface, added another dimension to Shaw’s analysis of the causes and effects of the war. In it, Shaw seemed to hold the English upper and cultured class responsible for Britain’s involvement in the Great War. Besides, the upper class indifference to the social and political concerns of pre-war Britain may have prompted the country’s move to war and self-destruction.

While some propagandist writers —mostly civilians— enthusiastically hailed the outbreak of War, other pacifist poet-soldiers like Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg, among many others, stressed the pity and the traumas engendered by that devastating war. In fact, those poets found dirt, suffering, and despair instead of glamour or fame in the trenches. The theatre as well could not be indifferent to the horrible and traumatic effects

of the Great War. Sean O'Casey, through an Expressionistic second act of his anti-war play *The Silver Tassie*⁴⁵ succeeded in depicting the victimisation of the individual by that war, and by any war for that matter. The second act with its nightmarish account of strife on the front-line lays the emphasis on the extinction of individuality, and on the universal experience of loneliness, fear and deprivation.

The Great War ended with the victory of Britain and its Allies. The British Empire acquired new territories mostly taken from the –now– former German and Ottoman Empires.⁴⁶ Yet the post-war years —especially post-World War II— witnessed serious uprisings and disturbances which Britain faced in Egypt, Kenya, Cyprus, Burma, as well as in India.⁴⁷ The British Empire, which used to be the greatest colonial power up to the nineteenth century, was waning and losing its world-wide position by the mid-twentieth century. Its involvement in two costly and devastating world wars had led to an economical, social, and even political breakdown. Several British colonies and protectorates were seeking, or had already got (like India), independence by the 1950s.

For the purpose of the present dissertation, and to provide a background for John Arden's play *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959), I shall limit myself to the conflict — mostly during the 1950s— between Great Britain and its former colony, Cyprus.

Great Britain had controlled the island of Cyprus for many years. “The Cyprus Convention of 1878 between Britain and Turkey provided that Cyprus, while remaining under Turkish sovereignty, should be administered by the British government.”⁴⁸ Because Turkey joined the Central European Powers in World War I, Britain annexed the island. Turkey recognised this under the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, and Cyprus was officially declared a Crown colony two years later. By the 1950s, both Greek and Turkish Cypriots wanted to rule the island and overthrow the British colonizer. In 1955 the EOKA⁴⁹ organisation was founded, seeking independence and union with Greece through armed

struggle. At the same time the Turkish Cypriots established, as a counterweight, a movement calling for *Taksim*, or partition.⁵⁰ Turmoil on the island was met with force by the British. In 1958, “a Greek Cypriot killed the wife of a British Army sergeant. As a result, locals were rounded up and three Cypriots were killed.”⁵¹ Two years later, Great Britain conceded control of much of the island to the Greek Cypriot majority.⁵²

Arden’s play, in fact, was inspired from a similar violent event that erupted in Cyprus, while still a British colony. Although set in a vaguely nineteenth-century past, *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance*⁵³ makes, in Arden’s words, “quite deliberate reference to an incident in Cyprus in 1958, in which a British soldier’s wife was shot and soldiers killed five people in reprisal.”⁵⁴ Besides, the play may be seen as a protest against colonial war and colonial practices in general, as well as against British imperialism more specifically. A small group of soldiers invade a bleak mining town in northern England in the 1880s, seemingly on a recruiting mission. But the men are deserters, and their leader, Serjeant Musgrave, who has become an anti-war fanatic, wants to bring the evils of colonial war back to the colonizer’s home. Musgrave demands the death of twenty-five townspeople to match the death of a local boy (Billy Hicks) who died in a colonial war and who was the trigger, in reprisal, for the death of five colonised men.

Arden chose to set his play in the nineteenth century because this was, as Malcolm Page claimed, a period “of naked rather than apologetic imperialism.”⁵⁵ The 1880s was a time when “the Empire was strong, and when there was little direct criticism of imperial expansion.”⁵⁶ However in the 1950s, there was little Empire left, information was plentiful and criticism was widespread. John Arden was a Leftist and emerged alongside a group of dissident British playwrights and novelists of the 1950s and early 1960s whom journalists dubbed the “Angry Young Men”. The “Angries,” who included writers such as John Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Kingsley Amis, and Alan Sillitoe among others, produced works

that expressed “discontent and disillusionment with the staid, hypocritical, middle- and upper-middle-class institutions of the so-called British establishment.”⁵⁷ At the same time, they shared “an outspoken irreverence for the British class system, the post-war welfare state”, and their writings frequently conveyed “raw anger and frustration as the post-war reforms failed to meet exalted aspirations for genuine change.”⁵⁸ John Osborne and his *Look Back in Anger* (1956) was, perhaps, the angriest and most forceful voice of this generation.

Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance, despite its urgent political theme, may be subject to varying interpretations. Throughout the play, Arden refers to confrontations between various conflicting groups or even beliefs: soldiers and civilians, colliers and colliery owners, men and women, order and anarchy, labour and strike, violence and pacifism, love and hate, and all that may arise when opposites come into conflict. “In finely wrought confrontations”, Professor David Graver asserts, *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* “weighs the importance of domestic labour issues against imperial foreign policy and compares three distinct responses to the atrocities of Empire: anarchic terrorism, calculated violent protest, and pacifism.”⁵⁹ This, I shall endeavour to discuss in the fourth chapter of the present dissertation.

In the previous section, I have attempted to show the sources which Sean O’Casey, Bernard Shaw, and John Arden drew their subject-matter from. Here, I shall focus on the dramatic styles that the aforementioned writers opted for and used in their plays to embody their thematic preoccupations. To this end, I shall refer to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries modes of playwriting, generally characterised by Realism and Naturalism, and see how both Shaw and O’Casey appropriated them to fit their plays. This will be followed by an analysis of the Expressionistic mode as well as the Epic Theatre, which developed as a reaction to the dominant illusionistic representations of the time.

O'Casey exploited some Expressionistic devices in *The Silver Tassie*, while John Arden borrowed techniques from Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre when writing *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. With each new mode, I shall discuss its greatest pioneers, why it emerged, what it was trying to say, and how it was saying it.

Any background to 20th century drama must obviously begin with a sketch of what the 19th century was like, because every action may well be a reaction to something else and effects would best be understood in the light of their causes. Throughout the 18th and part of the 19th centuries, English theatres were mainly places of shallow amusement for those who wanted to forget the toils and troubles of the actual world⁶⁰. The spectators contented themselves with the pathetic scenes of death and sentimental love. They did not trouble themselves to contemplate upon what they were watching. While there were lots of political, domestic, and social problems around to be solved, the stage seemingly renounced its function as a serious medium for representing social reality, and advocating social change.

In the late 19th century, however, the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen provided a new significance to drama which changed the development of the "modern theatre". Discovering dramatic material in everyday situations was the beginning of a realism that novelists as different as Emile Zola and Gustave Flaubert were already exploiting⁶¹. Ibsen introduced to the European stage "a new order of moral analysis that was placed against a severely realistic middle-class background and developed with economy of action, penetrating dialogue, and rigorous thought."⁶²

Daniel S. Burt in *The Literary 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Novelists, Playwrights, and Poets of All Time* asserts that modern drama originates with Henrik Ibsen, and precisely in 1879 with the publication—and performance—of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*⁶³. Nora Helmer, the heroine, shocked the audience at the play's close when she

slammed the door, leaving her comfortable marriage, husband, and children for an “uncertain future of self discovery.”⁶⁴ As Henrik Ibsen’s biographer Michael Meyer has observed, “No play had ever before contributed so momentously to the social debate, or been so widely and furiously discussed among people who were not normally interested in theatrical or even artistic matter.”⁶⁵ A contemporary reviewer of the play also declared: “When Nora slammed the door shut on her marriage, walls shook in a thousand homes.”⁶⁶

It might be claimed, therefore, that Ibsen replaced the idealistic vision of life as it should be with a realistic method in which the spectator is made to feel “as if he were actually sitting, listening, and looking at events happening in real life.”⁶⁷ The artificial conventions of the stage were reworked to focus on “ordinary individuals whose dramas were based on the details and circumstances of recognisable middle-class life in contemporary society.”⁶⁸ With Ibsen, then, drama became no longer a mere entertainment, but rather an important “truth-telling vehicle for a comprehensive criticism of life”⁶⁹. Besides, Ibsen fundamentally “redefined the drama and set a standard that later dramatists have had to absorb or challenge.”⁷⁰

Influenced by Henrik Ibsen’s works, George Bernard Shaw dedicated a whole book for the Norwegian playwright, entitled *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891, revised 1913). Shaw’s book did much to facilitate the initial change, bring Ibsen to critical attention, and awaken theatregoers to the possibilities of socially conscious drama⁷¹. In the chapter “The Technical Novelty in Ibsen’s Plays”, Shaw highlighted some of Ibsen’s contributions to the “modern theatre”,

The drama was born of old from the union of two desires: the desire to have a dance and the desire to hear a story. The dance became a rant, the story became a situation. When Ibsen began to make plays, the art of the dramatist had shrunk into the art of contriving a situation. And it was held that the stranger the situation, the better the play. Ibsen saw that, on the contrary, the more familiar the situation, the more interesting the play. Shakespear[e] had put ourselves on the stage but not our situations. . . . Ibsen supplies the want left by Shakespear[e]. He gives us not only ourselves, but ourselves in our situations. . . . his plays . . . are capable of both

*hurting us cruelly and of filling us with excited hope of escape from idealistic tyrannies, and with visions of intenser life in the future.*⁷² (Emphasis added)

In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, Shaw, to borrow Christopher Innes's words, presented Ibsen as "a socialist and a realist, whose naturalistic drama exposed all collective abstractions as damaging illusions, and promoted the 'individual will' against 'the tyranny of ideals'"⁷³. In addition, Shaw detected in Ibsen's work his switch from the conventions of the "well-made" play to a more open-ended "discussion play". This is more like a debate in which characters put forward different points of view⁷⁴. Accordingly, the clash of opinion would replace physical conflict, and the play's resolution would be the outcome of discussion. The admiration that Shaw professed for the Scandinavian playwright can be grasped when Shaw affirmed that:

Formerly you had in what was called a well made play: an exposition in the first act, a situation in the second, an unravelling in the third. Now you have exposition, situation and discussion; and the discussion is the test of the playwright The discussion conquered Europe in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*; and now, the serious playwright recognizes in the discussion not only the main test of his highest powers, but also the real centre of his play's interest.⁷⁵

Following the example of Henrik Ibsen, Shaw succeeded in revolutionising the English stage, disposing of the romantic conventions and devices of the "well-made" play, and instituting a "drama of ideas" grounded in realism. As a member of the Fabian Society, which advocated reform and gradual social change instead of revolutionary action, Shaw's target audience was the well-off middle classes that preferred to remain ignorant of social and economic injustice. It was fitting for Shaw, the Fabian socialist, to bring out the stark reality hidden behind well-preserved "appearances"; as Ian Clarke claims, "Shaw's engagement with the traditions of nineteenth-century theatre is to expose its conventions as arrant romantic and sentimental nonsense."⁷⁶ In attacking the false moral standards of late Victorian and Edwardian societies, Shaw's weapon was his wit and his masterly use of dialogue:

[Shaw's plays], which superficially seem to be conversation and nothing else, are in fact driven along by the interplay of ideas and Shawian wit. In *Heartbreak House* the apparently aimless discussion and the overall sense of stasis become the perfect theatrical image for Shaw's depiction of a society helplessly awaiting catastrophe.⁷⁷

Plays in which a discussion, often unresolved, superseded the plot, were preferable because they allowed audiences to judge situations for themselves, thus making them an active part of the theatrical experience rather than merely passive viewers⁷⁸. The critical distance that Shaw established between the audience and the stage by preventing emotional attachment to any one of the characters, pointed forward to a model for Bertolt Brecht in formulating his epic-dialectical theatre⁷⁹. From this change in the way plays were considered have grown increasingly more experimental theatre forms and concepts of theatrical expression, often in reaction against the constraints of realism. Irish-born playwright Sean O'Casey inherited the realistic / naturalistic conventions of the time, and worked towards incorporating more expressionistic devices in his subsequent plays.

By the time Shaw's dramatic achievements were widely acclaimed, Sean O'Casey's playwrighting career had just been launched. O'Casey's disillusionment with the social and political atmosphere in early twentieth-century Ireland prompted him to use theatre as a serious medium to express his resentment. Yet, thorny was the way for O'Casey's integration into the Irish dramatic canon. His first three plays submitted to the Abbey Theatre had all been rejected. Then, Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats (the Abbey Theatre directors) urged O'Casey to write about "the slum life he [O'Casey] knew well and to concentrate on characterization rather than polemics."⁸⁰ The advice was accepted, and the outcome was soon *The Shadow of a Gunman*, O'Casey's first play to be performed at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in 1923. *Juno and the Paycock* followed in 1924, and finally *The Plough and the Stars* (which will be the focus of the second chapter of this dissertation) performed in 1926 concluded what was to be dubbed the "Dublin Trilogy".

A fervent advocate of socialism and of the Irish Labour movement, O'Casey rose to both "prominence and controversy with his 'Dublin Trilogy', a series of plays focusing on the effects of revolutionary struggle on the Dublin working class."⁸¹ These plays, in fact, are related to a particular contemporary background (*The Shadow of a Gunman* with the Anglo-Irish war in 1920, *Juno and the Paycock* with the civil war which followed the 1921 treaty, and *The Plough and the Stars* culminating in the Easter Rising of 1916) which decisively contributed to the stage events relevance⁸². It may be claimed that O'Casey, by representing on stage the Irish society during times of war and revolution, aimed at giving a truthful image of life as it was actually experienced by the Dublin downtrodden. Besides, O'Casey's socialist convictions prompted him to denounce the working class social conditions —poverty, dirt, disease, unemployment— and to raise their awareness of the need for social change — even if this would mean rejecting nationalist politics.

Realism and Naturalism, then, seemed to impose themselves on O'Casey as the adequate modes of writing to achieve his aim. In theatre, the two movements developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They share characteristics such as "attention to detail, common people as subjects, a prosaic style which reflects the way real people speak, and portrayals of harsh circumstances,"⁸³ but many scholars see Naturalism's reliance on the principle of determinism as its distinguishing feature. This refers to the belief among naturalist writers that people's / characters' fates are determined by their environments and / or their genetics. Critic Donald Pizer declares:

The common belief is that the naturalists were like the realists in their fidelity to the details of contemporary life but that they depicted everyday life with a greater sense of the role of such causal forces as heredity and environment in determining behaviour and belief.⁸⁴

O'Casey's "slum trilogy" does reveal the shaping influence of such factors. "With a few minor exceptions", Heinz Kosok declares, "all his [O'Casey's] characters in these plays

belong to the tenements and are decisively stamped by this milieu both in their attitude and in their reactions.”⁸⁵ Besides, the stage directions are often explicitly naturalistic, with their frequent reference to the shaping of the characters by environment. Sean O’Casey in fact, depicts the Dublin common man. He depicts public events and people’s ordinary lives, making use of the colloquial Dublin city dialect.

Though the three Dublin plays belong to the tradition of “realistic / naturalistic drama”, one could argue that they “are modified by O’Casey in a characteristic way”⁸⁶. “It ought to be emphasised here”, Heinz Kosok claims, “that the term ‘realistic drama’ does not [exclusively] imply an unmanipulated reflection of reality, the renunciation of artistic form.”⁸⁷ The artistic value of O’Casey’s work should not be limited to A. E. Malone’s characterisation of O’Casey as “photographic artist” creating “slices of life in the strictest and most literal sense of the term.”⁸⁸ Special attention to *The Plough and the Stars* for instance, would reveal —as we shall later show— O’Casey’s tendency to insert some new, non-realistic dramatic devices. In act II, O’Casey makes use of the anonymous, shadowy Speaker who appears and disappears in the background, providing some key words for the future events of the Rising. Besides, the division of the dramatic stage into *on-* and *off-*stage actions, achieving a certain ‘distanciation’, is also remarkable. O’Casey has also used some symbolic objects like the Irish Citizen Army’s flag; “the plough and the stars”, or symbolic scenes like the ‘occupation’ of Bessie’s room as a symbol of the occupation of Dublin, or of Ireland on a larger scale.

It might then be argued that O’Casey’s combination of realistic and non-realistic dramatic techniques in *The Plough and the Stars* points forward to a playwright who will find his way to even more theatrical modes of expression. His next play, *The Silver Tassie* (1928), as William Armstrong asserts, marks “a transition in O’Casey’s themes and techniques from a predominantly (but not exclusively) naturalistic treatment of Irish

problems to a predominantly Expressionist treatment of European civilization,⁸⁹ and more precisely of the First World War.

Focused on Harry Heegan, Irish football hero and Volunteer soldier in the British Army, *The Silver Tassie* follows him from the moment of his success when he wins the cup—the Silver Tassie—for his club to his return from World War I, crippled and permanently confined to a wheelchair. “The first and the last acts”, Ian Clarke observes, “[are] in a similar realist mode to the Dublin plays,”⁹⁰ but the play’s most effective scene in fulfilling O’Casey’s anti-war purpose occurs amidst the Expressionistic second act;

[I]t was to techniques of German expressionist drama; *stylised, symbolic set instead of realistic domestic interiors, orchestrated chanting and singing instead of conventional Irish garrulousness*, that O’Casey turned to express a sense of the horror and futility of the war and the dislocated alienation of those forced to undergo it.⁹¹ (Emphasis added)

Expressionism in the theatre came out of the movement of the same name in the visual arts.⁹² The characters and sets of Expressionism tend to be distorted, oversimplified, and symbolic rather than realistic;

In forging a drama of social protest, Expressionist writers aimed to convey their ideas through a new style. Their concern was with general truths rather than with particular situations, hence they explored in their plays the predicaments of representative symbolic types rather than of fully developed individualized characters. Emphasis was laid not on the outer world, which is merely sketched in and barely defined in place or time, but on the internal, on an individual’s mental state; hence the imitation of life is replaced in Expressionist drama by the ecstatic evocation of states of mind.⁹³

Expressionist drama thrived in early twentieth-century Germany with the works of Frank Wedekind, Georg Kaiser, and Ernst Toller among others; however literary historians often refer to the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg (1849-1912) as the “Father of Expressionism”. Indeed, Strindberg’s later plays like *A Dream Play* (1902) anticipated the concerns and techniques of the expressionists in the 1920s.⁹⁴ In his preface to *A Dream Play*, August Strindberg provides perhaps the best explanation for this intent:

I have in this play sought to imitate the incoherent but ostensibly logical form of our dreams. Anything can happen; everything is possible and probable. *Time and*

space do not exist. Working with some insignificant real events as a background, the imagination spins out its threads of thoughts and weaves them into new patterns—a mixture of memories, experiences, spontaneous ideas, impossibilities and improvisations. *The characters split, double, multiply, dissolve, condense, float apart, coalesce.* But one mind stands over and above them all, the mind of the dreamer; and for him there are no secrets, no inconsistencies, no scruples, no laws.⁹⁵ (emphasis added)

Time and place, then, were ignored by the Expressionist dramatist so that he could feel free to create his own “subjective universe”. The dream, with its associations apparently lacking in cause or logic, was substituted for normal reality.⁹⁶ Unlike Strindberg, who sought to project “dream states” onstage, the German Expressionists “resorted to an intense subjectivism— that is, externalisation of their most private inner feelings— to illustrate their outrage at society that had betrayed [and repressed] them.”⁹⁷ It was not just society that was dark and repressive; “it was humankind as such and the whole world in general.”⁹⁸ The horrors caused by the destruction of Europe in World War I demonstrated that “human beings were lunatics who used technology to destroy themselves.”⁹⁹

O’Casey’s play, *The Silver Tassie*, is not entirely Expressionistic. Only the second act, set in a war zone, is modeled in an Expressionist manner to convey the horror of the war. “Instead of *telling* the audience through exposition that war is hell”, David Krause explains, “he [O’Casey] had found in the techniques of Expressionism a way of *showing* them a symbolic nightmare of that hell.”¹⁰⁰

Instead of hailing O’Casey’s novel techniques and experiments, W. B. Yeats and the Abbey Theatre rejected the play when it was first submitted in 1928. This prompted O’Casey to sever his relationship with the Abbey Theatre and to leave Ireland for a self-imposed exile in London.

The creativity of the early German Expressionists, one might assert, paved the way for subsequent theatre practitioners to “revolutionise” the styles of playwriting, and to offer an alternative to realistic acting. German playwright Bertolt Brecht inherited the

Expressionist tradition when he entered the theatre in the 1920s. However, being involved in the political world and a Marxist in beliefs, Brecht sought to bring to the people a theatre that would incite a desire to actively engage in their world, and to claim their own roles in the shaping of society. “I wanted to take the [Marxist] principle”, Brecht once declared, “that it was not just a matter of interpreting the world but of changing it, and apply that to the theatre.”¹⁰¹ Brecht, in fact, worked towards developing his own theory of the theatre for which he appropriated the term “Epic” or “Open” theatre.

In formulating his new theory, Brecht rejected the assumptions of realism and naturalism— what Brecht variously calls ‘Aristotelian’, ‘dramatic’, or ‘Ibsenite’ drama— that had dominated the European theatre after Henrik Ibsen.¹⁰² For Brecht, the realistic “theatre of illusion” encouraged the audience’s emotional involvement and complacency through verisimilitude instead of provoking spectators into a heightened social and political awareness.¹⁰³ Brecht did not want spectators to sympathise with his characters. He would rather force them to view the action of the play critically, from a detached, “alienated”, point of view,

The spectator of the *dramatic* theatre says: ‘Yes, I have felt the same. — I am just like this. — This is only natural. — It will always be like this. — This human being’s suffering moves me, because there is no way out for him. — This is great art: it bears the mark of the inevitable. — I am weeping with those who weep on the stage, laughing with those who laugh! The spectator of the *epic* theatre says: ‘I should never have thought so. — That is not the way to do it. — This is most surprising, hardly credible. — This will have to stop. — This human being’s suffering moves me, because there would have been a way out for him. — This is great art: nothing here seems inevitable. — I am laughing about those who weep on the stage, weeping about those who laugh!’¹⁰⁴

To encourage the audience to adopt a more critical attitude to what was happening on stage, Brecht developed his *Verfremdungseffekt* (“to make strange,” or “alienation effect”)—i.e., the use of anti-illusionist techniques to remind the spectators that they are in a theatre watching an enactment of reality instead of reality itself. G. J. Watson considers it a sort of ‘defamiliarisation’, in being “an attempt to make us see ordinary life in a fresh

way, to purge the film of familiarity from our eyes.”¹⁰⁵ Such techniques include short, self-contained scenes that keep the play from building to a cathartic climax; songs that comment on the action; and techniques of acting that prevent the actor from developing an emotional identity with his role.¹⁰⁶

Contrary to the traditional ‘Aristotelian’ or ‘dramatic’ theatre which relied on the conventional linear plot of the “well-made play”, with its marked causal connections of scene to scene, Brecht’s Epic theatre endorsed an episodic narrative form. Each episode or scene may be significant by itself, and often long periods of time separate them. The outcome of the action, in Brecht’s view, is “open, not predetermined: what happens depends on human decisions, not on some abstract concept like fate or inevitability.”¹⁰⁷ The Epic further differs from the “theatre of illusion” in that it deals with events set in a distant past rather than in the “imaginary present”, which unfolds before us as if it were happening for the first time. Brecht’s play *Mother Courage and Her Children*, for instance, is a chronicle play composed of twelve scenes, set during the Thirty Years’ War in seventeenth-century Europe. This use of “*historicisation*” may be meant to show how time and people can change societies and institutions. Indeed, “Brecht understood that ‘displacing’ our problems may enable us to see them more clearly, and to explore more fully general ideas— like the connections between war and capitalism,”¹⁰⁸ and thereby opening up new possibilities and perceptions.

Certainly Brecht’s attack on the ‘illusionist’ theatre influenced, directly or indirectly, the theatre of various Western countries. In Britain, especially after the visit of Brecht’s theatrical company “The Berliner Ensemble” in 1956, the effect became evident in the work of such playwrights as Edward Bond and John Arden, among others. Arden has listed Brecht, along with Federico Garcia Lorca and Ben Jonson, as “the most important of his literary models.”¹⁰⁹ As with Shaw’s reinterpretation of the quintessence of

Ibsenism to fit his own drama, Arden's analysis of Brecht also describes his own aims.

According to Arden, Brecht

believed that [the theatre] was a potential instrument of social progress; and that the playwright, by reflecting in his work the true image of human society, assisted the members of that society to diagnose the defects in the image and thence to improve the reality.¹¹⁰

A Marxist in beliefs like Brecht, Arden envisions a theatre that could present the puzzles of the world on the stage so that the audience would have the opportunity to critically engage in considering resolutions. When writing his anti-war play *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, Arden incorporated some devices reminiscent of the Brechtian, anti-illusionistic, Epic theatre. For instance, the play is set in a distant Victorian past, together with its use of minimal props and "indicative" scenery, the incorporation of songs and even dances for the sake of "making strange" and achieving a certain "defamiliarisation" that would allow the audience to think of what has been presented, and thereby stimulate action. All these elements will be expounded later on in the fourth chapter of the present dissertation, dealing with the thematic and the theatrical concerns of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. The next chapter, devoted to the study of Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*, is an attempt to analyse the thematic content and the staging of the Irish Easter Rising 1916.

Endnotes:

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- ¹ Norman Vance, *Irish Literature Since 1800* (London: Pearson Education Ltd., 2002), p. 5.
- ² Kenneth O. Morgan, *Twentieth Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 14.
- ³ The second chapter of the present dissertation is entirely devoted to the thematic and theatrical analysis of *The Plough and the Stars*.
- ⁴ Paul F. State, "From the Act of Union to the Great Famine (1800–1849)" in *A Brief History of Ireland* (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2009), pp. 187-8.
- ⁵ David Krause, "Prometheus of Dublin" in *Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1960), p. 4.
- ⁶ F. S. L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland: 1830-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 277–78.
- ⁷ Peter Cottrell, *The Anglo-Irish War: The Troubles of 1913-1922* (Oxford / New York: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2006), p. 26.
- ⁸ "In August 1913 William Martin Murphy (1844–1919), president of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce and, as such, head of the Employers' Federation, dismissed 40 men for their membership in the ITGWU and went on to organise a lockout against workers who refused to pledge not to join the union. Union leader James Larkin urged members not to comply. A strike by tram workers was called in August, and by September 24,000 people were barred from factories, storehouses, and dockyards. Eight months of bitter battling ensued. The so-called revolt of the slums included mass rallies, rioting, arrests, imprisonments, and deaths in the largest and most intense industrial dispute in Irish history." Cf. Paul F. State, "The Drive for Independence (1849–1922)" in *A Brief History of Ireland*, op. cit., pp.227-28.
- ⁹ "**Connolly, James (1870–1916)** Irish socialist and revolutionary. Born in Edinburgh of immigrant Irish parents, Connolly combined a Marx-inspired socialism with a Fenian-inspired republicanism. He helped found the Irish Socialist Republican Party in Dublin in 1896, and organised a strike of transport workers in 1913 with the Irish Labour leader James Larkin. His Irish Citizen Army took part in the Easter Rising against British rule in 1916, for which he was executed by the British." Cf. *The Hutchinson Encyclopedia of Ireland*, (Oxford: Helicon Publishing, 2005), p.137.
- ¹⁰ Peter Cottrell, *The Anglo-Irish War: The Troubles of 1913-1922*, op. cit., pp. 26-7.
- Maureen Malone states that: "the Irish Citizen Army had been formed by James Larkin and James Connolly in defense of labour interests in Ireland. This body remained at first aloof from and to some extent hostile to Sinn Fein and the Irish Volunteers because of class differences". Cf. Maureen Malone, "The Rising" in *The Plays of Sean O'Casey* (London /Amsterdam: Feffer & Simons, Inc., 1969), p. 4.
- ¹¹ "The IPP, formed in 1882, originated from the Home Government Association, which favoured limited self-government for Ireland; it became powerful under Charles Stuart Parnell in the latter part of the 19th century. Home Rule and Land Reform became the twin threads of their agenda, and despite several failures they finally got a Home Rule Bill passed in 1914." Cf. Peter Cottrell, *The Anglo-Irish War: The Troubles of 1913-1922*, op. cit., p. 16.

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- ¹² “British Prime Minister William E. Gladstone was converted to Home Rule by 1885, but it was rejected by Parliament in 1886. Gladstone introduced a second Home Rule Bill in 1893; it was defeated in the House of Lords. The third Bill had to wait for another Liberal ministry (the Conservatives had attempted to “kill Home Rule by kindness,” to undermine its programme by effecting moderate reforms); its introduction in 1912 inflamed the militant opposition of both Ulster Unionists (led by Edward Carson) and Republicans in Ireland.” Cf. Michael McNally, “Origins of the Campaign”, in *Easter Rising 1916: Birth of the Irish Republic* (Oxford / New York: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2007), pp. 7-8.
- ¹³ “On 13 January 1913, Sir Edward Carson and Sir James Craig founded the UVF to resist Irish Home Rule by force if necessary. Both the British army and Government tolerated the UVF and, despite its overt threat to plunge the country into civil war, it was allowed to smuggle weapons into Ulster and to drill openly under the instruction of both retired and serving army officers. During the First World War, the UVF formed the 36th (Ulster) Division and suffered heavy casualties on the Somme.” Cf. Peter Cottrell, *The Anglo-Irish War: The Troubles of 1913-1922*, op. cit., p. 23.
- ¹⁴ Peter Cottrell, *The Anglo-Irish War: The Troubles of 1913-1922*, op. cit., p. 29.
- ¹⁵ Cf. “Appeal from John Redmond, M. P. To the People of Ireland” in Appendix II of the present dissertation.
- ¹⁶ Maureen Malone, “The Rising” in *The Plays of Sean O’Casey*, op. cit., p. 5.
- ¹⁷ “**Sir Roger David Casement** (1 September 1864 – 3 August 1916) was an Irish patriot, poet, revolutionary, and nationalist. He was a British consul by profession, famous for his reports and activities against human rights abuses in the Congo and Peru but better known for his dealings with Germany before Ireland’s Easter Rising in 1916. He sought to obtain German support for a rebellion in Ireland against British rule. Shortly before the Easter Rising, he landed in Ireland and was arrested. He was subsequently convicted and executed by the British for treason, and became one of the principal Irish martyrs in the revolt against British rule in Ireland.” Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Casement, Internet accessed 05 April 2011.
- ¹⁸ *The 1916 Rising: Personalities and Perspectives*, National Library of Ireland. http://www.nli.ie/1916/1916_main.html, Internet accessed 20 October 2010.
- ¹⁹ Hampden Jackson, *England Since the Industrial Revolution* (1936), quoted by John O’Riordan, *A Guide to O’Casey’s Plays: From the Plough to the Stars* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 71.
- ²⁰ David Fitzpatrick, “Ireland Since 1870”, in R. F. Foster (ed.) *The Oxford History of Ireland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 198.
- ²¹ The full text of the “Proclamation of the Republic of Ireland” is given in Appendix I.
- ²² Paul F. State, “The Drive for Independence (1849–1922)” in *A Brief History of Ireland*, op. cit., p. 234.
- ²³ Idem.
- ²⁴ *The 1916 Rising: Personalities and Perspectives*, op. cit.
- ²⁵ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*, op. cit., p. 13.
- ²⁶ William E. Burns, *A Brief History of Great Britain* (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2010), p. 177.
- ²⁷ In Chapter III of the present dissertation dealing with the representation of the First World War, I shall refer to some propagandist poems by Rupert Brooke and Jessie Pope on the one hand,

and other pacifist poems written by poet-soldiers like Wilfred Owen.

- ²⁸ John Keegan, “A European Tragedy” in *The First World War*, op. cit., p. 3.
- ²⁹ Ibid. ; p. 4
- ³⁰ Ibid. ; p. 8
- ³¹ “**Fabian Society**, socialist society founded in 1883–84 in London, having as its goal the establishment of a democratic socialist state in Great Britain. The Fabians put their faith in evolutionary socialism rather than in revolution. The name of the society is derived from the Roman general Fabius Cunctator, whose patient and elusive tactics in avoiding pitched battles secured his ultimate victory over stronger forces. Its founding is attributed to Thomas Davidson, a Scottish philosopher, and its early members included George Bernard Shaw, Sidney Webb, Annie Besant, Edward Pease, and Graham Wallas. Shaw and Webb, later joined by Webb’s wife, Beatrice, were the outstanding leaders of the society for many years. In 1889 the society published its best-known tract, *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, edited by Shaw. The Fabians at first attempted to permeate the Liberal and Conservative parties with socialist ideas, but later they helped to organise the separate Labour Representation Committee, which became the Labour Party in 1906. The Fabian Society has since been affiliated with the Labour Party.” Cf. “Fabian Society” in *Encyclopædia Britannica 2007* (CD Rom).
- ³² Sidney Webb, “The Difficulties of Individualism”, in Sidney Webb, et al, *Socialism and Individualism*, Fabian Socialist Series. N°. 3 (New York: John Lane Company, 1911), p. 10.
- ³³ Eric Bentley, “Political Economy” in *Bernard Shaw* (New York: New Directions Books, 1947), p. 33.
- ³⁴ Ibid. ; p. 5.
- ³⁵ Sally Peters, “Shaw’s life: a feminist in spite of himself”, in Christopher Innes, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), pp. 8-9.
- ³⁶ Among the pamphlets that were published by the Fabian Society in the early 20th century, we may cite: Sidney Webb, et al, *Socialism and Individualism*, Fabian Socialist Series. N°. 3 (New York: John lane Company, 1911) **and** *Fabianism and the Empire: A Manifesto by the Fabian Society* , edited by George Bernard Shaw (1900).
- ³⁷ Eric Bentley, “Political Economy” in *Bernard Shaw*, op. cit., p. 37.
- ³⁸ Harold Bloom, “George Bernard Shaw” in, *Dramatists and Dramas*, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005), p. 172.
- ³⁹ “Common Sense About the War”, in *Current History of the European War*, Vol. I – No. 1. (New York: The New York Times Company, 1914) available at <http://books.google.com>
- ⁴⁰ Margery M. Morgan, “George Bernard Shaw” in Ian Scott-Kilvert (ed.), *British Writers*, Vol. VI (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1983), p. 119.
- ⁴¹ “Common Sense About the War”, in *Current History of the European War*, op. cit.
- ⁴² Margery Morgan states that “a letter from Shaw defending the rebels and warning of the folly of British reprisals had been published in the *Daily News*, and his help was sought and offered for the defence of Sir Roger Casement”. Cf. Margery M. Morgan, “George Bernard Shaw”, op. cit., p. 119.

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- ⁴³ Idem.
- ⁴⁴ Shaw's *Heartbreak House* will be analysed in Chapter III of the present dissertation as a pre-First-World-War play.
- ⁴⁵ Sean O'Casey, *The Silver Tassie* in *Three More Plays by Sean O'Casey* (London: Macmillan, 1965).
- ⁴⁶ Philippa Levine, "Contesting Empire", in *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (London: Pearson Education Ltd., 2007), p. 198.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid. ; p. 170.
- ⁴⁸ "Cyprus" in *Encyclopedia Britannica 2007* (CD Rom).
- ⁴⁹ In 1955 Lieutenant Colonel Georgios Grivas (known as Dighenis), a Cypriot who had served as an officer in the Greek army, began a concerted campaign for *enosis* (i.e. *union* with Greece). His National Organization of Cypriot Struggle (Ethnikí Orgánosis Kipriakou Agónos; EOKA) bombed public buildings and attacked and killed both Greek Cypriot and British opponents of *enosis*. Cf. "Cyprus" in *Encyclopedia Britannica 2007*.
- ⁵⁰ "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyprus>" Internet accessed on 23 October 2010.
- ⁵¹ Charles Arnold-Baker, *The Companion to British History*, Second Edition (London / New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 390-91.
- ⁵² Idem.
- ⁵³ The fourth chapter of the present dissertation is entirely devoted to the thematic and theatrical analysis of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*.
- ⁵⁴ Malcolm Page, *Arden on File* (London: 1985) p.20 , quoted by David Graver, "John Arden" in George Stade (ed.), *British Writers, Supplement II* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1992), p. 26.
- ⁵⁵ Idem.
- ⁵⁶ R. W. Ewart, York Notes on John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (Essex: Longman Group Ltd., 1982), p. 52.
- ⁵⁷ Daniel S. Burt, "Look Back in Anger" in *The Drama 100: A Ranking of the Greatest Plays of All Time* (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2008) p. 281.
- ⁵⁸ "Angry Young Men" from *Encyclopædia Britannica 2007* (CD Rom).
- ⁵⁹ David Graver, "John Arden" in *British Writers, Supplement II*, op. cit., p. 26.
- David Graver is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. He has published articles on twentieth-century American, British, European, and South African drama and theatre in *New Theatre Quarterly*, *Theatre Journal*, *The Drama Review*, and *Maske und Kothurn*.
- ⁶⁰ Anne Marie Hacht and Dwayne D. Hayes (ed.), *Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature*, Vol. 2 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), p. 829.
- ⁶¹ "Zola inaugurated the development of realist theatre throughout Europe when, in 1867, he declared the need for a new type of theatrical production that eliminated artificiality and sought to accurately reproduce the details of daily life. His play *Therese Raquin*, a

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- theatrical production of his 1867 novel, was produced on the stage in 1873 and marks the beginning of realist theatre.” Cf. Liz Brent, Critical Essay on Realism, in Ira Mark Milne (ed.), *Literary Movements for Students*, Second Edition. Vol. 2 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), p. 668.
- ⁶²“Henrik Ibsen” in *Encyclopedia Britannica 2007*(CD ROM).
- ⁶³ Daniel S. Burt, “Henrik Ibsen” in *The Literary 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Novelists, Playwrights, and Poets of All Time* (New York: Facts On File Inc., 2009), p. 133.
- ⁶⁴ Daniel S. Burt, “A Doll’s House” in *The Drama 100*, op. cit., p. 60.
- ⁶⁵Quoted by Daniel S. Burt in “A Doll’s House”, op. cit., p. 60.
- ⁶⁶ Idem.
- ⁶⁷ Daniel S. Burt, “Henrik Ibsen”, op. cit., pp. 134-5.
- ⁶⁸ Liz Brent, Critical Essay on Realism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, op. cit., p. 668.
- ⁶⁹ Daniel S. Burt, “A Doll’s House”, op. cit., p. 61.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.; p. 60.
- ⁷¹ Charles A. Berst, “New theatres for old”, in Christopher Innes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*, op. cit., pp. 55-60.
- ⁷² George Bernard Shaw, “The Technical Novelty in Ibsen’s Plays” in *Major Critical Essays: The Quintessence of Ibsenism, The Perfect Wagnerite, The Sanity of Art* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 170.
- ⁷³ Christopher Innes, “Nothing but talk, talk, talk – Shaw talk: Discussion Plays and the making of modern drama”, in *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*, op. cit., p. 162.
- ⁷⁴ J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 913-14.
- ⁷⁵ George Bernard Shaw, “The Technical Novelty in Ibsen’s Plays”, op. cit., p. 160.
- ⁷⁶ Ian Clarke, “Drama To 1950” in Martin Dodsworth (ed.), *The Penguin History of Literature: The Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 11.
- ⁷⁷ Idem.
- ⁷⁸ Christopher Innes, “Defining Modernism: George Bernard Shaw”, in *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 15, 20.
- ⁷⁹ G. J. Watson, “Shaw and Brecht: Making Us Think”, in *Drama*, op. cit., pp. 156-57.
- ⁸⁰ William. A. Armstrong, “Sean O’Casey” in Ian Scott-Kilvert (ed.), *British Writers, Vol. VII* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1983), p. 3.
- ⁸¹ ‘Sean O’Casey’, in *Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature*, Vol. 2 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), p. 1167.
- ⁸² Ian Clarke “Drama to 1950”, op. cit., p. 18.
- ⁸³ “Naturalism” in *Literary Movements for Students*, op. cit., p. 543.
- ⁸⁴ Donald Pizer, *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1984) reprinted in *Literary Movements for Students*, op. cit., p. 544.

