A STUDY OF THE TRAGIC ELEMENT IN IRISH DRAMA

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
ENGLISH AND THE GRADUATE COUNCIL OF THE KANSAS STATE
TEACHERS COLLEGE OF EMPORIA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SCIENCE

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July 1938

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Received S 3 '38

82690

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to express her sincere appreciation to Dr. V. A. Davis, of the English Department of the Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, for his helpful criticism and direction in the preparation of this thesis. Acknowledgment is also due Miss Teresa M. Ryan for her valuable advice and assistance from time to time. The writer is also indebted to Miss Harriet Elcock, order librarian at the Kellogg Library, for her assistance in the assembling of materials.

E. E. B.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the most interesting literary movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the Celtic Renaissance, an attempt on the part of Irish literary men and women to further a national consciousness and to develop a distinctive national literature. Of the different aspects of the movement, the dramatic phase was perhaps the most productive and most outstanding. By studying the old Gaelic language and by reviving the almost forgotten legends of ancient Ireland, Irish dramatists sought to portray in their writings the life of the Irish people with its picturesqueness, its individualism, and its tragedy.

Like the history of any people long held in subjugation, the story of Ireland has been "one long chronicle of war, pillage, confiscation, and repression."[1] The invasion of the Norsemen, the coming of the Normans under Strongbow, the expropriations of Elizabeth, the sanguinary fanatacisms of Cromwell, the torturous wars of the Stuarts, many famines, and bloody political controversies have been only a few of the important phases of Irish history that have served to keep back literature and to keep the Irish as outlaws within their own country. When, after long years of political struggle, the soul of Ireland once more found expression in

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[1] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 3.

literature, it was a distinctly new nationalistic literature, mirroring the life and ways of thought of a people entirely new in the world of letters.[1] Since literature is, at its best and greatest, merely an intimate portrayal of the life of the people, and since the history of Ireland has been essentially a tempestuous one, it is not surprising that the tragic note should predominate in much of Irish drama.

This study is an attempt to trace the tragic spirit through the drama of the Celtic Renaissance and to show the influence of environmental struggles as well as racial and tempermental characteristics of the people upon the drama, in an effort to determine the nature and extent of the tragic philosophy. The results of this study must be of interest to every student of literature, since the tragic spirit is extremely persistent and is inextricably interwoven with literature and life, and since the field of modern drama is an extremely important one.

The writer has drawn material for this study from a critical reading of the plays themselves, from all available books concerned with Irish drama, and from magazine articles treating particular dramas. Numerous good historical and critical studies of the Celtic Renaissance have been made; but in the process of compiling material for this study, none was found dealing specifically with Irish tragedy. Walter E. Malone, in his _The Irish Drama_, discusses the plays of outstanding dramatists, mentioning works that are predominantly tragic. Ernest A. Boyd, in his two works,

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[1] Thomas MacDonagh, _Literature in Ireland_ (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1916), p. 23.

Ireland's Literary Renaissance and The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, discusses Irish drama in general, but makes no effort to distinguish between comedy and tragedy. None of these books makes any thorough or detailed analysis of the plays themselves, to determine the nature and extent of their tragedy.

Before the writer proceeds further with this study, it is necessary to have a clear conception of tragedy, since it is a term that has been used with a variety of meanings in different periods of literary activity. From the nature of its subject-matter, tragedy easily holds an important place in literature. Philo Buck, in commenting on the meaning of tragedy, makes this statement: "The experience of tragedy is as old as human nature--the consciousness driven deep into the human heart of the pitiful discrepancy between aspiration and attainment."[1]

Ashley H. Thorndike expresses a similar opinion concerning the importance of tragedy:

> Tragedy takes an abiding place among the great courses of continuous human activity dedicated to an inquiry into the meaning of life. . . . Tragedy has survived many ages and creeds, and seems likely to survive as long as men try to understand other men, to sympathize with their troubles, and to relate these somehow to their own beliefs and ideals.[2]

In the broadest sense of the word, t ragedy, as distinguished from comedy, involves an unhappy ending; whereas comedy, not primarily concerned

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[1] Philo M. Buck, The Golden Thread (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), p. 66.

[2] Barrett H. Clark, A Study of the Modern Drama (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1925), p. 347.

with the outcome, merely serves to entertain the reader from moment to moment. Tragedy shows the struggle of strong individuals against fate or circumstances stronger than themselves, and this struggle must end in defeat; in comedy, however, the outcome never seriously matters, for usually the end is merely the union of the two lovers or the overcoming of all obstacles by the hero.[1]

One type of drama, however, cannot be absolutely distinguished from the other. A play presenting various persons and incidents which are necessarily complex in emotional effects may mingle suffering and ruin with happiness and success. Whether the main effect is to be tragic or comic depends on the point of view or the general tone. Divisions between comedy and tragedy cannot be mutually exclusive.[2] In this study Thorndike's view of tragedy will be adhered to; but only those dramas which are distinctly tragic in tone will be considered in the discussion.

The origin of tragedy goes back to Athens and to the rites of Dionysus, or Bacchus, the god of wine, who introduced the cultivation of the vine. Here drama assumed two forms that were distinct and never combined--comedy and tragedy. Aristotle, in his Poetics, says that tragedy "originated from the leaders of the dithyramb"[3]--a special form of poetry sung by revellers at the feast of Dionysus, recounting the

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[1] Ashley H. Thorndike, Tragedy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908), p. 377.

[2] Ibid., p. 4.

[3] Aristotle, Poetics (S. H. Butcher, editor, The Poetics of Aristotle, second edition, revised; London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1928), p. 19.

story of the god, or honoring him. By the sixth century B. C., the dithyramb was expanded and crystallized into a truly dramatic form. It came to be called "tragedy," or goat-song, from τραγος, goat, and ωδη', song. During the ritual a goat was sacrificed, a goat was given as a prize to the most successful poet, and the followers of Dionysus wore goat-skins.[1]

Tragedy as conceived in Greek drama was first technically defined in Aristotle's Poetics.

> Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper katharsis or purgation of these emotions.[2]

Since Aristotle believed a tragedy to be an imitation, not of men, but of an action and a life, he placed most emphasis on plot and held character in second place. A perfect tragedy should imitate actions exciting fear and pity. The reversal of fortunes should be, not from bad to good, but from good to bad.

In connection with classical tragedy, the doctrine of the dramatic unities has proved a point of vigorous contention. The doctrine consist of three essential points--unity of time, unity of place, and unity of action. First, the action must be compressed within the twenty-four period; the reason given was that the duration of the action which goes

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[1] Sheldon Cheney, The Theater: Three Thousand Years of Drama, Acting, and Stagecraft (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1936), p. 33.

[2] Aristotle, op. cit., p. 23.

on in a play should conform as nearly as possible to the duration of the period which it represents. Second, the series of events represented in a play must be limited to one place. Third, the action must be limited to one place. All lines of action must be subordinated and unified with the main line of action.[1]

Aristotle has usually been credited with formulating the doctrine of the unities, basing it upon the practice of the Greek tragedians. However, in the Poetics, the only work touching it at all, he lays stress on only the unity of action; he has only a sentence or two about the unity of time and admits there must be a small variation from this.[2] As a result of Aristotle's hints about the unity of time, place, and action, the doctrine of dramatic unity as expanded and strengthened by the French critics, Chapelain, Richlieu, Corneille, and Bolieau, has had an enormous influence on the academic view of drama.[3]

By means of these rigid restrictions laid down by Aristotle, Greek drama was strictly governed. It was a structure without acts, but with a chorus, limited to three actors on the stage at once, and including as subject matter a narrow range of subjects; the tragedy was derived from the conflict, usually between the gods and the will of man. Although Greek drama lacked variety of incident and much of the surprise element

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[1] Cheney, op. cit., p. 49.

[2] Thomas R. Lounsbury, Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), pp. 10-11.

[3] Brandner Matthews, A Study of the Drama (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910), p. 275.

predominant in modern plays, it represented the height of poetic style. The splendor and beauty of language made the plays a powerful and truthful portrayal of human character and deeds.

During the centuries, changing theatrical conditions and diversity of national peculiarities have resulted in ideas of tragedy at variance with one another and with the classics. Thus, Roman tragedy assumed new differences, best exemplified by the works of Seneca. Although in Greece classical drama flourished with great vigor, in Rome it remained as an exotic product, a literary fad or fashion introduced from Greece and cultivated by only a comparatively small circle of the upper class.[1] The themes were borrowed from Greek mythology, with a strong preference for the most sensational and bloody stories. In almost every case, crime and its retribution made up the burden of each story.

In technique, also, the Roman tragedies were quite different from those of the Greeks. The plays presented only the last phase of an action and, consequently, opened with a lengthy exposition of preceding events. There was much action behind the scenes, but little on the stage. In comparison with Athenian tragedy, the Roman plays seemed like prolonged rhetorical discussions. There were five acts; and the chorus, excluded from any participation in action, usually appeared only at the end of each act, to indulge in philosophical reflections, in hymns praising some deity, or in lamentations.

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[1] Cheney, op. cit., p. 54.

The theme was the conflict of the hero with his opponents. Each leading character was accompanied by an adviser or confidant. Supernatural visitants, such as furies, gods, or ghosts, were common. Long speeches, soliloquies, and elaborate analysis of moods of passion gave the play an introspective tone.

As Roman culture decayed, drama became less prominent. The Christian influence grew in power, and its opposition to the stage finally became so effective that plays were prohibited and actors were proscribed in city after city throughout the Roman Empire. Not until three or four hundred years after the death of Roman drama, did England have even the beginnings of a national drama. The next important step in the development of tragedy was the Renaissance period of English literature. Ten tragedies of Seneca were translated into English between 1560 and 1581. Coming into the hands of English playwrights at the time when they were consciously laboring to develop a national drama, these plays had a tremendous influence upon the development of English tragedy.[1]

A few distinctive changes arose which marked the evolving drama as clearly an English product. From the first, the tendency of English tragedy was to present everything on the stage, even the storming of cities or battles between great armies; whereas Seneca's plays had little stage action. Furthermore, the English playwrights early disregarded the dramatic unities and had no hesitation in shifting the scene to half a

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 60.

dozen countries in the course of a single play that might cover a time period of several years. Although classic drama made a sharp differentiation between comedy and tragedy, admitting no comic elements in a serious drama, English drama, on the contrary developed tragedy side by side with comedy, mingling the farcical with the august, the laughable with the pathetic, as they actually are mingled in real life.