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- ⁸⁵ Heinz Kosok, "Dublin as a Mirror of the World: Prefatory" in *O'Casey the Dramatist* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Ltd., / New Jersey: Barnes & Noble, 1985), p. 4.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid. ; p. 5.
- ⁸⁷ Idem.
- ⁸⁸ A. E. Malone, "O'Casey's Photographic Realism", in Ronald Ayling (ed.), *Sean O'Casey: Modern Judgements* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 71. Qtd by Heinz Kosok in *O'Casey the Dramatist*, op. cit., p. 5.
- ⁸⁹ William. A. Armstrong, "Sean O'Casey", op. cit., p. 7.
- ⁹⁰ Ian Clarke, "Drama to 1950", op. cit., p. 19.
- ⁹¹ Idem.
- ⁹² "Painters such as Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and Edvard Munch helped to lay the foundation for Expressionism in their use of distorted figures and vibrant colour schemes to depict raw and powerfully emotional states of mind. Munch's *The Scream* (1894), for example, a lithograph depicting a figure with a contorted face screaming in horror, epitomized the tone of much expressionist art." Cf. "Expressionism" in *Literary Movements for Students*, Second Edition, Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 253.
- ⁹³ "Expressionism" in *Encyclopedia Britannica 2007* (CD ROM)
- ⁹⁴ Daniel S. Burt, "August Strindberg" in *The Literary 100*, op. cit., p. 209.
- ⁹⁵ Quoted by David Rush in *A Student Guide to Play Analysis* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), p. 219.
- ⁹⁶ J. M. Ritchie, "Introduction," in *German Expressionist Drama* (Twayne Publishers, 1976), pp.15–39 excerpted and reprinted in *Literary Movements for Students*, op. cit., p. 276.
- ⁹⁷ David Rush, "Expressionism" in *A Student Guide to Play Analysis*, op. cit., p. 228.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid. ; p.217.
- ⁹⁹ Idem.
- ¹⁰⁰ David Krause, "A World at War" in *Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work*, op. cit., p. 113.
- ¹⁰¹ Quoted by G. J. Watson in "Shaw and Brecht: Making Us Think", op. cit., p. 158.
- ¹⁰² Ibid. ; p. 159.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid. ; p. 161.
- ¹⁰⁴ Quoted by Ibid. ; p. 161.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid. ; p. 162.
- ¹⁰⁶ "Epic Theatre" in David Galens and Lynn Spampinato (ed.), *Drama for Students*, Vol. 1 (Detroit: Gale, 1998), p. 317.
- ¹⁰⁷ G. J. Watson, op. cit., p. 163.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid. ; p. 162.
- ¹⁰⁹ Christopher Innes, "John Arden: the popular tradition and Epic alternatives", in *Modern British Drama*, op. cit., p. 134.
- ¹¹⁰ John Arden, *To Present the Pretence*, pp. 37-8, quoted by Christopher Innes, op. cit., p. 134.

CHAPTER II

THE 1916 EASTER RISING: *The Plough and the Stars*

The Covey. They're bringin' nice disgrace on that banner now.
Clitheroe (remonstratively). How are they bringin' disgrace on it?
The Covey (snappily). Because it's a Labour flag, an' was never
meant for politics. . . .

Sean O'Casey, *The Plough and the Stars*.

The world re-created by Sean O'Casey in his play *The Plough and the Stars*¹ (1926) is filled with patriotism and national pride, but also marked by a series of violent events, destruction, and bloodshed. Thus, my endeavour in the first section of this chapter is to study O'Casey's depiction of the futility of the Rising and the horrible experiences of the working-class Dubliners, innocent civilians and non-combatants, during the Easter Week Uprising, 1916. The focus will be laid on O'Casey's critique, from his Socialist standpoint, of the Easter Rising leaders who resorted to rebellion instead of defending the Labourites' cause. War for O'Casey, as will be discussed in the present chapter, is neither a joke, nor a 'big game', nor street parading in military uniforms, but rather deprivation, suffering, and death. The second section for its part will be devoted to the study of some theatrical devices and techniques that Sean O'Casey makes use of to stage the Easter Rising events. Special attention will be given to the conception of the dramatic space and the relationship between the stage action and the military events represented off-stage, together with O'Casey's use of a pattern of music and songs to emphasise some of the main themes and actions in this play.

1. Thematic Concern(s)

The opening Act of *The Plough and the Stars* is set in November 1915 while the First World War is still raging in Europe and elsewhere. The action takes place in a

cramped and shabby two-room tenement flat. It is the home of Jack and Nora Clitheroe; a young married couple. Other residents in the Clitheroes' tenement include Nora's uncle Peter Flynn an Irish National Forester; Fluther Good a carpenter; Bessie Burgess a street-fruit seller together with Mrs. Gogan a charwoman, and her sick fifteen-year old daughter Mollser, in addition to Jack's cousin who is referred to simply as "The Young Covey". Everybody in the tenement house, except for the Clitheroes and Bessie Burgess, gets ready for the meeting that is to take place during the night in Dublin. The purpose of the meeting is to rally the patriotic spirit of Labour to militant activity. Jack Clitheroe looks forward to winning freedom for Ireland, but is somewhat disappointed for not having been made an officer in the Citizen Army. Conversely, his wife Nora is more interested in keeping her husband alive than basking in glory. Subsequently, we learn from Captain Brennan that Jack Clitheroe has been appointed, by General Jim Connolly, Commandant in the Citizen Army. Jack is to command a battalion which will, later in the night, make a practice attack on Dublin Castle; the headquarters of the British occupying forces and seat of the local colonial government. Infuriated because Nora hid and burnt –earlier– the letter of his appointment, Jack decides to go out and attend the Citizen Army demonstration, disregarding Nora's pleas to keep him by her side. The Act closes as a detachment of loyalist Dublin Fusiliers, en route to war-torn France, marches past the street below.

The action then shifts in Act II to a pub outside of which a crowd is stirred by the voice of a public speaker. Referred to simply as "The Figure in the Window", the speaker rouses the local Irish to fight and sacrifice themselves for the independence of Ireland. As a result, Peter Flynn and Fluther Good become so excited by the Orator's words that they start boasting. Unlike the two men, Rosie Redmond, a prostitute present in the pub, pays no attention to the Orator's speech. She is complaining about the lack of customers, and attempts to attract The Covey. The latter, similarly unconcerned with the Speaker's call for

sacrifice, rejects Rosie's proposal and even denies her the right to enter the discussion in the pub because she is a prostitute. Then, a quarrel flares up between Bessie Burgess and Mrs. Gogan, and also between The Covey, Peter and Fluther Good. It nearly turns into a fight were it not for the barman's immediate intervention. In the meantime, Jack Clitheroe and his fellow demonstrators rush into the pub to have a drink. They carry the banner of the Irish Citizen Army 'The Plough and the Stars', and that of the Irish Volunteers 'the Tricolour'². They seem so excited by the Orator's speech that they swear "imprisonment, wounds, and death" for an independent Ireland.

In Act III, which is set five months later, we are brought to the actual Easter Week Uprising of April 24th, 1916. Padraic Pearse, leader of the Irish Volunteers, reads a Proclamation of Independence on the steps of the General Post Office. While the fighting goes on outside, The Covey, Peter, and Fluther are shown playing cards inside the Clitheroes' tenement, and discussing the events of the Uprising. No sooner does Bessie inform them that people are looting the shops than the three men leave the tenement to get their part of the plunder, despite the dangerous conditions outside. Nora, now pregnant, has unsuccessfully tried to find Jack at the barricades to bring him home. He is seen later at the tenement door aiding the wounded Volunteer, Lieutenant Langon. This time again, Jack ignores Nora's pleas to quit the fight, sending her into eventual madness, and causing her to miscarry their child.

In Act IV, set a few days later while "half o' th' city must be burnin'",³ we get news of Jack's 'heroic' death, as well as the death of the consumptive child, Mollser. Greatly outnumbered, the rebels have been defeated and the last few snipers tracked down by the British soldiers. When Nora screams at the window for Jack, her neighbour, Bessie Burgess, pulls her out of the way and gets mortally shot herself. The play ends with Dublin in flame and the two Tommies, who previously took the coffin of the dead Mollser, calmly

drink the tea Nora has prepared for Jack, while singing the British chauvinistic song “Keep the Home Fires Burning”.

The Plough and the Stars was the last of Sean O’Casey’s Dublin trilogy to be performed in the Abbey Theatre in the 1920s. The success of his first two plays *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) and *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) was the last to be acknowledged by the Abbey’s Dublin audience⁴. Indeed, *The Plough and the Stars* provoked angry responses from the spectators. The Irish nationalists who had rebelled in 1916 became martyrs in the eyes of many Irishmen. O’Casey’s characteristic depiction of war as wasteful and full of cowards, not heroes, outraged many audience members⁵. Once again, as he had done for John Millington Synge⁶, Abbey Director William Butler Yeats had to step in and defend O’Casey’s genius:

You have disgraced yourselves again. Is this to be an ever-recurring celebration of the arrival of Irish genius? Synge first, and then O’Casey. The news of the happenings of the past few minutes will go from country to country. Dublin has once more rocked the cradle of genius. From such a scene in this theatre went forth the fame of Synge. Equally the fame of O’Casey is born here tonight. This is his apotheosis.⁷

Yeats defended O’Casey on the grounds of artistry as the latter was a talented playwright. Thus O’Casey’s vision of Irish life [with Yeats’s consent] was to be played on the world’s stage whether the Irish nationalists liked it or not.

In this play, Sean O’Casey lays the emphasis on the vanity of the Irish patriots—or rather the would-be heroes— whose avowed nationalism and patriotism before the 1916 Easter Rebellion seems to be superficial. Indeed, as William Armstrong argues, “the vanity of the patriots is especially apparent in their excessive love of picturesque regalia and military rank.”⁸ How the patriots should appear, it could be claimed, seems much more important than how they should act. Such statement is best shown in the first two acts of *The Plough and the Stars* as the various patriots⁹ get ready for the meeting— which will

obviously lead to the coming war against Britain—wearing colourful military uniforms and marching under beautiful flags. Their uniforms are subjected to a mock-heroic treatment from O’Casey, as they seem to symbolise the great ‘much ado about nothing’.

Peter Flynn, though a minor character in the play, is given too much space in the first Act for his preparation to dress—for the meeting—in the National Foresters’ uniform. The latter, proudly worn by Peter, consists of a “green coat, gold braided; white breeches, top boots, frilled shirt. He [Peter Flynn] carries the slouch hat, with the white ostrich plume, and the sword in his hands.”¹⁰ The combination of all those gaudy items, which would supposedly provide honour and respect for Peter, become a source of mockery and ridicule from Mrs. Gogan, Fluther, The Covey and even from Nora Clitheroe. Commenting on Peter’s frilled shirt, Mrs. Gogan compares it first to a “woman’s petticoat” then to a “Lord Mayor’s nightdress”¹¹, while his sword is seen “twiced too big for him.”¹² To that comment, Fluther suggests, in a comic way, that “it’s a baby’s rattle he [Peter] ought to have.”¹³ The Covey’s attitude towards Peter’s regalia is the most revealing one: “Isn’t that th’ malignant oul’ varmint! Lookin’ like th’ illegitimate son of an illegitimate child of a corporal in th’ Mexican army!”¹⁴ Nora, brings her touch to Peter’s childish vaingloriousness when she fastens his sword, puts Peter’s hat on his head, and then hurries him out of the house. Although laughed at by the various tenement dwellers, Peter Flynn, unrepentantly, considers himself a ‘real patriot’ due to his frequent pilgrimages to Wolfe Tone’s shrine¹⁵ at Bodenstown in County Kildare.

The skin-deep nationalism is not just characteristic of Peter Flynn, the National Forester, but does also affect the officers of the Irish Citizen Army and of the Irish Volunteers. This is shown through O’Casey’s characterisation of Jack Clitheroe and Captain Brennan. Jack, a bricklayer in private life, and Brennan, a chicken-butcher, are just as proud of their military outfit as Peter Flynn is of his. When Captain Brennan comes in

the first Act bringing a message to Jack Clitheroe for a “reconnaissance attack” on Dublin Castle, he appears in a full and showy uniform of the Citizen Army: “green suit; slouch green hat caught up at one side by a small Red Hand badge; Sam Browne belt, with a revolver in the holster.”¹⁶ This time, the uniform reveals the vanity of the officers who wear it, the envy of those who do not. Jack Clitheroe, it may be reminded, had –earlier– left the Citizen Army because he was not made Captain: “Ay, you gave it [the Citizen Army] up— because you got th’ sulks when they didn’t make a Captain of you,”¹⁷ Nora confronts him in the first act. Unaware that he had been promoted to the rank of Commandant in the Citizen Army a fortnight before, Jack bristles with jealousy at the sight of Captain Brennan in a full military dress. And this is not surprising. Fluther Good reminds us early in the play that before Jack Clitheroe quit the Citizen Army, one would “hardly ever see him without his gun, an’ the Red Hand o’ Liberty Hall in his hat.”¹⁸ To this comment, Mrs. Gogan adds that Jack was so certain of being made Captain that “he bought a Sam Browne belt, an’ was always puttin’ it on an’ standin’ at th’ door *showing it off*, till th’ man came an’ put out th’ street lamps on him.”¹⁹ (Emphasis added).

Talking their heads off instead of acting seems to be the ‘doctrine’ of the would-be heroes.

Jack Clitheroe’s resentful remarks in the first Act are most illustrative:

“To-night is th’ first chance that Brennan has got of showing himself off since they made a Captain of him—why, God only knows. It’ll be a treat to see him swankin’ it at th’ head of the Citizen Army carryin’ th’ flag of the Plough and the Stars[. . .]”²⁰

Towards such attitudes on the part of the Citizen Army and of the Irish Volunteers—the two patriotic organisations which combined and fought the British forces during Easter 1916— O’Casey expressed his bitterness, particularly on the issue of purchasing uniforms for their soldiers to parade with. Maureen Malone claims that O’Casey, as Secretary of the Council of the Irish Citizen Army, argued in vain against the use of uniforms.²¹ In fact, in *Drums Under the Windows*, the third volume of O’Casey’s

Autobiographies, O’Casey argued that the kind of fighting such soldiers might have to do could best be accomplished by trained guerrilla fighters disguised in anonymous civilian dress:

If we flaunt signs about of what we are, and what we do, we’ll get it on the head and round the neck. As for a uniform—that would be worst of all. We couldn’t hope to hide ourselves anywhere clad in green and gold, or even green without the gold. Caught in a dangerous corner, there would be a chance in your workaday clothes. You could slip among the throng, carelessly, with few the wiser. In uniform, the crowd would shrink aside to show you, and the enemy will pounce. In your everyday rags you could, if the worst came, hang your rifle on a lamp-post and go your way.²²

The wisdom of such argument will actually find its strength as the play draws to its close. Once the Irish patriots are defeated and Dublin is in flame, Captain Brennan has but to change his military uniform (synonymous with pride and glory in the first Act) for the safer civilian clothes and take refuge in the tenement. He admits his inability to flee the British forces while remaining in his military dress: “I’d never have got here, only I managed to change me uniform for what I’m wearin’....”²³

As a matter of fact, Sean O’Casey resigned from the ICA because the latter no longer fought for the welfare of the proletariat it first advocated. O’Casey’s withdrawal from the ICA in 1914, as William Armstrong confirms, was due to the “increasing collaboration between the Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers, whose nationalistic principles were contrary, in some respect, to the socialism in which he [O’Casey] believed.”²⁴ This argument is further reinforced by David Krause, who claims that “the Volunteers were a patriotic, middle-class organization, in no way connected with labour and the fight for improved working and living conditions; in fact, they were if anything anti-labour[...]”²⁵

Actually, “The Volunteers’ interest in uniforms” and “their fantasy of patriotic glory is [deflated] by O’Casey’s presentation of the naked bodies of the Dublin poor”²⁶:

They will tempt money from you to deck you in uniforms of scarlet or grey, or green and gold, while they . . . cause you to forget the hundreds of your fellow-

countrymen and country-women gliding through Dublin's streets naked and unashamed in sin, misery and want.²⁷

O'Casey believed in social reform and acted for the betterment of the working class living conditions. Being a playwright from the Dublin slums, he undoubtedly knew their dire conditions and how they were plagued with poverty and disease. "Drawing the contrast between the vainglorious posturing of the Volunteers and the concrete life in the [Dublin] tenements,"²⁸ O'Casey discussed, even more sharply, the image of the Dublin slum-dweller:

I challenge [the Volunteers] to tell us if it be prudent to excitedly discuss the colours and distinctions of Volunteer uniforms, to beg for money to gratify their craving for pomp and show, while in Dublin alone twenty thousand families are wriggling together like worms in a putrid mass in horror-filled one-room tenements.²⁹

In the play under study, it may be argued, some of O'Casey's Socialist beliefs are voiced by The Young Covey. As he says to Bessie Burgess:

When I think of all th' problems in front o' th' workers, it makes me sick to be lookin' at oul' codgers goin' about dhressed up like green-accoutred figures gone astray out of a toyshop!³⁰

The Covey's remark, however, seems belated to the 'patriots' since the preparation for the forthcoming battle of Easter Week against Great Britain is, indeed, in progress.

O'Casey, in fact, follows a chronological order in his re-creation / fictionalisation of the historical events leading up to the Rising and ever after it. The second Act of *The Plough and the Stars* is set in a public-house outside of which a mass-organised political rally is being held. (It is one hour later). Both the patriots from the Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers, as well as common Irish labourers are stirred by the words of a shadowy "Figure in the Window". The Orator is the historical Padraic Pearse; one of the principal planners of the Easter Uprising, signer of the Irish Republic Proclamation, and Commandant-in-Chief of the Volunteer forces³¹ during Easter Week 1916. The call to

arms as well as the tension that precipitates the violence of the last two acts is motivated, throughout Act II, by the words of Padraic Pearse:

THE VOICE OF THE MAN. It is a glorious thing to see arms in the hands of Irishmen. We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms, we must accustom ourselves to the sight of arms, we must accustom ourselves to the use of arms.[. . .] *Bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation that regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood [. . .]* There are many things more horrible than bloodshed, and slavery is one of them!³² (Emphasis added).

The Speaker, apparently, incites the men to take up arms by appealing to their virility and fear of being called cowards. He even resorts to describing their cause in religious terms to heighten its significance. Rosie Redmond, the professional prostitute present in the pub, calls what the Orator was saying “th’ sacred truth”, to which the sensible Barman responds, “if I was only a little younger, I’d be plungin’ mad into th’ middle of it!”³³

In fact, as the second Act opens, Rosie Redmond provides us with a full description of the crowd’s mood as they are marching to Pearse’s meeting:

ROSIE. [...] They’re all in a holy mood. Th’ solemn-lookin’ dials on th’ whole o’ them an’ they marchin’ to th’ meetin’. You’d think they were th’ glorious company of th’ saints an’ th’ noble army of martyrs thrampin’ through th’ strheets of paradise.³⁴

As a result, no one seems interested anymore in flirting with the attractive Rosie, “[T]here isn’t much notice taken of a pretty petticoat of a night like this” she bitterly complains to Tom the Barman, to whom Rosie adds “[T]hey’re all thinkin’ of higher things than a girl’s garthers.”³⁵

While Rosie complains about her lack of customers, the immediate effects of the Speaker’s oratory may well be felt in Peter Flynn’s and Fluther Good’s responses (both are present in the pub), as well as in the uniformed officers’ assertions. Their talk soon becomes that of fighting for Ireland, dying for Ireland³⁶. Peter and Fluther are

enthusiastically fired by Padraic Pearse's speech, heard through the pub window, and are unable to stop "drinking" for relieving their thirst from excitement. "A meetin' like this", the cowardly Peter states, "always makes me feel as if I could dhrink Lock Erinn dhry!"³⁷ His excitement and thirst are so increased that, before resuming conversation with Fluther, he asks the Barman for two more halves. Peter needs to remember the glorious past of Ireland in order to feel more confident in his future actions³⁸. He confesses to Fluther:

PETER. I felt a burnin' lump in me throat when I heard th' band playin' "The Soldiers' Song," rememberin' last hearin' it marchin' in military formation, with th' people starin' on both sides at us, carryin' with us th' pride an' resolution o' Dublin to th' grave of Wolfe Tone [. . .] Th' memory of all th' things that was done, an' all th' things that was suffered be th' people, was boomin' in me brain. . . . Every nerve in me body was quiverin' to do somethin' desperate!³⁹

Fluther, for his part, becomes eloquent as the voice of the speaker moves him to thirst, and he himself trembles to express his excitement to the audience:

FLUTHER. You couldn't feel any way else [but thirsty] at a time like this when th' spirit of a man is pulsin' to be out fightin' for th' truth with his feet tremblin' on th' way to the gallows, an' his ears tinglin' with th' faint, far-away sound of burstin' rifle-shots that'll maybe whip the last little shock o' life out of him that's left lingerin' in his body!⁴⁰

As the meeting outside the pub goes on, Fluther is gradually enthused by the flaming rhetoric of Pearse. The things he has seen and heard have made the blood boil in his veins, and he feels ready to die instantly, for life seems meaningless after such a demonstration. He says to Peter as both carry on drinking:

FLUTHER. Jammed as I was in th' crowd, I listened to th' speeches patherin on th' people's head, like rain fallin' on th' corn; every derogatory thought went out o' me mind, an' I said to meself, "You can die now, Fluther, for you've seen th' shadow-dhreams of th' past leppin' to life in th' bodies of livin' men that show, if we were without a titther o' courage for centuries, we're vice versa now!" Looka here. (*He stretches out his arm under Peter's face and rolls up his sleeve.*) The blood was BOILIN' in me veins!⁴¹

This scene, which takes place inside the pub between two excited and drunk Irish civilians, gives an idea of what is happening to the crowd outside. The uniformed men,

such as Jack Clitheroe, Captain Brennan, and Lieutenant Langon, are galvanised by Pearse's words, and soon rush in. Bearing the two banners, the ICA's "Plough and the Stars" and the "Tri-colour" of the Volunteers, the three soldiers — in the words of O'Casey's stage directions— enter the pub "*in a state of emotional excitement. Their faces are flushed and their eyes sparkle,[. . .] They have been mesmerized by the fervency of the speeches.*"⁴²

The enthusiasm of the Irish patriots shows that the Orator's message has been fully understood and that the Rising would take place, regardless of all sacrifices. Possessed with the illusion of carrying a sacred banner in their hands, Clitheroe, Brennan, and Lieutenant Langon even use patriotic slogans when they describe Ireland as greater than a wife or a mother, and repeat that:

LIEUT. LANGON. Th' time is rotten ripe for revolution.
CLITHEROE. You have a mother, Langon.
LIEUT. LANGON. Ireland is greater than a mother
CAPT. BRENNAN. You have a wife, Clitheroe.
CLITHEROE. Ireland is greater than a wife.
LIEUT. LANGON. Th' time for Ireland's battle is now— th' place for Ireland's battle is here.⁴³

The Speaker, however, has not finished. He leads the Irish soldiers and civilians to the assumption that "the old heart of earth [need] to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields", and then asks them to "be ready to pour out the same red wine in the same glorious sacrifice, for without shedding of blood, there [will be] no redemption."⁴⁴ Once he becomes sure of the impact of his words on his countrymen, and feels their love for heroism and sacrifice, the Orator starts removing the last doubts which may possibly exist among the unwilling participants. Accordingly, he refers to the power of their foes while stressing that with their faith and courage, the Irish people can easily defeat them⁴⁵. His concluding speech seems intended to make Fluther's blood boil even hotter, and to make the demonstrators cheer even louder:

VOICE OF THE MAN. Our foes are strong, but strong as they are, they cannot undo the miracles of God, who ripens in the heart of young men the seeds sown by the young men of a former generation. They think they have pacified Ireland; think they have foreseen everything; think they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools!—they have left us our Fenian dead, and, while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland, unfree, shall never be at peace!⁴⁶

The result of this final speech is a team *emotionally* ready for war, or rather for the “big game.”⁴⁷ Captain Brennan, catching the Plough and the Stars, swears “Imprisonment for th’ Independence of Ireland!” Langon lifts the Tri-colour and vows, “Wounds for th’ Independence of Ireland!” Clitheroe vows, “Death for th’ Independence of Ireland!” The three together swear, “so help us God.”⁴⁸

As it stands, O’Casey makes us realise throughout the second Act, that the Rising’s cause seems completely justified after the patriots’ meeting with Pearse. The excited rebels from the Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers are ready to sacrificing mother, wife, and life for an independent Irish Republic. This leads, as expressed by William Armstrong, to one of the basic thematic truths of this play, that “the vanity and excitements created by patriotism and war disrupt fundamental human relationships, particularly those between husband and wife, and those between mother and child....”⁴⁹ A true statement since this ‘superficial’ patriotism is only the result of a flaming political oratory. Besides, the patriots’ conviction to take part in the Rising is made through sheer emotionalism rather than thorough cold thinking. Therefore, the consequences of the insurrection, as will be discussed hereafter, will be devastating to the whole Irish people.

In Act III, which is set outside the home of the Clitheroes at Easter 1916, we get news of the atrocious development of the Rising. Neither civilians nor combatants are out of danger. Mollser’s tuberculosis is rapidly changing for the worst, while the Irish Volunteers and the Citizen Army are retreating from the battle-front. Nora Clitheroe comes back home on Fluther’s shoulder, completely exhausted from searching in vain for her husband amidst the battle lines. Nora, in fact, makes us realise the patriots’ skin-deep

heroism as she describes their weakness, as well as their unexpressed fear in the middle of war, facing death. Besides, Nora comes to the conclusion that the sole reason why the so-called patriots participate in the Rising is only out of fear of being viewed as cowards by their peers. What she has seen in the rebels' eyes at the front, is angrily described in the following passage:

NORA [*with denunciatory anger*]. I tell you they're afraid to say they're afraid!...Oh, I saw it, I saw it, Mrs. GoganAt th' barricade in North King Street I saw fear glowin' in all their eyes... An' some o' them laughed at me, but th' laugh was a frightened one....An' some o' them shouted at me, but th' shout had in it th' shiver o' fear.... I tell you they were afraid, afraid, afraid!⁵⁰

This statement proves that the would-be-heroes pay only lip-service to revolution. They are unable to see the irony between their words and their deeds. In fact, their avowed patriotism and readiness to sacrifice everything for their motherland was only expressed in time of extreme excitement, drunkenness, and mostly when the Rebellion was far off. Once the war begins in earnest, those so-called patriots come to realise the high price required for an independent Irish Republic. Peter Flynn, for instance, so confident and proud in his Foresters' costume and ready to die for Ireland before the Rising, shows his cowardice as soon as the first gunfire is heard at a distance. He fearfully wonders: "What would happen if a shell landed here now?"⁵¹ Fluther Good, for his part, recognises that the Nationalists' opponent —the British army— is not "playing the game". When the British soldiers harshly retaliate using artillery, Fluther exclaims: "Surely to God they're not goin' to use artillery on us? [...] Aw, holy Christ, that's not playing the game!"⁵²

The weakness and fear shown in the civilians', non-combatants' attitude are not so much different from that characterising the rebels. Indeed, Jack Clitheroe, Captain Brennan, Lieutenant Langon, as well as many of the rank-and-file from both the Volunteers and the Citizen Army, find themselves incapable to face so tragic a situation.

“Wounded and defeated, they have no other alternative but to desert the battlefield, and seek shelter in the safety of the tenement,”⁵³

*...Captain Brennan comes in supporting Lieutenant Langon, whose arm is around Brennan’s neck. Langon’s face, which is ghastly white, is momentarily convulsed with spasms of agony. He is in a state of collapse, and Brennan is almost carrying him. After a few moments Clitheroe, pale, and in a state of calm nervousness, follows, looking back in the direction from which he came, a rifle, held at the ready, in his hands.*⁵⁴

In this scene, Lieutenant Langon is literally wounded, and it is *real blood* which is spilling out of his stomach. His reaction to this violent physical pain is “unheroically” expressed, as though Langon bitterly regrets his participation in the battle:

LIEUT. LANGON. Oh, if I’d kep’ down only a little longer, I mightn’t ha’ been hit! Everyone else escapin’, an’ me gettin’ me belly ripped asundher! . . . I couldn’t scream, couldn’t even scream . . . D’ye think I’m really badly wounded, Bill? Me clothes seem to be all soakin’ wet . . . It’s blood . . . My God, it must be me own blood!⁵⁵

This, as Nicholas Grene maintains, “does more than provide a grim contrast to the metaphorical and sacramental blood of Pearse’s speech in Act II — ‘the red wine of the battlefields’ ”⁵⁶— and puts into question Langon’s “rhetorical cry” in that earlier scene: “Wounds for th’ Independence of Ireland!”

Another instance of the patriots’ failure is illustrated by Jack’s declaration to Nora, “I wish to God I’d never left you,”⁵⁷ while he retreats from the fight⁵⁸. Nora’s reunion with Jack, after a long and unsuccessful search at the barricades, reveals one of the basic conflicts that arises in time of war; the conflict between “life / love” and “duty”. The sight of Jack Clitheroe, safe and sound, at the tenement’s door prompted Nora’s hysterical demonstration of her feelings:

NORA. Jack, Jack, Jack; God be thanked . . . be thanked . . . He has been kind and merciful to His poor handmaiden . . . My Jack, my own Jack, that I thought was lost is found, that I thought was dead is alive again! . . . Oh, God be praised for ever, evermore! . . . My poor Jack . . . Kiss me, kiss me, Jack, kiss your own Nora!⁵⁹

Besides, Nora tries to dissuade her husband from going back to fight. She even tells him, in the presence of his fellow patriots, how she risked everything amidst the danger of war only to bring him back home. The couple's reunion in this scene, which could have, supposedly, brought relief and comfort, provokes instead Jack's fury and feeling of humiliation for Nora's "shameful" act:

CLITHEROE (in fear of her action would give him future shame). What possessed you to make a show of yourself, like that? . . . What way d'ye think I'll feel when I'm told my wife was bawlin' for me at th' barricades? What are you more than any other woman?"⁶⁰

Despite Jack's rough reaction, Nora keeps on struggling to convince her husband as well as the rebels to retreat and save at least their lives. She becomes wise and sees the insurrection going nowhere but to threaten her life, family, and destroy any future hope. The boastful Jack, however, rejects her pleas and angrily pushes her away from him. He furiously yells at Nora: "Are you goin' to turn all the risks I'm takin' into a laugh?"⁶¹ From this instance, O'Casey provides evidence that Jack's involvement in the Uprising is but a way for feeding personal vanity and evading possible ridicule. Here again, as evidenced in Langon's case before, we may seize the irony of Jack's words at the close of the second act, when he declared "Ireland is greater than a wife".

In his analysis of the main ideas in *The Plough and the Stars*, John O'Riordan points out, among other things, that O'Casey's feelings during Easter Week resemble those expressed by the character of Nora Clitheroe. He states that: "Nora voices the playwright's acute understanding that bravery and fear are but two sides of the same coin, and arouse (in Nora's own case) tormenting moments of agonising perception"⁶². For O'Casey, the Easter Rising was unnecessary since the driving force behind the rebellion was but the firing "nationalist oratory", which brought only more suffering and death to the poor Dubliners:

The play suggests the whole of Easter Week may have been based on sham-rhetoric, and that bloodshed is not glorious red wine but unnecessary human sacrifice.⁶³

Accordingly, the many sacrifices that Dublin suffered could have been avoided had the Uprising leaders delayed the upheaval. In fact, the time of the Easter Rising, as O’Casey later on avowed, was “a rare time for death in Ireland ; and in the battle’s prologue many a common man, woman, and child had said goodbye to work and love and play. [. . .]⁶⁴

Moreover, one should not forget that the Easter Week Rising took place while the bloody “Great War” was raging at its most throughout Europe. Countless Irishmen were enlisting in the British forces and embarking for the Western Front to save the Crown. They are there to remind us, as background to the Rising, of that greater war in which so many Irishmen were fighting for Britain rather than against her. From this fact, as Maureen Malone affirms, O’Casey extracts full irony by juxtaposing the departure of the Dublin soldiers to the Front with the departure of Brennan and Clitheroe to Pearse’s meeting, where they are incited to rise against Britain.⁶⁵ This is echoed again, in the play, through Sean O’Casey’s characterisation of Bessie Burgess. This Protestant, Loyalist fruit-vendor, whose son is fighting at the Front, expresses hostility towards both the rebels and the rebellion.⁶⁶ She points out that to rise against the British at this moment is like stabbing them in the back; while they fight the Germans for everyone:

BESSIE [*speaking in towards the room*]. There’s th’ men marchin’ out into th’ dhread dimness o’ danger, while th’ lice is crawlin’ about feedin’ on th’ fatness o’ the land! But you’ll not escape from th’ arrow that flieth be night, or th’ sickness that wasteth be day. . . . An’ ladyship an’ all, as some o’ them may be, they’ll be scattered abroad, like th’ dust in th’ darkness!⁶⁷

During his meeting with the Irish rebels before the Rising, Padraic Pearse —“The Figure in the Window”— acknowledged the military supremacy of their British opponent, “our foes are strong”. He nonetheless showed some confidence that with their fate in God and courage, they could easily win the battle; “strong as they are, they cannot undo the

miracles of God.”⁶⁸ Unfortunately, this so confident a statement does not hold true. The British, in fact, possess heavy artillery, organised troops, and are combating against a group of vainglorious Irish patriots who seem much more concerned with parading in showy military uniforms than with learning the principles of warfare. How well the British Tommies are militarily equipped may be seen in O’Casey’s description of Corporal Stoddart of the Wiltshires. Following O’Casey’s stage direction in Act IV, “Corporal Stoddart of the Wiltshires enters in full war kit; steel helmet, rifle and bayonet, and trench tool”⁶⁹ which proves their preparedness for war when compared with the Irish patriots.

Another instance illustrating the supremacy of the British forces may be found in Act IV of *The Plough and the Stars*. When the British Tommy, Sergeant Tinley, complains that the Irish rebels are not fighting fair, Fluther Good vehemently retorts:

*FLUTHER (unable to stand the slight). Fight fair! A few hundhred scrawls o’ chaps with a couple o’ guns an’ Rosary beads, again’ a hundhred thousand thrained men with horse, fut, an’ artillery . . . an’ he wants us to fight fair! (To Sergeant) D’ye want us to come out in our skins an’ throw stones?*⁷⁰

This being said, the inequalities between the two belligerents are so significant that one would hardly predict success for the Irish rebels. Together with their inferiority, O’Casey mentions in the play the indifference of the Irish masses. In fact, the Dubliners on whom great hopes were stacked refused to participate in or support the Rising.⁷¹ While the fighting was at its most, the civilians are shown either playing cards or seizing the chance to loot the broken shops. In this regard, the Irish poet and storyteller James Stephens (1880-1950), in his account of the Rising, comments on the indifference of the men in the street to the great event. He says that “[m]any of these men did not care a rap which way it went, and would have bet on the business as if it had been a horse race or a dog fight.”⁷²

This lack of interest is actually depicted through O’Casey’s portrayal, in Act III, of the Dublin slum-dwellers during the Easter Week Rising. While the excited Nationalists go

to fight for Ireland, the poor civilians seize the opportunity to pillage the deserted shops of the city. Thus, no sooner does Bessie Burgess come with the news of the plunder than everybody in the tenement, except the frightened Peter Flynn, hurries out to get his share of the loot. Amidst the danger and confusion of war, the poor and starving slum-dwellers greedily seek for “*life*” without any sense of fighting for the Rising. Indeed, Bessie Burgess and Mrs. Gogan return with a pram full of looted clothes. The Young Covey, for his part, returns with a sack of flour and a ham on his back, while the drunken Fluther gets a half-gallon jar of whiskey, a shirt, and a woman’s hat. From this scene, we strongly feel that the poor Dubliners’ realistic desire for life shows no hesitation or shame in the battle of looting. They fight only for the purpose of self-preservation. They cannot be blamed, for they were, as O’Casey has said, “stretching out their hands for food, for colour, for raiment, and for life.”⁷³

The shop-looting, then, bears witness to the political leaders’ failure to sensitise the proletariat, and by extension to the failure of the whole Rising. The Irish populace, living under extreme poverty and recurring starvation, seem much more concerned with finding something to eat than following any idealistic Republicanism. Analysing this aspect in O’Casey’s play, Jack Lindsay comes to the conclusion that:

The shop-looting in *The Plough and the Stars* is an exposure both of the way in which the Republican Movement, for all its rhetoric, has failed to rouse the masses, and of the way in which those masses are unable to rise to the historic occasion and mould it in their likeness.⁷⁴

In the play, the plunder of the shops engendered, however, a sort of hostility between “the fighting men and the looting non-combatants.”⁷⁵ Captain Brennan and Commandant Clitheroe, it may be reminded, belong to an Army devoted essentially to the Labourites’ defence. When the workers refuse “to support what the insurgents are doing for them”⁷⁶ and opt for pillage instead, the Citizen Army and the Volunteers start firing at

them. Captain Brennan, besides his harsh reaction towards the poor and starving looters, is even “indignant that Clitheroe only fired warning shots at the looters”⁷⁷:

CAPT. BRENNAN (savagely to Clitheroe). Why did you fire over their heads? Why didn't you fire to kill?

CLITHEROE. No, no, Bill; bad as they are they're Irish men an' women.

CAPT. BRENNAN (savagely). Irish be damned! Attackin' an' mobbin' th' men that are riskin' their lives for them. If these *slum lice* gather at our heels again, plug one o' them, or I'll soon shock them with a shot or two meself!⁷⁸ (emphasis added).

Though the looting episode is seen by the Nationalists and some critics⁷⁹ as a disgrace on the cause of the Rising, O'Casey's standpoint is totally the opposite. In *The Plough and the Stars*, O'Casey is simply representing— rather coldly recording one of the consequences of war. The shop-looting may only be one of those consequences, because O'Casey's attitude to real-life looters may be different. However, in this play, O'Casey's working-class background may be seen as the angle from which he builds up his judgements, with particular sympathy for the tenement-dwellers. In this respect, he once declared “[M]y sympathies were always with the rags and tatters that sheltered the tenement-living Temples of the Holy Ghost.”⁸⁰ Besides, the plunder of the shops is considered rather a daring act in the midst of shell firings; “to go looting was a brave thing to do, for the streets sang songs of menace from bullets flying about everywhere.”⁸¹ Further, O'Casey returns to the defence of the Dublin civilians in giving his own interpretation of the looting episode, aimed mainly at those hostile Nationalists and critics:

[the looting] is usually condemned as ‘a dastardly insult to the unselfish men who were risking all for Ireland’. I don't look at it this way. When they got a chance, they ‘illegally’ seized the brighter goods of life which, with all others, they, too, had the right to have. Here people were usually called ‘the rats of the slums’; but I, who lived among them for so long, knew they had their own intelligence; they had courage, humour, and, very often, a great zest for life.⁸²

The fourth Act of *The Plough and the Stars*, which takes place in Bessie Burgess's two-room attic apartment, unveils the reality and ugly truth of the Easter Rising. The

showy uniforms are discarded, the proud flags fall, and the poor civilians, non-combatants, become demented or ultimately die. The ‘romantic patriots’ who launched the rebellion are no longer seen in the battlefield. They are either dead as is the case for Jack Clitheroe — shot dead at the Imperial Hotel⁸³—, or unwilling to resume the hopeless battle. This is best depicted through O’Casey’s presentation of Captain Brennan; the only survivor among the three oath-takers. Having been convinced of their opponent’s supremacy, Brennan had but to run away from the battle, leaving Clitheroe to die in a flaming building, and letting the ICA’s sacred banner “The Plough an’ th’ Stars [fall] like a shot as the roof crashed in.”⁸⁴ To escape death, he has even changed his once showy and proud uniform of the Citizen Army for safer civilian clothes, and joins the non-combatants in the relative security of the tenement. “There’s no chance o’ slippin’ back now”, he explains to the folk present in Bessie’s room, “for th’ military are everywhere, a fly couldn’t get through.”⁸⁵ Once more, O’Casey mentions in this scene the lack of solidarity between the civilians and the combatants. Since the British soldiers are everywhere, Brennan’s decision to stay in the tenement house disturbs The Covey, Fluther, and Peter. They become frightened and want him to leave by making such remarks as “you’d best be slippin’ back to where you come from” or “There’s no place to lie low. Th’ Tommies’ll be hoppin’ in here, any minute! [. . .] An’ then we’d all be shanghaied!”⁸⁶

Later on, The Covey, Fluther, and Peter Flynn are shown playing cards and bitterly declare that half of Dublin city must be burning. We learn from their conversation that the consumptive child Mollser is now dead; Nora Clitheroe has had a stillbirth and is consequently driven into madness. Indeed, near the men playing cards is shown a coffin where the two corpses of Mollser and Nora’s still-born child are lying. This symbol of death —the coffin— may have been brought on the stage, by O’Casey, to predict another

forthcoming disaster in the tenement house. This “shadow of death”, as John O’Riordan claims, “reflects bitter ones to come.”⁸⁷

In fact, Captain Brennan appears in this final act with a last message for Nora Clitheroe, but this time to announce Jack’s ‘heroic’ death. Rebuked by Bessie Burgess for his cowardice and for leaving Jack alone to face his tragic end, Brennan takes his own defence and explains:

CAPT. BRENNAN. I took me chance as well as him. . . . He took it like a man. His last whisper was to ‘Tell Nora to be brave; that I’m ready to meet my God, an’ that I’m proud to die for Ireland.’ An’ when our General heard it he said that ‘Commandant Clitheroe’s end was a gleam of glory.’ Mrs. Clitheroe’s grief will be a joy when she realizes that she has had a hero for a husband.⁸⁸

Brennan’s claim that ‘Mrs. Clitheroe’s grief will be a joy when she realizes that she has had a hero for a husband’ is immediately discredited when Nora appears in a mentally disordered state. “Here,” in Susan Harris’s words, “Nora demonstrates that her mind has been irrevocably [traumatised] by the loss of her baby and by Clitheroe’s betrayal.”⁸⁹

Besides, she puts the blame directly on Jack’s comrades:

Where’s my baby? Tell me where you’ve put it, where’ve you hidden it? [. . .] Give him to me, give me my husband! [. . .] I won’t go away for you; I won’t. Not till you give me back my husband. (*Screaming*) Murderers, that’s what yous are; murderers, murderers!⁹⁰

O’Casey shows that the men’s delusion and vanity which caused the Rising have destroyed Nora’s mind, killed her baby, and broken up the home she has been trying to make. Thus, Nora’s prophesy to Jack in the opening Act: “[Y]our vanity’ll be th’ ruin of you an’ me”⁹¹ proves to be true in this final scene.

As Bessie, who has been nursing Nora for three nights, takes her to have some rest, Peter, Fluther, and The Covey resume the card game. Soon afterwards, Corporal Stoddart shows up at the door. He makes the men carry the coffin out, and informs them that they are to be rounded up and locked in a Protestant Church.⁹² As the men leave Bessie’s room,

Nora Clitheroe, half insane, is shown arranging the table and preparing tea for her —now dead— husband. Ignoring the soldiers’ warnings to move away from the window, Nora comes near to it crying and seeking for her Jack. When Bessie throws Nora away from the window, she is mistakenly shot by the British soldiers who took Bessie for a sniper. Stunned by the shots, “Bessie screams, curses, crawls on her hands and knees, and finally dies lying on the floor.”⁹³ Her dying words seem to be both a rejection of the unnecessary sacrifices, and a condemnation of Nora:

BESSIE. Merciful God, I’m shot, I’m shot, I’m shot! . . . Th’ life’s pourin’ out o’ me!
(*To Nora*) I’ve got this through . . . through you, you bitch, you! . . . O God, have mercy on me! . . . (*To Nora*) You wouldn’t stop quiet, no, you wouldn’t, blast you! Look at what I’m after gettin’, look at what I’m after gettin’. . . . I’m bleedin’ to death, and no one’s here to stop th’ flowin’ blood!⁹⁴

Bessie’s death is followed by the entrance of Sergeant Tinley and Corporal Stoddart who regret that they have shot a woman by mistake. The Act ends with Dublin in flame and the two Tommies singing of “Keep the Home Fires Burning” in chorus with their fellow British soldiers offstage. This device is actually borrowed from Bernard Shaw’s *Heartbreak House*⁹⁵, which ends in the wake of the zeppelin raid with Randall Utterwood playing ‘Keep the Home Fires Burning’ on his flute. Commenting on the significance of this borrowed dramatic device, Nicholas Grene states that:

O’Casey’s irony is more inward and more deeply expressive of his dramatic situation. The two British soldiers sitting down to tea enjoying the home fire of the woman they have just shot could be read as *a fiercely satiric image of colonial occupation.* (Emphasis added)⁹⁶.

While Susan Cannon Harris returns to the origin of the Irish suffering during the period of the troubles, and stresses that “[T]he root of Irish suffering is the Irish male’s failure to deal with material reality: British soldiers take over the Clitheroe home because Jack has not kept his home fires burning.”⁹⁷

O'Casey has exposed, throughout the play, the unnecessary deaths and sufferings caused to the working-class Dubliners by this 'capitalist-inspired' rebellion. In tracing the decline of Nora Clitheroe, O'Casey has cleverly shown that the Rising provided hardship rather than relief for her class members. Materially, she is no better off at the end than she was at the beginning; the rebellion prevents her from rising out of the tenement life squalor. Psychologically, she has been destroyed: she lost her sanity, her husband, and her baby who may symbolise the loss of the next generation. And while many Irish people died through the conflict, poor Mollser died of consumption because of the poor conditions under which she was forced to survive. In fact, poverty is rampant in Ireland and nothing is being done to change that. As The Covey observes, more people are dying of consumption than war,⁹⁸ because the social system has remained unchanged despite all the fighting. This bears great witness to the betrayal of the workers' cause by the Citizen Army—the workers' militia—who opted for a war which is far beyond the workers' aspirations.

As we have seen earlier, the two bodies that combined and fought against Britain during Easter Week had entirely different aims. On the one hand, the Irish Volunteers are seen as a Nationalist body in no way connected with Labour, while the Citizen Army is a Labour force concerned with the struggle of the working class against the employers. It seems that the two forces were only linked by a shared hostility to Britain, because "the ranks of the Volunteers", as Maureen Malone indicates, "contained many of the employers who had tried to destroy the Irish Labour movement in the great lockout strike of 1913."⁹⁹ O'Casey, a fervent Socialist rather than a Nationalist, could not accept the betrayal of his fellow-labourers, and therefore resigned from the Citizen Army's secretaryship in 1914. Besides, O'Casey was not involved in the Rising because he saw his allegiance to the oppressed among whom he lived, rather than to any political or military cause. Being disillusioned with the talk of Nationalist ideals and principles, O'Casey once declared:

“Nationalism [for the workers] is a gospel without hope; it does not signify life for them,”¹⁰⁰ and favoured instead the doctrine of Socialism. In fact, ‘The Plough and the Stars’ of the title refer to emblems on the Citizen Army’s —or rather the workers’— banner. The significance of the flag’s design is that “the farmer’s plough is combined with the astral plough constellation to show the height to which hard work can take a people.”¹⁰¹

The character of The Young Covey, who identifies with the Labour Movement and Communism, receives however little sympathy from Sean O’Casey. The playwright, even if an advocate of Socialism, stays at an ironic distance from the Covey —by criticizing his brand of Socialism and making him just as ridiculous as the others. Early in the play, The Covey feels disgusted by Jack Clitheroe’s use of the Labour flag during the great demonstration. His anger is illustrated in the following passage:

THE COVEY. They’re bringin’ nice disgrace on that banner now.
CLITHEROE (remonstratively). How are they bringin’ disgrace on it?
THE COVEY (snappily). Because it’s a Labour flag, an’ was never meant for politics. . . . What does th’ design of th’ field plough, bearin’ on it th’ stars of th’ heavenly plough, mean, if it’s not Communism? It’s a flag that should only be used when we’re buildin’ th’ barricades to fight for a Workers’ Republic!¹⁰²

In addition, when ‘The Speaker’ incites the men to arms and bloodshed during the meeting in the second Act, The Covey shows himself untouched by his rhetoric. Deriding the Orator’s call to arms as “dope,” the Covey rejects the importance of national struggle in favour of the primacy of economic freedom¹⁰³: “There’s only one war worth havin’: th’ war for th’ economic emancipation of th’ proletariat.”¹⁰⁴ The success of this war, as The Covey points out, will provide the working men with the “control o’ th’ means o’ production, rates of exchange, an’ th’ means of disthribution.”¹⁰⁵ But, in order for this economic freedom to be achieved, one may argue, all the proletarians have to be united and fight together. The Covey’s Socialist / Marxist doctrine, as it is preached in this play, has, however, an effect of alienating rather than uniting the labourers around him. Even the language and terms used by The Covey could not be understood by the tenement folk. This

is in fact what we can grasp from The Covey's interaction with Rosie Redmond and Fluther Good; two proletarians present in the play.

When Rosie, the prostitute, starts chatting him up in the pub scene in Act II, The Covey's answer is to offer her a copy of "Jenersky's *Thesis on the Origin, Development, an' Consolidation of the Evolutionary Idea of the Proletariat*."¹⁰⁶ The book, with so indigestible a title, seems inadequate or rather alien for a prostitute. Besides, when The Covey refers to it, he does so "not to build solidarity with his fellow-workers but to prove his superiority over them."¹⁰⁷ Moreover, because Rosie is a prostitute, The Covey rejects her by attacking first her profession and then denies her even the right for an opinion:

"Nobody's askin' you to be buttin' in with your prate. . . . I have you well taped, me lassie. . . . Just you keep your opinions for your own place. . . . It'll be a long time before th' Covey takes any instructions or reprimandin' from a prostitute!"¹⁰⁸

The Covey's vanity is, therefore, made explicit in this unpleasant treatment of Rosie Redmond. The latter, however, ridicules him for behaving like a child and "swingin' heavy words about he doesn't know th' meanin' of."¹⁰⁹

Fluther Good, for his part, was not spared from The Covey's mockery. To claim his active membership in the Labour movement, Fluther offers as proof a cicatrix left on his head by "a skelp from a bobby's baton at a Labour meetin' in th' Phoenix Park."¹¹⁰ Instead of receiving Fluther as "a brother in arms, The Covey uses again his Marxist terminology to assert his dominance."¹¹¹ Besides, The Covey sees himself the only 'real' socialist because he simply understands economic theory:

THE COVEY. Well, let us put it to th' test, then, an' see what you know about th' Labour movement: what's the mechanism of exchange?

FLUTHER (*roaring, because he feels he is beaten*). How th' hell do I know what it is? There's nothin' about that in th' rules of our Thrades Union!

BARMAN. For God's sake, thry to speak easy, Fluther.

THE COVEY. What does Karl Marx say about th' Relation of Value to th' Cost o' Production?

FLUTHER (*angrily*). What th' hell do I care what he says? I'm Irishman enough not to lose me head be follyin' foreigners!

BARMAN. Speak easy, Fluther.

THE COVEY. It's only waste o' time talkin' to you, comrade.¹¹²

This exchange, in fact, convinces Fluther that The Covey is not his natural companion: "Don't be comradin' me, mate. I'd be on me last legs if I wanted you for a comrade."¹¹³

It seems that O'Casey is critical of the brand of Socialism represented by The Young Covey. At no point in the play do we see The Covey comprehending the real needs and preoccupations of the tenement dwellers. Beside, his brand of "Marxism becomes a barrier that discourages activism instead of encouraging it"¹¹⁴, because he uses it to claim his supremacy and dominance over his fellow tenement-dwellers. In this respect, it is worth noting what John O'Riordan said in his analysis of the character of the Young Covey:

Although the Young Covey's chief role in O'Casey's play is irritant to the foolish old uncle [Peter Flynn], he is a sardonic mouthpiece of the playwright's contempt for swaddling Socialists who aridly voice Marxian platitudes, with neither a glint nor gleam of respect for gaiety, colour and song in their estimation of values of life, paying only lip-service to revolutionary ideas without being able to relate them actively in the course of their interactions with others.¹¹⁵

The kind of revolution, one might say, that could bring about social and political change must originate within the concerns of the ordinary working-class people, and presented in a language familiar to them. The Socialism preached by The Covey to the tenement dwellers does no more to improve their situation than the rhetoric of The Speaker, or the vanity of Jack Clitheroe, Lieutenant Langon, and Captain Brennan. Thus, The Covey might be said to have committed "the Republican movement's original sin, insisting on the primacy of theory and dogma over the workers' bodily experience of pain."¹¹⁶

The fact that men in this play are depicted as insensitive to women's suffering, means that the playwright gives a higher place and consideration to the women. David Krause says precisely "the women in O'Casey's plays are realist from necessity; the men are dreamers by default. The men are frustrated and gulled by dreams which they are

unable and unwilling to convert into realities.”¹¹⁷ *The Plough and the Stars* is in fact dedicated to O’Casey’s mother: “TO THE GAY LAUGH OF MY MOTHER AT THE GATE OF THE GRAVE.”¹¹⁸ This bears evidence to O’Casey’s leaning more in favour of womankind. Nora Clitheroe is an Irish woman unwilling to sacrifice her husband to the cause of national freedom. This conflict between patriotism and a desire for preserving life at home may be seen as one of the basic conflicts that has given the play much of its dramatic power. Through Nora, O’Casey rejects any notion that women encourage their men to fight to death, as Nora cries

“I can’t help thinkin’ every shot fired ’ll be fired at Jack, an’ every shot fired at Jack’ll be fired at me [...] An’ *there’s no woman [who] gives a son or a husband to be killed* — if they say it, they’re lyin’, lyin’, against God, Nature, an’ against themselves!”¹¹⁹ (emphasis added)

Nora’s conviction brings forth a total denial of the image that men are “the chief sufferers” of war and that “women willingly send their men out to die.”¹²⁰ Nora, as we have seen, was endlessly struggling to keep her husband away from the violence, yet Jack leaves, disregarding all her pleas. As in *Juno and the Paycock*, here again we can say that the tragedy of war-torn Ireland is embodied in a woman, Nora Clitheroe.

O’Casey’s portrayal of women, in *The Plough and the Stars*, as homemakers and caretakers, might also be considered as a means for showing that “war and destruction of life are [...] also destructive of the home, fertility, and new life.”¹²¹ This way, O’Casey discredits the popular *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* idea of the masculine war saving the feminine Ireland.¹²² In fact, O’Casey was mocking all these illusions by looking at the brutality of war through “the realistic eyes of working-class Irishwomen instead of through the haze of sentimental patriotism.”¹²³

The character Bessie Burgess is ascribed a pivotal role throughout the play. Though a Catholic loyalist, Bessie shows deep sympathies towards the poor tenement dwellers like

her. It is indeed Bessie who hands a glass of milk to the consumptive Mollser, who fetches a doctor for the insane Nora in the midst of danger and becomes her ultimate caretaker.¹²⁴ With Bessie's death, as David Krause suggests, it is clear that "the main victims of the war rise to become the main heroes. This pattern is repeated in all [of O'Casey's] plays as some of the women die for their neighbours and others live to rebuild a new life out of the ruins [...] this is the only kind of untainted heroism that O'Casey recognizes."¹²⁵

Throughout this dramatic work, Sean O'Casey attempted to show, among other things, an Irish woman that had not yet appeared on stage.¹²⁶ His portrait of working-class Dublin women is the means through which O'Casey brought the realities of Dublin to the Dublin stage. Being a member of the Irish working class, O'Casey's plays are intended to force the Abbey's Dublin audience to think of the poor working-class Dubliners. Although O'Casey's women are not offered any alternative to the lives they already have in the Dublin slums, they are shown to be "the Ireland of tenacious mothers and wives, [...] — earthy, shrewd, laughing, suffering, brawling, independent women."¹²⁷

2. Stagecraft

Having dealt with some of the thematic concerns in *The Plough and the Stars*, my focus will shift, in the following section, to the study of some theatrical techniques and devices that O'Casey made use of to stage the Easter Rising events. This will be examined in three steps: first by analysing O'Casey's conception of the dramatic space, then by observing through key-scenes, the relationship between the stage actions and the great 'military' events represented off-stage, finally by analysing O'Casey's use of a pattern of music and songs to strengthen some of the main themes and actions in this play.

The Plough and the Stars, which presents a “realistic” portrayal of the Easter Rising 1916, may be described, though not conventionally enough, as a historical play. O’Casey, in some respects, anticipates on the tradition of Bertolt Brecht by opting to enact history not from the centre but from the margins.¹²⁸ His strategy is to displace dramatic interest away from history’s leading characters, shifting the focus instead to those disempowered slum-dwellers, men and women alike. In other words, the Rising events are dramatised through the perspective of the slum-dwellers around whom the play centres. As in Shakespeare’s play *Henry V*, Pistol, Bardolph, and Nym comment, from their subaltern position, on the war that the king Henry is mounting against France before the Battle of Agincourt. King Henry’s “Once more onto the breach” oration, urging the ‘noble English’ to make common cause, and show “that [they] are worth [their] breeding,”¹²⁹ is met with a double response. “The lines”, in Warren Chernaik’s¹³⁰ words, “are addressed to an onstage audience of soldiers, who respond by charging, resuming the battle”¹³¹. Yet, Professor Chernaik continues, “Pistol and his fellow clowns provide concrete evidence that several among those addressed resist the call, preferring to save their own skins”¹³²:

BARDOLPH: On, on, on, on, on, to the breach, to the breach.

NYM : Pray thee Corporal stay, the knocks are too hot: and for mine own part, I have not a case of lives [...]

PISTOL: [...] Knocks go and come, God’s vassals drop and die; and swords and shields, in bloody field, doth win immortal fame.

BOY: Would I were in an alehouse in London, I would give all my fame for a pot of ale, and safety.¹³³

It seems that Bardolph, Nym, and the others disprove King Henry’s rousing speech: they are in fact “the ordinary soldiers, who are not in the least motivated by heroism, but would rather be somewhere else.”¹³⁴ The appeal to courage and patriotism on the one hand, and the appeal to self-preservation on the other, seem to be the two different perspectives highlighted, in *Henry V*, throughout this episode.

In *The Plough and the Stars*, the major events of the Rising are not represented directly, but are merely echoed obliquely onstage. In a mere Shakespearean reported action, Nicholas Grene provides an illuminating parallelism when he writes that

The Plough [and the Stars] relates to the Rising as Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* relates to *Hamlet*. The high familiar drama is seen from backstage, from the wings, from the viewpoint of bit-players and spear-carriers rather than principals.¹³⁵

Before supplying Grene's comment with key-scenes from the play, it seems quite useful to consider the two major historical events which weave their way into the fabric of this play. First, the meeting held outside the pub in Act II, during which the Irish Volunteers and the Citizen Army members are roused by Padraic Pearse's —The Figure in the Window— inflaming speech. Then, in Act III when the same Padraic Pearse reads the "Proclamation" outside the General Post Office during Easter Monday 1916. In both scenes, as we shall illustrate hereafter, O'Casey has not directly represented political action onstage, but communicated it rather through 'concise visual and aural effects'.

In the second Act of *The Plough and the Stars*, O'Casey splits his stage to show the great events through an inventive scenic device: the *window* of the pub. This way, O'Casey employs a double stage device, and thereby splits and distances his audience. "This technique", as Jean Chothia observes, "gathers force in Act II [the pub-scene] where 'three fourths of the back is occupied by a tall, wide, two-paned window', and the brief appearance of a woman at the window in *The Shadow of a Gunman* is reworked here in the shadow of a real gunman"¹³⁶: "Through the window is silhouetted the figure of a tall man who is speaking to the crowd. The Barman and Rosie look out of the window and listen."¹³⁷ The attention of both audience and characters is drawn by the Orator's silhouette outside the window, calling for more blood sacrifice by parodying the Eucharist; "Bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing [...]"¹³⁸ O'Casey's conception of the dramatic space in this Act is acknowledged by Richard Allen Cave who describes it as "a brilliantly economical

feat of dramaturgy, communicating a central theme of the play through concise visual and aural effects.”¹³⁹ Accordingly, Heinz Kosok finds that “the stage becomes a mirror of the background events [which] are frequently seen as in a tarnished and distorting glass.”¹⁴⁰

With all his political fervour, Padraic Pearse —The Figure in the Window— remains physically peripheral to the sphere of action in this act, and his is mainly reduced to intermittent speech acts. O’Casey, in fact, places the inhabitants of the Dublin tenement house in the spotlight and keeps the leaders of the rebellion offstage. This measure may be regarded as O’Casey’s critique of the Rising and its hero-worshipping version, inviting instead the audience to internalise the tragic effects of the Rising on the poor Irish working-class.

The progression of the Rising, which reaches its climax by Easter Monday 1916, is represented in the third Act of *The Plough and the Stars*. The Rebels’ occupation of Dublin’s General Post Office and Pearse’s reading of the “Proclamation”¹⁴¹ declaring a free Irish Republic are immediately followed by the British forces retaliation using heavy artillery. It would appear that O’Casey and the Abbey Theatre would never have been capable to show this grand revolutionary manifestation directly on stage.¹⁴² All that O’Casey does is give us backward glimpses of it, this time again, from the perspective of the slum dwellers; placed as spectator-figures onstage. Indeed, “the dramatised events of Easter Monday,[. . .] including the appearance of the troops of the British cavalry, are narrated in the distanced style recommended for Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*.”¹⁴³ This is manifest in Peter and The Covey’s joint report of the initial stages of the rebellion when they describe, to Mrs. Gogan, the Lancers coming down O’Connell Street:

PETER: An’ we seen th’ Lancers—

THE COVEY (interrupting): Throttin’ along, heads in th’ air; spurs an’ sabres jinglin’, an’ lances quiverin’, an’ lookin’ as if they were assin’ themselves, ‘Where’s these blighters, till we get a prod at them?’ when there was a volley from th’ Post Office that stretched half o’

them, an' sent th' rest gallopin' away wondherin' how far they'd have to go before they'd feel safe.

PETER (rubbing his hands): 'Damn it,' says I to meself, 'this looks like business!'¹⁴⁴

This scene is not shown on stage but mediated and distorted by Peter Flynn and The Covey. While Peter dramatises himself as excited spectator and supporter of his team, as if it were a major sporting event ("this looks like business!"), The Covey prefers enlargement and exaggeration ("a volley from th' Post Office that stretched half o' them") to realistic description of the clash between the Irish rebels and the British forces. Even "the key moment of the [Rising]", manifestly seen in Pearse's reading of the 'Proclamation' announcing a free Irish Republic, is "rendered as the subject of excited gossip"¹⁴⁵:

THE COVEY. An' then out comes General Pearse an' his staff, an', standin' in th' middle o' th' street, he reads th' Proclamation.

MRS. GOGAN. What proclamation?

PETER. Declarin' an Irish Republic.

MRS. GOGAN. Go to God!¹⁴⁶

In the early stages of this play, some characters tend to regard the Rising as a mere continuation of the show; that which has already started with street parading and practice attacks on Dublin Castle. The Covey, for instance, ironically comments that he had "betther go and get a good place to have a look at Ireland's warriors passin' by."¹⁴⁷ That war is no glamorous show is what O'Casey soberly implies in the final moments of the play, as most of the characters become physically threatened by the brutality of war and violence. It is in fact through Nora Clitheroe, another spectator-figure put on stage that O'Casey seems to reveal the true atrocity of this rebellion. This may be confirmed in her description of the dead soldier, or rather the "corpse", she sees during her vain search for Jack in Act III:

NORA. Oh, I saw it, I saw it, Mrs Gogan. . . . At th' barricade in North King Street. [...] An' in th' middle o' th' shtreet was *somethin' huddled up in a horrible, tangled heap. . . . His face was jammed against th' stones, an' his arm was twisted round his back. . . . An' every twist of his body was a cry against th' terrible thing that had happened to him ... An' I saw they were afraid to look at it. [. . .]*¹⁴⁸ (emphasis added)

This dead soldier, who could also have been Jack Clitheroe, Captain Brennan, or any other rebel from the Volunteers or the ICA, is now faceless, distorted beyond any recognition; his body transformed into an unrecognisable *thing* (“*something* huddled up ... in a *heap*”; “afraid to look at *it*”). Nora’s report seems fragmented and imprecise, as if she were struggling to find words that could truly describe the horror of it. Besides, Nora in this passage “sees”, and by extension forces the audience to see, what the so-called heroes and terrified soldiers dare not see: “they were afraid to look at it.” Here again, O’Casey brings to light what that heroic rebellion or, say, “glamorous show” attempts to hide: the tragic death of the patriots which is soon to reach even the innocent civilians, non-combatants.

The window constituting a “fragile barrier between inside and outside world,” is literally “penetrated when Bessie Burgess,[...] supposedly safe from the fighting outside, is mistakenly shot”¹⁴⁹ by the Tommies she passionately supports. This is the first time in the play that O’Casey brings death onstage, forcing thereby the offstage audience to contemplate directly the true obscenity of violent death. Thus, “the ironies and implications,” to borrow Jean Chothia’s words, “are to be registered by the audience, not the characters”¹⁵⁰ because no one, except the insane Nora, is left onstage. Indeed, Bessie’s death is followed by “the intruding British soldiers who sit for their cup of tea, amid the chaos and disaster, and casually comment, ‘there goes the general attack on the Powst Office.’”¹⁵¹ In this final scene, O’Casey exhibits “the total collapse of the Rising” whose key moment is evidenced in “the deepening red flares, visible through the window, while the British homesick soldiers sing ‘Keep the Home Fires Burning.’”¹⁵²

In closing his play with Ivor Novello’s¹⁵³ wartime song, O’Casey points out another world-wide and bloody conflict of 1916 (the First World War), “during which thousands of

Irish as well as English were killed or crippled.”¹⁵⁴ Following O’Casey’s stage direction,
“*the voices of soldiers at a barricade outside the house are heard singing:*

They were summoned from the ’illside,
They were called in from the glen,
And the country found ’em ready
At the stirring call for men.
Let no tears add to their ’hardship,
As the soldiers pass along,
And although your ’heart is breaking,
Make it sing this cheery song:

Serjeant Tinley and Corporal Stodart (joining in the chorus, as they sip the tea)

Keep the Home Fires Burning,
While your ’hearts are yearning;
Though your lads are far away
They dream of ’owme;
There’s a silver loining
Through the dark clouds shoining,
Turn the dark cloud inside out,
Till the boys come ’owme!¹⁵⁵

In addition to Novello’s war song, O’Casey has made use of other songs throughout the play to either emphasise the major themes, or to -sometimes- convey implied messages.

In the first Act, just before Jack learns that Nora has destroyed his letter of promotion to the rank of Commandant, a love scene occurs for a while during which Nora beseeches her husband Jack to sing her the following song:

Th’violets were scenting th’ woods, Nora,
Displaying their charm to th’ bee,
When I first said I lov’d only you, Nora,
An’ you said you lov’d only me!

Th’ chestnut blooms gleam’s through th’ glade, Nora,
A robin sang loud for a tree,
When I first said I lov’d only you, Nora,
An’ you said you lov’d only me![...] ¹⁵⁶

Through this “sentimental ballad”, Jack conveys, though not heartily enough, his tenderness and love to his “little red-lipp’d” Nora. One could discover at this stage of the play that Nora and Jack seem to be romantic and not really interested in the coming war.

Their home and domestic happiness, at least as Nora endlessly stresses, comes before any patriotic consideration. This old love song, however, has only a nostalgic effect as there will be no new beginning, no better path. As soon as Jack discovers his military promotion, he elevates his love for Ireland above his love for Nora, something equivalent to, borrowing Ronan McDonald words, “elevating an abstract, bloodless idealism above the flesh and blood familial concerns of hearth and home.”¹⁵⁷ Jack’s rash decision, as we have seen earlier, leads him to a tragic end, while Nora suffers from mental disorder.

O’Casey’s conception of ‘home’, ‘life’ and ‘love’ together with their counterpoint ‘death’ is also highlighted in Rosie’s song in the second Act. O’Casey underscores this by paralleling the exit of the three officers with the exit of Fluther and Rosie from the pub. While “the sacrificial patriots”, who have already deserted their wives and homes, “run back to their meeting” and eventual death with Pearse, “Rosie has finally found an Irish man who can be lured back ‘home’ instead of onto the battlefield.”¹⁵⁸ Fluther’s submission is in fact celebrated with Rosie’s song:

I once had a lover, a tailor, but he could do nothin’ for me,
An’ then I fell in with a sailor as strong an’ as wild as th’ sea.
We cuddled an’ kissed with devotion, till th’ night from th’ mornin’ had fled;
An’ there, to our joy, a bright bouncin’ boy
Was dancin’ a jig in th’ bed!¹⁵⁹

Fluther is going ‘home’ to something that bears significance: “home to his own body, home to Rosie’s, and home to the desire that engenders life instead of death.”¹⁶⁰

The closing lines of *The Plough and the Stars* are given the form of a song. Both Serjeant Tinley and Corporal Stoddart, drinking tea in dead Bessie’s house, join in chorus with their fellow British soldiers offstage singing “Keep the Home Fires Burning.” The last two lines of this song refer as well to the soldiers’ longing for “home”: “Turn the dark cloud inside out, / Till the boys come ’owme!”¹⁶¹ but O’Casey’s finale seems much more

ironic. The two British soldiers re-enact the occupation of the city in the requisitioning of the house of Bessie Burgess they have just shot, while the homes of Dublin are literally burning down all around them. “This suggestive use of dramatic space”, Heinz Kozok argues, “is one of the central symbols in the play.”¹⁶²

Consciousness of the First World War, though apparently minor, is intermittently hinted at in this play. While the first Act closes with a detachment of loyalist Dublin Fusiliers en route to war-torn France, the second bears witness to the Great War’s bloodshed, heard in Pearse’s speech. Moreover, Bessie Burgess’ absent soldier son is a volunteer in the British forces, fighting in the trenches. Indeed, O’Casey’s concern with the terrible Europe-wide conflict was evident well before his writing of *The Silver Tassie*. This play together with George Bernard Shaw’s *Heartbreak House* will be the focus of our study in the next chapter, dealing essentially with the First World War.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Sean O’Casey, *The Plough and the Stars*, in *Three Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1975). All subsequent references to *The Plough and the Stars* will be from this edition.
- ² W. A. Armstrong, “The Sources and Themes of *The Plough and the Stars*,” in *Modern Drama*, Vol. 4, 1961, p 235.
- “The Irish Volunteers marched under the green, white, and orange flag of the Sinn Féin organisation. The flag of the Citizen Army [...] had a blue base on which was represented the formalised shape of a golden–brown Plough and the constellation of Stars which bears the same name. It thus symbolised the reality and the ideals of Labour.”
- ³ *Three Plays*, op. cit., p. 201.
- ⁴ “Up to 1926, O’Casey had been the darling of the Abbey and the Abbey audiences alike.” Cf. Nicholas Grene, “Reactions to Revolution” in *The Politics of Irish Drama* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), p. 140.
- ⁵ Susan Cannon Harris, “Excess of Love: Padraic Pearse and the Erotics of Sacrifice”, in *Gender and Modern Irish Drama* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 124.
- ⁶ When Synge’s play *The Playboy of the Western World* was first produced in the Abbey theatre in 1907, it caused riots because it featured a young man boasting of beating his father. W. B. Yeats, the Abbey Director, had to call in the police to restore order. Patriots considered the play “a slander on the fair name of Ireland.” Cf. J. M. Synge, Preface to *The Playboy of the Western World* (London : Routledge, 2003), p. 5.
- ⁷ Qtd. by David Krause in “Prometheus of Dublin”, *Sean O’Casey: The Man and His Work*, op. cit., p. 40.
- ⁸ W. A. Armstrong, “The Sources and Themes of *The Plough and the Stars*,” op. cit. , p. 237.
- ⁹ “The four representatives of patriotic organisations who appear in the second act of *The Plough and the Stars* are: Peter Flynn, an Irish National Forester, Langon, a lieutenant in the Irish Volunteers, Jack Clitheroe and Brennan are officers in the Irish Citizen Army.” Cf. W. A. Armstrong, “The Sources and Themes of *The Plough and the Stars*,” op. cit. , p. 237.
- “The Irish National Foresters were a less active, more middle-aged, social organisation whose main public and political function seemed to be to march, in regalia, in annual St Patrick’s Day and Manchester Martyrs’ processions.” In this case, Peter Flynn would look even more ridiculous. Cf. Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland 1910–1916* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 53-4.
- ¹⁰ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 150.
- ¹¹ Ibid. ; p. 141
- ¹² Ibid. ; p. 140.
- ¹³ Idem.
- ¹⁴ Ibid. ; p. 152.
- ¹⁵ “**Tone, (Theobald) Wolfe** (1763–1798): Irish nationalist and United Irishman leader, born in Dublin. Tone studied at Trinity College, Dublin, and trained as a barrister in London, but never practised. A founding member of the United Irishmen in 1791, he gradually changed the direction of this constitutional radical movement to a more extreme position. Disappointed with the progress of the United Irishmen through non-radical means, he started asking revolutionary France for help in arming the resistance to English rule. He accompanied Gen Hoche on an attempted landing with French forces in 1796, and when the Rebellion of 1798

broke out, tried again to land forces, but was captured by the British navy in October 1798 at Lough Swilly. Tried and convicted of treason, Tone committed suicide in prison by cutting his own throat to avoid public hanging. He was buried at Bodenstown, County Kildare, and his grave is the site of annual commemorations. His autobiography and journals were published posthumously by his widow, and they helped establish his reputation as a key Irish nationalist. Widely regarded as the father of Irish republicanism, Tone's death marked the apotheosis of the 1798 rebellion." Cf., *The Hutchinson Encyclopedia of Ireland*, op. cit., p. 551.

¹⁶ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , pp. 156-7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* ; p. 153.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* ; p.140.

¹⁹ *Idem.*

²⁰ *Ibid.* ; p.151.

²¹ Maureen Malone, "The Rising" in *The Plays of Sean O'Casey*, op. cit. , pp.7-8.

²² Sean O'Casey, *Drums Under the Windows*, Qtd. in W. A. Armstrong, "The Sources and Themes of *The Plough and the Stars*," op. cit. , p. 238.

²³ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 207.

²⁴ W. A. Armstrong, "The Sources and Themes of *The Plough and the Stars*," op. cit. , p. 239.

²⁵ David Krause, "Prometheus of Dublin", op. cit. , pp. 22-3.

²⁶ Susan Cannon Harris, "The Body of Truth: Sensationalism and Sacrifice in Sean O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy", op. cit. , p. 175.

²⁷ Sean O'Casey, *The Letters of Sean O'Casey. 1910-1941*, Qtd. by Susan Cannon Harris, in *Gender and Modern Irish Drama*, op. cit. , p. 175.

²⁸ Susan Cannon Harris, op. cit. , p. 175.

²⁹ Qtd. in *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 169.

³¹ Susan Cannon Harris, "Excess of Love: Padraic Pearse and the Erotics of Sacrifice", op. cit. , pp. 123-4.

³² *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 162.

³³ *Idem.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* ; p. 161.

³⁵ *Ibid.* ; pp. 161-2.

³⁶ Assia Kaced, *Sean O'Casey – Kateb Yacine: A Comparative Study of Their Early Plays*. University of Algiers: 2003 (unpublished Magister dissertation), p. 75.

³⁷ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 163.

³⁸ Assia Kaced, op. cit. , p.75

³⁹ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 163.

⁴⁰ *Idem.*

⁴¹ *Idem.*

⁴² *Ibid.* ; p. 177.

⁴³ Ibid. ; p. 178.

⁴⁴ Ibid. ; p. 164.

⁴⁵ Assia Kaced, op., cit., p. 76

⁴⁶ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 178.

William Armstrong in “The Sources and Themes of *The Plough and the Stars*,” *Modern Drama*, Vol. 4, (1961), has meticulously worked out the specific sources for the unseen Orator’s words. The first speech (p.162) except for the first sentence —“It is a glorious thing to see arms in the hands of Irishmen” — comes from Pearse’s “The Coming Revolution,” delivered in 1914. The second (p.164), comes in part from Pearse’s “Peace and the Gael,” delivered in 1915. The third (p. 169) is composed of selected sentences from “Peace and the Gael.” The fourth and final speech is O’Casey’s adaptation of Pearse’s grave-side oration for the Irish patriot, J. O’Donovan Rossa in July 1915 – Armstrong contends that O’Casey, by his artistic selection, makes his speaker “even more dogmatic in tone and oracular in attitude than Pearse”.

⁴⁷ Jessie Pope, a British First World War patriotic poet, composed a great deal of propagandist and patriotic poems like “Who’s for the Game”, designed essentially to indoctrinate the male readers to join the army. More concerning this point will be discussed in Chapter III of the present dissertation. Jessie Pope, “Who’s for the Game?”, available at <http://oldpoetry.com/opoem/52141-Jessie-Pope-Who-s-for-the-Game.htm>; Internet accessed 20 July 2009.

⁴⁸ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 178.

⁴⁹ William Armstrong, “The Sources and Themes of *The Plough and the Stars*,” op. cit. , p. 240.

⁵⁰ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 185

⁵¹ Ibid. ; p. 187.

⁵² Idem.

⁵³ Assia Kaced, op. cit. , p. 78.

⁵⁴ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 193.

⁵⁵ Ibid. ; p. 195.

⁵⁶ Nicholas Grene, “Reactions to Revolution” in *The Politics of Irish Drama*, op. cit. , p. 146.

⁵⁷ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 194.

⁵⁸ Ahmed Hateb, O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars* and Dib’s *Mille Hourras pour une gueuse: The Lure of Revolution*. University of Boumerdes: 2008 (unpublished Magister dissertation), p. 43.

⁵⁹ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 194.

⁶⁰ Ibid. ; p. 196.

⁶¹ Idem.

⁶² John O’Riordan, “*The Plough and the Stars* (1926): Evocation of the Irish Easter Rising”, in *A Guide to O’Casey’s Plays: From the Plough to the Stars* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 87.

⁶³ Ibid. ; p. 104.

⁶⁴ Ibid. ; p. 81.

⁶⁵ Maureen Malone, “The Rising”, op. cit. , pp. 9-10.