With the beginning of the Elizabethan era, tragedy received a much broader definition. More interested in the inner conflict than in anything else, Shakespeare held that the action of a tragedy should represent a conflict of wills, or will with circumstance, or will with itself. As an amendment to the Aristotelian tradition, Shakespearian tragedy emphasized a plot situation in which a great personality engaged in a struggle which ended disastrously. In each play the hero, a man of great attainments, is presented as involved in a moral struggle that results in his death. This conflict is two-fold, internal between opposing desires, and external against persons of the counter-action. Conflicting forces tend for mastery within the hero, and through their confusion he is driven on to disastrous action. The best potentialities of his nature are opposed and thwarted by powers of chance and circumstance beyond his control, by evil and intrigue of others, and still more by a defect or deficiency in his own character. The hero, noble and righteous, is brought into conflict with the results of evil and circumstance; and tragedy becomes inherent because of internal weakness.[1]

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[1] Thorndike, op. cit., p. 187.

Following the Shakespearian conception of tragedy to a large extent, modern tragedy, as contrasted with ancient Greek tragedy, has become broader in scope and simpler in plot and action. Each author, influenced by current practices, has tended, consciously or unconsciously, to write in accordance with some particular theory or example. The common conception of tragedy as a play involving deaths has never been entirely abandoned; for the modern concept of tragedy is that to live may, in some cases, be worse than to die as required by the classical conception. The one characteristic that is essential in order that a play be considered a tragedy is stated by Thorndike:

> A tragedy may permit of relief or even recovery for the good, or it may minimize the external and physical elements of suffering; but its action must be largely unhappy, though its end is not, and destructive, even if it does not lead to deaths.[1]

The tendency in modern tragedy is a return to the simplicity that Aristotle had in mind. The plays of Ibsen and other modern dramatists represent this fundamental simplicity of action and have even ventured to violate the idea of a "complete action" and to leave the endings in a state that might be called incomplete, similar to the ending of *A Doll's House*.

Realistic tragedy of today has refused to maintain that tragic effects can be secured only through stories of exceptional people. Many of the outstanding modern plays deal with contemporary burgeois life or even the life of the peasant. Even the requirement that tragedy deal

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

with characters of individual men is questioned. In Hauptmann's The Weavers interest is found in the emotions of a class of people, not those of one individual. Though the range of emotions has been greatly widened in modern tragedy in comparison with that of the classical, "pity and fear" still serve as well as any other terms to describe the emotional appeal peculiar to tragedy.[1] Although classical tragedy used poetry of the most embellished sort, realism has resorted to a bare style, and in the last century almost entirely to prose. As a last important characteristic, modern tragedy has become more specialized in its conflict, showing a portrayal of the inner life, not the world of outward fact, or even of outward action, but of the innermost thoughts, feelings, instincts, and passions of mankind. The modern concept is well stated by Vaughn in these words, "What distinguished the modern from the ancient drama above all other things is its greater inwardness."[2]

As an introduction to the discussion of the tragedy of Ireland, the writer will present a chapter on the development of the Irish theater for the purpose of leading to an understanding of Irish tragedy as a distinctly nationalistic drama. The dramatists will be discussed according to two general classifications, peasant and non-peasant drama. For the most part, the peasant drama will represent the earlier plays of Irish theater, while the non-peasant drama will include the plays produced

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[1] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[2] C. E. Vaughn, Types of Tragic Drama (London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1924), p. 8.

in the Abbey Theater from approximately 1910 up to the present time.

In the consideration of each dramatist, a short biographical sketch will be introduced in an attempt to point out tragical elements in the life of each author which may have influenced his particular conception of tragedy. The plays for each dramatist will be arranged chronologically. Each tragedy will be discussed with special attention to theme, conflict, and leading characters as they relate to the tragic philosophy shown by the writer. A statement of the findings in each tragedy will be given when that is necessary to reveal a tragic character or a situation. Comments from critics will be used whenever they apply. A summary of the findings in the study of each type of tragedy as displayed by particular dramatists will be placed at the end of each chapter, and a general statement of the findings and conclusions will be given in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IRISH THEATER

The prominent position which Irish drama has secured during the first quarter of the twentieth century has tended to obscure the fact that until the end of the nineteenth century Ireland was without any national drama, in either the Irish or the English language. This fact is the more surprising when one remembers that Ireland had one of the oldest civilizations in all Europe and that Irish culture has continued without a break from pre-Christian times. At the time the dramatists of Greece and Rome wrote, Ireland was highly civilized. It was due largely to the efforts of Irish missionary scholars during the Renaissance that the classical languages and literatures had their revival in Europe. The activities of the Irish scholars, however, left Ireland unmoved; for she remained unmoved up to the Renaissance and the revival of art and literature. Walter E. Malone describes the situation during the Renaissance thus:

> There seems to have been a lack of curiosity and a complete absence of that spirit of emulation, which is essential to the growth of literature. It would almost seem that Ireland had not belonged to the European system, and that its people were completely disinterested in anything that the people of Europe might do.[1]

Several factors can be found which may have operated to prevent, at least in a measure, the development of a national drama. Although

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[1] Malone, op. cit., p. 2.

political and social conditions were unfavorable to the development of drama, it may be doubted whether they were entirely responsible for its complete neglect and entire non-existence as a part of national culture. This same condition was true throughout much of Europe; for everywhere emperors, kings, princes, and barons were competing in a bloody struggle for domination and power. Despite all the troubles and disturbances of these countries, a cultural standard and a national drama were maintained.

In Ireland, however, a cultural system was maintained which, probably more than any other single cause, prevented the growth of a distinctly national drama. That system consisted of poetry recitals given in the homes and the oral diffusion of stories and news by the hearth. As a result, in Ireland recitation took the place of representation in other countries. The nobles and the aristocracy maintained the bard; and the ordinary people kept the shanachies, or storytellers, to provide recreation and instruction. The epic poem, when recited by the bard in the halls of the nobility, or the story, when told by the cottage fireside, brought to all classes of people the dramatic excitement which a representation on the stage would have done.[1]

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the system of poetry recitals had degenerated until there was only a public reading of the weekly newspaper. Then the orator in the market place had to take the place of both the bard and the shanachie to supply instructive recreation

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[1] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

to the populace. The only form of drama with which the Irish people were familiar was that supplied by dramatization of political conditions in the speeches of the politicans.

Another factor which may have helped to prevent national drama is that in Ireland there were no tropes to give the people that turn toward dramatic representation which produced the drama in other countries. In Ireland songs remained songs, never developing into actual drama; the heroic poems of the bards were recited, not represented. Furthermore, no association between religious rites and dramatical representation were found, as in other Catholic countries. From neither the Druidic worship nor the Catholic rites did Ireland receive any dramatic impulse.[1] There were also no Irish mystery or miracle plays. The Irish craftesmen were not organized in regulated trade guilds like the English; consequently, the only tràde guilds operating in Ireland were those from England, composed of English people. In Dublin and a few other towns English mystery plays were given, but these dramatic performances never became Irish in thought or outlook. When cleavage in European religious life came, the guilds in Ireland remained Protestant and English in outlook; and the Irish were barred from membership.[2]

A still more powerful factor that operated strongly against the production of national drama was that Catholic Ireland had, and to some

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

extent still has, a puritanical fear of the theater, much the same idea that Jeremy Collier had of Restoration Drama in England. Much of this prejudice may be accounted for, however, on the basis that the early guilds were Protestant, while Ireland was essentially Catholic.

As a result of the strength of these forces acting against drama, the Celtic Renaissance had to proceed slowly. It received its first emphasis with the publication, in 1878, of Standish O'Grady's History of Ireland. In this volume and its concluding one in 1880, O'Grady, sometimes called the Father of the Irish Literary Revival, explored the voluminous poetic literature of the remote Gaelic past, recreating for modern readers the figures of Cuchulain, Conchobar, Queen Maeve, Deirdre, and others. The History of Ireland thrilled poets with its color and glamorous retelling of legends and gave young writers the inspiration to go to the past and link themselves with the Gaelic literary tradition.[1]

The next step was the founding of Literary Societies in London and Dublin in 1892 and 1893. In the London Society were the best Irish poets of the times--Lionel Johnson, Katherine Tynan, Alice Milligan, John Todhunter, and Stopford Brooke; while in the Dublin Society were William Butler Yeats, Douglas Hyde, and Standish O'Grady. The purpose of the societies was to foster the growth of Irish literature by lectures on Celtic subjects and by the publication of authors hitherto neglected. The Societies are interesting because of their intentions rather than because

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[1] Carl and Mark Van Doren, American and British Literature Since 1890 (New York: The Century Co., 1925), p. 27.

of their actual achievements. They indicated a deliberate attempt to carry on the work of the Revival, by uniting only those who were actively aiding in the creation of a new literature.

In 1893 Stopford Brooke delivered the inaugural address to the London Society on the subject, "The Need and Use of Getting Irish Literature into the English Tongue." He pointed out that the use of the English language need not necessarily hamper the expression of the Celtic Spirit nor interfere with the continuation of Gaelic tradition. He defined the essential tasks--the translation and publication of Gaelic texts, the molding of mythological cycles into imaginary unities, the treatment in verse of isolated episodes and tales relating to super-natural heroes and the heroic world, and the collection of Irish folk tales and folk songs.[1]

Another distinctive movement was the Gaelic League, founded in 1893, by a small group of scholars and poets, of which group Douglas Hyde was the most prominent member. The purpose was to retell in English the old Irish legends and the still current Irish folk-songs, and to preserve the moods of Irish men and women, especially those moods which came to them out of their brooding over Ireland, her history, her landscape, the temper of her people.[2]

The first member of the Gaelic League to use the Irish language

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[1] Ernest A. Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance (New York: John Lane Company, 1916), p. 89.

[2] Cornelius Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913), p. 2.

as a medium of literature was Douglas Hyde, who, in 1893, published his Love Songs of Connacht and Religious Songs of Connacht in the original Irish with an English translation. The volume included a vast collection of Irish songs--love sings, drinking songs, political songs, religions songs, showing that Gaelic Ireland possessed a folk literature as beautiful as any in Europe. In addition to collecting songs, Dr. Hyde made translations, reproducing the distinct metrical effects of Gaelic verse and showing how these might be adapted to English.[1]

The founding of the Irish National Theater in 1899 was the most productive and the most outstanding step in the Celtic Renaissance movement. Before this time all drama in Ireland had been purely English. The impulse for the representation of plays upon the stage had always come from the outside. The aristocracy, or the landlord class, was English; and from this class came a long line of dramatists who gave the world essentially English drama. Among this group of dramatists living in England were Goldsmith, Wilde, Sheridan, and Shaw. Before the founding of the Irish National Theater, no Irish dramatist had peopled a play with Irish characters or had laid the scene in Ireland.[2]

The founders of the Irish National Theater, William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory, George Martyn, and George Moore were united primarily in a revolt against theatrical conditions in London. During the second half

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[1] Padraic Colum, "The Irish Literary Movement," Forum, 52:139-41, January, 1915.