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- ⁶⁶ John O’Riordan, *A Guide to O’Casey’s Plays*, op. cit. , p. 92.
- ⁶⁷ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 159-60.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid. ; p. 178.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid. ; pp. 207-8.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid. ; p. 213.
- ⁷¹ Ahmed Hateb, op. cit. , p. 46.
- ⁷² James Stephens, *The Insurrection in Dublin* (Dublin, 1916), quoted by Maureen Malone in “The Rising” op. cit. , p. 9.
- ⁷³ Sean O’Casey, *Drums Under the Windows*, Qtd. in John O’Riordan, *A Guide to O’Casey’s Plays*, op. cit. , p. 80.
- ⁷⁴ Jack Lindsay, “Sean O’Casey as a Socialist Artist” in Ronald Ayling, ed., *Sean O’Casey: Modern Judgment*, op. cit., p. 193.
- ⁷⁵ Nicholas Grene, “Reactions to Revolution”, op. cit. , p. 145.
- ⁷⁶ Idem.
- ⁷⁷ Idem.
- ⁷⁸ Sean O’Casey, *Three Plays*, op. cit. , pp. 193-4. Qtd. by Nicholas Grene, op. cit., p. 145.
- ⁷⁹ “Many Soviet admirers of O’Casey’s plays, including Boris Izakov, who corresponded regularly with O’Casey, as well as English critics such as Kenneth Tynan, who, on the contrary, were always openly hostile to them, were apparently irreconciled to the constant and cumulative anti-heroic attitudes and character-portrayal in plays such as *The Shadow of a Gunman*, *The Plough and the Stars*, and others. Izakov and other critics were doubtless puzzled by the apparent condoning on O’Casey’s part of the looting which took place by tenement-dwellers during the Easter Week Rebellion.” Cf. John O’Riordan, *A Guide to O’Casey’s Plays*, op. cit. , p. 79.
- ⁸⁰ Jack Lindsay, “Sean O’Casey as a Socialist Artist”, op. cit. , p. 192.
- ⁸¹ John O’Riordan, *A Guide to O’Casey’s Plays*, op. cit. , p. 80.
- ⁸² Ibid. ; p. 82.
- ⁸³ “During the Easter Rising, James Connolly sent the Labour flag to the Imperial Hotel as soon as it was taken, to be flown as a symbol that Labour had finally triumphed “over Martin Murphy and his kind.” Murphy, who owned the Imperial Hotel, was the employer whose intransigence made the 1913 strike as brutal as it was; and the hotel itself was the site of a battle in which at least five hundred striking workers were assaulted and wounded by the police. Clitheroe thus dies as a result of Connolly’s failed attempt to use Volunteer symbolism to achieve Labour’s concrete goals.”
- Cf. Susan Cannon Harris, “The Body of Truth: Sensationalism and Sacrifice in Sean O’Casey’s Dublin Trilogy,” op. cit. , p. 284.
- ⁸⁴ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 204
- ⁸⁵ Ibid. ; p. 207.
- ⁸⁶ Idem.
- ⁸⁷ John O’Riordan, *A Guide to O’Casey’s Plays*, op. cit. , p. 100.
- ⁸⁸ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 204.

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- ⁸⁹ Susan Cannon Harris, "The Body of Truth: Sensationalism and Sacrifice in Sean O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy", op. cit. , p. 217.
- ⁹⁰ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 205.
- ⁹¹ Ibid. , p. 158.
- ⁹² Maureen Malone states that much of the material in this play is taken directly from O'Casey's own experiences. Concerning this episode, she claims that "[O'Casey], like Fluther and the rest, was herded with a crowd of others into a Church, where he spent an uncomfortable night on a hard bench, and the next night he was marched to a granary where he found other prisoners whiling away the time, as Fluther had done, by playing cards. At last he was escorted home by a soldier who, shocked at the shortage of food in the house, demanded some from a nearby shop on O'Casey's behalf, reminding us of the kindly attitude of Corporal Stoddart." Cf. Maureen Malone, "The Rising", op. cit. , p. 11.
- ⁹³ Susan Cannon Harris, op. cit. , p. 217.
- ⁹⁴ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 215.
- ⁹⁵ Shaw's play *Heartbreak House* about the First World War will be studied in the coming chapter.
- ⁹⁶ Nicholas Grene, "Reactions to revolution", op. cit. , p. 149.
- ⁹⁷ Susan Cannon Harris, op. cit. , p. 224.
- ⁹⁸ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 208.
- ⁹⁹ Maureen Malone, "The Rising", op. cit. , p. 4.
- ¹⁰⁰ John O'Riordan, *A Guide to O'Casey's Plays*, op. cit. , p. 73.
- ¹⁰¹ Susan C. W. Abbotson, "War and Violence" in *Thematic Guide to Modern Drama* (Connecticut / London: Greenwood Press, 2003), p. 242.
- ¹⁰² *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 151.
- ¹⁰³ Susan Cannon Harris, op. cit. , p. 210.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 170.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid. ; p. 165.
- ¹⁰⁶ Idem.
- ¹⁰⁷ Susan Harris, op. cit. , p. 211.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 175
- ¹⁰⁹ Idem.
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid. ; p. 174.
- ¹¹¹ Susan Cannon Harris, op. cit. , p. 211.
- ¹¹² *Three Plays*, op. cit., pp. 174-5
- ¹¹³ Ibid. ; p. 175. Qtd. by Susan Harris, op. cit., p. 212.
- ¹¹⁴ Susan Cannon Harris, op. cit. , p. 212.
- ¹¹⁵ John O'Riordan, *A Guide to O'Casey's Plays*, op. cit. , p. 86.
- ¹¹⁶ Susan Cannon Harris, op. cit. , p. 211.
- ¹¹⁷ David Krause, "The Anti-Heroic Vision" in *Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work*, op. cit. , p.75.
- ¹¹⁸ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 132.
- ¹¹⁹ David Krause, op. cit, p. 184. Qtd. by Christina Wilson, "Representations of Women in the Abbey Theatre", in *The Chrestomathy Review*, Vol. 5, 2006, p. 326.

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- ¹²⁰ Idem.
- ¹²¹ Idem.
- ¹²² “*Cathleen ni Houlihan*, premiered in 1902, is considered Yeats’s most nationalistic play. On the eve of the French landing at Killala that signalled the beginning of the ill-fated 1798 uprising organised by the United Irishmen under Wolfe Tone, a *poor old woman* who identifies herself as Cathleen, daughter of Houlihan, visits a peasant family—the Gillane—while preparing for the wedding of their oldest son, Michael. Cathleen enters the Gillane home and tells how her ‘four beautiful green fields’ (symbolically, the four provinces of Ireland: Ulster, Munster, Leinster, and Connacht) were stolen from her, how poor she now is, and how she needs young men like Michael to fight for her. Cathleen’s words win Michael’s heart, despite the fact that she makes it perfectly clear that anyone who really wishes to serve her must be prepared to die young. After she leaves, Michael, over the protestations of his mother, Bridget, and his fiancée, Delia, charges off to join the French and the United Irishmen in the battle, where he will die. Bridget asks her younger son, Patrick, if he saw the old woman leaving the house, and he responds, ‘I did not, but I saw a young woman, and she had the walk of a queen’. The character of Cathleen is undoubtedly an emblem for Ireland; Ireland in 1902 needed patriots who were willing to fight and die for her. The very title informs audiences that this play is about rejuvenating Ireland; through the love and sacrifice of men like Michael, the old woman transforms into the young and beautiful Cathleen.” Cf. Susan Cannon Harris, “Body and Soul: Yeats, the Famine, and the Two Cathleens”, in *Gender and Modern Irish Drama*, op. cit. , pp. 52-3 ; and Christopher Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 20-1.
- ¹²³ David Krause, “The Anti –Heroic Vision”, op. cit. , p. 70.
- ¹²⁴ Maureen Malone, “The Rising” in *The Plays of Sean O’Casey*, op. cit. , p. 15.
- ¹²⁵ David Krause, “The Anti –Heroic Vision”, op. cit. , p. 74.
- ¹²⁶ Christina Wilson, “Representations of Women in the Abbey Theatre”, op. cit., p. 327.
- ¹²⁷ David Krause, “The Anti –Heroic Vision”, op. cit. , p. 74.
- ¹²⁸ Claire Gleitman, “Sean O’Casey”, in Alexander G. Gonzalez (ed.), *Modern Irish Writers: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook* (London: Greenwood Press, 1997), p. 303.
- ¹²⁹ William Shakespeare, *Henry V* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 57.
- ¹³⁰ Warren Chernaik is Visiting Professor at King’s College London, and Emeritus Professor, University of London.
- ¹³¹ Warren Chernaik, “Band of Brothers: *Henry V*”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s History Plays* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), p. 144.
- ¹³² Idem.
- ¹³³ Shakespeare, *Henry V*, op. cit., p. 58.
- ¹³⁴ Warren Chernaik, “Band of Brothers: *Henry V*”, op. cit., p. 145.
- ¹³⁵ Nicholas Grene, “Reactions to revolution”, op. cit. , pp. 141-2.
- ¹³⁶ Jean Chothia, “ Sean O’Casey’s Powerful Fireworks”, in Mary Luckhurst (ed.), *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama: 1880-2005* (Oxford: Blackwell publishing, 2006), p. 133.
- ¹³⁷ *The Plough and the Stars*, in *Three Plays*, p. 162.
- ¹³⁸ Idem.

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- ¹³⁹ Richard Allen Cave, “On the sitting of doors and windows: aesthetics, ideology and Irish stage design”, in Shaun Richards (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 104.
- ¹⁴⁰ Heinz Kosok, “The Plough and the Stars” in *O’Casey the Dramatist*, op. cit., p. 72.
- ¹⁴¹ The full text of the “Proclamation of the Republic of Ireland” is to be found in Appendix I of the present dissertation.
- ¹⁴² Nicholas Grene, “Reactions to revolution”, op. cit. , p. 142.
- ¹⁴³ Idem.
‘Alienation’ is the normal translation for the German *Verfremdungseffekt*: an approach to theatre and to acting in particular rediscovered by Brecht and sometimes translated as ‘distanciation’ or ‘defamiliarisation’. In his theatre Brecht used various *Verfremdung* or defamiliarisation strategies to expose alienation as a historical, man-made phenomenon, and to rouse spectators to use their capacity to control and transform their lives and social relations.” Cf. Meg Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht*, (London / New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 166-7.
Further study of Brecht’s “alienation effect” is to be found in the fourth chapter of the present dissertation, when analysing John Arden’s *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance*.
- ¹⁴⁴ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p.182.
- ¹⁴⁵ Nicholas Grene, “Reactions to revolution”, op. cit. , p. 142
- ¹⁴⁶ Idem.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p.152.
- ¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* ; p. 185.
- ¹⁴⁹ Jean Chothia, “ Sean O’Casey’s Powerful Fireworks”, op. cit., p. 133.
- ¹⁵⁰ Idem.
- ¹⁵¹ Idem.
- ¹⁵² Idem.
- ¹⁵³ “David Ivor Davies (15 January 1893 – 6 March 1951), better known as Ivor Novello, was a Welsh composer, singer and actor who became one of the most popular British entertainers of the early 20th century. Novello first became known as a result of the song ‘Keep the Home Fires Burning’, which he composed in 1914 with words by Lena Guilbert Ford.” Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivor_Novello ; Internet accessed 10 August 2010.
- ¹⁵⁴ Jean Chothia, “Sean O’Casey’s Powerful Fireworks”, op. cit., p. 133.
- ¹⁵⁵ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 218.
- ¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* ; pp. 155-6.
- ¹⁵⁷ Ronan McDonald, “Delusion and Disillusionment: The Tragedy of Meliorism in Sean O’Casey’s Early Drama”, in *Tragedy and Irish Literature* (New York : Palgrave Publishers Ltd., 2002), p. 112.
- ¹⁵⁸ Susan Cannon Harris, op. cit. , p. 214.
- ¹⁵⁹ *Three Plays*, op. cit. , p. 179.
- ¹⁶⁰ Susan Cannon Harris, op. cit. , p. 214.
- ¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* ; p. 218.
- ¹⁶² Heinz Kosok, “The Plough and the Stars”, op. cit. , p. 72.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST WORLD WAR: FROM TREMORS TO TRAUMAS

“It is impossible to estimate what proportion of us, in khaki or out of it, grasped the war and its political antecedents as a whole in the light of any philosophy of history or knowledge of what war is...But there can be no doubt that it was prodigiously outnumbered by the comparatively ignorant and childish.”

George Bernard Shaw, *Heartbreak House*.

My endeavour in this chapter is to study the representation of the First World War in George Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House* and Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie*, as well as in some poems dealing with the War in question. The first section will be devoted to the analysis of *Heartbreak House* as a pre-war play. I shall show how the play, along with its lengthy Preface, added another dimension to Shaw's analysis of the causes and effects of the war stated in his *Common Sense About the War* (1914). The emphasis will be laid on Shaw's critique of the complacency of the English upper and cultured class that he seems to hold responsible for Britain's involvement in the Great War. Besides, Shaw was against the patriotic and propagandist war anthems churned by poet-patriots. The second section will be devoted to the analysis of Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie*, a play dealing with the horror and traumas engendered by the Great War. The focus will be on the Expressionistic second Act set in a war zone. I shall show how O'Casey conveyed 'the pity of war', expressed by pacifist poets here too, through Expressionist devices used in stage scenery, language, as well as characterisation.

1. Heartbreak House

Following the outbreak of World War I in 1914, George Bernard Shaw spoke often and extensively about the need for his fellow citizens to open their eyes to the world's political situation. He produced a constant flow of speeches, newspaper columns, pamphlets, magazine articles and essays concerning the causes and evils of the war, and what should be done to prevent it. Out of those remarkable pamphlets came his notorious *Common Sense About the War* (hereafter, *Common Sense*), which was published as a War Supplement to the November 14, 1914 issue of the *New Statesman*.¹

With his usual Shavian frankness, he opened with the sentence “The time has now come to pluck up courage and begin to talk and write soberly about the war.”² The pamphlet was an attempt to seriously explain the causes of the War and dispel ill-conceived notions of German and English cultures. In it, Shaw took the position that the War was a senseless fight between the German and English aristocrats and militarists in which the ultimate losers would be the general populace of both countries. He further exposed the fact that militaristic super patriotism (“Junkerism” in Germany and “Jingoism” in Britain), as found on *both* sides, was simply a cover for the real cause of the War — capitalists fighting over raw materials, cheap labour, and markets. Shaw argued that, now that the war had begun, England and France (with the necessary help of the United States) must win. He then prescribed the key clauses of a desirable armistice. Throughout *Common Sense*, Shaw derided the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of the English in general and the diplomats in particular. He also criticised the duplicity of the Church, contending that its ministers were following the pagan war god Mars in the name of the “Prince of Peace”. In *Common Sense* Shaw attacked almost every conceivable assumption that would justify the War, allowing only the pragmatic arguments for continuing the fight, now that it had begun.

Though *Common Sense* was read by a wide and influential audience, the public reactions to Shaw's position on the War were overwhelmingly negative. Many Britons were outraged, even some of his closest friends would distance themselves from him over the War issue.³ H. G. Wells's attack was specially notable. He described Shaw as "an idiot child screaming in a hospital, distorting, discrediting, confusing [. . .] He is at present an almost unendurable nuisance."⁴ Wells was not alone in publicly attacking Shaw's positions on the war, and there were other consequences. The Dramatists' Club informed Shaw that, due to his views on the war, he would not be invited to further meetings.⁵ Shaw was "quite widely branded a traitor, even forced to resign from the Dramatists' Club, and some who had been his friends broke with him temporarily or permanently."⁶ Even Herbert Asquith (the second son of Herbert Henry Asquith, then British Prime Minister) declared that "The man ought to be shot!"⁷

In spite of the negative reactions, Shaw stuck to his 'doctrinal' guns. During the war, he continued to write essays, expanding on the wide range of themes he had addressed in *Common Sense*. Those works included essays about British patriotism, compulsory enlistment, military censorship, as well as reports from the front.⁸ He also wrote four one-act plays on war themes: *O'Flaherty, V.C.* (1915), *The Inca of Perusalem* (1915), *Augustus Does His Bit* (1916) and *Annajanska, the Bolshevik Empress* (1917), all of which stress Shaw's anti-war message. *O'Flaherty, V.C.*, for instance, subtitled 'A Recruiting Pamphlet', "was a brilliant attack on both the war and British consideration of enlistment in Ireland."⁹ The playlet may be seen as a severe criticism of "British attempts to recruit Irishmen of the south, who broadly saw the war as a British not an Irish affair."¹⁰ Most of *O'Flaherty, V.C.*, Mary Luckhurst observes, "evolves as a dialectical debate between O'Flaherty [an Irish Volunteer] and the British General, Sir Pearce."¹¹ The General's

arrogance and “dullness of mind are constantly exposed by O’Flaherty’s pragmatic responses:

SIR PEARCE: [. . .] Does patriotism mean nothing to you?

O’FLAHERTY: It means different to me than what it would to you, sir. It means England and England’s king to you. To me and the like of me, it means talking about the English just the way the English papers talk about the Boshes. [. . .] What better is anybody?

SIR PEARCE: [*huffed, turning a cold shoulder to him*] I am sorry the terrible experience of this war – *the greatest war ever fought* – has taught you no better, O’Flaherty.

O’FLAHERTY: [*preserving his dignity*] I don’t know about *it’s being a great war*, sir. It’s a big war; but that’s not the same thing.¹² (Emphasis added).

Through O’Flaherty, Shaw reveals that the War is neither heroic nor noble. “O’Flaherty’s rejection of the term *great*” could mean that “Britain’s defeat would hardly be a matter of mourning to him.”¹³ Besides, “the ‘Victoria Cross’; a military honour he may have been awarded for his ‘heroism’, would be “meaningless to the Irishman as a national symbol.”¹⁴

Unlike Shaw, some propagandist writers —mostly civilians— enthusiastically hailed the outbreak of War, and supported “the hysteria of blind patriotism then sweeping the country.”¹⁵ Probably the most familiar voice is that of Rupert Brooke — an English young man and a leading member of the Cambridge Fabian Club before the war¹⁶ — who joined up enthusiastically and encouraged others to do the same. In his war sonnet “The Soldier”, he expressed his will and eagerness to dying for the beloved England:

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there’s some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England’s, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home¹⁷ [. . .]

Another of Brooke’s patriotic poems is “Peace” which regards the War as having awakened young men from the “sleep” of peace¹⁸ and given them a chance to prove themselves:

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and *wakened us from sleeping*,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary.¹⁹[. . .] (Emphasis added)

Following the path of Rupert Brooke, Jessie Pope showed her enthusiasm for the war in “The Call”, a poem addressing directly the young men and urging them to participate,

Who’s for the trench –
Are you, my laddie?
Who’ll follow the French –
Will you, my laddie?
Who’s fretting to begin,
Who’s going out to win?
And who wants to save his skin –
Do you, my laddie?²⁰ [. . .]

Instead of following Brooke’s or Pope’s jingoism, Shaw kept to his pacifist credo during the war period and ever after it. His major play about the war was *Heartbreak House*²¹, which he wrote from 1916–1917 with unusual difficulty for a man accustomed to writing plays “*d’un seul trait*.”²² One important connection is that the preface and *Heartbreak House* may be considered as further stages of the arguments Shaw advanced in *Common Sense*. As was his practice, he wrote the preface last (in 1919), in this case waiting until the war was over.²³

The play and its preface, as Shaw explains, are stinging indictments of the European leisured classes in “this half century of the drift to the abyss.”²⁴ The emphasis is on the condition of England, and on the English ruling class’s irresponsible drifting into war and self-destruction: “*Heartbreak House*”, Shaw opens his lengthy preface, “is not merely the name of the play which follows. . . . It is cultured, leisured Europe before the war.”²⁵ In this play, the English leisured class confronts various kinds of personal power in the shadow of global catastrophe. The ‘House’ of the title, in which the play is set, resembles a ship. This ship may symbolize the situation of the nation — with the imperial

British ship of state²⁶ in disarray and heading for catastrophe. And the play begins with a guest arriving to visit the ‘ship of state’.

Miss Ellie Dunn, a young and romantic lady, arrives at the ship-house at the invitation of Hesione Hushabye, Captain Shotover’s daughter. Ellie lets herself in, and sits alone, reading *Othello*, before she is met by Nurse Guinness, a classic Irish family servant. Ellie is mystified by the odd house at which she has arrived, and the Nurse warns her that “... this house is full of surprises for them that don’t know our ways.”²⁷ When Shotover meets her, Ellie becomes a ‘symbol’, as he assigns her an ‘idyllic’ identity: “Youth! Beauty! Novelty! They are badly wanted in this house.”²⁸ Ellie will be followed by a bizarre collection of characters, all gathering at Shotover’s strange house.

Arriving unexpectedly is Ariadne Utterword, Hesione’s long-absent sister. Her love of “proper” society prompted her to leave this “strange house” and marry a respectable colonial governor; Hastings Utterword, known for his forceful ruling style in the colonies. Ariadne is followed by Ellie’s idealistic, but impoverished father, Mazzini Dunn. We are told that both Ellie and her father are invited because Hesione wants to talk them out of marrying Ellie to Boss Mangan, a supposedly rich, middle-aged capitalist, whom they think has been their benefactor. Mazzini Dunn believes that his daughter would be better off with a wealthy man, even if she does not actually love him. Since financial security proves to be much more important to Ellie than love and loyalty, she maintains her conviction to marry Mangan, despite the fact that she is in love with a handsome stranger, Marcus Darnley.

No sooner does Ellie reveal her secret to Mrs. Hushabye than the mysterious stranger shows up. Astonishingly, he is none other than Hesione’s husband Hector, a handsome liar who invents fantastic stories of adventure. Ellie’s disillusionment with Hector only makes her more resolved to marry the capitalist Mangan. Ariadne, who

initially seems disgusted at the lack of manners in the Shotover household, soon finds a connection with the attractive Hector Hushabye. The last of the guests to arrive is Ariadne's brother-in-law, Randall Utterword. Quite uninvited, Randall's presence is but a trick to pursue his beloved Ariadne, though the latter treats him as a child. Besides, the sight of Ariadne flirting with the charming Hector makes Randall increasingly angry and jealous.

The ever-changing romantic combinations and shifting relationships of these characters provide the impulse for a series of debates on religion, politics, capitalism, morality and the nature of love. The play takes the form of 'game playing', particularly the stripping off of the masks of convention and pretension. The outcome is that while everyone is exposed (even Shotover secretly drinks rum to keep going), Mangan, and the money power he represents, is revealed as a fraud. In the end, Ellie renounces Mangan and instead decides to marry the eccentric eighty-eight-year-old Captain Shotover, in a quest for "life with a blessing."²⁹

The play concludes with an explosion of bombs on the horizon which Hesione and Ellie find thrilling "like Beethoven." But Shotover sees them as "the hand of God,"³⁰ and warns: "The judgement has come. Courage will not save you; but it will show that your souls are still alive."³¹

Along with a number of other literary responses to the war, *Heartbreak House* is often considered to be one of the early 20th century's great works of apocalyptic literature, that is, literature which envisions the coming of the end of the world or a particular catastrophic event. A similar work from the period may well be W. B. Yeats's poem "The Second Coming" (1920). However, it is to Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) that *Heartbreak House* has been most frequently compared.³² In fact, Shaw expressed his love for Chekhov's play in the preface to *The Quintessence of*

Ibsenism describing it as “exquisite, touching, delicate” in its portrayal of the “attack all along the front of refined society”³³ by the forces of modernity. In *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov’s dramatic contrast between the sentimental old world and the aggressive new one can be illustrated with the following two speeches:

TROFIMOV: Man *can* make progress, struggle for perfection. There *is* a discernible future in which we’ll find solutions to the problems that confronts us now; but we’ll achieve it only through *unremitting struggle*, by *working* [. . .]. Here, now, in Russia, very few are embarked on that course. The greater part of the intelligentsia seek nothing, do nothing and appear congenitally incapable of work of any kind. They bask in the term ‘intelligentsia’ and treat their servants like an inferior species and peasants like beasts of burden. Their scholarship is banal, their level of culture nil, their grasp of science non-existent and their feeling for art trivial and irrelevant. Of course, they can look as grave as anyone and talk important matters and make metaphysical speculations with the best [. . .] I fear those ‘grave’ faces we pull, these ‘earnest’ discussions we endlessly embark on. Fear them and despise them. We’d do better to hold our tongues.³⁴

Some of Shaw’s characters in *Heartbreak House* (Ellie, Hector, Hesione, Randall, and intermittently Shotover) echo that speech. But the aggressive modern invaders (Ariadne, Mangan, and even the strangely-behaving Burglar) are not just keeping still. Rather, they echo the ambitious attitude of Lopakhin, the character who buys the estate from the aristocratic Ranevskaya family in *The Cherry Orchard*:

LOPAKHIN: Where are you, Father, Grandfather, get up from your graves and see me *now*, the one you kicked and starved and sent around half-naked in the snow . . . It’s *me* . . . the man himself . . . and I’ve just bought this estate and you won’t find a finer one anywhere in the world! I’ve bought the estate you were both serfs on, where you weren’t even allowed inside the kitchen. [. . .] She [Mme Ranevskaya] threw away the keys, to show her reign is ended [. . .] Come on, and see how the dull and lowly Lopakhin will take his axe to the cherry orchard and send the trees whistling to the ground!³⁵

The axes chopping down the beloved family “Cherry Orchard” might allude to the upstarts (like Lopakhin) chopping down the Russian aristocratic, old-fashioned social order. It seems that Shaw had great ambitions for his ‘Heartbreak’ play to do for England what Chekhov symbolically and prophetically accomplished for Tzarist Russia.³⁶ The two plays, indeed, share a cutting indictment of the complacent leisured

classes; Shaw declared them both full of “the same nice people, the same utter futility.”³⁷ The Chekhovian reference, as Christopher Innes claims, “has a purely thematic function.” Echoes of *The Cherry Orchard* are used “to expand the play’s focus, showing that ‘the Russian manner’ is appropriate to the English scene— Russia being not only the most distant area of Europe, but a country in which revolution had already changed the face of society— a way of demonstrating that all the traditional ruling classes are in the same boat.”³⁸

In order to highlight Shaw’s pessimistic vision of the English ruling class which led the country into decline and destruction, I shall organise my analysis of the play along the following lines: first by depicting the nature and the practices of the English ruling class (es) before the war, then by observing through key-passages, the relationship between the various representatives of society present in Shotover’s ship-house, finally by analysing Shaw’s option for a kind of selective violence as the means by which this degenerate system was to be destroyed, if a new moral order is to be created.

Following his criticism, in the play’s preface, of the “cultured, leisured Europe before the war,” Shaw makes a distinction between what he calls Heartbreak House and Horseback Hall. The former is filled with high culture society which indulges in the pleasures of art, music, and literature to the neglect of politics and governance. The latter consists of “exiles from the library, the music room, and the picture gallery.”³⁹ They prefer to ride on horseback. According to Shaw, the Heartbreakers, who are the “sole repositories of culture,”⁴⁰ fail to provide the moral and intellectual guidance that could save Europe from the horrors of an impending war,

Heartbreak House was far too lazy and shallow to extricate itself from this palace of evil enchantment. It rhapsodized about love; but it believed in cruelty. It was afraid of cruel people; and it saw that cruelty was at least effective. . . .

Heartbreak House, in short, did not know how to live, at which point all that was left to it was the boast that at least it knew how to die; a melancholy accomplishment which the outbreak of war presently gave it practically unlimited opportunities of displaying.⁴¹

The failure of the Heartbreakers, in fact, paves the way for the “barbarian” Horsebackers to forge an alliance with the vulgar and greedy capitalists to propel themselves to power. “The war”, Robert Brustein asserts, “has come about as a consequence of this irresponsibility, for the Heartbreakers, while engaging in useless private amusements, have permitted ‘power and culture’ to fall into ‘separate compartments.’”⁴² He then argues that while the Heartbreakers were “[B]orn to rule, [. . .] they have handed the government over to the incompetents and the marauders: the Horsebackers [. . .] and the Practical Businessmen. The result, according to Shaw, has been an orgy of blood, pugnacity, and lunacy.”⁴³

Looking through Shaw’s double prism of Heartbreak House and Horseback Hall, we can identify Hesione, Hector, Shotover, Ellie, and Mazzini as heartbreakers while Randall, Ariadne, together with the absent Hastings as horsebackers. Ariadne escaped from her father’s bohemian⁴⁴ house by marrying into Horseback Hall and now identifies herself as the mistress of “Government House.” She reasserts her renunciation of Heartbreak House and affirms her place in Horseback Hall when she warns Hector not to think of her as a bohemian because she is a Shotover: “You may think because I’m a Shotover that I’m a bohemian, because we are all so horribly bohemian. But I’m not. I hate and loathe bohemianism.”⁴⁵ Shaw might be asking then the question: who is to steer England, or the ‘ship of state’, to safety? Is it to be taken by the Heartbreakers or the Horsebackers? More analytically, is the country to be run by Boss Mangan, the captain of industry, or by Hastings Utterword the colonial governor, or even by Shotover, the captain of dreams?

Mangan, the “Boss” and the practical businessman, thinks he is up to the task. He responds with too much assurance to Ariadne’s question —about who would save the country—, that no one else will except him,

LADY UTTERWORD. Do you expect to save the country, Mr Mangan?

MANGAN. Well, who else will? Will your Mr Randall save it? [. . .] as you’re in a world where I’m appreciated and you’re not, you’d best be civil to me, hadn’t you? Who else is there but me?⁴⁶

Mangan represents an early twentieth-century capitalist, who makes money out of making money, and not by the sweat of his own back. He confesses frankly to Ellie that he ruined her father “on purpose.” Indeed, he accomplished that by obtaining money for Mazzini to start a business, then rescuing him from bankruptcy at an eventual profit for himself, and finally keeping Mazzini bound to him in grateful servitude. Because of his financial influence, Mangan is appointed to an important government post. Besides, Mangan exposes the corruptness of himself and others in government when he boasts that he does what he can for selfish reasons to block any progress. He tells the people assembled in Heartbreak House:

MANGAN. Well, I dont know what you call achievements; but Ive jolly well put a stop to the games of the other fellows in the other departments. Every man of them thought he was going to save the country all by himself, and do me out of the credit and out of my chance of a title. I took good care that if they wouldnt let me do it they shouldnt do it themselves either. I may not know anything about my own machinery; but I know how to stick a ramrod into the other fellow’s. And now they all look the biggest fools going.⁴⁷

Shaw the Fabian Socialist, however, does not consider Mangan, the heartless and exploitative capitalist, fit for the task of piloting the ship of state. That is why he has him blown up at the end of the play along with the burglar, Mangan’s spiritual brother.

Ariadne thinks only her husband Hastings Utterword of Horseback Hall can save the nation:

LADY UTTERWORD. There is Hastings. Get rid of your ridiculous sham democracy; and give Hastings the necessary powers, and a good supply of bamboo to bring the British native to his senses: he will save the country with the greatest ease."⁴⁸

Shaw does not find this alternative acceptable either and suggests through Shotover that it is better to see the ship go down than to live under a dictatorship:

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER. It had better be lost. Any fool can govern with a stick in his hand. *I* could govern that way. It is not God's way. The man is a numskull.⁴⁹

Of the occupants of Heartbreak House, only Captain Shotover seems urgently aware of the need to struggle for a means to save society. The difficulty of salvation seems to arise from an inability to gain the necessary power and then to put it into the hands of the right people. Captain Shotover and Hector discuss this complicated problem pointing out the existence of two kinds of people, those with power who are abusing it, and those who are their victims,

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER. We must win powers of life and death over them both. I refuse to die until I have invented the means.

HECTOR. Who are we that we should judge them?

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER. What are they that they should judge us? Yet they do, unhesitatingly. There is enmity between our seed and their seed. They know it and act on it, strangling our souls. They believe in themselves. When we believe in ourselves, we shall kill them.

HECTOR. It is the same seed. You forget that your pirate has a very nice daughter. Mangan's son may be a Plato: Randall's a Shelley. What was my father?

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER. The damndest scoundrel I ever met.

HECTOR. Precisely. Well, dare you kill his innocent grandchildren?

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER. They are mine also.

HECTOR. Just so. We are members one of another [. . .] We live among the Mangans and Randalls and Billie Dunns as they, poor devils, live among the disease germs and the doctors and the lawyers and the parsons and the restaurant chefs and the tradesmen and the servants and all the rest of the parasites and blackmailers.⁵⁰

Shotover advocates the rehabilitation of intelligence to replace the present aimless drifting of society. He questions Hector:

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER. What then is to be done? Are we to be kept for ever in the mud by these hogs to whom the universe is nothing but a machine for greasing their bristles and filling their snouts? ⁵¹

Within these questions is a recognition of the despair brought about by a materialistic view of the universe, one in which mind has been banished. Politicians, in fact, become not men but ‘hogs’, and the entire universe is reduced to a machine to care for them. The formula for dealing with the “hogs” is given by Hector Hushabye:

HECTOR. I tell you I have often thought of this killing of human vermin. Many men have thought of it. Decent men are like Daniel in the lion’s den: their survival is a miracle; and they do not always survive [. . .] What are our terrors to theirs? Give me the power to kill them; and I’ll spare them in sheer—

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER [*cutting in sharply*] Fellow feeling?

HECTOR. No. I should kill myself if I believed that. I must believe that my spark, small as it is, is divine, and that the redlight over their door is hell fire. I should spare them in simple magnanimous pity. ⁵²

Hector’s method does not seem to be appropriate, and this is indicated in the way the play ends. However, it is Hector who has foreshadowed the bombing raid that closes the play. He tells Hesione about the “splendid drumming in the sky” that it was “Heaven’s threatening growl of disgust at us useless futile creatures,”⁵³ and carries on with the following warning:

HECTOR. [*Fiercely*] I tell you, one of two things must happen. Either out of the darkness some new creation will come to supplant us as we have supplanted the animals, or the heavens will fall in thunder and destroy us. [. . .] There is no sense in us. We are useless, dangerous, and ought to be abolished. ⁵⁴

The “splendid drumming in the sky” is in fact Shaw’s reference to the bomb-dropping Zeppelins moving through the sky in the distance. The play becomes more active after an extended period of stasis and lengthy conversations. The Zeppelin-dropped bombs begin falling, and Hector, in a wild mood, disobeys the police order and rushes about the “ship-house” turning *on* all of the lights. Shotover pronounces doomsday; the three ladies

refuse to leave and join the servants down in the cellar. Here is the climactic stage direction and how Shaw envisioned his apocalyptic scene:

A terrific explosion shakes the earth. They reel back into their seats, or clutch the nearest support. They hear the falling of the shattered glass from the windows.

MAZZINI. Is anyone hurt?

HECTOR. Where did it fall?

NURSE GUINNESS [*in hideous triumph*] Right in the gravel pit: I seen it. Serve un right! I seen it. [*She runs away towards the gravel pit, laughing harshly*].

HECTOR. One husband gone.

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER. Thirty pounds of good dynamite wasted.

MAZZINI. Oh, poor Mangan!

HECTOR. Are you immortal that you need pity him? Our turn next.

They wait in silence and intense expectation. Hesione and Ellie hold each other's hand tight.

A distant explosion is heard.

MRS. HUSHABYE [*relaxing her grip*] Oh! They have passed us.⁵⁵

The danger seems to be over for the moment, but could reappear later on. Boss Mangan, the captain of industry to whom Ellie was engaged, was killed in the bombing raid while hiding in the gravel pit (where Shotover stores his dynamite) along with the Burglar. The bombs annihilating Heartbreak House might be seen as Shaw's version of the thudding of the axes destroying the Ranevskaya estate in *The Cherry Orchard*. Ellie speaks the last line of the play:

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER. Turn in, all hands. The ship is safe. [*He sits down and goes asleep*].

ELLIE [*disappointedly*] Safe!

HECTOR [*disgustedly*] Yes, safe. And how damnably dull the world has become again suddenly! [*He sits down*]

MAZZINI [*sitting down*] I was quite wrong, after all. It is we who have survived; and Mangan and the burglar –

HECTOR. – the two burglars –

ARIADNE. – the two practical men of business –

MAZZINI. – both gone. And the poor clergyman will have to get a new house.

MRS. HUSHABYE. But what a glorious experience! I hope theyll come again tomorrow night.

ELLIE [*radiant at the prospect*] Oh, I hope so.⁵⁶

Shotover might have been voicing Shaw's emergent pessimism, stressing that Shaw's targets are not only the idle upper class, Hesione, Hector, and Randall; but also the two

burglars, the burglars as practical men of business. “This perhaps explains,” to borrow Christopher Innes’s words, “some of the underlying tone of despair in *Heartbreak House*, as well as being reflected in the apocalyptic hope of renewal expressed at the end of the play.”⁵⁷ Following Shaw’s Fabianist option for reform, Christopher Innes points out that “if Fabian gradualism cannot survive such a war environment, then the only possibility of reform is through destruction of the social order (symbolized by the house)”⁵⁸

It seems that what Shaw means by “heartbreak” differs from the common understanding of the word. He does not refer merely to a romance gone wrong, but rather to “the breaking of a heart in a larger sense — a broken heart is one that is devoid of passion for life.”⁵⁹ Heartbreak denotes a permanently “damaged spirit, one for which the only remedy is self-destruction.”⁶⁰ The destruction has come, and the play closes with Randall Utterword who, at last, succeeds to play the chauvinistic war song “Keep the Home Fires Burning” on his flute, announcing the start of the First World War. It is this war and its traumas, in fact, that Sean O’Casey represents in his play *The Silver Tassie*, which constitutes the focus of the following section.

2. *The Silver Tassie*

With *The Silver Tassie* (1928), his first play written in exile, O’Casey progresses from the narrow confines of tenement life depicted in the Dublin trilogy⁶¹ to the battlefields of Europe. From the photographic, and therefore narrow limitations of stage Realism, his dramaturgy begins to include the more abstract forms of Symbolism and Expressionism exploited by August Strindberg, Ernst Toller and Eugene O’Neill.⁶² Maureen Malone provides us with the following details,

Expressionism, as used by such German writers as Ernst Toller and Georg Kaiser, based on methods used at various times by Gerhardt Hauptmann, Frank

Wedekind, and August Strindberg, involved not only the use of certain techniques but also the choice of certain themes, among them *hatred of capitalist war*, of industrialism, [and for O'Casey] *of loss of individual personality in [. . .] the machine of capitalist-inspired war*.⁶³ (Emphasis added)

O'Casey, in Heinz Kosok's words, "must have had some grounding in German expressionist plays, as he had the opportunity to witness several expressionist plays in the productions of the Dublin Drama League."⁶⁴ More to the point, William Armstrong claims that "even if O'Casey had had no knowledge of earlier examples, he would probably have evolved expressionist techniques because of the highly experimental bent of his imagination."⁶⁵

In rejecting traditional aesthetic forms, Expressionism relies on a "deliberate distortion of observable reality"⁶⁶ without however completely severing the links with 'real' life. In fact, as David Rush asserts, *the irrational linking of rational elements* is one of the constituent characteristics of expressionist literature.⁶⁷ In drama, this is equally true of language, characters, structure and stage scenery.⁶⁸

In order for O'Casey to fulfil, in *The Silver Tassie*, his anti-war purpose and reveal the sufferings of the ordinary soldier in that *capitalist-inspired* "Great War", he has opted for an entirely Expressionistic second Act. O'Casey indeed, as I shall endeavour to show hereafter, has moved the action from a Realistic setting in Dublin to an Expressionistic one to stage a war zone experience. Throughout the second act, which will constitute the focus of our analysis, O'Casey has made use of a stylised, symbolic set instead of realistic domestic interiors, a symbolic instead of an individualised characterisation, together with the use of chanting and singing instead of conventional language.

In *The Silver Tassie*, we follow the tragic fate of Harry Heegan, who was once strong and brave then became weak and crippled after war experience. Harry plays a dual role — that of a universal soldier as well as that of an Irishman, a point brought out clearly

in the fact that only Act II of the play is set in the war zone, while the other three acts are set in Dublin.

It is in Dublin that we first meet Harry Heegan, soldier and football hero, the idol of his locality. Home on leave from the war, he has steered his team (the Avondale Football Club) to victory in a crucial football match. The “silver tassie”, the victor’s cup, and an important symbol in the play, is his. In celebration of his victory, he and his girlfriend, Jessie Taite, drink wine from the tassie which is described by Harry as “sign of youth, sign of strength, sign of victory!”⁶⁹ By the end of the first act, Harry, along with his neighbour Teddy Foran whose unhappy relationship with his wife is juxtaposed with the romantic Harry-Jessie one, will leave to return to the war front. The women in this play, unlike Nora in *The Plough and the Stars*, happily welcome their men folk’s return to the trenches. Mrs. Heegan, Harry’s mother, is concerned that her son should catch the boat to France, because his non-participation in the war will mean her missing his allowance cheques, as demonstrated in her following conversation with Susie:

Mrs. HEEGAN. The chill’s residin’ in my bones, an’ feelin’s left me just the strength to shiver. He’s overstayed his leave a lot, an’ if he misses now the tide that’s waitin’, he skulks behind desertion from the colours.

SUSIE. On Active Service that means death at dawn.

Mrs. HEEGAN. *An’ my governmental money grant would stop at once.*⁷⁰
(Emphasis added)

Mrs. Foran looks forward to Teddy’s (her husband’s) return to the front because she will not have to suffer his violence. While Jessie Taite sends Harry off to war because she is really in love with the image of the hero rather than the man himself. As in Shaw’s war playlet *O’Flaherty, V.C.*, the women are only concerned with the money they would possibly get from the Government due to O’Flaherty’s enlistment in the British army. Disregarding all of O’Flaherty’s pain and trouble, his mother expects a raise in her allowance, while his *fiancée*, Teresa Driscoll, is thinking of nothing but to get O’Flaherty back again to be wounded so that she may spend his pension.⁷¹

Act II is a brilliantly crafted Expressionist description of O'Casey's theme about the futility of war. Called by Shaw "the finest thing ever written for the stage"⁷², this Act presents, as a whole, a complex symbol of war. In a letter, O'Casey explained his intention of refraining from any realistic depiction of the battle situation:

I had seen war plays where attempts at 'realism' would consist of explosions that would near lift one out of one's seat. I determined to do a play in which a shot wouldn't be heard. And, to depict the war it would have been useless to try to make it real (I've heard of a production of *Journey's End* in which real grass grew on the sandbags); so I set out to show the spirit of war, and, to judge by the howling, it seems to be a success.⁷³

The setting is the no-man's land of the war zone; a setting described by Heinz Kosok as being:

"an anonymous front-line situation, anonymous not only because the characters are nameless but also because it is immaterial to which unit they belong, on which battlefield they are fighting, what side they are on, and even what war they are fighting. The contacts with reality are restricted to those elements that are common to every war: hunger, fatigue, dirt, cold, pain, homesickness, antagonism towards the superior officers and resentment against those who have stayed at home. These, and the unanswered question as to the purpose of the war: [*"But wy 'r we 'ere, wy 'r we 're — that's wot we wants to know!"*]⁷⁴] the undefined longing for a religious justification and the very real fear of the enemy's attack, are the constituent elements of this act."⁷⁵

The overall atmosphere is reminiscent of Wilfred Owen's war poem, "Exposure":

Our brains ache, in *the merciless iced east winds that knife us* . . .
Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent . . .
Low drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient . . .
Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,
Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.
Northward incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,
Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.
*What are we doing here?*⁷⁶ [. . .] (Emphasis added).

Throughout this poem, Owen shows that war held other dangers other than dying from bullet wounds. The soldiers were forced to suffer intolerably through harsh weather conditions, "the merciless iced east winds that knife us..." The sibilance in that quote conveys the evil of the weather and reveals its threatening presence, like that of the enemy.

The futility is shown in “What are we doing here” which echoes O’Casey’s abovementioned soldiers, as they keep chanting “But wy’r we ’ere, wy’r we ’re — that’s wot we wants to know!”, and the endless waiting is emphasised by the fact that “nothing happens.” The main focus of the poem is the continual waiting of soldiers as they suffer from the weather and the eerie silence.

Along with the aforementioned Expressionist setting, O’Casey extends his use of Expressionist techniques to model even his soldiers. They are in fact nameless, and are envisaged to be like “a close mass, as if each was keeping the other from falling, utterly weary and tired out.” Besides, “they should appear as if they were almost locked together.”⁷⁷ Moreover, the soldiers’ language is restricted to “little verbal communication [...]” in the form of “miniature soliloquies, addressed to no one and expecting no reply, even if they consist only of three or four words.”⁷⁸ The following is a sample of the soldiers’ utterances:

1st SOLDIER. Cold and wet and tir’d.
2nd SOLDIER. Wet and tir’d and cold.
3rd SOLDIER. Tir’d and cold and wet. . . .
4th SOLDIER [*very like Teddy*]. Twelve blasted hours of ammunition transport fatigue!
1st SOLDIER. Twelve weary hours.
2nd SOLDIER. And wasting hours.
3rd SOLDIER. And hot and heavy hours.
1st SOLDIER. Toiling and thinking to build the wall of force that blocks the way
from here to home.
2nd SOLDIER. Lifting shells.
3rd SOLDIER. Carrying shells.
4th SOLDIER. Piling shells.⁷⁹

O’Casey’s soldiers, to borrow Heinz Kosok’s words, frequently “evolve into what [the playwright] calls ‘chants’, verse-passages either conjuring up dreams of home,”⁸⁰ as in the following:

THE REST [*dreamily*]. Wen ’e thinks of ’ome, ’e thinks of a field of dysies.
1st SOLDIER. [*chanting dreamily*]:
I sees the missus paryding along Walham Green,
Through the jewels an’ silks on the coster’s carts,
Emmie a-pulling her skirt an’ muttering,

‘ a balloon, a balloon, I wants a balloon’,....⁸¹

“or extended visionary metaphors of the War:

2nd SOLDIER:

Squeals of hidden laughter run through
The screaming medley of the wounded
Christ, who bore the cross, still weary,
Now trails a rope tied to a field gun.”⁸²

In his introduction to the published text, the playwright “wished these ‘chants’ to be presented in the mode of medieval plainsong (*cantus planus*), and he even provided musical notations.”⁸³ It might be said that by stressing the soldiers’ monotonous chants, O’Casey has offered a remarkable form of staging the monotony of life at the front.

While the ordinary language is substituted by songs and chants throughout the Expressionist second Act, the scenery, as conceived by O’Casey, further stresses the horror of the war zone. The following description sheds more light on the subject:

[the scenery] consists of the ruins of a monastery, the rubble of destroyed houses from which ‘lean, dead hands are protruding’ and the barbed wire bordering the trenches, all of this dominated by ‘the shape of a big howitzer gun, squat, heavy underpart, with a long, sinister barrel now pointing towards the front at an angle of forty-five degrees’. At the end of the Act, when the enemy is attacking, this gun is graphically described as firing, but ‘Only flashes are seen; no noise is heard.’ These threatening embodiments of the War are contrasted with a stained-glass window depicting the Virgin, miraculously preserved and lit from the inside, and a life-size crucifix: ‘A shell has released an arm from the cross, which has caused the upper part of the figure to lean forward with the released arm outstretched towards the figure of the Virgin.’⁸⁴

The “Croucher”, a skeletal and symbolic figure, described by O’Casey in his notes to the play “as close as possible to a dead’s head, a skull; and his hands should show like those of a skeleton’s”⁸⁵ is positioned *above* the other weary soldiers. The Croucher on the one hand is a soldier suspended from service because of his injuries; on the other hand he is— as described by O’Casey— the personification of *death*. His intoned verses of destruction that hangs over the battlefield, as Cecelia Zeiss⁸⁶ declares, are adapted from Ezekiel 37 in which the meaning of the prophecy is inverted. The prophecy of the original

foretells the restoration of the kingdom of Israel through the image of the divine breath resuscitating dry bones, and transforming them to a living army:

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me round among them; and behold, there were very many upon the valley; and lo, they were very dry. And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, thou knowest."

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host.⁸⁷

The Croucher, in the following passage, reverses the meaning of the prophecy:

CROUCHER. And the hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of a valley. And I looked and saw a great multitude that stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army. And he said unto me, Son of man, can this exceeding great army become a valley of dry bones?

[*The music ceases, and a voice, in the part of the monastery left standing, intones:* Kyr. .. ie ... e ... eleison. Kyr ... ie ... e ... eleison, (*followed by the answer*): Christe ... eleison.

CROUCHER [resuming]. And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. And he said, prophesy, and say unto the wind, come from the four winds a breath and breathe upon these living that they may die.

[*As he pauses the voice in the monastery is heard again*]: Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.

CROUCHER [resuming]. And I prophesied, and the breath came out of them, and the sinews came away from them, and behold a shaking, and their bones fell asunder, bone from his bone, and they died, and the exceeding great army became a valley of dry bones.⁸⁸

In the Croucher's version, the breath departs from the living, giving way to a "valley of dry bones." The "breath" should be seen not only as evidence of physical life, but as "the spiritual vitality inherent in faith in God's purpose for man."⁸⁹

The Croucher's intonation is in counterpoint with the *Kyrie Eleison*, a prayer for mercy, that is being celebrated among the ruins of a monastery in the background. All that remains of the altar, as described in O'Casey's stage direction⁹⁰, are a broken stained-glass window of the Virgin Mary, and a life-size crucifix, its broken arm leaning towards the Virgin. Alongside the Croucher's dark prophecies and the chanting of the *Kyrie*, are heard

the soldiers' dejected responses. Their pitiful attempts at prayer express a hope of finding God "knocking abaht somewhere."⁹¹ Besides, the soldiers' credo expresses not only their belief in God, but ironically in their weapons of war, which may save their country and their lives: "We believe in God and we believe in thee [the weapons]"⁹² .

It is worth mentioning that throughout the entire second Act, no reference is made to Harry Heegan; the strong and athletic hero of the first Act. As we have seen, almost all the soldiers are "unnamed" except Barney (Harry's mate) who is mentioned by name, and whose presence is justified by his punishment for theft. Besides, only the 4th *Soldier* is said to be "very like Teddy."⁹³ Thus, one may wonder why O'Casey has entirely removed Harry from this scene. Besides, can the "Croucher" be the substitute for Harry in this Act, when observing the incapacity of Harry in the final two Acts? The appropriate answer to these questions might well be that suggested by Heinz Kosok:

If [the second] act is a symbol of war, dealing with the situation of all soldiers, Harry's individual fate would be out of place here. O'Casey's play is effective precisely because the soldiers have individual traits only at home, while the war turns them into indistinguishable ciphers, a situation from which many of them will not escape in future.⁹⁴

It would, therefore, be quite inappropriate to introduce a soldier "very like Harry" into Act II, or to turn him entirely into the character of the Croucher.⁹⁵

Throughout *The Silver Tassie*, O'Casey has made use of both Realistic and Expressionistic devices. It ought to be emphasised, however, that the "Expressionist techniques" are only used in the war-zone Act, "while the three Dublin Acts employ, [more or less], the Realistic mode."⁹⁶ "The sharp division between Act II on the one hand and Acts I, III and IV on the other," Heinz Kosok asserts, "is a sophisticated device to set the war experience apart from life at home, and to dramatise the unbridgeable gap between the returned soldiers and those who have not undergone the experience visualised in Act II."⁹⁷

In fact, the returned soldiers — mostly Harry and Teddy— as we shall see hereafter, are suffering from their injuries of war, and will suffer more from the indifference and injustice of their society.

In Act III, set in a hospital ward in Dublin, we discover that Harry, the hero of Act I, has suffered a serious spinal injury and is paralysed from the waist down. Barney, the man who carried him out of the line of fire, has not only won the Victoria Cross for bravery, but also Jessie Taite, Harry's girl friend. Harry's mother, instead of being broken by her son's disability has her morale boosted by the prospect of receiving the maximum disability allowance. Teddy Foran lies with Harry in the hospital, blinded for life. Though they are looking forward to the surgical operation the coming day, Harry feels increasingly hopeless to regain his formerly prowess:

SIMON. ... Everybody's remarking what a great improvement has taken place in you during the last few days [...] and with the operation tomorrow, [...] you'll maybe in the centre of the football field before many months are out.

HARRY [irritably]. Oh, shut up, man! It's a miracle I want — not an operation. The last operation was to give life to my limbs, but no life came, and again I felt *the horrible sickness of life* only from the waist up.⁹⁸ (Emphasis added)

Medicine seems incapable to give Harry back what the war has “stolen” from him. Although Surgeon Maxwell asserts that the operation will be “very successful”, Harry's disability, accompanied with a permanent grief, will never know any hopeful alternative.

Harry Heegan, like too many other soldiers, was probably *misled, betrayed* rather, by the “Great War” propaganda. This Irish Volunteer, a “typical young worker”, may have enthusiastically responded to Jessie Pope's “The Call”, and to all those who considered the war a “big game”. Jessie Pope, in fact, in her poem “Who's for the Game?” makes light of the war by calling it a game, “the biggest that's played,” and exhorting young men:

Come along, lads – [...]
Your county is up to her neck in a fight,

And she's looking and calling for you.⁹⁹

The opening line makes us feel that war is no excruciating pain, but rather an enjoyable game. Pope, the *civilian* poetess, also promotes patriotism by saying that going to war is giving your country a hand, and men would eventually enlist because they want to help their beloved country. The poetess might also be thinking that men would want to come back with a crutch or some injury as a souvenir from the war.

Harry is described as being “sensitive by instinct rather than by reason”, and said to have gone “to the trenches as unthinkingly as he would go to the polling booth.”¹⁰⁰ However, instead of enjoying himself in the fun and game of the war, as Jessie Pope promised, Harry comes back “Disabled”; a title given by Wilfred Owen to one of his pacifist war poems.

In “Disabled”¹⁰¹ Owen describes a man who was pressured to go to enlist and returned “disabled”, “Legless, sewn short at elbow.” Again in this poem, the unnamed victim resembles Harry Heegan, as he went to the war with the same thoughtlessness, and became paralysed like Harry; they even have a common background in football. The poem points out how he “used to swing so gay,” and enjoy life during that time “before he threw away his knees,” but now, man's indifference has tossed him aside and instead of coming back a hero, he comes back a broken wreck only thanked by “a solemn man who brought him fruit.” He was once popular with women, but he notices how their attention has “passed from him to the strong men that were whole” now. ‘Whole’ implying that he is incomplete, less than a man. Ironically he is now dependent on young women to put him to bed, in contrast to his pre-war virility. “He's lost his colour very far from here / Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry” may be the brave man's answer to the war which no epic words can express, and the intensity of this line takes us back to the first line which

says “He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark.” “Dark” in that line may be a metaphor for *death*.

The disabled Harry is seen in Act IV at the Avondale’s War Victory Dance. Harry turns up, a broken man, his once powerful body trapped in a wheelchair. His presence is but a nuisance for Jessie, his former sweetheart, who is dancing and enjoying herself with the now victorious and healthy Barney Bagnal. Harry calls for red wine and drinks to the memory of the dead men who lie in the battlefield of France, and *dead* men like himself, who “can neither walk, nor run, nor jump, nor feel the merry motion of a dance.”¹⁰² While Harry is paralysed, Teddy becomes blind. Both are suffering from their powerless existences, which seem devoid of all meaning. The following exchange between Harry and Teddy parallels their fates, and highlights one of O’Casey’s main purposes: “to present an image of the effects of war extending beyond the private fate of Harry Heegan.”¹⁰³

HARRY. I can see, but I cannot dance.

TEDDY. I can dance, but I cannot see.

HARRY. Would that I had the strength to do the things I see.

TEDDY. Would that I could see the things I’ve strength to do.¹⁰⁴

The maiming and the crippling caused by the ‘Great War’ is continued in the figure of a nameless patient, referred to simply as ‘Twenty-three’. This traumatised soldier seems to suffer from mental illness, or “shell-shock”, whom Surgeon Maxwell describes as a “hopeless case. Half his head in Flanders. May go on like that for another month.”¹⁰⁵ The very number serves to create the image of an endless chain of victims, of whom Harry, Teddy and “Twenty-three” are mere samples.¹⁰⁶

O’Casey reintroduces expressionistic chanting into this largely realistic fourth Act by means of Harry’s ‘symbolic’ drinking of wine:

HARRY. Red wine, red like the faint remembrance of the fires in France; red wine like the poppies that spill their petals on the breasts of the dead men. No, white wine, white like the stillness of the millions that have removed their clamours from the crowd of life. No, red wine;

*red like the blood that was shed for you and for many for the commission of sin!*¹⁰⁷ (Emphasis added)

“The last line”, in Cecelia Zeiss’s words, “is an allusion to Christ’s regenerative sacrifice, and evokes the futile sacrifice in the blasphemous ritual of war.”¹⁰⁸ The tragic irony of this ritual is that Harry’s sacrifice —and that of all war victims— has redeemed nobody. Harry’s continued existence merely has nuisance-value for those who wish to erase recognition of his suffering from their consciousness. Susie brings forth the attitude of those not hit by the war:

*SUSIE. [To Jessie] Teddy Foran and Harry Heegan have gone to live their own way in another world. Neither I nor you can lift them out of it. No longer can they do the things we do. We can’t give sight to the blind or make the lame walk. We would if we could. It is the misfortune of war. As long as wars are waged, we shall be vexed by woe; strong legs shall be made useless and bright eyes made dark. But we, who have come through the fire unharmed, must go on living. [Pulling Jessie from the chair] Come along, and take your part in life! [To Barney] Come along, Barney, and take your partner into the dance!*¹⁰⁹ (Emphasis added)

The point is that no charitable gesture whatsoever could improve the victims’ situation, because they now live in *another world* to which the healthy have no access. All those who have stayed at home, including Mrs. Foran, Susie, and the others, “will never be able to penetrate beyond the surface of their lives into that ‘other world’ of suffering.”¹¹⁰

With reference to the returned soldiers and the way they were received by the civilians, it seems quite useful to mention what Robert Graves¹¹¹ said. When he was sent home in 1916 to recover from his wounds, Robert Graves remarked that

“England looked strange to us returned soldiers. We could not understand the war-madness that ran wild everywhere ... The civilians talked a foreign language; and it was newspaper language.”¹¹²

For Graves, serving the nation paradoxically left him feeling a stranger, a misfit, in his homeland. It may be claimed that Britain expected a good deal from the young men and

women who served, but seemed to offer little in return. The outcome was that “many were troubled by the long-term effects of war injuries,” while “thousands suffered long-term mental illnesses, known at the time as ‘shell shock’ or war neurosis.”¹¹³ For those who fervently claim that “it is sweet and glorious to die for your country”, which in Latin translates to “Dulce et Decorum est pro patria mori”¹¹⁴ Wilfred Owen responds with a powerful poem bearing the same title.

Throughout the poem, Owen describes with shocking imagery the horror of war and the unforgettable sight of men dying “writhing” in agony. The soldier deeply affected by what he has seen and done, realises that war is filthy, vile and senseless. Phrases like “Bent double, like old beggars under sacks” give a mental image of men stooped over by their heavy burdens, muddy and ragged. The poem’s greatest strength is in the harshness of its message, i.e., anyone could die any time, regardless. The poem ends with Owen admonishing the listener not to tell children lies about the war “My friend, you would not tell with such high zest / To children ardent for some desperate glory / the old lie”; the lie that it is sweet and glorious to die for your country “Dulce et decorum est / *Pro patria mori*”. Owen might be asserting that there is no glory in war, apart from the lives you save. Fighting may be a necessity, a duty, or a responsibility, but not a glorious adventure. Owen was killed in 1918, one week before the war ended. The irony of his death proved in retrospect that each of his poems was true.

In *The Silver Tassie*, Harry’s recognition of his weakness and maiming crystallises in his symbolic smashing of the “silver tassie”. In Act I, the ‘silver tassie’ is carried by Jessie Taite, “joyously, rather than reverentially, elevated as a priest would elevate a chalice.”¹¹⁵ The tassie symbolises love, life, youth and joy. By Act IV, however, it

metamorphoses into the cup of *grief* and *suffering* as Harry Heegan, the “Christic symbol” of the play, crushes it to the floor among the people present at the dance party:

HARRY. . . . Mangled and bruised as I am bruised and mangled. Hammered free from all its comely shape. Look, there is Jessie writ, and here is Harry, the one name safely separated from the other.

[*He flings it on the floor.*] Treat it kindly. With care it may be opened out, for Barney there to drink to Jess, and Jessie there to drink to Barney.¹¹⁶

As Harry exits with the blind Teddy, he enunciates the bitter truth that lies at the heart of the troubles of both Ireland and the world at large: “The Lord hath given and man hath taken away.”¹¹⁷ The line encompasses in itself the play’s theme of the wastefulness of life in this futile, *capitalist-inspired, man-made* war.

Throughout *The Silver Tassie*, O’Casey exposed some of the terrors of war and the sufferings of the returned soldiers. The horror is conveyed through an entirely Expressionistic Act, set in an unnamed war zone, where dialogues are replaced by songs and chants, and individual traits have entirely been smoothed out. Death, omnipresent in times of war, is conveyed by O’Casey through a crouching “skeletal figure”. This remarkable device will also be employed by John Arden in his play *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance*, dealing with the aftermath of colonial wars, which will be the subject of the next chapter.

Endnotes:

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- ¹ “Shaw had been a leading contributor to the *New Statesman*, a newspaper founded by the Fabian Society, as well as a member of its board; at the time he was writing *Heartbreak House* he felt himself forced to resign. This may have been partly to protect the newspaper from the fallout after the publication of his *Common Sense About the War*, but it was also (Shaw’s publicly stated position— due perhaps to a new sharpening of focus from working on the play) because he found himself identified with opinions about the war which he rejected, printed in its pages.” Cf. Christopher Innes (ed.), *A Sourcebook on Naturalist Theatre* (London / New York : Routledge, 2002), p. 233.
- ² “Common Sense About the War”, in: *Current History of the European War*, op. cit.
- ³ “The War to end Shaw”, in Hesketh Pearson, *Bernard Shaw* (London: Four Square Books, 1964), p. 343.
- ⁴ Ibid. ; p. 349.
- ⁵ Ibid. ; p. 346.
- ⁶ Margery M. Morgan, “George Bernard Shaw” in Ian Scott-Kilvert (ed.), *British Writers, Vol. VI* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1983), p. 119.
- ⁷ “The War to end Shaw”, in Hesketh Pearson, *Bernard Shaw*, op. cit. , p. 344.
- ⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Bernard_Shaw, Internet accessed 26 March 2010.
- ⁹ Mary Luckhurst, “A Wounded Stage: Drama and World War I”, in Mary Luckhurst (ed.), *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama: 1880-2005*, op. cit., p. 304.
- ¹⁰ Idem.
- ¹¹ Idem.
- ¹² Qtd. in Ibid.; pp. 304-5.
- ¹³ Ibid. ; p. 305.
- ¹⁴ Idem.
- ¹⁵ Margery M. Morgan, “George Bernard Shaw”, op. cit. , p. 119.
- ¹⁶ Christopher Innes (ed.), *A Sourcebook on Naturalist Theatre*, op. cit. , p. 233.
- ¹⁷ Rupert Brooke, “The Soldier” , in Jon Silkin (ed.), *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 77-8. Full text of “The Soldier” is given in Appendix II of the present dissertation.
- ¹⁸ Harold Bloom (ed.), *Poets of World War I: Rupert Brooke & Siegfried Sassoon* (Broomall, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), p. 18.
- ¹⁹ Rupert Brooke, “Peace”, available at <<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/1914-i-peace/>>; Internet accessed 20 July 2010. Full text of “Peace” is given in Appendix II of the present dissertation.

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- ²⁰ Jessie Pope, "The Call", in *Jessie Pope's War Poems* (London: Grant Richards Ltd., 1915), p. 38.
Full text of "The Call" is given in Appendix II of the present dissertation.
- ²¹ George Bernard Shaw, *Heartbreak House: A Fantasia in the Russian Manner on English Themes* (London: Penguin Books, 1976). All subsequent references to this play will be from this edition.
- ²² "Letter to Mrs. Patrick Campbell, May 14, 1916", in: Alan Dent (ed.), *Bernard Shaw and Mrs Patrick Campbell: Their Correspondence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1952), p. 209.
- ²³ "Lillah McCarthy, Harley Granville-Barker's wife who had acted leading roles in several of Shaw's plays including *Man and Superman* and *The Doctor's Dilemma*, had approached Shaw for permission to stage *Heartbreak House* in 1917. However, Shaw refused to have the play performed during the war; and the negative reaction to the text, published in 1919, strengthened his reluctance to allow a production." Cf. Christopher Innes (ed.), *A Sourcebook on Naturalist Theatre*, op. cit. , p. 237.
- ²⁴ Shaw, *Heartbreak House*, op. cit., p. 14.
- ²⁵ Ibid. ; p. 7.
- ²⁶ "The **ship of state** is a famous and oft-cited metaphor put forth by Plato in Book VI of his *Republic*. It likens the governance of a city-state to the command of a naval vessel - and ultimately argues that the only men fit to be captain of this ship are **philosopher kings**, benevolent men with absolute power who have access to the Form of the Good." available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ship_of_state; Internet accessed 16 March 2010.
- ²⁷ Shaw, *Heartbreak House*, op. cit., p. 51.
- ²⁸ Ibid. ; p. 57.
- ²⁹ Ibid. ; p. 149.
- ³⁰ Ibid. ; p. 158.
- ³¹ Ibid. ; p. 159.
- ³² Ronald Bryden, "The roads to *Heartbreak House*" in Christopher Innes, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*, op. cit., p. 183.
- ³³ Bernard Shaw, *Major Critical Essays*, op. cit., p. 32.
- ³⁴ Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, Tran. Trevor Griffiths (London: Pluto Press Ltd., 1978), p. 26.
- ³⁵ Ibid. ; p. 42.
- ³⁶ Christopher Innes, (ed.), *A Sourcebook on Naturalist Theatre*, op. cit. , p. 232.
- ³⁷ Shaw, *Heartbreak House*, op. cit. , p. 8.
- ³⁸ Christopher Innes, "Defining Modernism: George Bernard Shaw", in *Modern British Drama*, op. cit., p. 46.
- ³⁹ Shaw, *Heartbreak House*, op. cit. , p. 8.

⁴⁰ Idem.

⁴¹ Ibid. ; pp. 15-16.

⁴² Robert Brustein, “Bernard Shaw: The Face Behind the Mask”, in R. J. Kaufmann (ed.), *G. B. Shaw: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New Jersey : Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965), p. 114.

⁴³ Idem.

⁴⁴ Martin Gray in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines ‘Bohemian’ as: “A word for a socially unconventional person or way of life: artists and writers of loose and irregular habits, vagabonds and adventurers are so called. The word was originally applied in France to gipsies, who were thought to have arrived in Western Europe from Bohemia, a central European State.” (Essex: Longman York Press, 1984), p.35.

The residents of the Shotover household follow the arts, live and dress unconventionally, and dabble in aesthetic and political ideas. Shaw writes, in his Preface, “Heartbreak House was quite familiar with revolutionary ideas on paper. It aimed at being advanced and freethinking, and hardly ever went to church or kept the Sabbath except by a little extra fun at week-ends. When you spent a Friday to Tuesday in it you found on the shelf in your bedroom not only the books of poets and novelists, but of revolutionary biologists and even economists [...] and all the literary implements for forming the mind of the perfect modern Socialist and Creative Evolutionist.” But, Shaw adds, while the residents of Heartbreak House “were the only repositories of culture who had social opportunities of contact with politicians, administrators, and newspaper proprietors, or any chance of influencing their activities ... they shrank from that contact. ... In short, power and culture were in separate compartments.” Cf. *Heartbreak House*, op. cit. , pp.8-10.

⁴⁵ Shaw, *Heartbreak House*, op. cit. , p. 82.

⁴⁶ Ibid. ; p. 145.

⁴⁷ Ibid. ; pp. 144-5.

⁴⁸ Ibid. ; p. 145.

⁴⁹ Idem.

⁵⁰ Ibid. ; pp. 86-7.

⁵¹ Ibid. ; p. 86.

⁵² Ibid. ; p. 87.

⁵³ Ibid. ; p. 140.

⁵⁴ Idem.

⁵⁵ Ibid. ; pp. 159-60.

⁵⁶ Ibid. ; p. 160.

⁵⁷ Christopher Innes (ed.), *A Sourcebook on Naturalist Theatre*, op. cit. , p. 233.

⁵⁸ Idem.

⁵⁹ Madeleine Oldham, “Shaw’s Surreal and Unconventional Heartbreakers”, in Megan Wygant (ed.), *The Berkeley Magazine*, N° 01., 2007-8, p. 16.

⁶⁰ Idem.

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- ⁶¹ The Dublin Trilogy comprises *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926).
- ⁶² Ronald G. Rollins and Llewellyn Rabby “*The Silver Tassie: The Post-World-War-I Legacy*,” in *Modern Drama*, Vol. 22, No. 1, June, 1979, pp. 125-126. For more details concerning this point, Cf . Chapter I of my present dissertation, pp. 32-33.
- ⁶³ Maureen Malone, “The Great War” in *The Plays of Sean O’Casey*, op. cit., p. 41.
- ⁶⁴ Heinz Kosok, *The Theatre of War: The First World War in British and Irish Drama*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 132.
- ⁶⁵ William. A. Armstrong, “Sean O’Casey”, op. cit., p. 7.
- ⁶⁶ David Rush, “Expressionism” in *A Student Guide to Play Analysis* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), p. 217.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid. ; p. 220.
- ⁶⁸ “Expressionism” in *Encyclopedia Britannica 2007* (CD ROM).
- ⁶⁹ Sean O’Casey, *The Silver Tassie* (London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 39. All page references to *The Silver Tassie*, will be from this edition.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid. ; p. 32.
- ⁷¹ George Bernard Shaw, *O’Flaherty V.C. in Heartbreak House, Great Catherine, and Playlets of the War*, op. cit. , pp. 181-84.
- ⁷² Quoted by Heinz Kosok in “The Silver Tassie”, *O’Casey The Dramatist*, op. cit., p. 104.
- ⁷³ Idem.
- ⁷⁴ O’Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. , p. 50.
- ⁷⁵ Heinz Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, op. cit., p. 132.
- A photo showing a scene from Act II of Sean O’Casey’s *The Silver Tassie* is given in Appendix II of the present dissertation. Augustus John designed the setting for the Expressionist second act for the original (1929) production at the London Apollo Theatre.
- ⁷⁶ Wilfred Owen, “Exposure” in Jon Silkin (ed.), *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, op. cit. , pp. 175-6. Full text of “Exposure” is given in Appendix II of the present dissertation.
- ⁷⁷ O’Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. , p. 19. Qtd. by Heinz Kosok, in *The Theatre of War*, op. cit., p. 132.
- ⁷⁸ Heinz Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, op. cit., p. 133.
- ⁷⁹ O’Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. , p. 49.
- ⁸⁰ Heinz Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, op. cit., p. 133.
- ⁸¹ O’Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. , p. 50.
- ⁸² O’Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. , p. 19. Qtd. by Heinz Kosok, in *The Theatre of War*, op. cit., p. 133.

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- ⁸³ Heinz Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, op. cit., p. 133.
- ⁸⁴ Idem.
- ⁸⁵ O'Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. , p. 19.
- ⁸⁶ Cecelia Zeiss, "Liturgy and Epiphany: Religious Experience as Dramatic Form in Two of Sean O'Casey's Symbolic Plays," in *O'Casey Annual No. 3*, edited by Robert G. Lowery, MacMillan Press, 1984, pp. 169-85.
- ⁸⁷ Idem.
- ⁸⁸ O'Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. , p. 48.
- ⁸⁹ Cecelia Zeiss, "Liturgy and Epiphany: Religious Experience as Dramatic Form in Two of Sean O'Casey's Symbolic Plays," op. cit.
- ⁹⁰ O'Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. , p. 47.
- ⁹¹ Ibid. ; p. 57.
- ⁹² Ibid. ; p. 65.
- ⁹³ Ibid. ; p. 49.
- ⁹⁴ Heinz Kosok, "The Silver Tassie" in *O'Casey The Dramatist*, op. cit., p. 111.
- ⁹⁵ David Krause, *Sean O'Casey*, op. cit., p. 121.
- ⁹⁶ Heinz Kosok, *The Theatre of War*, op. cit., p. 134.
- ⁹⁷ Idem.
- ⁹⁸ O'Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. p. 74.
- ⁹⁹ Jessie Pope, "Who's for the Game?," available at <http://oldpoetry.com/opoem/52141-Jessie-Pope-Who-s-for-the-Game.htm>; Internet accessed 20 July 2010. Full text of "Who's for the Game?" is given in Appendix II of the present dissertation.
- ¹⁰⁰ O'Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. p. 38.
- ¹⁰¹ Wilfred Owen, "Disabled" in Jon Silkin (ed.), *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, op. cit. , pp. 179-180. Full text of "Disabled" is given in Appendix II of the present dissertation.
- ¹⁰² O'Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. , p. 89.
- ¹⁰³ Heinz Kosok, "The Silver Tassie", op. cit., p. 96.
- ¹⁰⁴ Qtd. in Ibid. ; p. 96.
- ¹⁰⁵ O'Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. , p. 75.
- ¹⁰⁶ Heinz Kosok, "The Silver Tassie," op. cit. , p. 97.
- ¹⁰⁷ O'Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. , p. 97.
- ¹⁰⁸ Cecelia Zeiss, op. cit.
- ¹⁰⁹ O'Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. , pp. 105-6.
- ¹¹⁰ Heinz Kosok, "The Silver Tassie", op. cit., p. 100.

¹¹¹ “Graves, Robert (1895-1985). English poet, novelist, critic, and classical scholar who carried on many of the formal traditions of English verse in a period of experimentation. His more than 120 books also include a notable historical novel, *I, Claudius* (1934); an autobiographical classic of World War I, *Good-Bye to All That* (1929; rev. ed. 1957); and erudite, controversial studies in mythology. As a student at Charterhouse School, London, young Graves began to write poetry; he continued this while serving as a British officer at the western front during World War I, writing three books of verse during 1916–17. The horror of trench warfare was a crucial experience in his life: he was severely wounded in 1916 and remained deeply troubled by his war experiences for at least a decade.” Cf. *Encyclopedia Britannica 2007* (CD ROM).

¹¹² Quoted by Trudi Tate in “The First World War: British Writing”, Kate McLoughlin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p. 167.

¹¹³ Idem.

¹¹⁴ Wilfred Owen, “Dulce Et Decorum Est” in Jon Silkin (ed.), *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, op. cit. , pp. 177-8. Full text of “Dulce Et Decorum Est” is given in Appendix II of the present dissertation.

At first, this poem was directly addressed to Jessie Pope. Mark Rawlinson explains that Wilfred Owen “rejected two epigraphs – ‘To Jessie Pope, etc’, then ‘To a certain Poetess’ and changed it to ‘My friend’ in the last stanza- to leave the identity of those whose sleep is uninterrupted by war dreams unspecified”. Cf. Mark Rawlinson, “Wilfred Owen” in Tim Kendall (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 125.

¹¹⁵ O’Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, op. cit. , p. 38.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. ; p. 105.

¹¹⁷ Idem.

CHAPTER IV

THE AFTERMATH OF COLONIAL WARS: *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*.

This fourth and last chapter will deal with the aftermath of colonial wars through an analysis of John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959)¹. The first section will be devoted to the thematic concern(s) of the play. I shall show how Arden, with a Marxist bent, makes a general statement about war, the immorality of imperialism, capitalism and colonial practices, together with an exploration of colonial violence when it comes home to roost. The emphasis will be laid on the place of violence in society and the varying responses to it by the different social conflicting groups, as well as the possible justification of using violence to end violence. The second section of this chapter will be devoted to the theatrical aspects of the play. I shall depict Arden's incorporation of some devices reminiscent of Brecht's Epic Theatre when writing his anti-war play *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. Reference will be made, when necessary, to Brecht's anti-war, anti-capitalist play *Mother Courage and her Children* in their similar way of using various dramatic devices such as songs, poetic verse, and dances to emphasise the time and place of the action as well as develop characters.

1. Thematic Concern(s)

Set in the second half of the nineteenth century, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* tells the story of Serjeant "Black Jack" Musgrave and three soldiers in his command who return to England after stealing a sum of money and deserting the army in an unnamed overseas colony. Pretending to be on a recruiting campaign, the soldiers arrive in mid-winter in a mining town in the north of England. The town has been brought to a standstill as a result of

the local colliers' strike. While town officials receive the soldiers enthusiastically, the strikers and others are hostile and less receptive. The soldiers have with them a Gatling gun and the remains of Billy Hicks, a comrade of theirs who was killed in a colonial uprising. It is revealed that Hicks was a native of the town and had a relationship with Annie, a barmaid at Mrs. Hitchcock's public house, who has given birth to a stillborn child.

Upon their arrival, the Parson, who is also a magistrate, assumes that the soldiers have come to break the strike. The Mayor of the town (also the colliery owner), encourages Musgrave to recruit the striking miners as a way of ending the strike. He even provides Musgrave with a list of names of "agitators" including Walsh, the strikers' leader. In the meantime the Bargee, an important minor character, informs Walsh about the Gatling gun and suggests that he steal it so that he can start a real rebellion. Walsh fails in this attempt, but is hidden by Musgrave. Meanwhile, one of Musgrave's men, Sparky, persuades Annie to run off with him. Sparky is accused of deserting the deserters, and a fight ensues between Musgrave's soldiers in which Sparky is accidentally killed.

The following morning, Musgrave and the Mayor arrange a celebration intended to encourage the colliers to enlist. One among the deserters, Private Attercliffe, however loads the Gatling gun and directs it towards the townspeople. He does not shoot. Then Musgrave and his men upraise Hicks's skeleton, still in Redcoat uniform, on the market cross in the centre of town.

Just before a troop of Dragoons arrives, Musgrave delivers a disordered and messianic speech about the horrors and injustice of colonial war. The Dragoons shoot one of the soldiers (Hurst) as he flees and arrest Musgrave and Attercliffe. In the final scene Mrs. Hitchcock, the public house owner, visits the soldiers as they await execution for desertion, while the townsfolk, joined by the Mayor, the Parson, and the Constable, celebrate the restoration of order with songs and dance around a barrel of beer.