[2] Malone, op. cit., p. 13.

of the nineteenth century, the English theater had become almost entirely an institution for profit. For all practical purposes poetry was gone from the English stage. The part of the actor-manager was considered of greater importance than the verse; and plays were produced with an eye on the box-office. With the coming of Ibsen there began to be a revival of drama in Europe. In Paris, Berlin, and London, free theaters were being founded as part of the revolt against the commercial theater. The founders of the Irish theater took Ibsen for their master, hoping to do for Ireland what he did for Norway.[1]

In respect to ideals, however, the four founders of the National Theater differed greatly. Lady Gregory was the only one who was concerned with the expression of a folk mind in a national drama. Yeats was concerned mainly with poetic drama, and in the beginning he was not preoccupied with the creation of a national drama. George Moore, on the other hands, was primarily the literary artist, without any particular interest in nationality in drama. Martyn was concerned with the drama of ideas as expounded by Ibsen and his followers. If that drama could not be found in relation to Ireland and Irish conditions, it must be brought from other countries. It was this great divergence in ideals that eventually caused a cleavage between the founders of the Theater, and in 1902 Martyn and Moore finally withdrew.

Since the founders of the Theater had no money, they sent out a

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[1] Ibid., p. 21.

letter asking for guarantees to the extent of three hundred pounds. Their purpose was stated in the letter thus:

> We propose to have performed in Dublin in the spring of every year certain Irish and Celtic plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our device to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theaters of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed.[1]

People of all classes and opinions readily gave support. Guarantors were never called upon to make any payment, as Mr. Martyn defrayed all expenses out of his own pocket. The first actors were English. Since it was impossible to secure a Dublin theater, the first performance was announced for May 8, 1899, at the Ancient Concert Rooms in Great Brunswick Street, Dublin. The plays for this first night were _The Heather Field_, by Martyn, and _The Countess Cathleen_, by Yeats. Yeats' play shocked Dublin and caused such uproarious behavior on the part of the audience that police were secured to line the gallery; but English critics, especially Max Beerbohm, praised the play highly. The Irish objected to the fact that the Countess Cathleen sold her soul to two demons during a famine, and the play was attacked on the grounds of being anti-Irish and anti-Catholic.[2] There was no point in the attack, however, for the play shows only self-sacrifice of the noblest sort.

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[1] Lady Augusta Gregory, _Our Irish Theater_ (New York: G. B. Putnam's Sons, 1913), pp. 8-9.

[2] Malone, _op. cit._, p. 35.

On February 19 and 20, 1900, the same English company performed three plays at the Gaiety Theater in Dublin: Maeve, by Martyn; The Bending of the Bough, by Moore; and The Last Feast of the Fianna, by Alice Milligan. An enthusiastic audience attended the plays. The Irish National Theater was well launched and on its road to success.

On October 21, 1901, an amateur company from London, headed by Frank Fay, produced Diarmuid and Grania, by Yeats and Moore, and The Twisting of the Rope, by Dr. Hyde. Hyde's play was the first production on any stage of a play in the Irish language. Diarmuid and Grania was never published and has now been forgotten. This was the last occasion upon which any English actors appeared in a play of the Irish theater. Two Irish brothers, Frank and William Fay, decided to form the Fay Company, or the Irish Dramatic Company. On April 2 and October 29, 30, and 31, 1902, this company presented two plays at Saint Teresa's Hall, Clarendon Street, Dublin--Deirdre, by George Russell, and Cathleen ni Houlihan, by Yeats. This marked the real beginning of the Irish National Theater. "For the first time the plays were written by Irish playwrights, acted by an Irish Company, and staged by an Irish producer."[1] These players, later known as the Abbey Players, became known for the fine quality of their acting. The distinguishing characteristic of their performance was simplicity, for they portrayed the characters of the folk-play in a simple, sincere, yet thoroughly realistic fashion.[2]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 39-40.

[2] Ernest A. Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1917), p. 41.

The fifth performance of the Irish National Theater, in March, October, and December, 1903, produced two plays by Yeats, The Hour-Glass and The King's Threshold, and the first play of Lady Gregory, of Padraic Colum, and of J. M. Synge, Twenty-five, Broken Soil, and In the Shadow of the Glen. In this same year divergence arose among the founders of the Theater as to the type of drama that was to be produced. Gregory and Yeats inclined to folk-drama; whereas Moore and Martyn held to Ibsen and the drama of ideas. There was no open breach, no quarrel; but Moore and Martyn dropped out. The experiment ended at the close of the three year period for which it had been planned.[1]

In May, 1903, the Fay Company, went to London for the first time. The acting made such an impression on the critics that the visit was easily the theatrical event of the year. The visit was a triumph for the young players, for it strengthened their confidence and brought the company under the notice of Miss A. E. F. Horninan, Queen of the Repertory. She was so favorably impressed with the players that she obtained the lease of a small theater in Dublin, rebuilt it; and under the name of the Abbey Theater it became the home of the Abbey Players, rent free, for a period of six years, beginning in 1904. In 1910 the theater was purchased from her by public subscription.[2]

In December, 1904, the Abbey Theater opened with its first performance of two one-act plays: On Baile's Strand, by Yeats; and Spreading

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[1] Malone, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

[2] Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, pp. 87-88.

the News, by Lady Gregory. The testing time of the Abbey Theater came, however, in January, 1907, when the Theater opened with the first production of Synge's The Playboy of the Western World. The production of the play led to riotious scenes; missiles of all kinds were hurled onto the stage; five hundred police were required to keep order in the theater, but the whole controversy drew the attention of the world and made the theater intensely popular. The real cause of the riots might, however, be traced, not to a fundamental dislike for the play, but to the tender consciousness of an Irish audience in a period of political tension. These riots were probably due to several causes. Lady Gregory and Yeats thought the unusual amount of bad language in the play was the cause. Others thought that the reference to "khaki cut-throats" aroused the suspicious interference of Dublin Castle. The drama was regarded by many as an argument against Ireland and home rule in that it drew an unpleasant picture of the average Irishman. Synge, as a consequence, was regarded as one who tried to belittle his mother country.[1]

From 1911-1916 St. John Ervine was manager of the Abbey Theater. His play, Mixed Marriage, had not been very enthusiastically received; and the theater unde. his management was never very popular. He comprehended the theater as an expression of Irish national culture in terms of dramatic art, and he wished to present world masterpieces in order to teach Irish dramatists how to write. His aggressive methods alienated

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[1] Malone, op. cit., p. 102.

many; and several of the company left the theater, never to return. As a result, Ervine resigned in 1916 and left Ireland for England, where he prepared to write John Ferguson.

By the year 1920 the Theater had reached a critical period in its history when Ireland entered the final phase of her political struggle. The Theater attempted to keep open at any cost, and from 1916-1923 the tendency of the Theater was toward melodrama and farce; few plays of real distinction were produced. On Easter Monday, April 25, 1916, the theater was scheduled to open with the play, The Spancel of Death; but a military uprising broke out, and the play was never produced. Although fire raged in the vicinity of the Theater, destroying whole blocks of buildings, the Theater escaped destruction.[1]

When the Abbey Theater reopened in 1921, its policy seemed to be set toward the attainment of the status and dignity of the State Theater. In recent years there has been a tendency to accept the ideal of Martyn rather than that of Lady Gregory by placing less emphasis on peasant plays and giving more attention to the works of European dramatists in selecting a repertory. Malone comments, "The pioneers have grown weary of pioneering, and it seems that the Abbey Theater is to settle down to the repertory work of a State Theater."[2]

Despite a possible disintegration in recent years, the Abbey

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[1] Ibid., p. 118.

[2] Ibid., p. 126.

Theater has, however, accomplished primarily what it set out to do. It has created a drama which, although not cosmopolitan, has been intensely realistic and yet poetical, rendering faithfully the pains and joys of simple men and women.[1] Padraic Colum, in his article entitled, "The Irish Literary Movement," has summarized the accomplishments of the Abbey Theater in this statement:

> It has produced a national drama of Ireland; it has intensified in Irish writers national characteristics, and it has encouraged them to write plays that are charged with the Irish temperament, the Irish instincts, the Irish traditions.[2]

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[1] Harold Williams, Modern English Writers (London: Sedgwick and Jackson, Limited, 1918), p. 194.

[2] Colum, op. cit., p. 145.

CHAPTER III

TRAGEDY IN PEASANT DRAMA

Many of the earliest plays produced in the Irish Literary Theater were those which sought to portray the life of the Irish peasant with its pathos and tragedy. Folk drama has appealed to dramatists because Ireland is essentially a nation of peasants and because the national life of Ireland is the peasant life. The people of Ireland are an agricultural people, fresh from the fields and the country, busy with the eldest and simplest things of life, people who have not grown up among the artificialities of life.[1] Ervine, in commenting on the importance of peasant drama, says:

> The Irish dramatist writes his play around peasant characters because peasant life is the national life, because the peasant influence is the strongest influence in Ireland. . . . The Irish aristocrat and the Irish middle-class man are much like the English aristocrat and the English middle-class man: they have no distinctly national qualities. . . . All the vitality and color and weakness and grey tones in Ireland come from the peasant, all the vigor and clash of personalities and swift changes of nature, and where these things are, there also is drama. . . . The Irish peasant has remained national and local, and the Irish dramatist is compelled to make the peasant the protagonist of his plays, for the peasant has national courage and meanness, cowardice and nobility, humor and the lack of it, curelty, and gentleness, high feeling and low feeling, wit and dullness, generosity and greed all mingled in his nature; and these things are the stuff of drama.[2]

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[1] McDonagh, _op. cit._, p. 24.

[2] St. John G. Ervine, "The Irish Dramatist and the Irish People," _Forum_ 51:946, June, 1914.

In this chapter on folk drama the works of seven writers of peasant drama will be discussed. An attempt will be made, in each case, to point out the particular type of tragedy each portrays and to show its tragic elements.