Although *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is set in a northern British mining town in the nineteenth century, Arden is said to have drawn from several contemporary sources for inspiration. One immediate cause was a violent event that occurred in Cyprus, then under British occupation, in October 1958. Commenting upon the origin of the play, Arden notes that

A soldier's wife was shot in the street by terrorists – and according to newspaper reports –which was all I had to work on at the time– some soldiers ran wild at night and people were killed in the rounding-up. The atrocity which sparks off Musgrave's revolt, and which happens before the play begins, is roughly similar.²

To this immediate source, Glenda Leeming adds that Arden has also drawn, regarding the way “the play's plot unfolds as a classic ‘strangers rode into town’ situation, whereby new elements are introduced into a closed community, from a film *The Raid*”³, set during the American Civil War in mid-nineteenth century:

The plan of the film is rather similar: a group of them– Confederate soldiers in disguise– ride into a Northern town. Three-quarters of the film is taken up with their installation in the town, and the various personal relationships they establish. On the appointed morning they all turn out in their Confederate uniforms, hoist a flag in the square, rob the bank and burn the houses. Finally, as in *Serjeant Musgrave*, the cavalry arrives at the last minute although in this case they are too late.⁴

In the play, the deserters narrate the events that followed Hicks's death and precipitated their return to England. The atrocity of those events is similar to what happened in Cyprus, during which many Greek Cypriots were taken to detention centres, while others, including children, were killed.⁵

Despite the specificity of the reference to events in Cyprus, Arden intended *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* to make a general statement about war, imperialism and colonial practices, and, as Mary Brewer observes, to “explore what might happen if colonial practices came home to the colonizers.”⁶ In doing so, Arden lays the emphasis on the place of violence in society and the varying responses to it, as well as he examines the possible justification of violence to end violence:

I have endeavoured to write about the violence that is so evident in the world, and to do so through a story that is partly one of wish-fulfilment. I think that many of us have felt an overpowering urge to match some particularly outrageous piece of violence with an even greater and more outrageous retaliation.⁷

This point is further supported by Michael Anderson in *Anger and Detachment*. According to him, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is “not so much a play about war as about *violence* in more general terms, and still more it is a play about *discipline, repression* and *anarchy*.”⁸ (Emphasis added).

On the other hand, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* has been considered by many critics as being pacifist by nature. That is, the play depicts “the brutalizing effects of [colonial] war.”⁹ However, as will be discussed hereafter, one could argue that pacifism is lost on Musgrave and some of his soldiers as they resort to using violence. The play’s professed pacifism, then, seems dubious as Musgrave and his fellow-soldiers intend to sensitise the townsfolk about the evils of warfare by killing twenty-five of them. According to Malcolm Page, Arden is asking the question, “why pacifist ideas have not had more influence,” and that “the answer, or moral, that the play expresses lies in the uncertain motives of the pacifists themselves.”¹⁰

To start with, Serjeant Musgrave’s message seems, on the surface at least, to be promoting pacifism. He has led the soldiers to the coal-mining town in order to show the townsfolk how war has negatively affected one of their own fellows, Billy Hicks. Billy’s death in an unnamed British colony inspired a thirst for revenge on the part of the soldiery against the civilians in the area. To avenge Billy, some locals were rounded up and five, including a young girl, were killed. To this violent incident in particular, and to the violence of military life in general, the soldiers have different responses: Attercliffe does not want to kill anyone; Sparky tries to desert the deserters; and Hurst is ready to kill at an instant’s notice. Though they seek to end warfare, their intentions and pacifist motives need to be questioned, since the play ends with the defeat of the four soldiers and a triumphal dance

celebrating the continuity of the *status quo*.

The play, therefore, seems susceptible to many interpretations, depending upon one's broadly 'political' viewpoint¹¹. As Malcolm Page notes, "*Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* continues to puzzle or anger many critics." "Clearly," he adds, "there are grounds for uncertainty about the import of the play; difficulties in comprehension arose mainly because neither method nor subject was what the critics expected."¹²

Though Musgrave believes in his mission to be pacifist, the sanguinary ways he intends to use seem to totally contradict the sincerity of his convictions¹³. He plans to kill twenty-five people in order to bring home the violence of colonialism and instigate popular protest against militarism and imperialism. Musgrave's "logic" dictates: "One man, and for him five. Therefore, for five of them we multiply out, *and* we find it five and twenty."¹⁴ Musgrave sees this calculation as entirely logical and insists, "Logic to me is the mechanism of God."¹⁵

On the other hand, one may wonder whether pacifism could be an acceptable alternative to Musgrave's horrifying means. If we admit so, could such an approach be *effective* for achieving the Serjeant's mission? Arden's refusal to provide definite answers to such questions serves to complicate matters further:

It is the job of the playwright to demonstrate the complexity, to try to elucidate it by the clarity of the demonstration. But to go further and start deciding for his audience I think is rather presumptuous. If I was able to give the solution to *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* I would be the Prime Minister. And I am not.¹⁶

It might be understood, from the playwright's comments here, that simplistic interpretations of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* would not be appropriate. More specifically, the play's interpretation should not be limited to the central character (Musgrave) and his message, though it is of central importance. Because, of equal importance are "the views and actions of all the other characters in the colliery town. Moreover, the social, economic, and political conflicting aspects of the town are seen, at least by Musgrave, as similar to the

unhappy colonial conflict from which he and his followers have fled”¹⁷. It is, in fact, the perplexing interaction of all such factors, the relations both within and between the different characters / groups in the play, which serve to reveal the complexity of the problem at hand. In order to shed more light on the subject, we shall investigate first the relationship between Musgrave and his soldiers, then between Musgrave and the colliers as an analysis of the relationship between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. Next by contrasting the soldiers, representative of “Discipline and Duty”, with Annie and Mrs. Hitchcock who embody “Life and Love”. Finally, by showing how Serjeant Musgrave and his ‘message’ constitute a threat to “the system” represented by the ‘Establishment’ figures.

Musgrave and his soldiers

In the beginning of their mission, all the soldiers seem to have deserted the army with the same ambition. They set up a plan which would hopefully awaken the British conscience in regard to the immorality of warfare. This, the soldiers think, might only be achieved by hoisting Billy Hicks’s skeleton, and displaying a lethal Gatling gun.

The circumstances of the mining town, where the soldiers have arrived, are also favourable. Since the town is snowbound and the community isolated, together with the local labour strife, Musgrave and his squad will have time to safely execute their plan. Though the colliers are hostile and suspicious that the soldiers have been called by the “Establishment” to break the strike, Musgrave is confident that their support will be won: “At the present, they believe we’ve come to kill them. Soon they’ll find we haven’t, so they’ll stop hating.”¹⁸ This so confident a statement is only the result of Musgrave’s own conviction that the local pitmen and his soldiers share the same cause:

It’s a hot coal, this town, despite that it’s freezing—choose your minute and blow: and whoosh, she’s flamed your roof off! They’re trembling already into the strikers’ riots. Well, *their riots and our war are the same one corruption*. This town is ours, it’s ready for us: and its people, when they’ve heard us, and

the Word of God, crying the murders that we've done— I'll tell you they'll turn to us, and they'll turn against that war!¹⁹ (Emphasis added)

The situation, then, seems quite clear-cut: Musgrave's band and the colliers are "rebels" with a common cause and a common oppressor. The town's officials are regarded, at least by Musgrave, as being similar to the political, economic, and religious forces which launched the war against which they have revolted. Since colonial uprisings are very often quelled by using the Imperial military force, the Mayor finds in its use a successful means for ending the local social conflicts:

The Queen's got wars, she's got rebellions. Over the sea. All right. Beat these fellers' drums high around the town, I'll put one pound down for every Royal Shilling the serjeant pays. Red coats and flags. Get rid o' the trouble-makers. Drums and fifes and glory.²⁰

It might therefore be assumed that the deserters are likely to succeed in their mission. Such factors as the union amongst themselves and the colliers' support against the town's authority figures only appear to be advantageous for achieving their plan.

Arden makes clear, however, that this unanimity may well be illusory. "Though the soldiers appear to have a common purpose and a common danger, sharp and even violent dissensions exist within them in respect to the motivations which prompted their mission and the means by which they hope to accomplish it."²¹ Musgrave, for instance, constantly stresses the religious nature of his motives and seems convinced that "Providence Himself" is directly involved:

But there's more to it than a bodily blackmail—isn't there?—because my power's the power of God, and that's what brought me here and all three of you with me.²²

Unlike Musgrave, who stresses the divine guidance, Hurst holds a fairly different view. Rejecting the "treat-you-like-dirt" aspect of army life, Hurst longs for instigating some killing relying only on his own 'practical' means:

. . . It's nowt to do wi' *God*. I don't understand all that about God, why d'you bring God into it ! You've come here to tell the people and then there'd be no more war—²³

Hurst is not opposed to killing in itself, since he has already executed “a murderous officer”; an act considered by Musgrave to be for a “good reason.”²⁴ Moreover, After Billy Hicks's skeleton is revealed in the market place in the final act, the soldier Hurst addresses the colliers:

We've earned our living by beating and killing folk like yourselves in the streets of their own city. Well it's drove us mad—and so we come back here to tell you how and show you what it's like. The ones we want to deal with aren't, for a change, you and your mates, but a bit higher up. The ones as never get hurt.²⁵

Indicating the Mayor, Parson and Constable, Hurst tells the colliers

Him. Him. Him. You hurt them hard; they'll not hurt you again. And they'll not send *us* to hurt you neither. But if you let 'em be, then us three'll be killed—aye and worse, we'll be forgotten—and the whole bloody lot'll start over again!²⁶

As for Sparky's motives, they seem much more coupled with personal grief after his friend's (Billy's) death than with any concept about pacifism. This might be underscored from his jeering at Hurst— who was not acquainted with Billy — in the early stages of their mission: “you didn't even know him when he lived, you weren't in his squad, what do *you* care that he's dead?”²⁷ Besides, Sparky's reference to the Serjeant Musgrave as “God” might also bear some evidence of his fright. Indeed, when asked by the Serjeant to explain their choice of this particular town, a stage direction notes that Sparky replies “*as with a conditioned reflex.*”²⁸

The only deserter whose motivations might be defined as clearly pacifist would be Attercliffe. He expresses a desire to turn not only against *colonial war*, as Musgrave's puts it, but rather against all wars:

All wars, Serjeant Musgrave. They've [the townsmen] got to turn against all wars. Colonial war, do we say, no war of honour? I'm a private soldier, I never had no honour, I went killing for the Queen, I did it for me wages, that wor my

life. But I've got a new life. There was one night's work, and I said: no more killing.²⁹

Accordingly, Attercliffe rejects Hurst's claim that "it's time we did our *own* killing."³⁰

On the whole, then, there is no unified opinion within the group, despite the danger and the common purpose which apparently unite it. Due to the soldiers' varying motivations, it would appear that it is only Musgrave's firm leadership—at least in the earliest stages—which ensures a relatively unified action.

Musgrave and the colliers: 'insiders' vs. 'outsiders'

The study of the colliers' resorting to violence as well as their hostile response to Musgrave's message, in addition to their behaviour towards the 'Establishment' worthies, reveals that even within the coal-miners a similar lack of harmony exists. Unlike Walsh, their leader, the other pitmen are easily provoked to violence. Evidence of their aggressive behaviour may be seen in the Pugnacious Collier's attack on the Constable when the latter orders Mrs. Hitchcock to close the bar (Act II, Scene two, p.47), or his warning "I'll break your bloody head" to the Slow Collier, when a fight breaks out between them. Such behaviour might suggest that even within the town "rebels", a lack of unity subsists.

Though the colliers' differ in their responses and behaviour towards some issues, they appear of one hostile mind and attitude in their conflict with the town worthies. In fact, the collective self-interest prompts all the coal-miners to unify their actions against their oppressors.³¹ As for Musgrave and his mission, the colliers' conduct is somewhat at odds with the disciplined obedience he demands—and temporarily receives from his own followers. The colliers' compliance, one might suggest, seems to be a prerequisite for the success of Musgrave's plan.

As we have seen thus far, the plot of the play seems complicated probably due to the existence of various conflicting groups within this community. It is clear that we have a conflict within the town between the “Establishment” and the colliers, and a conflict between the group of army deserters and their society which accepts and uses violence as a way of life, but as Steinberg observes, “there is an overlapping conflict that embraces both, a conflict between the townspeople and the soldiers, that is, between the ‘insiders,’ the settled inhabitants, and the ‘outsiders’ who come into their midst and are regarded with mistrust.”³² This last point seems to deserve much more emphasis, particularly with reference to the clash between Walsh, spokesman for the colliers, and Serjeant Musgrave, the self-proclaimed missionary of peace.

Musgrave believes that his soldiers as well as the colliers share a common cause against the ‘Establishment’s’ representatives (the Mayor, Parson and Constable). He explicitly links imperial wars and class warfare when he speaks of the strikers’ riots as “the same one corruption.”³³ Yet, as we have seen, nothing of the sort happens. Musgrave’s failure largely results from his inability to act effectively on the camaraderie he feels with the strikers. He is unable to appeal to the colliers and they (or at least Walsh) are rightly suspicious of his methods and fanatical discourse. This distrust is obvious during Walsh’s first meeting with Musgrave, when he tells him, “there’s a Union made at this colliery, and we’re strong.” He adds that the soldiers, unlike the colliers, “fight for pay. You go sailing on what they call punitive expeditions, against what you call rebels, and you shoot men down in streets. But not here. These streets is *our* streets.”³⁴

Unlike Musgrave, Walsh seems to reject all sort of resemblance that could supposedly unify the colliers’ and the deserters’ interests.³⁵ Addressing the local pitmen in the presence of Musgrave, Walsh exclaims:

...*he's* still in uniform, and he's still got his Book. He's doing his duty. Well, I take no duties from no bloody lobsters. This town lives by collieries. That's coal-owners and it's pitmen —aye, and they battle, and the pitmen'll win. But not wi' no soldier-boys to order our fight for us. Remember their trade: you give 'em one smell of a broken town, you'll never get 'em out.³⁶

The same suspicion is underscored in the dialogue between Musgrave and the colliers in Act III, a dialogue which follows Hurst's urging the colliers in the market place to turn against the representatives of power:

MUSGRAVE. For God's sake stand with us. We've *got* to be remembered!

SLOW COLLIER. We ought to, you know. He might be right.

WALSH. I don't know. I don't trust it.

PUGNACIOUS COLLIER. Ahr and be damned, these are just like the same as us. Why don't we stand with 'em?

WALSH (obstinately): I've not yet got this clear.³⁷

It could be said that Musgrave's failure to involve the colliers in his plan may also be attributed to his religious fanaticism. He believes that he is on some sort of mission from God and claims that "[his] power's the power of God."³⁸

Described by Arden as similar to the sergeants who fought under Cromwell and in the Crimea with Bible in one hand and weapon in the other,³⁹ he is religious, militantly authoritarian and, perhaps more, single-minded. "It's not material," is his favourite reply to queries or arguments that seem, in one way or another, to call into question the correctness of his position. As Katharine Worth notes, the phrase "runs through the play like a desperate affirmation of the logic of his position."⁴⁰

Though a military deserter, both his personality and his plan paradoxically embody many characteristics of the life from which he has escaped. He hates "anarchy" of any sort and even expresses to the Constable his dislike of agitators "in or out of the army."⁴¹ While apparently a man of "peace," and has faith in the "Logic of God", his conception of that "logic" resembles, to some extent, the bloody militarism he wishes to destroy:

I'm in this town to change all soldiers' duties. My prayer is: keep my mind clear so I can weigh Judgement against the Mercy and Judgement against the Blood, and make this Dance as terrible as You have put into my brain. The Word alone is terrible: the Deed must be worse. But I know it is Your Logic, and You will provide.⁴²

Musgrave's "logic" which dictates the killing of twenty-five innocent townspeople seems totally irrational and inhuman. Such 'logic' may only be regarded as rational by the supporters of imperialism—who kill in cold blood—and the industrial capitalists, who seek only personal interests. By stressing the 'logic' of Musgrave on the one hand, and that of the colliery-owners on the other, Arden seeks to demonstrate that both imperialism and capitalism are illogical and cold-blooded.

For Musgrave to mount a meaningful protest against the 'Establishment' and carry out his plan, the support of all the locked-out colliers seems necessary. The colliers, however, seem to be doubtful and even hesitant to take any part in Musgrave's mission. This might be underscored from Walsh's exchange with Musgrave, objecting to his fellow miners' to drink on Musgrave's money:

MUSGRAVE. [. . .] I wasn't given these—(*he touches his stripes*)— for not knowing men from ninepins. Now I'm telling you one word and I'm telling you two, and that's all. (*He lowers his voice*) You and me is brothers—
WALSH. (*in high irony*). Eh begod! A Radical Socialist! Careful, soldier, careful; D' ye want to be hanged?
MUSGRAVE. (*very seriously*). No jokes. I mean this. I mean it. Brothers in God—
WALSH. (*even more scornful*). Oh, hoho, *that*—
MUSGRAVE. —And brothers in truth. So watch and wait. I said, *wait*.
WALSH. (*jeering*). Brothers in God. Gentle Jesus send us rest
Surely the bosses know what's best! *Get* along with yer—⁴³

Walsh, apparently, rejects the 'brotherhood' that Musgrave proposes. For him, a man as indoctrinated with the military culture and discipline as Musgrave would never be able to mount a revolt against the 'Establishment' worthies.⁴⁴

Walsh may be regarded as the most sensitive of all the colliers. At first, he has even shown some sympathy towards the soldiers' cause. Yet, "after hearing of Sparky's death, Walsh begins to lose faith in the Serjeant's mission, and then decides against any action."⁴⁵ His opposition, however, does not imply a total lack of sympathy. "A stage direction makes clear that he is angry at the revelry that follows the arrival of the Dragoons and that it is only with "*extreme bitterness*" that he finally joins in the dance himself."⁴⁶ Besides, Walsh's refusal of Musgrave's actions constitutes a criticism of the Serjeant's plan and methods, which seem both irrational and inadequate to bring about any change for the locked-out colliers.

Indeed, after the Dragoons arrest Serjeant Musgrave and Private Attercliffe, Walsh bitterly comments that "the community's been saved. Peace and prosperity rules. We're all friends and neighbours for the rest of today. We're all sorted out. We're back where we were. So what do we do?"⁴⁷ This statement might suggest that even if order is restored in the colliery town and that Musgrave will be executed for desertion, the imperial system would firmly remain unchanged. Walsh's question "So what do we do?", in Adam Daniel's words, "suggests that the colliers must find a solution for themselves and that it must be a collective solution rather than the individual martyrdom Musgrave longs for."⁴⁸ This may resemble the kind of action that the working-class Dubliners in *The Plough and the Stars* would have to undertake to bring about social and political change. The action should originate within the concerns of the ordinary Dubliners, and presented in a language familiar to them. The sacrificial rhetoric of Pearse, like Musgrave's, did no more to improve their situation than the "individualistic" socialism preached by The Young Covey. Here, the irony in Walsh's comment about "peace and prosperity" can be seen as a statement on the "affluent" culture of the late fifties. By implication, then, the remark argues that the prosperity and peace of

the late fifties are shared unequally, with the working classes experiencing little prosperity and colonised peoples abroad little peace.

The Soldiers, Annie and Mrs. Hitchcock: “Discipline and Duty” vs. “Life and Love”

In his introduction to the published text, John Arden suggests that “a study of the roles of the women, and of Private Attercliffe, should be sufficient to remove any doubts as to where the ‘moral’ of the play lies.”⁴⁹ It may be said that one of the major obstacles or threats to the soldiers’ fulfilment of their “duty” is the “life and love” that Annie has to offer, and of which Musgrave fails to appreciate the human significance. But, before focusing on Annie’s role as the personification of “life and love”, Mrs. Hitchcock’s humane position needs to be illuminated. Described by Arden as “a woman of deep sympathies and intelligence,”⁵⁰ Mrs. Hitchcock is indeed sympathetic first towards Annie as she takes care of her after Billy’s, and later Sparky’s, deaths. She is also sympathetic towards the colliers’ cause as well as towards Musgrave and Attercliffe when she visits them in jail in the play’s final scene and offers them a drink.

When describing the local labour strife, Mrs. Hitchcock lays much more emphasis on the human suffering that such conflict engenders:

No work in the colliery. The owner calls it a strike, the men call it a lock-out, we call it *starvation*.⁵¹ (emphasis added)

Her reference here to *starvation* expresses a deep concern for the *immediate* despair caused by the strike, as opposed to the *long-term* causes and solutions that preoccupy Musgrave. Indeed, the townspeople in general, and the locked-out colliers more specifically, are concerned with something transcending what is “right” and what is “wrong”, as Musgrave endlessly insists; they are rather concerned with what is “vital” and “necessary”.⁵² Mrs. Hitchcock and Musgrave do actually differ in their conception of what is immediate and of

certain priority for the starving colliers. Naturally, food is a first-class necessity. As in *The Plough and the Stars*, the Dublin slum-dwellers, who are living under extreme poverty and recurring starvation, seem much more concerned with finding something to eat than following Pearse's idealistic republicanism. Amidst gun-firing and bombardment, they go to loot the broken shops, looking for food, drinks, and clothes.

Annie, referring to herself as the soldier's whore and saying that she has been called "life and love" by a soldier before, brings forward another basic human "necessity" which is of an "emotional" nature. She may be seen as the embodiment of the "Life Force". Her life in this bleak town is harsh and bitter. Yet, despite the bitterness and grief felt after Billy Hicks's desertion and her baby's death a couple of months later, she still has "love" to offer to the soldiers. Such a deed, however, provokes a stern reaction from Musgrave, who stresses the importance of "discipline" and "duty" among his men, and strongly opposes any satisfaction of an immediate desire:

Look, lassie, anarchy: now, we're soldiers. Our work isn't easy, no and it's not soft: *it's got a strong name—duty*. And it's drawn out straight and black for us, a clear plan. But if you come to us with what you call your *life or love—I'd call it your indulgence—and you scribble all over that plan, you make it crooked, dirty, untidy, bad—there's anarchy*. I am a religious man. I know words, and I know deeds, and I know how to be strong. So do these men. *You will not stand between them and their strength! Go on now: take yourself off.*⁵³ (emphasis added)

The militantly self-disciplined Hurst also rejects Annie's proposal, responding therefore to the Serjeant's 'discipline and duty'.

Arden tells us in his introduction that he envisions Hurst as "bloody-minded, quick-tempered, handsome, cynical, tough, but not quite as intelligent as he thinks he is."⁵⁴ Yet he emerges in the play in a somewhat different light. For one thing he is an obeyer of orders, a man who respects power, and at times yearns to use power of his own. Musgrave has little difficulty with him since Hurst's rebelliousness, or at least the period during which he

questions Musgrave's authority, is short-lived. For Hurst "Love" equals desertion, or at least a disregard of duty.

Unlike Musgrave's and Hurst's cold reactions, Attercliffe at least showed some kindness towards Annie. Though Attercliffe too rejects Annie's offer, his rejection is based on the assumption that sleeping with Annie "wouldn't do no good."⁵⁵

Attercliffe, Arden suggests, is "aged about fifty, grey-haired, melancholy, a little embittered."⁵⁶ He seems to represent the position of complete non-violence in the play. Attercliffe is, in John Mills' words, "dominated by an impulse to modify the behaviour of others—by a desire to police the world."⁵⁷ He interrupts the fight between the Pugnacious collier and the Constable, and it is he who puts his own body in the line of fire of the Gatling gun which Hurst has trained onto the crowd in the town square.⁵⁸ In other words, he is "a non-violent man whose desire to make human beings accept *his* point of view, involves him in violent actions."⁵⁹ Like Hurst, Attercliffe too rejects the "life and love" that Annie offers, and becomes, perhaps, a victim of other people's cruelty. The fight in the stable, during which Sparky is killed, is at the same time

an ironic manifestation of Attercliffe's own role in the events of the play, and a little parable about war: the impetus to kill comes from the savage Hurst, but the man who actually wields the bayonet, and does the killing, is Attercliffe, the man of decent and generous impulses.⁶⁰

Arden tells us that a study of Attercliffe's role should help us see where the "moral" of the play lies. He later suggests that the play may be advocating, "with some timidity," the doctrine of complete pacifism.⁶¹ Yet, Attercliffe, as we have tried to show, is too much of a hollow man, say a "loser", to exemplify any set of values one could describe as "positive." In addition, Hurst's violent attitude implies discipline, obedience, and therefore power over others. Attercliffe's non-violent attitude, by contrast, implies prevention, avoidance, and the

like, i.e. *power over others*. Hence, an effective alternative to Attercliffe's position may well be that expressed through the character of Sparky.

Sparky, Arden says, is "easily led, easily driven, inclined to hide from himself behind a screen of silly stories and irritating clownishness."⁶² Throughout most of the play he appears frivolous and sometimes even incoherent, but his emotion regarding the loss of his friend Billy Hicks is true to the point of overpowering him. After Hurst and Attercliffe reject Annie's offer, she breaks down and begins to weep. Sparky attempts to comfort her, contradicting thereby both of Hurst's and Musgrave's convictions:

It *wouldn't* be anarchy you know; he can't be right there ! All it would be, is: *you* live and *I* live — we don't need his duty, we don't need his Word — a dead man's a dead man! We could call it *all* paid for! Your life and my life — make our *own* road, we don't follow nobody.⁶³

Sparky can offer himself to the barmaid. This, he discovers, is what payment means; although Billy Hicks cannot be avenged, he may probably be "replaced." The concept begins to take shape and Sparky, "following his thought in great disturbance of mind," expresses it "with a sudden access of resolution," and "with a switch to hard seriousness."⁶⁴ He then plans to desert to London with Annie; a plan which is interrupted by Hurst and which leads to his accidental death at the hands of the kindly Attercliffe.

Regarding Serjeant Musgrave, one could say that he totally opposes the "life" and "love" values, characteristic of the women in the play. This might infer that Musgrave, though an army deserter, is still supporting the discipline and the military culture he represents."⁶⁵ Indeed, when Mrs. Hitchcock visits Musgrave and Attercliffe in jail, she evokes the Serjeant's words about life, love, and anarchy and demands of him:

Then *use* your Logic—if you can. Look at it this road: here we [the townspeople] are, and we'd got life and love. Then *you* came in and did your scribbling where nobody asked you. Aye, it's arsy-versey to what you said, but it's still anarchy, isn't it? And it's all your work."⁶⁶

As Musgrave intends to justify his deeds by “don’t tell me there was life or love in this town,” Mrs. Hitchcock replies that “there was. There was hungry men, too—fighting for their food. But *you* brought in *a different war*.”⁶⁷ It might be suggested that though ‘life and love’ are essential, they seem inadequate in themselves to bring about social change. The life and love do also reveal the weakness of Musgrave’s stern philosophy, a point acknowledged by Attercliffe near the end of the play: “To end it by its own rules: no bloody good. She’s right, you’re wrong.” Besides, Attercliffe’s assertion that “you can’t cure the pox by further whoring”⁶⁸ further discredits Musgrave’s unquestionable “Logic”. And like Mrs. Hitchcock, Attercliffe remains optimistic even after his imprisonment at the end of the play. His question to Musgrave: “They’re going to hang us up a length higher nor most apple-trees grow, Serjeant. D’you reckon we can start an orchard?”⁶⁹ may bear some evidence of hope and renewal.

Musgrave and the ‘Establishment’ figures: a threat to the system?

The Mayor, the Constable, and the Parson, who stand for the authority figures in the play, are envisaged by Arden as being only “silhouettes”, leaving out all their specific details. Yet, by portraying the Mayor as the colliery-owner and the Parson as a magistrate, Arden lays much more emphasis on “the relationships between economic, political, and religious power”⁷⁰ in this snowbound, mining town. The Dragoon Officer, standing for the missing ‘link’ of the “Establishment’ chain, shows up at the play’s close. In his introduction to the play, Arden calls the officer a “deus-ex-machina”⁷¹ suggesting him to only be “tall, calm, cold and commanding.”⁷²

Because Serjeant Musgrave is not actually on a recruiting mission, his presence in the town threatens the system, though he is quickly neutralised by the military force he once represented. Indeed, the military power is but a repressive means for keeping up the *status*

quo, and protecting the ‘Establishment’s’ interests. This is manifest in the Mayor’s expectation, at the play’s opening, that Musgrave and his squad have come in a strike-breaking mission.⁷³ The Parson, for his part, praises Musgrave and his men as they stand for Britain’s worldwide power and pride. This point is evidenced in his exchange with the Mayor:

PARSON. Fine strong men. They make me proud of my country. Mr. Mayor, Britain depends on these spirits. It is a great pity that their courage is betrayed at home by skulkers and shirkers. What do *you* think?

MAYOR (looking at him sideways). I think we’ll use ’em, Parson. Temporary expedient, but it’ll do. The price of coal has fell, I’ve had to cut me wages, I’ve had to turn men off. They say they’ll strike, so I close me gates. We can’t live like that for ever. There’s two ways to solve this colliery—one is build the railway here and cut me costs of haulage, *that* takes two years and an Act of Parliament, though God knows I want to do it. The other is clear out half the population, stir up a diversion, turn their minds to summat else. The Queen’s got wars, she’s got rebellions. Over the sea.⁷⁴

It ought to be emphasised that the Parson, through his abovementioned comment, may well be voicing the ideology of imperialist Britain. The Mayor too finds in patriotism a useful means for protecting his personal and class interests. The Parson’s comment, during which the soldiers are introduced to the townsmen, sheds more light on his own “imperial” convictions:

PARSON. And if our country is great, and I for one am sure that it is great, it is great because of the greatness of its responsibilities. They are worldwide. They are noble. They are the responsibilities of a first-class power.”⁷⁵

The “responsibilities”, in fact, point to the way in which colonialism was justified as Britain’s “civilizing” mission.⁷⁶ The Parson continues,

[W]hen called to shoulder our country’s burdens we should do it with a glancing eye and a leaping heart, to draw the sword with gladness, thinking nothing of our *petty differences and grievances*—but all united under one brave flag, going forth in Christian resolution, and showing a manly spirit!”⁷⁷ (Emphasis added)

By “petty differences and grievances” the Parson might mean class differences and economic grievances, which he feels should be transcended by religion and national loyalty.

For the Parson, imperialism and capitalism should be stabilised so as to maintain Britain's strength and worldwide position. Even the military can help to prevent their collapse, preferably by neutralising discontented workers and encouraging patriotism but also, as the play shows, by force if necessary.

In his preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre writes that "violence has changed its direction." He explains, speaking as a citizen of a European imperialist State, that "violence comes back on us through our soldiers, comes inside and takes possession of us."⁷⁸ Arden's thesis in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* seems to resemble Sartre's, as Musgrave and his soldiers brought back the colonisers' violence into one of their own towns.

Arden, to borrow Adam Daniel's words, "wants to show that violence perpetrated in the colonies cannot be contained or held at arm's length."⁷⁹ During Musgrave's long speech in the climactic penultimate scene, he exhorts the people:

Join along with my madness, friend. I brought it back to England but I've brought the cure too—to turn it on to them that sent it out of this country—way-out-ay they sent it, where they hoped only soldiers could catch it and rave! Well, here's three redcoat ravers on their own kitchen hearthstone!⁸⁰

Musgrave imagines imperialism as "a disease—a madness—that, in addition to inflicting immeasurable suffering on colonised peoples, weakens the imperial nation-state."⁸¹ Eventually, "the cycle of violence that brought Musgrave to the town begins with the imperialist. But the specific sequence of events that brought him there began with a violent anti-colonial action."⁸² Thus, the play implies, the imperial state must struggle simultaneously with the violence of its own agents and with the hostility which that violence engenders.

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance makes clear Arden's attitude toward empire and helps in understanding his deep concern with the immorality of imperialism. After 1968, following

his visit with his wife Margareta D'Arcy to India, Arden made clear his embracement of a Marxist revolutionary doctrine, as he claims:

I hope I have made it clear.....that I recognise as the enemy the fed man, the clothed man, the sheltered man, whose food, clothes and house are obtained at the expense of the hunger, the nakedness, and the exposure of so many millions of others: and who will allow anything to be *said* in books or on the stage, so long as the food, clothes and house remain undiminished in his possession.⁸³

Arden demonstrates, without attempting to depict the sufferings of colonised people in great detail, that both the Empire's citizens and the colonised subjects alike suffer from the effects of imperialism. Arden achieves "a broad perspective that sees imperialism as a function of power disparities between peoples and draws attention to the violence those disparities make possible."⁸⁴

2. Stagecraft

Having dealt in the previous section with some of the play's thematic concerns, and exposed Arden's variations between warfare, violence, and pacifist intentions, my focus will shift in the following to the dramaturgy of the play. I shall show how Arden used some devices taken from Bertolt Brecht's "Epic Theatre" and appropriated them to embody his thematic preoccupations. The focus will be laid on the conception of the setting(s) and the dramatic space, the use of the "Alienation effect", the incorporation of songs, poetic verse, and dances, together with Arden's use of direct address to the audience.

In his introduction to *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, John Arden claims that "this is a realistic, but not a naturalistic play." "Therefore," he continues, "the design of the scenes and costumes must be in some sense stylized."⁸⁵ From these statements, we might understand that Arden draws from some theatrical models different from the conventions of the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed his play is inspired from the Brechtian sense of

showing not only the negative effects of present social institutions, but also the historical, and therefore changeable nature of those institutions.

Of significant influence, then, is Bertolt Brecht whose Berliner Ensemble toured London in 1956. The impact of the Berliner Ensemble's production was felt by many playwrights. "Not only was Arden familiar with Brecht;" Michael Patterson declares, "he went so far to say that *Mother Courage and her Children* (1941) was the 'twentieth-century play he would most like to have written.'"⁸⁶ This does not imply, however, that Arden blindly imitates Brecht. In 1966—seven years after the premiere of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*—Arden replied thus to an interviewer's question as to whether he had been influenced by Brecht:

Yes, but I don't copy Brecht; I don't use him as a model. After I had started writing plays I decided that Brecht was inspired by the same sort of early drama that was interesting me: The rather conventionalized plays of the European Middle Ages, the Elizabethan writers and various exotic styles such as the Japanese and Chinese theatre. I was not interested in naturalistic Ibsenite writing.⁸⁷

In a naturalist play, characters are often caught in closed indoor spaces, and are helpless against the pressures of the apparently unchangeable world outside. This deterministic worldview even encourages the audience's emotional involvement and complacency. By contrast, John Arden, like Brecht, envisions a theatre that could present the puzzles of the world on the stage so that the audience could have the opportunity to critically engage in considering resolutions. Terry Eagleton's description of Brecht's methods may serve nearly as well for those of Arden:

Brecht recognized that [illusionistic drama] reflected an ideological belief that the world was fixed, given and unchangeable, and that the function of the theatre was to provide escapist entertainment for men trapped in that assumption. Against this, he posits the view that reality is a changing, discontinuous process, produced by men and so transformable by them. The task of the theatre is not to "reflect" a fixed reality, but to demonstrate how character and action are historically produced, and so how they could have been, and still can be, different. The play itself, therefore, becomes a model of the process of that production; it is less a reflection *of*, than a reflection *on*, social reality.⁸⁸

This distinction between *reflecting reality* and *reflecting on it* helps understand Arden's work. "Usually through the Brechtian 'alienation effect', Arden constantly reminds the audience that what they are seeing is constructed and mediated by the author's intelligence. In other words, the play is an *interpretation of reality*."⁸⁹ Transparent representation may seem to be impossible; thus Arden opts to create a 'realistic' – but not superficially naturalistic– picture of social relationships and historical processes. Arden's play, in fact, "is realist, in the same sense as Brecht's are, always – coldly – referring to (but not purely reflecting) specific events in the past in order to comment on contemporary social relations."⁹⁰

In addition to the claimed realistic aspect of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, Arden refers later in his introduction to "the obvious difficulties, caused by the mixture of verse, prose, and song."⁹¹ Such a mixture, again a Brechtian device, is meant by Arden to stress the 'artificiality' added to the theatre through these elements. He claimed in 1960 that "people must want to come to the theatre *because* of the artificiality, not despite it."⁹² It is worth pointing out here that Brecht's incorporation of songs in his plays is aimed at providing "a commentary on the events of the play,"⁹³ therefore 'distancing' or 'alienating' the audience into thinking about the ideas of the plays and not giving way to immersion in plot or characters. Arden's songs, however, "are considered by the characters as part of the natural dialogue."⁹⁴

In the light of the aforementioned statements then, my emphasis will be on John Arden's use — in his conception of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*— of some devices reminiscent of the Brechtian, anti-illusionistic, Epic Theatre. To do so, I shall first examine the various 'settings' and 'scenery' employed throughout the play, then analyse Arden's incorporating of songs and dances to achieve a certain 'estrangement', finally observe

through a key-scene, how the audience becomes part of the dramatic action, breaking thus the “fourth wall” of the illusionist theatre.

2.1. Setting

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance is set in the north of England in the 1880s⁹⁵. Much of the action takes place in a public house (pub) in a small mining town torn apart because of the local miners' strike. There are also a few outdoor settings, such as the churchyard, the street, and the town's market-place.

The settings add to the realism of the play. Both the pub and the market-place are places where different kinds of people come together, from town officials to common colliers. The other settings emphasise the cold harshness of life in the northern town.

In Naturalistic / illusionistic plays, the stage-directions generally “offer a full description of the setting,” and at times, “even contain information that could not be perceived by the audience. By contrast, the setting of the first scene of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is defined simply as ‘A canal wharf. Evening.’”⁹⁶ Such brevity does not imply a lack of theatrical imagination on the part of the playwright; what Arden is actually concerned with is “to offer only enough information relevant to the staging / performance of the scene.”⁹⁷ The following passage reveals Arden's own conception of the scenery in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*:

Scenery must be sparing - only those pieces of architecture, furniture and properties actually used in the action need be present: and they should be thoroughly realistic, so that the audience sees a selection from the details of everyday life rather than a generalised impression of the whole of it.⁹⁸

What Arden claims here echoes Brecht's understanding of the function of scenery. Such a setting reminds “the audience that they are in a theatre, [watching a play, and] a much more real experience is offered in place of the illusion of reality.”⁹⁹

Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children*, for instance, is an anti-war play set in Europe during the Thirty Years' War, specifically covering the years 1624–1636. The action takes place in a number of locales in Europe, including (in this order) Dalarna, Poland, Bavaria, Fichtelgebirge, Central Germany, and Halle. Almost every scene is set in the outdoors, on roads and highways, next to camps or peasants' farms, or inside tents. This represents the constant change and flux of a wartime environment. The settings illustrate the impermanence in Mother Courage's life. There are only two constants in each scene of the play: Mother Courage and her canteen wagon, and these items are notable for their mobility; they are capable of moving quickly as the war progresses.

Likewise, "*Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* requires eight different locations, half of them exterior"¹⁰⁰: A canal wharf, the churchyard, a street, and the market-place. Indeed, "theatre space", as Michael Patterson observes, "is acknowledged to be such," and the play openly concedes that the audience is looking at a stage. This can be illustrated from "the end of the first scene as Musgrave 'makes a rapid circuit of the stage.'¹⁰¹ One may also point out Arden's use of "non-realistic devices," evidenced in "the split stage in Act II, Scene three with action alternating between stable and bedroom"¹⁰²: One part of the stage is divided into areas representing the stables where Attercliffe, Sparky and Hurst are to sleep, another part of the stage represents Musgrave's bedroom. Or again "in the transition from Scene one to Scene two in the third Act, where the prison is 'achieved by a barred wall descending in front of the dancers of the previous scene.'¹⁰³

Another importance given by Arden to his setting lies in its historical distancing aspect. Michael Patterson explains, in the following, the playwright's motives:

One reason he [Arden] gave for placing the action roughly between 1860 and 1880 was that it allowed him to have redcoat soldiers, and the ballad-like effect of the strong colours of the play has been frequently noted: *red* is the colour of the soldiers' coats and the mayor's robe, and of blood; *black* the colour of coal and Black Jack Musgrave, and of the Queen of Spades, the card of death; *white* the colour of snow and Musgrave's 'white shining word', and of the bones of Billy's skeleton. Even more importantly, the historical setting allows Arden to set his

chosen theme at a distance, in the same way that Brecht uses history in *Mother Courage* to permit a more objective discussion of political issues than would be possible in a contemporary context.¹⁰⁴

Arden adds to this sense of distancing by placing the action in an unnamed snow-bound town in winter. Neither the date, nor the town, nor even the colony in which Musgrave's men have served are identified, achieving, hence, the allegorical purpose of the play. Besides, by "retaining a sense of its historical context, the play remarkably acquires the quality of a 'parable'."¹⁰⁵ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, we should not forget, is actually subtitled 'an un-historical parable'.

2.2. Songs, Verse, and Dance

A major achievement in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is the playwright's sophisticated use of various contrapuntal devices to emphasise the time and place of the action as well as develop characters. The most prominent of these are songs, poetic verse, and dances.

Many of the main characters sing folk-type songs and recite verse. This technique is already acknowledged by Arden to be drawn from "the rather conventionalized plays of the European Middle Ages, the Elizabethan writers and various exotic styles such as the Japanese and Chinese theatre."¹⁰⁶ In addition, many aspects of the play, as claimed by Frances Gray, reflect affinity to the ballad tradition in poetry, a tradition which Arden is concerned to translate into purely visual terms:

In the ballads the colours are primary. Black is for death, and for the coalmines. Red is for murder, and for the soldier's coat the collier puts on to escape from his black. Blue is for the sky and for the sea that parts true love. Green fields are speckled with bright flowers. The seasons are clearly defined. White winter, green spring, golden summer, red autumn.¹⁰⁷

Arden also draws upon conventions of various theatrical genres. He notes that *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is "based on a combination of Elizabethan tragedy and nineteenth century melodrama."¹⁰⁸

To start with, the songs used in the play are, for some of them, contained within the

action; that is to say, they arise naturally out of the situation on stage. Songs of this type are, for instance, Sparky's in Act I, Scene one; a song of "desertion":

When first I deserted I thought myself free
Till my cruel sweetheart informed upon me- [...]
Court martial, court martial, they held upon me
And the sentence they passed was the high gallows tree.¹⁰⁹

Sparky's song at the same time foreshadows what awaits the deserters at the end of their journey into the bleak town of northern England: death by hanging is the way army deserters were punished. Throughout the play, Sparky sings many times, commenting on the action and revealing much about himself and his attitude towards life, and more specifically, towards army life.

Other songs employed in the play are 'independent', separated from the rest of the action. Indeed, they are "songs [which] interrupt the action, have a more obvious commenting function, and may be sung straight out to the audience."¹¹⁰ This might be illustrated through "Annie's ballad, which describes the life of a soldier, and the songs with which scenes end: the Bargee's in the first scene,"¹¹¹ commenting on Musgrave's "A soldier's duty is a soldier's life" with:

The Empire wars are far away,
For duty's sake we sail away,
Me arms and legs are shot away,
And all for the wink of a shilling and a drink...¹¹²

This also applies to Sparky's song in Act II, Scene one (p. 52), or, most notably, Attercliffe's at the end of the play.¹¹³

Attercliffe sings a ballad about how a soldier gave his girl a "blood-red-rose-flower", went to war and then came back to find that she had found love with another:

Your Blood-red rose is withered and gone
And fallen on the floor:
And he who brought the apple down
Shall be my darling dear.¹¹⁴

This love is represented in the song by the seed of the apple that her new love had given her, which would grow and strengthen and provide more love for others. The rose, described as being the colour of blood, represents ‘violence’, while the apple and its seeds represent the enduring power of ‘love’. The song may refer to love transcending violence, another way of expressing the point made by the visual image of Annie cradling Hicks’s bones at the end of Act III, Scene one.

Mrs. Hitchcock and the Bargee also sing, while Walsh, other colliers, and Attercliffe (especially at the very end of the play) break in with enlightening verse. The Bargee is always whistling the song “Michael Finnegan.”¹¹⁵ During the recruiting party (as Act II, Scene one opens), everyone but Musgrave sings and dances. Two of the colliers do a clog dance while the Bargee and others provide the music. This creates a festive atmosphere and gives a sense of the culture of Northern England.

It is worth mentioning that a great deal of the songs —and even the dances— particularly those sung by the Bargee, are intended to mock the soldiers (mostly Musgrave) as well as ridicule their mission in that northern bleak town. In Act II, Scene one —in the middle of the drinking, the flirtations and the singing—the Bargee gets out a harmonica and sings a song that refers to ‘Crooked Old Joe’, saying that the Lord provides:

Old Joe looks out for Joe
Plots and plans and who lies low?
But the Lord provides, says Crooked Old Joe.¹¹⁶

Musgrave asks him sharply what he means, but the Bargee says he is only joking and then goes out. ‘Crooked Old Joe’, we should not forget, is how the Bargee introduces himself to the soldiers during their first meeting on the canal wharf. His name may suggest another name for the ‘Devil’. Its use in this song suggests that the devil can disguise his evil work with religious words.

Another important point (still in Act II, Scene one) has to do with satire. The clumsy dances of the colliers mock the idea of Musgrave's 'dance' and also foreshadow the dance following the play's climax in Act III. Once again, in Act II, Scene two, the Bargee, the Pugnacious Collier and the Slow Collier perform a drunken, mocking military drill. The drill performed mocks not only the soldiers but symbolically mocks their mission as well, suggesting that it is as foolish as their drunken attempts at precision and discipline. "The parody of military discipline", Christopher Innes observes, "is an image of the reality behind the supposed recruiting party: the effect should be, not so much of three incompetents pretending to be soldiers, but of three trained soldiers gone mad."¹¹⁷ The mock drill may also suggest that Musgrave does not have as much control as he thinks he does, an idea reinforced by the brief conversation between the Bargee and Walsh at the end of this scene:

BARGEES. They won't stay drunk all week. Oh the soldiers gives 'em sport, they need a bit o' sport, cold, hungry... When you want 'em, they'll be there. Crooked Joe, he's *here*.

WALSH. Aye?

BARGEES. Could you shoot a Gatling gun?

WALSH (looking at him sideways). I don't know.

BARGEES. If you really want a riot, why don't you go at it proper? Come on I'll tell you... (*He hops out, whistling 'Michael Finnegan' and looking back invitingly.*)

WALSH (considering). Aye, aye? Crooked, clever, kelman, eh? ... Well - all right - then *tell me!*¹¹⁸

It can be assumed that the character of the Bargee represents mockery, trouble, and self-interest in the play. Described by Arden as "something of a grotesque, a hunchback.... very rapid in his movements, with a natural urge towards intrigue and mischief,"¹¹⁹ the Bargee is always "in favour of anything that offers him momentary gratification."¹²⁰ Once again in the middle of a scene busy with physical action culminating in the accidental death of private Sparky in Act II, Scene three, the Bargee appears and refers to himself as Old Joe. While his name may or may not actually be Joe, the fact that he refers to himself by a term that he previously used to refer to the Devil suggests that on some level he is the Devil, a double-dealer and troublemaker. We should remember that he is the one who told Walsh

about the contents of the coach house in the first place, at the end of Act II, Scene two, then informs Musgrave about the intended robbery. The Bargee may be seen as an arch-egotist without any loyalty to anyone or anything but himself. His egotism prompts him to have two distinct attitudes depending on the Serjeant's shifting positions: "when Musgrave seems to be in control," Michael Patterson explains, "he [the Bargee] seizes a rifle as a gesture of support, shouting; 'When do we start breaking open the boozers? [...]' Minutes later, when the Dragoons arrive, the Bargee uses the same rifle to place Musgrave under arrest."¹²¹ It may be assumed that the Bargee "serves to weaken the gravity of Musgrave's conduct with grotesque parody."¹²² This is manifest indeed in the Bargee's "posturing behind Musgrave's back during the Serjeant's prayer which ends Act I, or in the *Fred Karno* drilling of the drunken Colliers in Act II, Scene two."¹²³

In other words, whatever his reason the Bargee wants to provoke trouble in this town, and he sets about making sure it happens. Perhaps he just wants the reward he asks Musgrave for, but whatever his motivation, it is clear that the Bargee represents misrule and mockery.

The Bargee, in Barry Thome's words, "is a mocking figure of intrigue reminiscent of the '*Vice figure*' of Renaissance morality plays."¹²⁴ Symbolizing the potential evil of man's nature, he therefore "extends the meaning of the play beyond conventional warfare, beyond the battle of the colliers and the Establishment, to the violence which may afflict all men."¹²⁵ That the Bargee represents the very thing Musgrave is battling against is made clear in Mrs. Hitchcock's speech in Act III, Scene two, when she exclaims despairingly, "All I can see is Crooked Joe Bludgeon having his dance out in the middle of fifty Dragoons!"¹²⁶

The Bargee's kinship with the Vice tradition may again be suggested through his inducing the Parson to use soldiers to control the colliers. He represents "the self-seeking

egotism of man which provokes not only battles between coal-owners and pitmen, but colonial wars as well.”¹²⁷ The Bargee’s tempting of Walsh, to use the Gatling gun in forcing the mine owners to surrender, establishes a clear parallel between Walsh and Musgrave. Walsh, the union leader, has been stung into action by injustice, but he is just as willing as Musgrave to allow the end to justify any means used.

Equally single-minded, Walsh might also be willing to foster anarchy. Ironically, both these reformist leaders (Walsh and Musgrave) live to see crooked human nature defeat their idealism. Therefore, Walsh’s defeat and eventual joining in the beer dance symbolise the triumph of egotistic self-interest.

2.3. Musgrave’s “dance of death”

Throughout most of the play’s moments of singing and dancing, Serjeant Musgrave remains silent or, at times, uninterested. He lets loose only in Act III, Scene one, which represents the play’s climactic confrontation between Musgrave and the townspeople; he both sings and, as the title of the play indicates, ‘dances’:

Up he goes and no one knows
How to bring him downwards
Dead man’s feet
Over the street
Riding the roofs
And crying down your chimneys
Up he goes and no one knows
Who it was that rose him
But white and red
He waves his head
He sits on your back
And you’ll never never lose him
Up he goes and no one knows
How to bring him downwards.¹²⁸

His furious words and movements are a release from his tight-lipped presence throughout the play. The colliers, who took part in the singing and dancing in the pub, refuse

to join in the dance Musgrave performs beneath Billy's skeleton; a dance which Douglas Bruster calls his "ritualized expression of ideological rage."¹²⁹ The song and dance allow him to express the true meaning of his appearance in town: to display the skeleton of Billy Hicks, avenge Hicks's death, and warn the townspeople against the horrors of war.

Musgrave sings and dances about how the dead man sits on your back and never leaves. When Musgrave asks Walsh for his opinion, Walsh says that his opinion is not necessary, that the bones on the flagpole are all the proof anybody needs of what a soldier's life is all about. Walsh adds that soldiers who go uninvited into other people's countries deserve what they get. Musgrave's insanity, though less noticeable in the earlier scenes, finally becomes completely apparent, reaching its paroxysm in his elevating of Hicks's bones up the flagpole and his singing and dancing at Hicks's feet.

Commenting on the visual images in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, Frances Gray makes a link between the 'Soldier' as a recurrent figure in the ballad, the 'Hanged Man' and, more importantly, 'the dancing skeleton' representing 'Death' which, Gray continues, "haunted the art of Europe in the Middle Ages."¹³⁰ By implication then, the Soldier is incarnated by Musgrave who is also "the death-dancer"¹³¹ as he performs his "dance of death" beneath the dangling skeleton of Billy Hicks. Since Musgrave and Billy's skeleton wear the soldier's tunic, both of them, in differing ways, turn into the "hanged man".

As we have already mentioned, Sparky's song of desertion at the very beginning of the play, foreshadows the execution of army deserters by hanging. The point is further reinforced by Attercliffe's saying, as the play ends, "They're going to hang us up a length higher nor most apple-trees grow, Serjeant."¹³² Likewise, one event in the first scene of *Mother Courage and her Children* foreshadows the deaths of Mother Courage's children as well as others. Mother Courage claims to have "second sight." When the recruiters try to

take Eilif away, she has them all draw lots. She tears up a piece of paper into four slips and draws a cross on one of them. Anyone who draws, the three children as well as the Swedish sergeant, picks the piece of paper with the cross on it. The cross, as evidenced throughout the play, symbolises the death awaiting those characters.

The world of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is, then, violent, and its deaths as cruel and incidental as those of Mother Courage's children. Arden, in Peter Thomson's words, "uses violence as a metaphor for power, and Musgrave's defiance, like Mother Courage's strategy for survival, is ultimately construed as compliance with the exploiters."¹³³ Eilif's war-dance with his sabre¹³⁴ in Scene Two of *Mother Courage* is an "obscene postlude to casual slaughter" (Eilif is hailed by The Commander as a hero, because he led his troops into a skirmish with peasants which resulted in the capture of cattle). Musgrave's 'dance of death' in the market-place is also "an obscene prelude to casual slaughter"¹³⁵; Musgrave intends to kill twenty-five innocent townspeople to avenge Billy's death and wage a war against war. But in the end it is he and his 'army' who are killed casually as it were. Life (other people's life) goes on and power remains in the hands of the powerful.

Billy Hicks's bones are a powerful symbol of death and violence, and as such they are the clearest visual representation of the play's theme that violence triggers violence. This idea is first strengthened during the fight between the soldiers which led to Sparky's death; then Hurst dies (shot by the Dragoons) after he gets the Gatling gun ready to start shooting. The idea is further reinforced by the way Musgrave, after raising the bones and showing the crowd the results of violence, is triggered off to more shocking acts of brutality and murder.

At the end of this scene (Act III, Scene one) the Bargee, once again, mocks Musgrave and his idea of the "Dance", this time by leading the townspeople in a beer-fuelled dance of their own. The dance, in which even Walsh eventually participates,

combines with Annie's embracing of her beloved's bones to dramatise the way the true dance of life, God's true word, continues. For all its flawed, occasional joy and frequent grief, it goes on in spite of the efforts of insane leaders like Musgrave who want to shape it to their own goals and desires.

In singing a ballad at the play's end, Attercliffe shows he is the one soldier who is truly repentant of what he did and is prepared to accept the consequences. He also seems to be ironically aware of the possibility that even though they failed, they may have still accomplished their goal. By illustrating how violence can beget violence, he and Musgrave have actually made their point, but without killing anyone.

A very telling point is Musgrave's stubbornness. He either remains silent or repeats that he was right. This indicates that he has learnt nothing from what happened. The same can be said of Mother Courage. As the play closes, she loses everything: her three children and even her money. But she goes on alone with her cart in order to do business and make up more money. It seems that she has not understood anything about the social and economic circumstances of her own living. Brecht indeed leaves it to the audience to make their own judgment. Unlike Musgrave and Mother Courage, Attercliffe has clearly learnt something.

Hicks's "crucifixion" has not led to a new era of peace; as Mrs. Hitchcock says, the townspeople's dance at the end is "not [really] a dance of joy." And Attercliffe knows why this is so: you can not "end it [war] by its own rules: no bloody good."¹³⁶ Musgrave tried to expose the absurdity of war by extending the reign of bloodshed and terror. Now his own folly is unmasked, for no shedding of blood in the name of peace is good.

But Mrs. Hitchcock does suggest the tentative hope that what Musgrave attempted to achieve through the wrong means will someday be accomplished through the right means:

“Let’s hope it, any road, Eh.”¹³⁷ The ballad that Attercliffe sings to round off the play contrasts the “blood-red rose-flower”, a symbol for the soldiers, and even for violence, with “the apple holds a seed will grow / In live and lengthy joy / To raise a flourishing tree of fruit / For ever and a day.”¹³⁸

The apple, significantly enough, becomes the major symbol of life and hope in the play.

2.4. Audience participation

According to Michael Patterson, “one indicator of the way Arden’s characters may no longer be regarded as ignoring the *dark hole* of the audience, is the use Arden makes of direct address to the spectator.”¹³⁹

In fact, in the climactic scene of *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* (Act III, Scene one), the audience becomes part of the drama. In the market-place, a small crowd gathers to hear the speeches. Yet because there is no crowd of townspeople beyond the handful of characters, it is as if Arden were putting his argument directly to the audience.

The Bargee is especially important in this scene. He is the link between the audience and the action on stage. The stage instructions call for him to “*create the crowd-reactions.*”¹⁴⁰ When Musgrave and his men pull out their rifles and Gatling gun, they aim them at the audience¹⁴¹, emphasizing that this message is addressed directly to them, the townspeople of the world.

In addition, some statements made by the characters, may acknowledge, though not necessarily, the presence of the audience in “their use of simple, straightforward self-introduction.”¹⁴² For instance, the way the Mayor introduces himself to the soldiers in Act I, Scene two: “I’m the Mayor of this town, I own the colliery, I’m a worried man.”¹⁴³ Or again,

during “Sparky’s revelation of the soldiers’ mission”¹⁴⁴ which seem to be more suitable if the actor played it directly to the audience:

MUSGRAVE ... We’ve come to this town to work that guilt back to where it began
... Why to this town? Say it, say it!
SPARKY (as with a conditioned reflex). Billy. Billy’s dead. ... He came from this town.
MUSGRAVE: Use your clear brain, man, and tell me what you’re doing here!¹⁴⁵

France Gray points out the way this passage was treated during the play’s production at the National Theatre in 1981. He says that “the lines were delivered quite straightforwardly to the audience as a way of imparting information which they needed to know.”¹⁴⁶

It may then be understood that John Arden intended his play to be “an attack on the complacency of the British public.”¹⁴⁷ This is supported by the play’s most striking dramatic ‘gesture’: “the doubling of the theatre audience as the townspeople in the climactic scene. This doubling occurs when the Gatling gun, which the soldiers confirm is properly loaded, is aimed out into the theatre.”¹⁴⁸ Adam Daniel Knowles argues that “not only does this gesture shatter the ‘fourth wall’ of naturalistic drama by involving the audience in the action; it clarifies the play’s thesis as well.”¹⁴⁹ Arden means the audience, faced with the gun, to question the government’s policy in Cyprus and elsewhere and, as Musgrave says of the townspeople, to “turn against the war.”¹⁵⁰ The threat of violence against the townspeople of the play implies that the public is not as far removed as they might think from events in the colonies and that they are collectively responsible for the actions of the government.

Throughout *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance*, Arden exposed some of Britain’s colonial practices and their ‘negative’ effects on both the British citizens and the colonised subjects. By relating imperialism to class oppression, Arden pointed out the place of violence in society and its frequent use as an imposed solution to social protests. Since violence cannot be regarded as the appropriate means to solve the miners’ and their community’s problems,

another alternative has to be found so as to resist the despots and capitalist oppressors. By employing a dead-soldier's "skeleton" to denounce colonial wars and make a plea for their end, Arden might be said to have followed O'Casey who anticipated on the subject through his use of a crouching "skeletal figure", denouncing the 'Great War', in *The Silver Tassie*.

With its combination of historical scope, dramatic effectiveness, poetic impact, and the emotional distancing from the action involved in Brecht's "alienation effect", *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* — the 'parable' — certainly raises the spectators' awareness; a goal which, with varying emphases and means, has been pursued by Shaw and O'Casey.

Endnotes:

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- ¹ John Arden, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (London: Methuen, 2005). All subsequent references to this play will be from this edition.
- ² Quoted by Glenda Leeming in "Commentary and Notes", John Arden, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , pp. xxiii-xxiv.
- ³ Ibid. ; pp. xxiv-xxv. *The Raid* is a Technicolor 1954 American film directed by Hugo Fregonese. It stars Van Heflin, Anne Bancroft, Richard Boone and Lee Marvin.
- ⁴ Idem.
- ⁵ Such reprisals were also reported in liberation war-torn Kenya and Algeria in the fifties.
- ⁶ Mary Brewer, "Empire and Class in the Theatre of John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy" in Mary Luckhurst, (ed.), *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama: 1880-2005*, op. cit., pp. 160-1.
- ⁷ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 7.
- ⁸ Michael Anderson, *Anger and Detachment* (London: Pitman Publishing Ltd., 1976), pp. 62-3.
- ⁹ Christopher Innes, (ed.), "John Arden: the popular tradition and Epic alternatives", in *Modern British Drama*, op. cit., p. 139.
- ¹⁰ Malcolm Page, "The Motives of Pacifists: John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*", in *Drama Survey*, Spring-Summer, 1967, pp.71-72.
- ¹¹ Kenneth James Norman Long, *The Use of Historical Material in Contemporary British Drama*. University of Simon Fraser: 1968 (Master of Arts Dissertation), p. 174.
- ¹² Malcolm Page, "The Motives of Pacifists: John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*", op. cit. , p. 66.
- ¹³ Kenneth James , *The Use of Historical Material in Contemporary British Drama*, op. cit. , p. 174.
- ¹⁴ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 91.
- ¹⁵ Idem.
- ¹⁶ Quoted by A. M. Aylwin in *Notes on John Arden's Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (London: Methuen Educational, 1976), p. 34.
- ¹⁷ Kenneth James Norman Long, op. cit. , p. 175.
- ¹⁸ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 33. Qtd. Kenneth James, op. cit. , p. 176.
- ¹⁹ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. p. 36.
- ²⁰ Ibid. ; p. 22.
- ²¹ Kenneth James , op. cit. , p. 177.
- ²² Qtd. in Ibid.
- ²³ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 30.
- ²⁴ Ibid. ; p. 29.

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- ²⁵ Ibid. ; p. 94.
- ²⁶ Idem.
- ²⁷ Ibid. ; p. 35.
- ²⁸ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 34, Qtd. Kenneth James, op. cit. , p. 178.
- ²⁹ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 36.
- ³⁰ Idem.
- ³¹ Kenneth James , op. cit. , p. 179.
- ³² M. W. Steinberg, "Violence in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*: A Study in Tragic Antitheses," in *The Dalhousie Review*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 1977, p. 442.
- ³³ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 36.
- ³⁴ Ibid. ; p. 32.
- ³⁵ Kenneth James , op. cit. , p. 196.
- ³⁶ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , pp. 92-3.
- ³⁷ Ibid. ; pp. 94-5.
- ³⁸ Ibid. ; p. 30.
- ³⁹ Quoted by Glenda Leeming , op. cit., p. xxiv.
- ⁴⁰ Katharine J. Worth, "Avant Garde at the Royal Court Theatre: John Arden and N. F. Simpson," in William A. Armstrong, (ed.), *Experimental Drama* (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1963), p. 207.
- ⁴¹ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 50.
- ⁴² Ibid. ; p. 37.
- ⁴³ Ibid. ; p.54.
- ⁴⁴ Adam Daniel Knowles, *Memories of England: British Identity and the Rhetoric of Decline in Post-war British Drama, 1956-1982*. The University of Texas at Austin : 2003 (Ph.D Thesis), p. 180.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid. ; p. 175.
- ⁴⁶ Kenneth James , op. cit. , p. 196.
- ⁴⁷ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 99, Qtd., Adam Daniel Knowles, *Memories of England*, op. cit. , p. 176.
- ⁴⁸ Idem.
- ⁴⁹ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p.7.
- ⁵⁰ Idem.
- ⁵¹ Ibid. ; p. 20.
- ⁵² Kenneth James , op. cit. , p. 187.
- ⁵³ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p.51.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid. ; p. 6.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid. ; p. 60.

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- ⁵⁶ Ibid. ; p. 6.
- ⁵⁷ John Mills, “Love and Anarchy in ‘*Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance*,’” in *Drama Survey*, Winter, 1968-9, p. 48.
- ⁵⁸ *Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance*, op. cit. , p. 96.
- ⁵⁹ John Mills, “Love and Anarchy in ‘*Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance*,’” op. cit. , p. 48.
- ⁶⁰ Idem.
- ⁶¹ *Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance*, op. cit. , p 7.
- ⁶² Ibid. ; p. 6.
- ⁶³ Ibid. ; pp. 63-4.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid. ; p. 66.
- ⁶⁵ Adam Daniel Knowles, *Memories of England*, op. cit. , p. 177.
- ⁶⁶ Qtd. In Ibid., pp. 177-8.
- ⁶⁷ Idem.
- ⁶⁸ Idem.
- ⁶⁹ *Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance*, op. cit. , p. 104.
- ⁷⁰ Adam Daniel Knowles, *Memories of England*, op. cit. , p. 180.
- ⁷¹ When discussing the different parts of the Plot, David Letwin said that “some resolutions [or ‘denouement’] have what is called a *deus ex machina*. This is Latin for “God from a machine” and refers to the Greek practice of using ropes and pulleys to lower a character representing a God onto the stage at the play’s end to resolve all the plot complications. It has come to mean the use of any improbable or random occurrences that function in this way.” Cf. David Letwin, et. al., *The Architecture of Drama: Plot, Character, Theme, Genre, and Style* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), pp. 43-4.
- ⁷² “Introduction” in *Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance*, op. cit. , p. 6, Qtd. Adam Daniel Knowles, *Memories of England*, op. cit. , p. 180.
- ⁷³ Ibid. , p. 181.
- ⁷⁴ *Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance*, op. cit. , p. 22.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid. ; p.79.
- ⁷⁶ Adam Daniel Knowles, *Memories of England*, op. cit. , p. 182.
- ⁷⁷ *Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance*, op. cit. , p. 85.
- ⁷⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Preface”, in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Trans. Constance Farrington, (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 23, Qtd. Adam Daniel Knowles, *Memories of England*, op. cit. , pp. 182-3.
- ⁷⁹ Adam Daniel Knowles, *Memories of England*, op. cit. , p. 183.
- ⁸⁰ *Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance*, op. cit. , p. 92.
- ⁸¹ Adam Daniel Knowles, op. cit. , p. 183.
- ⁸² Idem.
- ⁸³ Quoted by Frances Gray in *John Arden* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 72.

⁸⁴ Adam Daniel Knowles, op. cit. , p. 184.

⁸⁵ “Introduction” in *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance*, op. cit. , p. 5.

⁸⁶ Michael Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 44.

⁸⁷ Quoted by Peter Thomson in “The afterlife of Mother Courage”, *Brecht: Mother Courage and her Children* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 160.

⁸⁸ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, op. cit., p. 60.

⁸⁹ Adam Daniel Knowles, op. cit. , p. 148.

Frances Gray states that : “The **Alienation effect**, as Brecht called this method of distancing the spectator from the action, has suffered from endless misinterpretation. By rejecting the idea of empathy with the tragic hero, and the idea that a play should leave the audience ‘purged’ of all emotion and therefore content with the world as it is, he hoped not to banish passion from the theatre but to excite different and more constructive ones- the righteous anger of the oppressed, the urgency of the sense of justice; the sheer intellectual pleasure in suddenly understanding some of the workings of society. Brecht saw man not as lone hero, but as the product of social forces which he could learn to control and change.” Cf. Frances Gray, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

⁹⁰ Ibid. ; p. 149.

⁹¹ Quoted by A. M. Aylwin, op. cit., p. 14.

⁹² Idem.

⁹³ Frances Gray, op. cit., p. 9.

⁹⁴ Idem.

⁹⁵ The play could also be interpreted as set in the late 1950s— owing to the reference to the Cyprus liberation war.

⁹⁶ Michael Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, op. cit., p. 46.

⁹⁷ Idem.

⁹⁸ “Introduction” in *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance*, op. cit. , p. 5.

⁹⁹ Michael Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, op. cit., pp. 46-7.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. ; p. 47.

¹⁰¹ Idem.

¹⁰² Idem.

¹⁰³ Idem.

¹⁰⁴ Idem.

¹⁰⁵ Idem.

¹⁰⁶ Peter Thomson, op. cit. , p. 106.

¹⁰⁷ Frances Gray, op. cit., p. 108.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted by Glenda Leeming in “Commentary and Notes”, op. cit. , p. xxv.

¹⁰⁹ *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance*, op. cit. , p. 10.

¹¹⁰ Michael Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, op. cit., p. 50.

¹¹¹ Idem.

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- ¹¹² *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 14.
- ¹¹³ Michael Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, op. cit., p. 50
- ¹¹⁴ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 103.
- ¹¹⁵ “**Michal Finnegan**: a cyclical folk-song in which the same verse can be repeated as many times as the singer wishes. The song the Bargee repeatedly sings is ‘Michael Finnegan’, who loses his beard (‘poor old Michael Finnegan’), then after, ‘Begin agen’, the same verse is repeated *ad infinitum*. Whatever happens, the Bargee, whose actual name, significantly, is Bludgeon, is a survivor who will always ‘begin agen’. “Begin again” is the recurring call at the end of the scene in the marketplace (Act III, Scene one), and any spectator who has followed the plot of Arden’s play will be able to perceive the negative implications of this new beginning.” Cf. Helena Forsas–Scott, “Life and Love and Serjeant Musgrave: An Approach to Arden’s Play,” in *Modern Drama*, Vol. 26, 1983, pp. 1–11.
- ¹¹⁶ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 41.
- ¹¹⁷ Christopher Innes, (ed.), “John Arden: the popular tradition and Epic alternatives”, op. cit., p.138.
- ¹¹⁸ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , pp. 55-6.
- ¹¹⁹ John Arden, “Introduction” in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 6.
- ¹²⁰ Glenda Leeming, op. cit. , p. xxiii.
- ¹²¹ Michael Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, op. cit., p. 58.
- ¹²² Idem.
- ¹²³ Idem.
- Fred Karno**: The author is referring to the turn-of-the-century music-hall comedian, who by the First World War had become synonymous with anything farcical and absurd. Cf. “Notes” in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 109.
- ¹²⁴ Barry Thome, “*Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*: Form and Meaning,” in *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. 78, 1971, pp. 567–71
- The Vice**. A figure in Morality Plays of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who tempts mankind in a half-comic, half-unpleasant manner. Shakespeare’s Falstaff in *Henry IV* (1597-8) is thought to be partly modelled on this stock figure.” Cf. Martin Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Essex: Longman York Press, 1984), p. 217.
- ¹²⁵ Idem.
- ¹²⁶ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 102.
- ¹²⁷ Barry Thome, “*Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*: Form and Meaning,” op. cit.
- ¹²⁸ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , pp. 84-5.
- ¹²⁹ Qtd. by Mary Brewer, “Empire and Class in the Theatre of John Arden and Margaretta D’Arcy”, in Mary Luckhurst (ed.), *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama:1880-2005*, op. cit., p. 161.
- ¹³⁰ France Gray, op. cit., pp. 110- 111.
- ¹³¹ Idem.
- ¹³² *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 104.
- ¹³³ Peter Thomson, “The afterlife of Mother Courage”, op. cit., p. 161.
- ¹³⁴ “**Sword dance**: A dramatic ritual of ancient origin; in the first place probably a fertility rite symbolizing the death and resurrection of the year. It is widespread in central Europe. In England also, especially in Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland. Often enough the practice of the dance survives in mining areas. There are many variations. An element

common to a large number of them is the symbolic death of one of the characters and his revival. There are some stock characters, notably a Fool and a man dressed in woman's clothes. The sword dance is one of the origins of the Mummery Play." Cf. J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 883-4.

¹³⁵ Peter Thomson, "The afterlife of Mother Courage", op. cit., p. 161.

¹³⁶ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 102.

¹³⁷ Ibid. ; p. 103.

¹³⁸ Ibid. ; p. 104.

¹³⁹ Michael Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, op. cit., p. 49.

¹⁴⁰ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 76.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Appendix III of the present dissertation. A picture showing 'Shock effect' in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*.

¹⁴² Michael Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, op. cit., p. 49

¹⁴³ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 21.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, op. cit., p. 50.

¹⁴⁵ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 34.

¹⁴⁶ Frances Gray, op. cit., p.115. Qtd. by Michael Patterson in *Strategies of Political Theatre*, op. cit., p. 50.

¹⁴⁷ Adam Daniel Knowles, op. cit. , p. 174.

¹⁴⁸ Idem.

¹⁴⁹ Idem.

'fourth wall' : in the 'theatre of imitation', or Naturalist theatre, the actors are enclosed within the walls of a setting and by assuming that there is an imaginary 'fourth wall' on the side where the audience is placed, they can re-create imaginatively the feeling of living in a real room. Among modern directors, Andre Antoine (1858–1943) was the most extreme exponent of the idea of the fourth wall: 'For a stage set to be original, striking, and authentic, it should first be built in accordance with something seen – whether a landscape or an interior. If it is an interior, it should be built with its four sides, its four walls, without worrying about the fourth wall, which will later disappear so as to enable the audience to see what is going on.' Cf. Kenneth Pickering, *Key Concepts in Drama and Performance* (New York / Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 175-6.

¹⁵⁰ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, op. cit. , p. 36.

CONCLUSION

My analysis of the theme of *War* in Sean O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars* and *The Silver Tassie*, in Bernard Shaw’s *Heartbreak House*, and John Arden’s *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance*, has allowed me to draw some conclusions concerning the mutual interdependence of the “content” and the “form” of representation in the aforementioned plays. Throughout this study, I have tried to show how the plays’ thematic concerns have been effectively expressed —by the playwrights— through discursive and dramatic devices. In their attempt to raise the audience’s awareness of the huge economic, social, political, as well as moral repercussions of war, O’Casey, Shaw, and Arden have made of the stage a serious — yet entertaining, medium for foregrounding the ensuing human tragedy, and advocating social change.

In the first part of my dissertation, I have attempted to provide the historical background as well as the aesthetics of the genre for the selected plays. The study has enabled me to point out the specific —historical— events which the playwrights drew their subject-matter from. On the other hand, it has allowed me to trace the changes that were taking place in modern drama, starting from the plays of Henrik Ibsen to those of Bertolt Brecht. The study has shown that Realism and Naturalism, Expressionism, and the Epic Theatre were the staging modes / styles that the playwrights have employed —separately or in combination— to convey their thematic preoccupations.

On the level of history, the 1916 Easter Rising, which ‘solidifies’ the clash between the Irish revolutionaries and the British occupying forces, forms the background of O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars*. The “Great War” which is anticipated in Shaw’s *Heartbreak House*, paves the way for O’Casey’s *The Silver Tassie*’s dramatisation of its

nightmarish and traumatic consequences. Finally, the aftermath of Britain's imperialist and colonialist wars is revealed through John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*.

Modern drama for its part witnessed various changes during the first half of the 20th century. Borrowing from Ibsen the element of *discussion* and leaving out the "well-made play's" cause-to-effect arrangement of incidents, Shaw established his unique kind of realism. He succeeded in instituting a "drama of ideas", which allowed the employment of political / social satire to draw people's attention to prevailing social problems. Shaw, the Fabian Socialist, aimed his plays at the affluent middle classes that preferred to remain ignorant of the social and economic injustices. O'Casey for his part inherited the Realistic / Naturalistic conventions which sought to accurately reproduce the details of daily life and the shaping of the characters by their environment. He then moved towards incorporating Expressionistic devices in his subsequent plays, where the characters and sets have tended to be distorted, oversimplified, and symbolic. Arden for his part borrowed from Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre to provoke spectators into a heightened social and political awareness. Arden, like Brecht, did not want spectators to sympathise with his characters, so his plays deliberately seek to alienate, or distance, the audience from play and actors.

Having exposed the historical and the dramatic contexts in which the plays were written, I have moved to the analysis of the thematic content and the theatrical representation of the 1916 Easter Rising. O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* was premiered by the Abbey Theatre only ten years after the Irish rebellion; which explains the degree of hostility it met with at the time. The Rising events are dramatised from the perspective of the slum-dwellers around whom the play centres. O'Casey, in fact, places the inhabitants of the Dublin tenement house (Peter Flynn, Fluther Good, The Covey, Nora Clitheroe, Mrs. Gogan, and Bessie Burgess) in the spotlight and keeps the leaders of the

rebellion, like Padraic Pearse, offstage. The correspondence between specific stage events and the wider political background action is achieved through the slum-dwellers who reflect and reflect *on*, as a group, the course of the Rising. This dramatic technique stresses O'Casey's critique of the Rising and its dogmatic hero-worshipping ethos, inviting instead the audience to empathise with the suffering of the destitute Irish working-class.

Being a committed socialist (and a humanist as well), O'Casey expresses the sense of waste resulting from the heady practices of the Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers. The patriots betray Labour's cause as they opt for a war which, according to O'Casey, is beyond the workers' aspirations. Jack Clitheroe and Captain Brennan from the ICA, and Lieutenant Langon from the Volunteers, at first look at war as a 'big show' in which all the soldiers will be street-parading in military uniforms. Their inflated pride prompts them to leave "wife and hearth" and join this 'bourgeois-inspired' and ill-fated insurrection. O'Casey shows that the vanity of the would-be heroes causes innocent people like Bessie Burgess, Nora Clitheroe, and Mollser to pay the greatest sacrifices. Indeed, the Rising destroys Nora Clitheroe's mind, kills her baby, and breaks up the home she has been trying to make. Besides, Mrs Gogan's child, Mollser, dies of consumption because of the harsh conditions under which she is forced to survive. The social system remains unchanged despite all the fighting. In the end, the would-be heroes, Jack, Brennan, and Langon find themselves the victims of their own vanity and delusions. Captain Brennan runs away from the hopeless battle, Langon is mortally wounded, while Jack Clitheroe dies in a burning building. The only characters spared from O'Casey's criticism are the women. They are shown to be the strongest and most tenacious. Nora Clitheroe, Bessie Burgess, and Mrs. Gogan are "the people whom O'Casey admires, fighting a far harder fight in their struggle against poverty than any of the idealistic nationalists, who, though courageous, kept their heads among the stars so constantly that they saw nothing of the plough beneath."¹

In *Heartbreak House*, George Bernard Shaw denounces the complacency of the English upper class during the period leading up to the First World War. A prominent socialist and a pacifist like O'Casey, Shaw was bitterly, often violently, denounced as being unpatriotic owing to his countless anti-war speeches which ran totally opposite Rupert Brooke's or Jessie Pope's chauvinistic discourses. Alongside his war pamphlet "*Common Sense About the War*" calling for the immediate start of peace negotiations, *Heartbreak House* has offered more of Shaw's debunking of the spiritual bankruptcy of the warmongers.

By viewing the pre-War British society as a ship of fools, with a shipwreck as the inescapable outcome, Shaw has given the play an exceptionally original (Shavian) turn. Besides, *Heartbreak House* complies with the techniques of Shaw's discussion plays by following a free episodic development instead of logically resolving a pre-packaged plot.

Through the ship-house of Captain Shotover, Shaw has given us a full picture of the ruling classes of pre-War Britain. The representatives of Heartbreak House, i.e., Hesione, Hector, Shotover, Ellie, and Mazzini and those of Horseback Hall, i.e., Randall, Ariadne and the absent Hastings, together with the plutocrats (Boss Mangan) are gathered in Shotover's ship-house indulging in endless chit-chat. Though a series of subjects including politics, capitalism, morality, and the nature of love are discussed, what emerges most from the characters' debate is a sense of impending crisis and imminent collapse. Shaw has targeted all those who either could or would not assume responsibility for getting society to move towards equality and justice.

The ship-house, which also stands for the imperial British ship of state, needs steering. The octogenarian Captain cannot lead because he is too old and stands aloof from reality. The romantically handsome Hector, lost in dreams of heroism, is not up to the job

either. And the men who are eager to rule, Hastings Utterword and Boss Mangan, are not fit to rule. Both are driven only by the spirit of acquisitiveness and are inclined to use brute force to get power. The outcome of Utterword's and Mangan's rule, based on private wealth and class privilege, can only be war. Hence, the play ends with the dropping of bombs in an unannounced and unspecified war — though it is clearly meant to be the “Great War”.

Shaw is perhaps seeking to draw a moral from a tale depicting a general state of breakdown and decay, with democracy in ruins and the ship of state heading for destruction. Violence, it seems, is the means by which this degenerate system can be destroyed. This is not to suggest that violence operates in a purely negative way in the play. On the contrary, in the explosion which causes the death of the capitalist Mangan and the burglar (both robbers of society), there is also some hope of renewal. It is as if destruction were to act as a liberating agent, cleansing the world of impurity. The mystique of regeneration through fire seems to be suggested.