William Butler Yeats

The most widely known name in contemporary Irish literature is that of William Butler Yeats, essayist, writer of tales, romantic poet, and dramatist. He was born in Dublin of a Protestant family in 1865. His father, John Butler Yeats, was a well-known artist; and his brother, Jack Butler Yeats, became a noted painter of Irish landscapes. Most of Yeats's childhood was spent in Sligo, where his grandfather was a merchant and shipowner.[1] When William was sixteen, he began to write poetry and to publish it in Irish journals and newspapers. For three years he studied painting, but was restless and unproductive in the work. An ardent patriot, he preferred to browse in libraries, reading translations, or making them, from old Gaelic tales and poems. He liked to sit by turf fires in old Connaught and listen to the folk tales of the peasantry.[2]

In 1887 Yeats went to London and worked as a journalist. Because his first play, The Countess Cathleen, performed in Dublin in 1892, was

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[1] Dilly Tante, Living Authors (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1931), p. 450.

[2] J. W. Cunliffe, English Literature in the Twentieth Century (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 101.

not well received by the public, Yeats wrote only poetry until he was thirty-five. He later was active in establishing the Irish National Theater, and he worked zealously with Lady Gregory in producing and writing plays for the Abbey Theater.

Since 1900 the literary reputation of Yeats has increased greatly. He is regarded as the accepted leader of the Irish movement. Had it not been for Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory would never have written plays and would not have been attracted to aid in the establishing of the Irish Theater. In 1923 Yeats received the Nobel Prize for literature. Since then, several honorary degrees have been conferred on him; and from 1922 to 1928 he was a senator of the Irish Free State.[1]

During the nineties, Yeats came under the influence of the French Symbolists. He transplanted Symbolism to Ireland, where he made it flower with astonishing success. In the ancient Irish mythology, unfamiliar to many of the Irish readers, he found a treasury of symbols at hand.[2]

Always a mystic, Yeats expressed his mysticism through the ancient Irish mythology and through the traditional superstitions of the Irish peasants. Although Yeats has used peasant characters in several of his dramas, he is not a peasant dramatist in the sense that Synge and Lady Gregory are. His greatest interest has been in the poetic aspects of

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[1] Tante, op. cit., pp. 460-61.

[2] Mark Van Doren, "William Butler Yeats," New Republic 60:141, September 25, 1929.

the old heroic legends rather than in actual portrayal of the peasant mind. One critic has said of Yeats's plays, "All his plays are a quest for Beauty--'Beauty like a tightened bow'--and all have the quality of dream rather than the realisy of everyday."[1] To the Celtic spirit with its yearning for the remote, the beautiful, the ideal, Yeats's plays have made a great appeal.

> His philosophy, though it was one of escape from life rather than a resolute attempt to face its problems and agitations, was not unwelcome to a generation world-weary and somewhat oppressed with a sense of its own meaningless materialism.[2]

The Countess Cathleen, written in 1892, has come to be regarded by critics as the finest poetic drama of modern times.[3] Yeats found the story in a newspaper where it was given as an Irish legend, but he discovered it was a translation from a French tale.[4] The scene is laid in Ireland, in the "old times." Sheumas Rua, his wife Mary, and their son Teigue, peasants who live in a small cottage, are without food of any kind. Sheumas and Teigue, entirely discouraged, utter blasphemy against God. Mary, however, remains steadfast in her faith.

> Teigue. What is the good of praying? father says.
> God and the Mother of God have dropped asleep.
> What do they care, he says, though the whole land
> Squeal like a rabbit under the weasel's tooth?
> Mary. You'll bring misfortunes with your blasphemies
> Upon your father, or yourself, or me.[5]

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[1] Malone, op. cit., p. 131.

[2] Cunliffe, op. cit., p. 102.

[3] Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1925), p. 411.

[4] William Butler Yeats, Plays and Controversies (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), p. 285.

[5] William Butler Yeats, The Countess Cathleen in The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), p. 4.

Two demons dressed as Eastern merchants come to the door and parley with Shoumas. They offer great sums of money in exchange for the soul of each person. Shoumas and Teigue are overjoyed at the offer, but Mary is very angry. She opposes the demons actively.

> Mary. Destroyers of souls, God will destroy you q ickly.
> You shall at last dry like dry leaves and hang
> Nailed like dead vermin to the doors of God.
> Second Merchant. Curse to your fill, for saints will
> have their dreams.
> First Merchant. Though we're but vermin that our Master
> sent
> To overrun the world, he at the end
> Shall pull apart the pale ribs of the moon
> And quench the stars in the ancestral night.
> Mary. God is all-powerful.
> Second Merchant. Pray, you shall need Him.
> You shall eat dock and grass, and dandelion,
> Till that low threshold there becomes a wall,
> And when your hands can scarcely drag your body
> We shall be near you. (Mary faints.)[1]

The Countess Cathleen, a person much beloved, is described as having almost unearthly physical beauty. Oona, Cathleen's foster-mother, says of Cathleen's sympathy for the unfortunate, "Sorrows that she's but read of in a book weigh on her mind as if they were her own."[2] The Countess Cathleen offers her property for sale in an effort to save her people, but the demons steal all her money and delay her grain ships because they wish to obtain possession of her soul--the finest, most valuable soul in the community. When Cathleen signs the deed for sale for her soul, she realizes the enormity of her sacrifice. Heart-broken, she dies; and the grief-stricken peasants kneel about her in the darkness.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[2] Ibid., p. 8.

Suddenly the darkness is broken by a visionary light. Half in light, half in darkness stand armed angels. One man seizes an angel and bids him tell where Cathleen's soul has gone. The angel replies,

> The light beats down; the gates of pearl are wide;
> And she is passing to the floor of peace,
> And Mary of the seven times wounded heart
> Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair
> Has fallen on her face; The Light of Lights
> Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
> The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.[1]

The Countess Cathleen stands out as a great tragic character whose unselfish love is so great that she is willing to sacrifice even eternal life for her people. Her tragedy comes when she finally realizes the enormity of her sacrifice, and her death occurs on the stage. Oona, perhaps more than Cathleen, is the really tragic character. Few lines in literature are more poignantly pathetic than her impassioned cry at the end of the play. Life without Cathleen seems utterly dreary, and Oona tells the angel,

> Tell them that walk upon the floor of peace
> That I would die and go to her I love;
> The years like great black oxen tread the world,
> And God the herdsman goads them on behind,
> And I am broken by their passing feet.[2]

The conflict arises from the nature of Cathleen's sacrifice; and the tragic force is the power of the demons over Cathleen, a power which eventually brings about her death and downfall. The tragedy is mitigated,

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[2] *Loc. cit.*

however, at the end, when the Angels break the power of evil; and goodness is again established; but Cathleen has already been forced to pay the extreme penalty with her death.

Throughout the entire play a sense of terror pervades the scenes. Mysterious forces manifest their presence in the occurrence of simple, insignificant incidents. The grey hen flutters from her nest.[1] Teigue sees, in a nearby bush, two birds with human faces.[2] An angelical being appears to warn Aleel, Cathleen's lover, of the danger that threatens her.[3] Another time Aleel sees a vision of the "archangels rolling Satan's empty skull over the mountain-tops."[4] The imaginative picturing of the sacrifice also strikes terror in the reader.

> How can a heap of crowns pay for a soul? . . .
> Some sell because the money gleams, and some
> Because they are in terror of thegrave,
> And some because their neighbors sold before,
> And some because there is a kind of joy
> In casting hope away, in losing joy,
> In ceasing all resistance, in at last
> Opening one's arms to the eternal flames,
> In casting all souls out upon the wind;
> To this--full of the gaiety of the lost--
> Would all folk hurry if your gold were gone.[5]

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[1] Ibid., p. 3.

[2] Ibid., p. 4.

[3] Ibid., p. 25.

[4] Ibid., p. 44.

[5] Ibid., p. 31.

The symbolism of the play is very apparent. The demons represent evil in a poverty-stricken land, while Cathleen herself is goodness, love for mankind. Although she, like Faustus, has sold her soul to the devil, her damning bargain does not hold because she has made it unselfishly, in order to buy back the souls of the people who have pledged themselves to the devil to gain food. God, the "Light of Lights," however, studies motives as well as actions. Perceiving the unselfish spirit that has prompted Cathleen's sacrifice, God takes her soul to eternal bliss.[1]

The Countess Cathleen provoked violent opposition from many directions in Ireland. It shocked Dublin and was the occasion of uproarious behavior at its first performance. The fact that Cathleen sold her soul to the devil was attacked in a pamphlet entitled Souls for Sale, as being anti-Irish and anti-Catholic. The audience failed to see that the play shows only self-sacrifice of the noblest kind.[2] The exquisite charm of the language, however, made the play popular in after years.

Cathleen ni Houlihan, written in 1902, is "perhaps the most dramatically effective one-act play in Irish drama, as it is also one of the greatest one-act plays of the modern theater."[3] The scene is laid in Killala, in 1798, on the eve of the French landing. An Irish

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[1] Cornelius Weygandt, The Time of Yeats (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Incorporated, 1937), p. 168.

[2] Malone, op. cit., p. 37.

[3] Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 150.

rebellion against unfair representation in English parliament had begun in 1798 and had speedily been put down by the English. The Irish had sent to France for help, but it had arrived too late to help in the rebellion.[1]

The plot consists of a straightforward story told quickly. Michael Gillane is about to marry Delia Cahel, and thereby solve the financial problems of his parents; for Delia is to bring a large dowry. Michael and his parents are counting the money when a haggard old woman enters the cottage. She is weary and woebegone; and Bridget, Michael's mother, questions her as to the cause of her suffering.

> Old Woman. Sometimes my feet are tired and my hands are quiet, but there is no quiet in my heart. When people see me quiet, they think old age has come upon me and that all the stir has gone out of me. But when the trouble is on me I must be talking to my friends.
> Bridget. What was it put you to wandering?
> Old Woman. Too many strangers in the house.
> Bridget. Indeed you look as if you'd had your share of trouble.
> Old Woman. I have had my trouble indeed.
> Bridget. What was it put the trouble on you?
> Old Woman. My land that was taken from me.
> Peter. Was it much land they took from you?
> Old Woman. My four beautiful green fields.[2]

The old woman reveals that her name is Cathleen ni Houlihan. The story of her sufferings stirs Michael, and he desires to help her; but

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[1] Charles Johnston and Carita Spencer, Ireland's Story (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1905), p. 281.