While waiting for the instauration of this new moral and social order, however, the ‘machine’ of the Great War continued to slaughter both civilians and soldiers in an unprecedented spectacle of horror and bloodshed. Sean O’Casey, who protested against the suffering endured by his fellow countrymen in *The Plough and the Stars*, moved towards a more vehement protest by exposing “the suffering of the ordinary soldier in a war waged principally for the benefit of a capitalist society.”² And he does this all the more successfully as he resorts to Expressionistic devices.

The horror is particularly felt through the act set in an unnamed war zone. The soldiers are reduced to mere numbers, devoid of any individual traits. The ordinary and common language is substituted by songs and chants while a crouching “skeletal figure”

pronounces doomsday. By focussing on Harry Heegan, a former football player, now a cripple, O'Casey combines the authenticity of specific characters and experience with the universality of the de-humanising suffering of war.

Though O'Casey's lack of direct war experience led W. B. Yeats to query his ability for writing a war play,³ it may be precisely his non-combatant status that contributed to the power of his rendition of the contrast between home and the battle zone. O'Casey's Harry Heegan is incapable of articulating his protest, and the burden of the objection seems to fall on the reader or spectator. The enormous gap between Harry's pre-War physical prowess and his post-War impotence makes of him the object of the audience's compassion. The spectators' protest should be aimed first at those who are responsible for Harry's fate, those who were precisely denounced— in anticipation— by Shaw in *Heartbreak House*.

Throughout the Expressionistic second act, O'Casey's protest is extended to further victims who share Harry's inability to realise how they are being manipulated. In this respect O'Casey went further than Wilfred Owen, whose unnamed victim in his poem "Disabled" Harry otherwise resembles⁴.

Britain's imperialist and colonialist practices are exposed throughout John Arden's play *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. Arden points out the *violence* and *repression* which are meant to serve as an instrument of exploitation and the maintenance of the *status quo*. Musgrave and his squad look forward to ending colonial warfare through peaceful means. The peaceful means, however, turn out to be the display of a machine gun, as well as the skeleton of a young soldier shot on duty by anti-colonial rebels. But as evidenced through the personality of Serjeant Musgrave, militarism cannot be got rid of overnight, and

certainly not by killing. Arden reveals, through Musgrave, that using violence to end violence triggers only more violence.

Another conclusion to be drawn from *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is that colonial wars may also be seen as a symptom of class warfare. The colliers' strike for better jobs and decent wages suggests that peaceful means do exist by which disputes might be settled. The mine-owners, however, look forward to military recruitment in order to rid the town of the "agitators" and the most militant workers, protecting thenceforth personal and class interests. From this perspective, colonialism is regarded as "the extension of an unjust social system. The treatment of its own working people is identical to that of foreign natives in a Protectorate."⁵

Arden, by incorporating some Brechtian devices in his play, aims at showing not only the negative effects of present social institutions, but also the historical, and therefore changeable nature of those institutions. Brecht saw "man not as lone hero, but as the product of social forces which he could learn to control and change."⁶ In *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, Arden invites the audience to act their part when the Gatling gun is aimed out into the pit. The audience becomes involved in the action, and has therefore to critically engage in considering solutions to the problems raised throughout the play.

Through his criticism of imperialism and industrial capitalism, Arden attempts to tell the audience and the reader that these two systems are ready to use whatever means possible to maintain the *status quo*. The description of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* as "an un-historical parable" confirms his purpose. Arden presents a confrontation of beliefs and values which is not contingent upon a specific era and locale, but rather transcends time and space to acquire a worldwide and permanent meaning. It is about societies which

resort to using armed force as weapons of expansion and repression, and at times, even as imposed solutions for economic and social problems.

This cannot be denied when one considers the bloody events which have accompanied all the peaceful, pro-democracy demonstrations during the year 2011. Too many rulers, from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and from many other Arab nations, have resorted to *violence* instead of peaceful means to quell the various, legitimate, protests. Violence has proved to be the Establishment's response to all those who question the validity of a political regime, or look for a better alternative. This, however, does not entirely imply that change would never be reached, provided that such change originates within the concerns of the ordinary people and is conveyed through adequate and appropriate means.

Beyond the thematic, what unite O'Casey, Shaw, and Arden are their 'Leftist' and pacifist leanings. Their mode of representation, however, varies. Each playwright has in fact made use of the theatrical mode and techniques which he thought to be the most appropriate for conveying his thematic concerns. From Naturalism to Brecht's 'Epic Theatre', passing through the 'drama of ideas' and Expressionism, the plays cover in their theatricality the major currents on the subject in the twentieth century. Hence, a constant to-and-fro movement between Art and History has been established. Like Picasso's *Guernica*, their 'living' frescoes of the war empower our frail but indomitable humanity.

Endnotes

¹ Maureen Malone, “The Rising” in *The Plays of Sean O’Casey*, op. cit., p. 15.

² Ibid. ; p. 41.

³ William. A. Armstrong, “Sean O’Casey”, op. cit., p. 6.

⁴ The protagonist in Wilfred Owen’s “Disabled” went to the War with the same thoughtlessness, and became paralysed like Harry Heegan. Both even have a common background in football. Cf. pages 109-110 of my present dissertation.

⁵ Christopher Innes, (ed.), “John Arden: the popular tradition and Epic alternatives”, in *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century*, op. cit., p. 139.

⁶ Frances Gray, *John Arden*, op. cit., p. 10.

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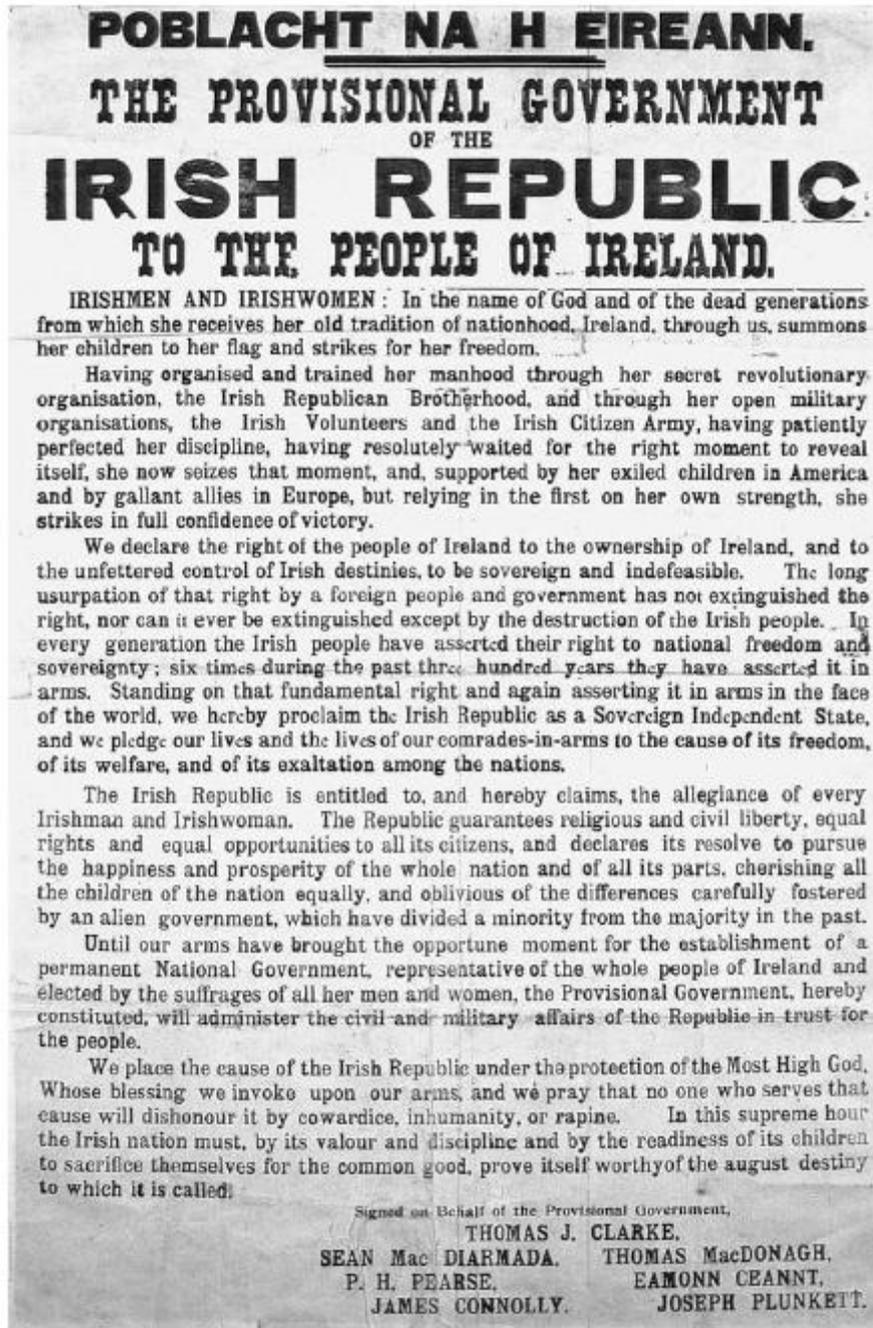
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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX I

Easter Rising 1916



Proclamation of the Republic of Ireland (Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)

Source: Paul F. State, *A Brief History of Ireland* (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2009), p. 233.

IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY

Leaders in the Insurrection, May, 1916

<p>IRISH REBELLEON, MAY 1916</p>  <p>THOMAS MACDONAGH President of the Provisional Government Shot at the Curragh, Co. Wick, Ireland Executed May 16, 1916</p>	<p>IRISH REBELLEON, MAY 1916</p>  <p>J. J. DEVLIN Member of the Provisional Government Shot at the Curragh, Co. Wick, Ireland Executed May 16, 1916</p>	<p>IRISH REBELLEON, MAY 1916</p>  <p>SEAMUS KIRBY Member of the Provisional Government Shot at the Curragh, Co. Wick, Ireland Executed May 16, 1916</p>	<p>IRISH REBELLEON, MAY 1916</p>  <p>SEAN MAC BRAIDE Member of the Provisional Government Shot at the Curragh, Co. Wick, Ireland Executed May 16, 1916</p>
<p>IRISH REBELLEON, MAY 1916</p>  <p>TOM WARRILL Member of the Provisional Government Shot at the Curragh, Co. Wick, Ireland Executed May 16, 1916</p>	<p>IRISH REBELLEON, MAY 1916</p>  <p>NAOMH JOSEPH BURKE Member of the Provisional Government Shot at the Curragh, Co. Wick, Ireland Executed May 16, 1916</p>	<p>IRISH REBELLEON, MAY 1916</p>  <p>A. H. FAGAN Member of the Provisional Government Shot at the Curragh, Co. Wick, Ireland Executed May 16, 1916</p>	<p>IRISH REBELLEON, MAY 1916</p>  <p>JAMES CONNOLLY President of the Provisional Government Shot at the Curragh, Co. Wick, Ireland Executed May 16, 1916</p>
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<p>IRISH REBELLEON, MAY 1916</p>  <p>JOSEPH PLUNKETT Member of the Provisional Government Shot at the Curragh, Co. Wick, Ireland Executed May 16, 1916</p>	<p>IRISH REBELLEON, MAY 1916</p>  <p>DR. M. O'RIADA Member of the Provisional Government Shot at the Curragh, Co. Wick, Ireland Executed May 16, 1916</p>	<p>IRISH REBELLEON, MAY 1916</p>  <p>THOMAS J. CLARKE Member of the Provisional Government Shot at the Curragh, Co. Wick, Ireland Executed May 16, 1916</p>	<p>IRISH REBELLEON, MAY 1916</p>  <p>JOSEPH PLUNKETT Member of the Provisional Government Shot at the Curragh, Co. Wick, Ireland Executed May 16, 1916</p>

Printed and Published by the Powell Press, 22 Parliament Street, Dublin.

“*Easter 1916*”, a poem by W. B. Yeats

I have met them at close of day
 Coming with vivid faces
 From counter or desk among grey
 Eighteenth-century houses.
 I have passed with a nod of the head
 Or polite meaningless words,
 Or have lingered awhile and said
 Polite meaningless words,
 And thought before I had done
 Of a mocking tale or a gibe
 To please a companion
 Around the fire at the club,
 Being certain that they and I
 But lived where motley is worn:
 All changed, changed utterly:
 A terrible beauty is born.

That woman's days were spent
 In ignorant good-will,
 Her nights in argument
 Until her voice grew shrill.
 What voice more sweet than hers
 When, young and beautiful,
 She rode to harriers?
 This man had kept a school
 And rode our wingèd horse;
 This other his helper and friend
 Was coming into his force;
 He might have won fame in the end,
 So sensitive his nature seemed,
 So daring and sweet his thought.
 This other man I had dreamed
 A drunken, vainglorious lout.
 He had done most bitter wrong
 To some who are near my heart,
 Yet I number him in the song;
 He, too, has resigned his part
 In the casual comedy;
 He, too, has been changed in his turn,
 Transformed utterly:
 A terrible beauty is born.

Hearts with one purpose alone
 Through summer and winter seem
 Enchanted to a stone
 To trouble the living stream.
 The horse that comes from the road,
 The rider, the birds that range
 From cloud to tumbling cloud,
 Minute by minute they change;
 A shadow of cloud on the stream
 Changes minute by minute;
 A horse-hoof slides on the brim,
 And a horse plashes within it;
 The long-legged moor-hens dive,
 And hens to moor-cocks call;
 Minute to minute they live;
 The stone's in the midst of all.

Too long a sacrifice
 Can make a stone of the heart.
 O when may it suffice?
 That is Heaven's part, our part
 To murmur name upon name,
 As a mother names her child
 When sleep at last has come
 On limbs that had run wild.
 What is it but nightfall?
 No, no, not night but death;
 Was it needless death after all?
 For England may keep faith
 For all that is done and said.
 We know their dream; enough
 To know they dreamed and are dead;
 And what if excess of love
 Bewildered them till they died?
 I write it out in a verse --
 MacDonagh and MacBride
 And Connolly and Pearse
 Now and in time to be,
 Wherever green is worn,
 Are changed, changed utterly:
 A terrible beauty is born.



**Irish Citizen Army outside Liberty Hall. (Courtesy of
National Library of Ireland. Photographic Archive)**

Source: Peter Cottrell, *The Anglo-Irish War: The Troubles of 1913-1922* (Oxford / New York: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2006), p. 28.



The devastation of Dublin in the aftermath of the Easter Rising. To many, such scenes were uncannily reminiscent of the destruction of parts of Belgium and France.

Source: Senia Paseta, *Modern Ireland: A Very Short Introduction* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 78.

APPENDIX I: Easter Rising 1916



British troops in Dublin attempted to see off Irish rebels during the Easter Rising 1916, from behind a makeshift barricade.

Source: <http://www.thefirstpost.co.uk/31037,in-pictures,news-in-pictures,picture-past-april-24-1916-easter-rising#ixzz1JWSZ3ats>



Ria Mooney, the original Rosie Redmond in the Abbey Theatre's 1926 performance of *The Plough and the Stars*, seen here with the playwright.

Source: <http://www.salemstate.edu/sextant/v4n2/maciver.html>



Photos from "*The Plough and the Stars*"
by Sean O'Casey

Source: <http://homepage.eircom.net/~berginj/plough/plough.html>



Scene from the Huntington Theatre Company's 1985 production of *The Plough and the Stars* in Boston with Wyman Pendleton as Peter Flynn, Sean G. Griffin as Fluther Good, Keliher Walsh as Nora Clitheroe, and Pauline Flanagan as Bessie Burgess.

Source: <http://www.salemstate.edu/sextant/v4n2/maciver.html>

APPENDIX II

The First World War

The First World War Poetry:

Jessie Pope, "The Call"

Who's for the trench—
 Are you, my laddie?
Who'll follow the French—
 Will you, my laddie?
Who's fretting to begin,
Who's going out to win?
And who wants to save his skin—
 Do you, my laddie?

Who's for the khaki suit—
 Are you, my laddie?
Who longs to charge and shoot—
 Do you, my laddie?
Who's keen on getting fit,
Who means to show his grit,
And who'd rather wait a bit—
Would you, my laddie ?

Who'll earn the Empire's thanks—
 Will you, my laddie?
Who'll swell the victor's ranks—
 Will you, my laddie?
When that procession comes,
Banners and rolling drums—
Who'll stand and bite his thumbs—

Source: Jessie Pope, *Jessie Pope's War Poems* (London: Grant Richards Ltd., 1915), p. 38.

"Who's for the Game?"

Who's for the game, the biggest that's played,
The red crashing game of a fight?
Who'll grip and tackle the job unafraid?
And who'll toe the line for the signal to 'Go'?
Who'll give his country a hand?
Who wants a turn to himself in the show?
And who wants a seat in the stand?
Who knows it won't be a picnic –not much-
Yet eagerly shoulders a gun?
Who would much rather come back with a crutch
Than lie low and be out of the fun?

Come along, lads -
But you'll come on all right -
For there's only one course to pursue,
Your county is up to her neck in a fight,
And she's looking and calling for you.

Source: <http://oldpoetry.com/opoem/52141-Jessie-Pope-Who-s-for-the-Game.html>

Rupert Brooke, "The Soldier"

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England
given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Source: Jon Silkin (ed.), *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 77-8.

"Peace"

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love!

Oh! we, who have known shame, we have found release there,
Where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;
Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there
But only agony, and that has ending;
And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.

Source: <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/1914-i-peace>

Wilfred Owen, "Exposure"

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us ...
Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent ...
Low drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient ...
Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,
Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.
Northward incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,
Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.
What are we doing here?

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow ...
We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.
Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army
Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of gray,
But nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.
Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow
With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew
We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,
But nothing happens.

Pale flakes with lingering stealth come feeling for our faces.
We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,
Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.
—Is it that we are dying?

Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed
With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;
For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs;
Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed, —
We turn back to our dying.

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;
Now ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.
For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,
For love of God seems dying.

To-night, this frost will fasten on this mud and us,
Shrivelling many hands, puckering foreheads crisp.
The burying-party, picks and shovels in shaking grasp,
Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,
But nothing happens.

“Disabled”

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
 And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
 Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
 Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
 Voices of play and pleasure after day,
 Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

About this time Town used to swing so gay
 When glow-lamps budded in the light-blue trees
 And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,
 In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
 Now he will never feel again how slim
 Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands,
 All of them touch him like some queer disease.

There was an artist silly for his face,
 For it was younger than his youth, last year.
 Now he is old; his back will never brace;
 He's lost his colour very far from here,
 Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
 And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race,
 And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.
 One time he liked a bloodsmear down his leg,
 After the matches carried shoulder-high.
 It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,
 He thought he'd better join. He wonders why.
 Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts.
 That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg,
 Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts,
 He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;
 Smiling they wrote his lie; aged nineteen years.
 Germans he scarcely thought of; and no fears
 Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
 For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;
 And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;
Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.
 And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.
 Only a solemn man who brought him fruits
Thanked him; and then inquired about his soul.

Now, he will spend a few sick years in Institutes,
 And do what things the rules consider wise,
 And take whatever pity they may dole.
 To-night he noticed how the women's eyes
 Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
 How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
 And put him into bed? Why don't they come?

“Dulce Et Decorum Est ”

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame, all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! — An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime . . .
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin,
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs
Bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, —
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

Source: Jon Silkin (ed.), *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 177-8.

APPEAL FROM
JOHN REDMOND, M.P.
To the People of Ireland.

At the very commencement of the War I made an appeal to the Irish people, and especially to the young men of Ireland, to mark the profound change which has been brought about in the relations of Ireland to the Empire, by whole-heartedly supporting the Allies in the field.

I pointed out that, at long last, after centuries of misunderstanding, the democracy of Great Britain had finally and irrevocably decided to trust Ireland, and I called upon Ireland to prove that the concession of liberty would, as we had promised in your name, have the same effect in our country as in every other portion of the Empire, and that Ireland would henceforth be a strength, instead of a weakness.

I further pointed out that this was a just war, provoked by the intolerable military despotism of Germany; that it was a war in defence of the rights and liberties of small nationalities; and that Ireland would be false to her history and to every consideration of honour, good faith, and self-interest if she did not respond to my appeal.

I called for a distinctively Irish Army composed of Irishmen, led by Irishmen, and trained for the field at home in Ireland.

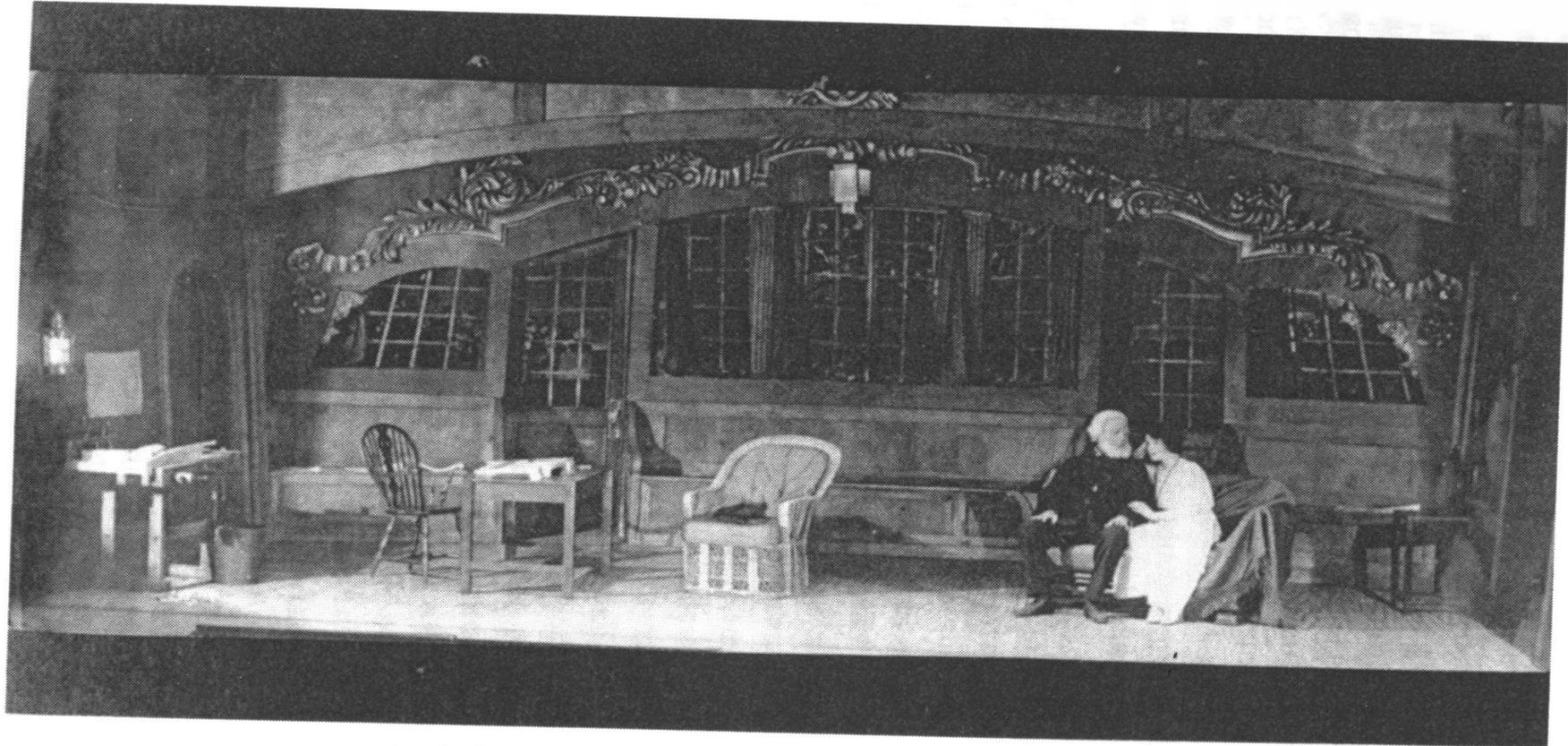
I acknowledge with profound gratitude, the magnificent response the country has made.

For the first time in history, we have to-day a huge Irish army in the field. Its achievements have covered Ireland with glory before the world, and have thrilled our hearts with pride.

North and South have vied with each other in springing to arms, and please God, the sacrifices they have made side by side on the field of battle will form the surest bond of a united Irish Nation in the future.

Source: Nuala C. Johnson, *Ireland, the Great War and the Geography of Remembrance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 30.

APPENDIX II: The First World War



Symbolic setting in Shaw's *Heartbreak House* (New York première)

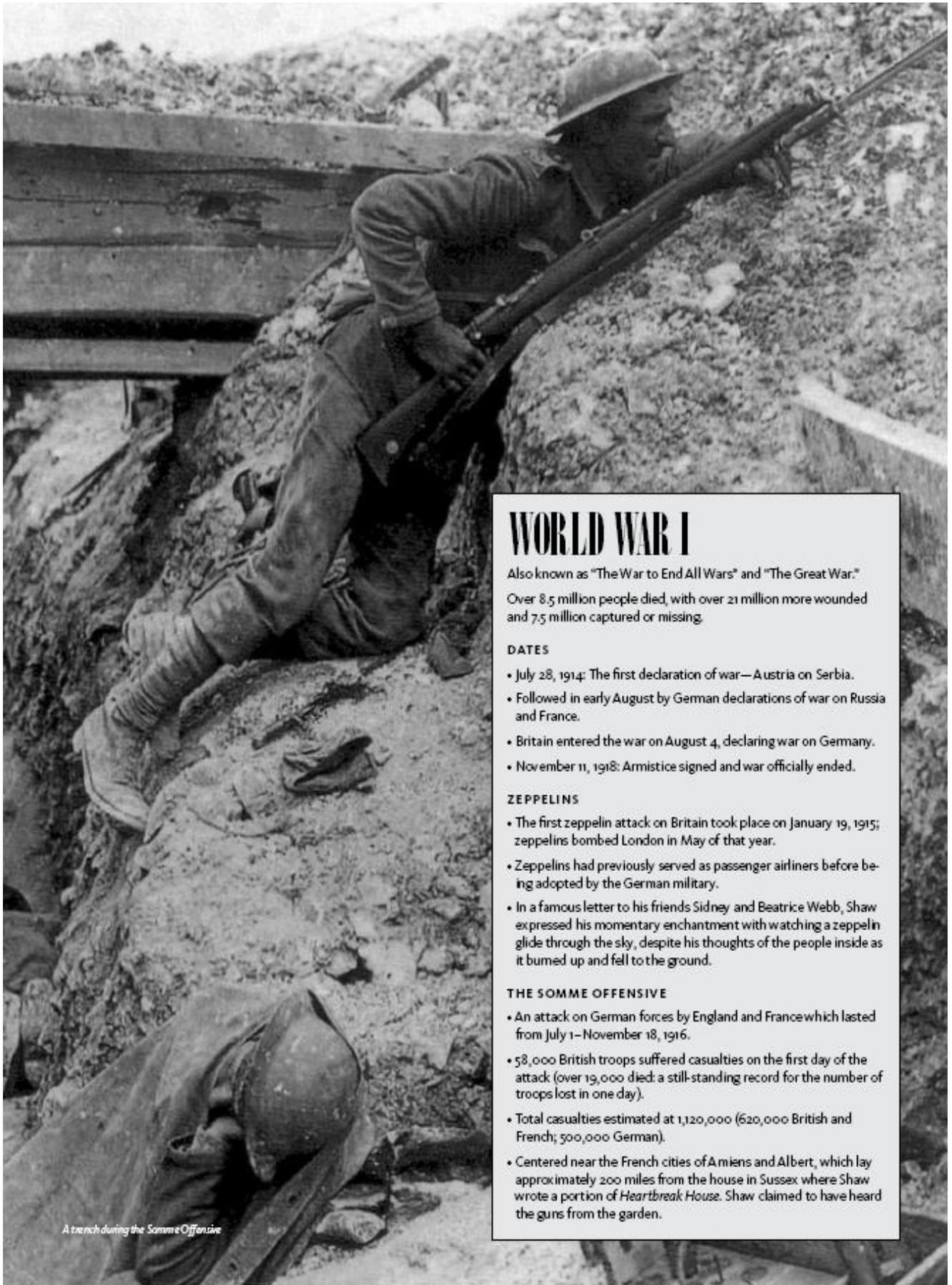
Source: Christopher Innes, (ed.), *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 45.

APPENDIX II: The First World War



Scene from Act II of Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie*
in the original (1929) production at the London Apollo Theatre.

Source: Heinz Kosok, *The Theatre of War: The First World War in British and Irish Drama* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. ii.



A trench during the Somme Offensive

WORLD WAR I

Also known as "The War to End All Wars" and "The Great War."

Over 8.5 million people died, with over 21 million more wounded and 7.5 million captured or missing.

DATES

- July 28, 1914: The first declaration of war—Austria on Serbia.
- Followed in early August by German declarations of war on Russia and France.
- Britain entered the war on August 4, declaring war on Germany.
- November 11, 1918: Armistice signed and war officially ended.

ZEPPELINS

- The first zeppelin attack on Britain took place on January 19, 1915; zeppelins bombed London in May of that year.
- Zeppelins had previously served as passenger airliners before being adopted by the German military.
- In a famous letter to his friends Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Shaw expressed his momentary enchantment with watching a zeppelin glide through the sky, despite his thoughts of the people inside as it burned up and fell to the ground.

THE SOMME OFFENSIVE

- An attack on German forces by England and France which lasted from July 1–November 18, 1916.
- 58,000 British troops suffered casualties on the first day of the attack (over 19,000 died: a still-standing record for the number of troops lost in one day).
- Total casualties estimated at 1,120,000 (620,000 British and French; 500,000 German).
- Centered near the French cities of Amiens and Albert, which lay approximately 200 miles from the house in Sussex where Shaw wrote a portion of *Heartbreak House*. Shaw claimed to have heard the guns from the garden.

APPENDIX III

Colonial Wars

John Arden



**Shock effect: threatening the audience in Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*
(Royal Court revival, 1965)**

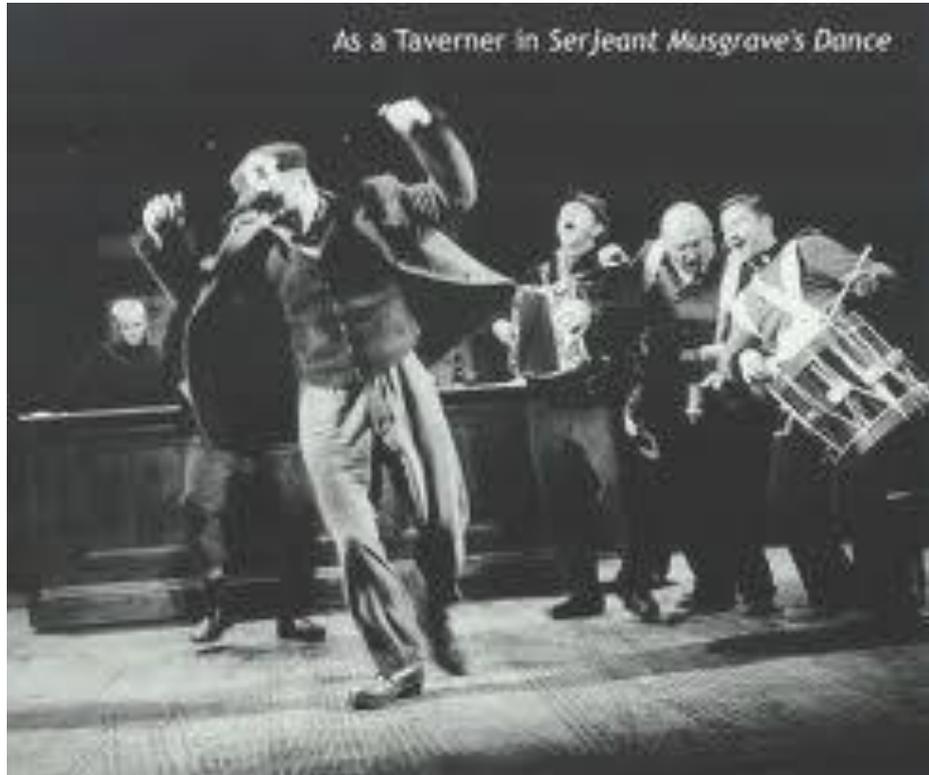
Source: Christopher Innes, (ed.), *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 139.



Scene from the Oxford Stage Company's 2003 production of
Serjeant Musgrave's Dance at the Greenwich Theatre

With Tobias Menzies as Hurst, Edward Peel as Musgrave, Dermot Kerrigan as Walsh,
Sam Cox as The Parson and Colin Tarrant as The Mayor.

Source: <http://www.curtainup.com/serjeantmusgravesdance.html>



A scene from “*Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance*”,
by John Arden

Source: http://www.paulrainbow.com/Acting_CV_files/sjnt_musgraves_dance_prog.jpg

RÉSUMÉ

Le présent mémoire de Magister examine le thème de la guerre et ses différentes représentations théâtrales dans l'œuvre de Sean O'Casey *The Plough and the Stars*, *Heartbreak House* de George Bernard Shaw, et *Serjeant Musgrave's Danse* de John Arden. Ces œuvres sont, respectivement, des adaptations théâtrales du soulèvement de Pâques en Irlande en 1916, de la Première Guerre Mondiale telle que vécue en Grande Bretagne, et des conséquences des guerres coloniales dans l'Angleterre des années cinquante.

O'Casey, Shaw, et Arden ont vécu pendant des périodes de guerre et de cataclysme, et ont exprimé des opinions véhémentes à l'égard du militarisme et de l'impérialisme britanniques. A travers leurs œuvres pacifistes, ils ont dénoncé la sauvagerie de la guerre qui n'épargna ni soldats ni civils. Le théâtre devient donc le moyen par lequel ces dramaturges ont essayé d'éveiller la conscience sociale et politique, et de préconiser un changement social.

En se basant sur l'étude textuelle et contextuelle des œuvres sus-mentionnées, notre recherche essaie d'analyser la variation des modes de représentation théâtrale d'une même thématique. Le but est de montrer que chaque dramaturge utilise le mode prédominant de son époque tout en incorporant des éléments dramaturgiques novateurs. O'Casey a eu recours au mode réaliste / naturaliste, et même expressionniste dans *The Plough and the Stars*. Shaw a emprunté sa rhétorique d'Ibsen et lance le "théâtre des idées", tandis qu'Arden se détache du naturalisme de façon décisive dans *Serjeant Musgrave's Danse* et opte pour le théâtre de l'aliénation brechtien.

Notre recherche se compose de quatre chapitres: dans le premier, nous essayons de cerner les événements sociopolitiques à partir desquels les auteurs tirent leur thème, ainsi que la dramaturgie des pièces en question. Le second est consacré à l'étude thématique et l'examen technique de la pièce d'O'Casey. L'accent est mis sur la Semaine de Pâques et ses conséquences tragiques, en plus des supports scéniques qu'O'Casey utilise pour mettre en scène les événements de ladite insurrection. Le troisième chapitre examine les frémissements et traumatismes engendrés par la Première Guerre Mondiale. L'accent est mis en premier sur l'œuvre de Shaw qui énonce les prémisses de cette guerre, complétée par une autre pièce expressionniste d'O'Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, qui en dit toute la déshumanisation. Le dernier chapitre porte sur les conséquences socio-psychologiques des guerres coloniales. Nous tentons ici d'explorer le pacifisme d'Arden et la façon dont il rend l'immoralité de l'impérialisme, du capitalisme, et des pratiques coloniales. Nous attachons un intérêt particulier aux techniques du théâtre brechtien utilisées par John Arden. Finalement, la conclusion évaluera la capacité d'O'Casey, de Shaw, et d'Arden à traiter le thème de la guerre dans leurs pièces de théâtre, en mettant en valeur l'interdépendance mutuelle du contenu et de la forme, et à établir l'équilibre entre divertissement et engagement politique.

ملخص

يتناول هذا البحث موضوع الثورة و تجلياتها المختلفة في مسرحية "المحراث و النجوم" (*The Plough and the Stars*) لـ شون أو كييسي، و "بيت القلب المنفطر" (*Heartbreak House*) لـ جورج برنارد شو، بالإضافة إلى "رقصة الرقيب ماسغريف" (*Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*) لـ جون آردن. إن هذه المسرحيات وفق ترتيبها هذا، عبارة عن تمثيل لأحداث أسبوع عيد الفصح بايرلندا عام 1916، الحرب العالمية الأولى كما تمت معاشتها ببريطانيا العظمى، و كذا عواقب الثورات الاستعمارية من خلال أفق خمسينيات القرن العشرين ببريطانيا.

عايش أو كييسي، شو، و آردن فترات من الحرب و الاضطرابات العنيفة، و كانت لهم آراء حادة حول ممارسات بريطانيا العسكرية و الامبريالية. من خلال مسرحياتهم السلمية، صيروا وحشية الحرب ممثلة كما أثرت في كل من العسكريين و المدنيين. هكذا أصبحت خشبة المسرح الوسيط التمثيلي لهؤلاء الكتاب في واجب الرفع من الوعيين الاجتماعي و السياسي، و تأييد التغيير الاجتماعي.

من خلال التركيز على الدراسة السياقية و النصية للمسرحيات المشار إليها أعلاه، حاولت في بحثي هذا أن أحلل الطرائق التي سعت موضوعاتية هذه المسرحيات إلى التعبير عنها بواسطة العناصر الفنية، الأسلوبية، و الدرامية. إن الهدف هو بيان أن كل كاتب مسرحي يستعمل الوسائل الفنية السائدة في عصره، مع توظيف مزيد من الفنيات المسرحية المستجدة. أو كييسي يلجأ إلى النمط الواقعي / الطبيعي، و حتى النمط التعبيري (*Expressionism*) في مسرحية *The Plough and the Stars*. برنارد شو أخذ بلاغته من إيسن (*Ibsen*) و أسس "دراما الأفكار"، في حين أفلت آردن من الطبيعية في *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* و مال نحو نمط برتولت بريخت (*Bertolt Brecht*) المعروف بـ "المسرح الملحمي".

ينقسم هذا البحث إلى أربعة فصول: يتناول الفصل الأول الأحداث الاجتماعية و السياسية التي استوحى من خلالها كتاب المسرح موضوعاتهم، و كذا الأرضية المسرحية لأعمالهم. ويهتم الفصل الثاني بالتحليل الموضوعاتي و التقني لمسرحية أو كييسي. يكون التركيز على أسبوع عيد الفصح 1916 و عواقبه القاسية، بالإضافة إلى اللواحق المسرحية التي يستعملها أو كييسي لإظهار أحداث هذا العصيان المسلح. يتناول الفصل الثالث الهزات الأولى من جهة و الجروح التي خلفتها الحرب العالمية الأولى من جهة أخرى. ينصب التركيز أولاً على تمثيل برنارد شو للهزات المبدئية للحرب، ثم الانتقال إلى تصوير الجروح و العواقب الأليمة للحرب العالمية الأولى من خلال مسرحية أو كييسي التعبيرية *The Silver Tassie*. الفصل الأخير يعالج عواقب الحروب الاستعمارية. إنها محاولة لاستنباط روح آردن المعادية للثورة، للامبريالية و الرأسمالية، و لكل الممارسات الاستعمارية من جهة، واستظهار الجوانب الفنية البريختية لآردن من جهة أخرى. و في النهاية تتناول الخاتمة مدى نجاح شون أو كييسي، برنارد شو، و جون آردن في تناول موضوع الثورة في مسرحياتهم، و الإبراز في الوقت ذاته مدى تكامل الشكل و المضمون و اعتماد كل واحد منهما على الآخر. هذا يلقي الضوء أكثر على قدرة كتاب المسرح هؤلاء في التوفيق بين الرسالة و وسيلة نقلها، و كذا التوازن في المزج بين الوعظ و التسلية.