[2] William Butler Yeats, Cathleen ni Houlihan in The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), p. 81.

she shakes her head sadly, replying, "It is not a man going to his marriage that I look to for help."[1] She also adds, "If anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he must give all."[2] Going out of the cottage, she tells Michael,

> It is a hard service they take that help me. Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-cheeked; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries; many a good plan will be broken; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it; many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. They that have red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake; and for all that, they will think they are well paid. (She goes out; her voice is heard outside singing.)
>
> They shall be remembered for ever,
> They shall be alive for ever,
> They shall be speaking for ever,
> The people shall hear them for ever.[3]

Michael stands entranced, and Delia's brother brings the news that the French have landed. Delia enters, but Michael fails to notice her. He breaks away to leave the cottage; and as he does so Peter, the father, asks his wife, "Did you see an old woman going down the path?" She replies, "I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen."[4]

Cathleen ni Houlihan is perhaps the most tragic play that Yeats

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[1] Ibid., p. 85.

[2] Ibid., p. 84.

[3] Ibid., p. 86.

[4] Ibid., p. 88.

has written. Michael's instant surrender, especially on his wedding night, and his forsaking of home and all dear ties make for high tragedy. The conflict here is between patriotism and home ties, and the choice is one which every soldier is forced to make. The tragedy is the greater because patriotism, the tragic force, is, in itself, a noble, highly meritable emotion, yet one which inevitably brings hardship upon the people. Seen in the light of high patriotism, the characters are nearly all tragic ones. Cathleen herself, although only a personification, stands through the ages as a suffering, noble personality. Michael, led to desert his fiancee and his family, is a tragic character caught in the ruthless force of war; and the family, left at home to grieve, bear the real brunt of the tragedy.

The symbolism of the play is very apparent. The old woman, Cathleen, with "too many strangers in her house" and with her "four beautiful green fields" taken from her is Ireland and her four provinces as possessed by England.[1] No local incidents or specific happenings are given in the drama. Thus, the play becomes more nearly universal. Since patriotic ardor applies to every country, the play is intelligible and interesting to any audience. It has been popular in many countries other than Ireland.[2] One critic describes the emotional power of the drama in these words:

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[1] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 50.

[2] Malone, op. cit., p. 136.

> Seen and listened to, Cathleen ni Houlihan brings tears to the eyes and chokes the throat with sobs, so intimately physical is the appeal of its pathos. He is, indeed, dull of understanding or hard of heart who can witness a performance of this play and not feel that something noble has come his way.[1]

The King's Threshold, written in 1904, is as nearly a play with a purpose as anything that Yeats has written. It was written after Yeats had been conducting a strenuous agitation in favor of the artist in national life, but no change had been effected in public opinion. The play, the plot of which was taken from an old Irish story,[2] shows Yeats's contention that the poet is as important to society as is the man of action and that poetry cultivated for its own sake, the sake of art, is as necessary to a nation, to Ireland, as patriotism.[3]

King Guiare has commanded that the poet Seanchon shall be seated at a table lower than his counselors.

> Three days ago
> I yielded to the outcry of my courtiers--
> Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law--
> Who long had thought it against their dignity
> For a mere man of words to sit amongst them.[4]

Seanchon has refused to take the lower seat assigned to him and has gone in to lie upon the King's Threshold, refusing to touch food of any kind.

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[1] Weygandt, op. cit., p. 51.

[2] Malone, op. cit., p. 140.

[3] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 60.

[4] William Butler Yeats, The King's Threshold, in The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), p. 108.

The King says,

> He has chosen death:
> Refusing to eat or drink, that he may bring
> Disgrace upon me; for there is a custom,
> An old and foolish custom, that if a man
> Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and starve
> Upon another's threshold till he die,
> The common people, for all time to come,
> Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
> Even though it be the King's.[1]

The King sends all manner of food to Seanchon and promises the poet great riches if he will only eat. Fedelm, the girls to whom Seanchon is engaged, and finally the King himself plead with the poet; but he will not submit. As a last final effort the King brings on the stage the pupils of Seanchon with halters around their necks. They will die unless he submits. Still refusing, Seanchon dies in protest. The pupils raise the litter on their shoulders. As they carry it from the stage, the youngest pupil says:

> O silver trumpets, be you lifted up
> And cry to that great race that is to come,
> Long-throated swans upon the waves of time,
> Sing loudly, for beyond the wall of the world
> That race may hear our music and awake.[2]

Seanchon is a true tragic character, one who dies a martyr for his cause; but there is irony in the fact that no one but the pupils are any longer interested in his death. The tragic force reacting against him is public opinion. As compared with the warriors and statesmen,

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[1] _Loc. cit._

[2] _Ibid._, p. 143.

the poet has never been conceded a place among the first rank of men. Seanchon, as a character, however, does not stand out clearly. He appears more as an exponent of an idea than as an individualized personality. To an Ireland long familiar with famines and hunger strikes, The King's Threshold has long proved a popular play.

On Baile's Strand, written in 1904, is one of Yeats's most successful plays. The subject matter is a dramatic arrangement of the story which tells of the duel between Finmol and his unrecognized father, Cuchulain.[1]

A young man comes to the court of King Cuchulain, challenging the king to a duel. Cuchulain is unwilling to fight because the boy resembles Queen Aoife, a warlike queen whom he has once loved. The boy, however, refusing to reveal his true identity, is careless of his life and remarks to Cuchulain, "Whether I live or die is in the gods' hands."[2] Other kings standing near by urge on the hesitating Cuchulain.

Cuchulain reluctantly accepts the challenge and goes out to fight the boy. A few minutes later he returns, wiping the blood of the slain boy from his sword. A Fool and a Blind Man are talking together. In their conversation they reveal that the boy is the son of Queen Aoife. Cuchulain carelessly asks if the father of the boy is known. The Fool replies that he has heard Aoife boast that she has had but one lover.

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[1] Malone, op. cit., p. 141.

[2] William Butler Yeats, On Baile's Strand in The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), p. 266.

Cuchulain turns pale when he learns that he has killed his own son. On the verge of madness he rushes down to the sea in the hope that the huge waves will sweep him out to sea. The Fool and the Blind Man watch his progress.

> Fool. . . .There is a great wave going to break, and he is looking at it. Ah! now he is running down to the sea, but he is holding up his sword as if he were going into a fight. (Pause.) Well struck! well struck!
> Blind Man. What is he doing now?
> Fool. O! he is fighting the waves! . . . . There, he is down! He is up again. He is going out in the deep water. There is a big save. It has gone over him. I cannot see him now. He has killed kings and giants, but the waves have mastered him, the waves have mastered him![1]

Few of Yeats's characters are more tragic than Cuchulain, who, like Rustum, unknowingly kills his own son. The situation in itself contains all that Aristotle postulated as essential to tragedy, the arousing of the emotions of pity and fear.[2] The action is rendered the more tragic because Cuchulain, in a few passages before, has expressed his deep longing for a son to succeed him as king. Too, Aoife, the boy's mother, is the only woman who has ever stirred Cuchulain to romantic heights. The catastrophe occurs when Cuchulain kills his only son, and the tragic force is clearly shown to be Fate, which forces Cuchulain to fight his own son.

The Blind Man and the Fool play the part of a chorus in a Greek tragedy. In the first part of the play, when they are talking together,

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[1] Ibid., pp. 277-78.

[2] Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 159.

they become the mouthpieces of Fate,[1] revealing the relationship of Aeolfe and the young warrior. When Cuchulain goes out to fight, the women left standing on the bank mourn the coming disaster. The first woman says, "I have seen Cuchulain's roof tree leap into fire, and the woods split and blacken."[2]

As in all Yeats's plays there is ironic symbolism in On Baile's Strand. The Fool and the Blind Man are two wastrels who might have prevented the tragedy if they had desired to do so. Through the aimless chatter of fools and blind people, most of the unhappiness of the world arises.[3] While Cuchulain rushes out to die battling the waves, the Fool and the Blind Man, caring nothing for the impending disaster, seize their opportunity to rob the larders of homes of those persons who have gone down to the seashore.

For the plot of his next play, Deirdre, Yeats again went back to old Irish literature, selecting the story of Deirdre, which has appealed to almost every Irish poet and to many dramatists. Unlike George Russell and J. M. Synge, who have written of the same legend, Yeats has confined himself to the last act of the tragedy and has concentrated its essence in a single act of great dramatic intensity.[4]

The play opens with the arrival of Naisi and Deirdre at the palace

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[1] Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 79.

[2] Yeats, On Baile's Strand, in The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats, p. 271.

[3] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 59.

[4] Malone, op. cit., p. 142.

of King Conchobar. Fergus has guaranteed the good faith of the King, but Naisi and Deirdre suspect that the desire for revenge is behind the invitation to return. Fergus converses with the musicians before Naisi and Deirdre enter. Reviewing the history of Deirdre, the musicians say that when "she put on womanhood, and he lost peace."[1] The forbodings of the musicians and Fergus' efforts to reassure them prepare the audience for the treachery of the King. Fergus replies,

> I have believed the best of every man,
> And find that to believe it is enough
> To make a bad man show him at his best,
> Or even a good man swing his lantern higher.[2]

When Deirdre and Naisi enter, the musicians tell the rumors they have heard of a horrible revenge. Deirdre, frightened, cries,

> O mover of the stars.
> That made this delicate house of ivory,
> And made my soul its mistress, keep it safe![3]

Naisi reassures her, murmuring to Fergus, "She has the heart of the wild birds that fear the net of the fowler or the wicker cage."[4] She begs Naisi to flee with her; but Fergus tells her flight is impossible, that no safety can be found.

A messenger appears at the door with a message from the King, summoning Deirdre and Fergus to the table, but not Naisi. Naisi says he

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[1] William Butler Yeats, Deirdre in The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), p. 172.

[2] Ibid., p. 181.

[3] Ibid., p. 183.

[4] Ibid., p. 184.

will protect Deirdre with his sword. She, too, regains her courage and answers,

> O, singing woman, set it down in a book,
> That love is all we need, even though it is
> But the last drops we gather up like this;
> And though the drops are all we have known of life,
> For we have been most friendless--praise us for it,
> And praise the double sunset, for naught's lacking
> But a good end to the long, cloudy day![1]

She and Naisi sit down to play chess. Concobar appears at the door, and Naisi rushes out to fight him. Deirdre obtains a knife from a musician. Concobar and his men bring in Naisi tangled in a net. Concobar offers to release Naisi if he will renounce Deirdre. Deirdre is willing to make the sacrifice to save him, but Naisi forbids it; and he is murdered by the King's men.

In passionate delirium Deirdre feigns affection for Concobar so that she may go to the body of Naisi. Once there, she kills herself so she may be with Naisi in death. When Concobar parts the curtains, and finds her dead body, he declares passionately,

> You are traitors, all against me--all.
> And she has deceived me for a second time;
> And every common man can keep his wife,
> But not the King. . . . I, being King, did right
> In choosing her most fitting to be Queen
> And letting no boy lover take the sway.[2]

The Deirdre of Yeats's play stands out as one of the noblest, most tragic characters he has portrayed. She is willing to make the

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[1] Ibid., p. 191.

[2] Ibid., p. 203.

supreme sacrifice of death. As a character, she is the most individualized of all those that Yeats has portrayed.[1] Her tragedy is the severing of her happiness, and the tragic force is the power of Fate or circumstance.

Over the entire play broods the inevitability of a Greek tragedy. The musicians serve the purpose of a chorus in a Greek tragedy, for they outline all events as they occur. The use of the chorus arouses the tragic expectancy of the audience so that the unfolding of the fateful history is followed with interest. When Deirdre and Naisi first enter, the dark furtive figures of swarthy men moving in the background strike a sinster note. The atmosphere is charged with suspicion and treachery, and the audience is prepared by the skill of the dramatist to receive the full impression of horror.[2]

In few of Yeats's plays is there any real attempt to create character, but rather is there an attempt to express the emotions and elemental passions through figures which are only symbols. The protagonists of the plays do not emerge as full-bodied or red-blooded characters. There is, however, always conflict, not always the conflict of will with will, but certainly the conflict of the material and the spiritual worlds. The conflict is shown through fairies, demons, and visions. Van Doren, in evaluating the plays of Yeats, has said:

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[1] Malone, op. cit., pp. 142-43.

[2] Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 161.

> His plays are somewhat lacking in structure; they occasionally fail in dramatic effect; they are often vague and inconclusive; but all of them are beautifully written, and the best of them have stirred their audiences to a profound and poetic response.[1]

Summary

William Butler Yeats has written five plays that are outstandingly tragic in tone--The Countess Cathleen, Cathleen ni Houlihan, The King's Threshold, On Baile's Strand, and Deirdre. Three of the plays, The King's Threshold, On Baile's Strand, and Deirdre, are based on old Irish folk tales; and The Countess Cathleen is a translation from an old French tale. According to the classical conception of tragedy, the action of the plays is simple; and no comic situations or lighter elements are included. The Countess Cathleen portrays the Countess Cathleen, who, during a famine, sells her soul to the devil in order that the peasants may have food. The play symbolizes the conflict between good and evil, Cathleen symbolizing goodness. Cathleen ni Houlihan, a patriotic drama, tells the tragedy of a young man, who, on the night of his wedding, is called to fight for Ireland. The tragic force is the patriotic ardor inspired by war, and it brings destruction to many. The King's Threshold is a play with a purpose, written to vindicate the right of the poet in the community. Seanchon, the poet, starves himself to death because he has been removed from his high seat near the King. By his death he attempts to break the

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[1] Carl and Mark Van Doren, American and British Literature Since 1890, p. 288.

tragic force, the power of public opinion discriminating against the poet. On Baile's Strand, following the old heroic legend, reveals the tragedy of Cuchulain, who, in a duel, unknowingly kills his own son. The tragic force in this play, as in Deirdre, is fate. Deirdre, following the old story, shows Deirdre as a tragic character, whose happiness is terminated by the death of Naisi. In three of the plays, The Countess Cathleen, The King's Threshold, and Deirdre deaths occur on the stage. In the field of poetic, symbolic tragedy William Butler Yeats has been most outstanding.

John Millington Synge

John Millington Synge is considered by most critics as not only the greatest dramatist of the Irish Theater, but one of the greatest dramatists who has written in English.[1] He is also a peasant dramatist in that all of his plays, with the exception of one, are based upon the life of the people living by the sea and on the hills in the west of Ireland.[2] "There can be little doubt," another writer comments, "that the peasant play . . . owes its success to this writer who at the outset revealed its dramatic and poetic possibilities."[3]

For the most part, Synge's plays do not fit easily into the categories of comedy and tragedy, for "pathos is always close behind his

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[1] Williams, op. cit., p. 178.
Malone, op. cit., p. 156.
P. P. Howe, J. M. Synge (London: Martin Secker, 1912), p. 19.

[2] Henry Seidel Canby, "The Works of Synge," Yale Review 2:767, July 1913.

[3] Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 316.

humor, and the humor of rich humanity supplies his serious drama and keeps it from over-intensity."[1] Based upon a radical and hopeless disillusionment, Synge's dramas, comedies and tragedies alike, are all sad. "The drift of all Synge's work has been to emphasize the eternal hostility between a harsh and repugnant world of facts controlled by law, and the inviting realm of lawless imagination."[2]

Born in a suburb of Dublin in 1871, John Millington Synge, a member of an old Anglo-Irish family, was the youngest of eight children. He entered Trinity College, Dublin, at an early age and received a degree in four years. He had three great interests--nature, music, and languages. He knew every nook in the Wicklow Mountains, was proficient in piano, violin, and musical composition, and mastered several ancient and modern languages.[3] With equal facility he won prizes in Hebrew and Irish, and a scholarship at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. "As a boy he knew the note and plummage of every bird, and when and where they were to be found."[4]

In 1893 Synge finished college and went to Germany to prepare for a musical career. After a year of wandering he gave up music and turned

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[1] Canby, _loc. cit._

[2] Stuart P. Sherman, "John Synge," _Nation_ 95: 609, December 26, 1912.

[3] Stanley J. Kunitz, editor, _Authors Today and Yesterday_ (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1933), pp. 641-42.

[4] Benjamin Brawley, _A Short History of the English Drama_ (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921), p. 233.

literature. Always interested in French literature, Synge went to Paris, hoping to qualify himself for literary criticism. For five years he lived in Paris, visiting his family in Ireland for only a part of each year.

In 1898 he met William Butler Yeats. At that time Synge was miserably existing in the hope he would soon find recognition as a critic. Yeats, recognizing Synge's genius, persuaded him to go to the Aran Islands, treeless, almost primitive islands off the coast of Donegal, and to live for a time among the peasants on the west coast. Here, on these islands, primitive conditions still remained; and the speech of the country had not lost its original flavor.[1]

From this time on until his death in 1909, Synge lived a part of every year in the Aran Islands. He lived among the people as one of them, conversed with them in Irish, entertained them with his fiddle, and noted the beauty of their speech. In an account of his personal experiences, he tells how he listened through a chink in the floor to servant girls in the room below in order to set down faithfully, word by word, innumerable phrases of peasant speech.[2] It was in these islands that he first heart many of the anecdotes and sayings which later found their way into his plays. In 1907 he published The Aran Islands, a journal of his daily life on the island; and in this source may be found

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[1] Carl and Mark Van Doren, American and British Literature Since 1890, p. 291.

[2] Williams, op. cit., p. 207.

many of the incidents which afterward were used in his plays.[1]

Yeats, who grew to know Synge intimately, has described him thus, "He was a drifting, silent man full of hidden passion, and loved wild islands because there, set out in the light of day, he saw what lay hidden in himself."[2] Yeats has also said of Synge's personality, "He loves all that has edge, all that is salt in the mouth, all that is rough to the hand, all that heightens the emotion by contest, all that stings into life the sense of tragedy."[3]

Synge was ill on January 26, 1907, when the first performance of The Playboy of the Western World caused one of the stormiest controversies in all literary history. There is little doubt that these disturbances aggravated his condition. In 1908 he had an operation for cancer, and while he was convalescing in Germany his mother died. Her death was such a great shock that Synge returned to the hospital, never to leave it again. He died in 1909 and was buried in Dublin. Deirdre of the Sorrows was written during the last months of his illness.[4]

Because the thought of death was always in Synge's mind, he lived his life very fully; and the outstanding quality of his work is its intensity. The characters in his plays, during the short while they are on the stage, make the supreme gesture of their lives. All that has

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[1] Howe, op. cit., p. 20.

[2] W. B. Yeats, "J. M. Synge and the Ireland of His Time," Forum 46: 192, August, 1911.

[3] Ibid., p. 190.

[4] Kunitz, op. cit., p. 644.

happened in their past lives leads up to the time when they are seen on the stage, and in a few significant words and actions they reach their consummation.[1] Synge himself put on the lips of Deirdre what must have been something of his own philosophy of life when he said, "It should be a sweet thing to have what is best and richest, if it's for a short space only."[2]

In the Shadow of the Glen, Synge's first play, written in 1903, pictures the tragedy arising from the loneliness of life in the mountain glens, a loneliness that drives men to harsh, unfeeling actions. The scene is a cottage in County Wicklow; in a bed against the wall lies the body of Dan Burke, who has died only that morning. His wife, Nora Burke, is seated at a table, counting the contents of an old stocking. A tramp, seeking shelter, knocks at the door; and Nora asks him in. A few minutes later she leaves him with the dead man while she goes to tell the neighbors of Dan's death. She has been gone only a short time when Dan raises his head from beneath the sheet and demands a drink of water. Terrified, the tramp hands it to him. When Dan hears some one coming, he commands the tramp to cover him again and not to tell what he has seen.

Nora comes in with her lover, Michael Dara. The two of them talk together quietly in the corner, while Michael speculates on the probable

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[1] L. A. G. Strong, "John Millington Synge," Bookman 73: 131, April, 1931.

[2] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 160.

value of the farm. They count the money left in the old stocking, and Michael talks of marriage. Dan gets up noiselessly from under the sheet, tiptoes to the door, bolts it tightly, and then shouts angrily to Michael,

> Now you'll not marry her the time I'm rotting here below in the Seven Churches, and you'll see the thing I'll give you will follow you on the high mountains when the wind is high. . . . (Turning to Nora.) It's little you care if it's dead or living I am, but there'll be an end now of your fine times, and all the talk you have of young men and of old men, and of the mist coming up or going down. (He opens the door.) You'll walk out from that door, Nora Burke, and it's not tomorrow, or the next day, or any day of your life, that you'll be getting old with that life, I'm telling you; it's soon your teeth'll be falling, and your head'll be the like of a bush where sheep do be leaping a gap.[1]

The tramp tries to appease Dan, but Dan remains obdurate. Michael refuses to accompany Nora; but the tramp, rising to his feet, says he will go with Nora.

> Tramp. You'll not be getting your death with myself, lady of the house, and I knowing all the ways a man can put food in his mouth. . . . We'll be going not, I'm telling you, and the time you'll be feeling the cold, and the frost, and the great rain, and the suns again, and the south wind blowing in the glens, you'll not be sitting up on a wet ditch, the way you're after sitting in this place, making yourself old with looking on each day, and it passing you by. You'll be saying one time, "It's a grand evening, by the grace of God," and another time, "It's a wild night, God help us, but it'll pass surely." . . . You'll be hearing the grouse and the owls with them, and the larks and the big thrushes when the days are warm, and it's not from the like of them you'll be hearing a talk of getting old and losing the hair off you, and the light of your eyes, but it's fine songs you'll be hearing when the sun goes up, and there'll be no old fellow sneezing, the like of a sick sheep, close to yourself.

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[1] J. M. Synge, In the Shadow of the Glen (Boston: John W. Luce and Company, 1911), pp. 33-35.

Nora. I'm thinking it's myself will be wheezing that time with lying down under the Heavens when the night lies cold; but you've a fine bit of talk, stranger, and it's with yourself I'll go.[1]

She and the tramp go out into the rain, leaving the husband and the lover drinking together in entire amity.

The tragedy of Nora Burke is essentially the tragedy of loneliness. Married to a hard, grasping man many years her senior, she instinctively seeks the companionship of her shallow, weak-willed lover, Michael. She expresses something of this growing loneliness when she says to Michael,

> . . . For what good is a bit of a farm with cows on it, and sheep on the back hills, when you'd be sitting looking out from a door the like of that door, and seeing nothing but the mists rolling down the bog, and the mists again, and they rolling up the bog, and hearing nothing but the wind crying out in the bits of broken trees were left from the great storm, and the streams roaring with the rain.[2]

Nora is not the type of woman to wander on the roads, but even for her there will be a certain degree of compensation; there will be the joy of the road once she learns to know it. Howe, in speaking of Nora, says, "She is no longer the impersonal butt for an old man's generalizations upon women; she is Nora Burke with a personal tragedy that will stay in the mind as long as the tragedy of Nora Hellmer's."[3]

Throughout the play, as in most of Synge's dramas, there is a thread of irony. One critic has said that this attitude of ironical detachment, which is so alien to Irish sentiment, is due to the influence

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[1] Ibid., pp. 37-39.

[2] Ibid., p. 29.

[3] Howe, op. cit., p. 113.

of French literature on Synge's writing.[1] In the Shadow of the Glen shows the irony of love. Nora is turned out to roam the roads, not with her lover, but with a tramp, a stranger whom she has never seen before that evening. Inside, the husband and lover, who ought to be quarreling, drink together happily. Nora begins a new life, freer for the moment than her old life, but proving, in the end, to be only the old dull round of living.[2]

In many of Synge's plays one finds the tragic situations mingled with bits of comedy which tend to give the dramas superb contrasts of tone. In this respect his plays follow the Shakespearian idea of tragedy.[3] This is particularly true of In the Shadow of the Glen. At moments the play approaches farce, especially when the supposed corpse rises up and drinks whiskey with the tramp. The situation, however, turns to pathos when Nora sits with the tramp, her lover, and her dead husband, listening to the wind and thinking of the coming of old age and death.[4]

Nearly all of Synge's plays can be traced to some particular incident found in his journal. This is particularly true of Riders to the Sea, written in 1904. The central incident in the play was suggested

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[1] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, pp. 175-76.

[2] Ibid., p. 177.

[3] Howe, op. cit., p. 146.

[4] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, pp. 168-69.

to Synge by a tale that he had heard of a man whose body had been washed up on a distant coast, and who had been identified as the last of a long line of seafaring people, all of whom had died at sea. Of the "keen," a way of expressing grief entirely characteristic of the people of the Aran Islands, Synge has said:

> In this cry of pain the inner consciousness of the people seems to lay itself bare for an instant and to reveal the moods of beings who feel their isolation in the face of a universe that wars upon them with wind and seas. They are usually silent, but in the presence of death all outward show of indifference or patience is forgotten, and they shriek with pitiable despair before the horror of the fate to which they are all doomed.[1]

The poignancy of this cry is heard through every line of Riders to the Sea.[2]

Maurya is now an old woman, and the sea has claimed the lives of her husband and five sons. She has only one son, Bartley, left. Against her will he takes the gray pony to the fair. They quarrel, but Maurya goes after him to take back her harsh words. When she returns, she tells her daughters, Nora and Cathleen, about a vision she has seen, Michael, the last son who was drowned, riding a gray pony and wearing fine clothes. A few minutes later men carry in the body of Bartley, covered with a bit of sail. Maurya, heart-broken by the news, speaks in a hushed tone to herself:

> They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me. . . . I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south and

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[1] Quoted from Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 323.

[2] Loc. cit.

> you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other. I'll have no call now to be going and getting holy water in the dark night after Samhuin, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening. . . . It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God; but it's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time surely. . . . They're all together this time, and the end is come. May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Sheaumus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn (bending her head); and may he have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of everyone is left living in the world. . . . Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied.[1]

Riders to the Sea is a compressed picture of the helplessness of Maurya in her hopeless struggle with the sea. Her grief when her last son is taken from her is a more subdued, more restrained sorrow than anything which she has previously felt. The reader watches her gain a deep submission, an acceptance of the situation that has to be met and endured. Thus, she obtains a noble resignation which, although it does not stop her grief, helps her to bear it unflinchingly. Few dramas of the modern theater have revealed a character who is more truly pathetic than Maurya in her final conflict with the sea.

Critics have not agreed as to whether Riders to the Sea can be called a tragedy in the strictest sense of the word. Nicoll, who believes it is great tragedy, says, "The sea becomes a living force, a demon hungering after men; the figures in the cottage, weak as they may be in

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[1] J. M. Synge, Riders to the Sea in Contemporary Drama--English and Irish Plays, edited by E. Bradlee Watson and Benfield Pressey (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), pp. 23-25.

face of the physical power of the ocean, are titanic in their courage and grandeur."[1] Boyd also states, "The inevitability of a Greek tragedy weighs upon each scene. . . . There are few more flawless tragedies than this little piece with its subtle blending of diverse elements."[2] These critics have held to the modern definition of tragedy, a play in which "the action is largely unhappy," a criterion which, in itself, is sufficient to enable one to classify Riders to the Sea as deep tragedy.

Other critics, adhering to the Aristotelian definition of tragedy, have held that the play is not a true tragedy because of the fact that there is no struggle between human wills. Maurya simply succombs to a resistless fate--the sea.[3] Clark, however, feels that the struggle is in the background and cannot be seen or participated in by the audience. The struggle is so hopeless, moreover, that it leaves room for only blind submission; whereas a true tragedy gives the character a chance to fight. A tragic figure must have the opportunity to fail honorably, to put forth his best efforts, and to fail, after a valiant struggle, because the forces are finally too great to be overcome. All this struggle must be seen by the audience.[4]

In the immensity of its issues, Riders to the Sea may be considered a Greek play. In one act the dramatist has concentrated all the passionate

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[1] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 405.

[2] Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 95.

[3] Frank Wadleigh Chandler, Aspects of Modern Drama (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), p. 263.

[4] Clark, op. cit., p. 341.

horror of death, and the play is relieved by no comic elements or lighter situations. Old Maurya becomes a symbolic figure, personifying the grief of a people in the face of a common enemy. There is no suspense as to the fate of Bartley; one knows he has gone to meet the same fate his brothers did, and the interest of the reader is not in the particular event, but in the great, universal tragedy of death. "Maurya takes on the profound significance of an Aeschylean figure, in her vain protest against Fate, and her ultimate resignation."[1]

For the subject matter of the play Deirdre of the Sorrows, Synge has gone back to the legendary story of the beautiful Deirdre and has written the greatest modern version of the Gaelic classic.[2]

Deirdre, kept prisoner by Concobar, longs for a lover with "hair like the raven, and his skin like the snow and his lips like blood spilt on it."[3] Meeting Naisi one day in the woods, she falls in love with him and persuades him to elope with her to Scotland. For seven years they are blissfully happy. Then Owen, a spy from Concobar comes, bringing the news that they are forgiven and may return to Emain. Deirdre wishes to return, for she has a great fear of growing old and of their love fading away; but she has a presentiment of evil. Naisi, however, is serene.

Naisi and Deirdre are awaiting Concobar in a tent in Emain when

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[1] Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 322.

[2] Boyd, Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 108.

[3] J. M. Synge, Deirdre of the Sorrows (Boston: John W. Luce and Company, 1911), p. 23.

Deirdre pushes back a curtain and finds a new grave which she knows is intended for Naisi and his brothers. She begs him to flee with her, but he refuses to leave his brothers. Filled with weariness and fear of death, Naisi quarrels with Deirdre. Angrily, he dashes off to defend his brothers, leaving no kind words for Deirdre.

Suddenly a shot is heard, and Deirdre knows that Naisi and his brothers are dead. Pushing back the curtains a few minutes later, she sees the grave now filled with the dead bodies. Conochar enters, and she speaks to him, saying:

> Deirdre (in a high and quiet tone.) I have put away sorrow like a shoe that is worn out and muddy, for it is I that have had a life that will be envied by great companies. It was not by a low birth I made kings uneasy, and they sitting in the halls of Emain. It was not a low thing to be chosen by Conochar, who was wise, and Naisi had no match for bravery. It is not a small thing to be rid of grey hairs, and the loosening of the teeth. . . . (Showing Naisi's knife.) I have a little key to unlock the prison of Naisi you'd shut from his youth for ever. Keep back, Conochar; for the High King who is your master has put his hands between us. (She half turns to the grave.) It was sorrows for foretold, but great joys were my share always; yet it is a cold place I must go, to be with you, Naisi; and it's cold your arms will be this night that were warm about my neck so often. . . . It's a pitiful thing to be talking out when your ears are shut to me. It's a pitiful thing, Conochar, you have done this night in Emain; yet a thing will be a joy and triumph to the ends of life and time. (She presses the knife into her heart and sinks into the grave.)[1]

Throughout the drama death and old age become the leading tragic themes. When Deirdre persuades Naisi to elope with her, she says, "For

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[1] Ibid., pp. 91-92.

it's a sweet life you and I could have, Naisi. . . . It should be a sweet thing to have what is best and richest, if it's for a short space only."[1] Owen, sent by Conchobar to spy on her happiness, tells her, "Queens get old, Deirdre, with their white and long arms going from them and their back hooping. I tell you it's a poor thing to see a queen's nose reaching down to scrape her chin."[2] When Deirdre and Naisi prepare to return to Emain, she says,

> Woods of Cuan, woods of Cuan, dear country of the east! It's seven years we've had a life was joy only, and this day we're going west, this day we're facing death, maybe, and death should be a poor, untidy thing, though it's a queen that dies.[3]

Viewing the bodies of Naisi and the three brothers, she remarks, "It's you three will not see age or death coming."[4]

Deirdre, more than any other of Synge's characters, is the true tragic heroine. She steps out of the legend and lives before the reader as an amorous woman, passionately devoted to the beauty and happiness which are her life.[5] Her tragedy is the passing of happiness, the infinite sorrow of living. The conflict arises from the severing of her love and Naisi's, and Death is the tragic force. A seven years' love "without fleck or flaw" is "surely a wonder"; but, like all good things, it must come to an end. Once back in Emain, Naisi finds his love poisoned

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[1] Ibid., pp. 39-40.

[2] Ibid., p. 52.

[3] Ibid., p. 66.

[4] Ibid., p. 84.

[5] Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 331.

by the canker of doubt and weariness; and their happiness is nearly sundered. It is a tragic pity that the two deaths did not come sooner, that Naisi's last words to her who had given all for his sake should have been words of cruel, bitter import.[1] Over the entire play broods a feeling of inevitability that is almost Greek. Deirdre's fate had been ordained by the curse of the Druids.[2] Van Doren says of Deirdre, "She is a living woman, possessed of great power of death and old age; and in the course of the play she expresses for the last time in Synge the poet's profound dread of death and old age."[3]

As a writer of peasant drama, Synge is outstanding. "His skill in the delineation of character, his style, and his sense of majesty make him a superb tragic dramatist."[4] Into the speech of the Irish peasant he has put a wistfulness and a passion of his own. He has written "a prose of beautiful cadence, varied and profound, a fit vehicle for great drama."[5] Harriet Monroe, in an article in Poetry, has said of Synge's tragedy:

> Synge probed the tragedy of human life as profoundly as Aeschylus or Shakespeare, whether that tragedy was expressed through an Aran Island mother or fisherman or

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[1] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 408.

[2] Howe, op. cit., p. 92.

[3] Carl and Mark Van Doren, British and American Literature Since 1890, p. 296.

[4] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 410.

[5] Howe, op. cit., p. 155.

> through the deathless love of Deirdre, the beautiful; and his sense of life's comedy was touched by the grotesque, that slant of tragedy perceived by all great artists who must inevitably feel the littleness of human affairs.[1]

Summary

John Millington Synge has written six plays, three of which are outstandingly tragic. All of the plays, except Deirdre, are based upon Irish peasant life. In the Shadow of the Glen, his first play, shows the tragedy of loneliness, the passing of life without fulfillment. Riders to the Sea depicts the grief of a woman whose six sons have all been drowned at sea. Deirdre of the Sorrows, based on the legendary story, reveals the coming of old age and death, and the fading away of love as a tragedy. All three plays are simple in action; and Riders to the Sea and Deirdre, following the classical conception of tragedy, are wholly tragic, showing no comic situations or lighter elements. In the Shadow of the Glen, however, resembles farce in plot; and the tragic situations are closely followed by the comic ones. The conflict in each case arises from a clash of wills with circumstances too powerful for the characters to control. This drama shows loneliness as a tragic force, and in the end Nora is turned out to wander on the road. Deirdre has, as tragic forces, death and old age, and also the termination of love. In Riders to the Sea the tragic force is the power of the sea--an ever-present menace in the

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[1] Harriet Monroe, "Padraic Colum Collects," Poetry 41:283-84, August, 1932.

lives of the fishermen; this is the only one of Synge's plays which does not show a great struggle on the stage. Neither Deirdre nor Nora meets her fate without a struggle, but Maurya accepts death submissively, succombing to her fate without resistance. All three plays show a certain degree of compensation in the tragic ending. Nora will wander on the roads, but, despite the hardships, she will find joys in the open road if she once learns to enjoy them. Deirdre meets death bravely, and it proves a benison that prevents a great love from dying. Even Maurya, because she is submissive, will have peace; and she need worry no longer when the breakers are roaring. Only one play, Deirdre, ends in death on the stage. By most critics Synge is believed to be the most outstanding writer of tragic Irish drama.

Lady Gregory

Lady Gregory is known primarily for her comedies of Irish peasant life, but she has also written four plays which are distinctly tragic in tone. Three of these plays, Grania, Kincora, and Dervorgilla, are based upon legendary characters of Irish history; but the fourth play, The Goal Gate, is concerned with peasant life. Lady Gregory's most interesting work, however, has been her comedies; and for this reason her tragedies comprise only a small amount of her work.

Isabella Augusta Persse, a member of a notable English family, was born at Roxborough, County Galway, in 1859. Her near neighbor was Edward Martyn, who lived at Tillyra Castle; and George Moore lived a little

farther away at Moore Hall, in County Mayo.[1] In 1881 she married Sir William Gregory, many years her senior, who, up to his death in 1892, was a violent partisan whose sympathies were characteristically on the side of rebellion.

During the greater part of her life Lady Gregory lived among the peasants of her native Galway, never being away from her home for any prolonged period. In her early life she was attracted by the folk-stories and folk-songs of the cottagers, and she began a systematic collection of the material which she has presented to the world in many of her plays. Her love for the people grew until it became almost a passion. It led her to learn the Irish language so that she could converse freely with the Irish-speaking peasantry of Galway.[2]

In 1894 Lady Gregory published the biography of her husband. At about the same time she began to write fiction, using Irish folk-lore as her material. A chance meeting with Yeats in 1898 identified her with the Irish Renaissance Movement. She came to be known as its godmother; she was called "The Charwoman of the Abbey Theater," a title bestowed upon her by George Bernard Shaw.[3]

Although Lady Gregory's literary fame rests largely upon her distinctive personality and her position as a patron of letters, a number of her works have lasting qualities. Several of her one-act plays are

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[1] Malone, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

[2] Ibid., p. 57.

[3] Kunitz, op. cit., p. 281.

considered among the finest examples of the form and have been played in all parts of the world. Few Little Theater groups have failed to give at least one of her one-act plays, so simple and homely are they and so well do they lend themselves to amateur production. All are written in her favorite "Kiltartan," the Anglo-Irish dialect of Western Ireland, and deal with either native folk-lore or with everyday peasant life.[1]

The Goal Gate, a one-act peasant drama written in 1903, shows the tragic note more clearly than any of her more pretentious dramas.[2] A mother and her son's wife have come to the prison where Denis, the son, is held for a political offense. The gossip among their neighbors has been that Denis has informed on his companions, but the women are convinced he will soon be released. Then they will go with him to America, where he will be free from gossip. There is not enough money for all to go, but the mother is willing to go to the workhouse. The two women have brought with them a letter they have received recently, but neither can read. They believe it to be a notice telling of the son's release from prison.

The door is opened, and the gatekeeper appears with a lantern in his hand. He reads the letter, which tells that Denis died yesterday. He goes inside to bring out the clothes of the dead man. Both women are

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 282-83.

[2] Boyd, *Ireland's Literary Renaissance*, p. 348.

crushed by the news, their sorrow being much greater because Denis died with a blemish on his name. The wife sinks on the doorstep, rocking herself and keening:

> Oh, Denis, my heart is broken you to have died with the hard word upon you! My grief you to be alone now that spent so many nights in company! [sic.]
> What way will I be going back through Gort and through Kilbecanty? The people will not be coming out keening you, they will say no prayers for the rest of your soul!
> What way will I be the Sunday and I going up the hill to the Mass? Every woman with her own comrade, and Mary Cushin to be walking her lone!
> What way will I be the Monday and the neighbors turning their heads from the house? The turf Denis cut lying on the bog, and no well-wisher to bring it to the hearth!
> What way will I be in the night time, and none but the dog calling after you? Two women to be mixing a cake, and not a man in the house to break it!
> What way will I sow the field, and no man to drive the furrow? The sheaf to be scattered before springtime that was brought together at the harvest!
> I would not begrudge you, Denis, and you leaving praises after you. The neighbors keening along with me would be better to me than an estate.
> But my grief your name to be blackened in the time of the blackening of the rushes! Your name never to rise up again in the growing time of the year![1]

The gatekeeper appears and hands them a few clothes. He tells them Denis is buried in the field of the jail and adds, "Those that break the law must be made an example of. Why should they be laid out like a well-behaved man? A long rope and a short burying, that is the order for a man that is hanged."[2]

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[1] Lady Augusta Gregory, The Gaol Gate in Seven Short Plays (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), pp. 181-82.

[2] Ibid., p. 183.

The grief of the women mounts higher at these words. They curse violently when they learn the companions of Denis were set free the previous day. Denis had been outside the house, and his footprints had been identified. When Denis had refused to inform on his companions, the law set the others free because there was no evidence against them.

The gatekeeper goes in and shuts the door; the two women are overjoyed to learn that Denis was no traitor. The mother holds out her hands, saying,

> Are there any people in the streets at all till I call on them to come hither? Did they ever hear in Galway such a thing to be done, a man to die for his neighbor?
> Tell it out in the streets for the people to hear, Denis Cahel from Slieve Echtge is dead. It was Denis Cahel from Daire-caol that died in the place of his neighbor! . . . It was not a little thing for him to die, and him protecting his neighbor.
> One word to the judge and Denis was free, they offered him all sorts of riches. They brought him drink in the gaol, and gold, to swear away the life of his neighbor! . . . Denis would not speak, he shut his mouth, he would never be an informer. . . . Come hither, Mary Cushin, till we'll shout it through the roads, Denis Cahel is dead for his neighbor![1]

The Gaol Gate represents a situation in which the tragedy of death is somewhat mitigated. In keeping with the modern idea of tragedy, the play emphasizes the fact that there are shades of tragedy. In the eyes of the Irish, who take much pride in family relationships, the fact that Denis is believed to have turned traitor is unspeakably tragic. Death in itself is tragic, but a death by which one sacrifices himself for others

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 184-85.

carries a certain degree of compensation. In the fact that her son has been noble, the mother finds much consolation.

It is interesting to notice that in this highly dramatic, one-act drama no deaths and scarcely any action occur on the stage; but the play is as thoroughly tragic as though it were all acted out for the reader. The mother and the wife stand out as great tragic characters in an action which is "as universal as it is intensely national."[1] The conflict is one arising from pride in family name; but the tragic force is not so much death as it is dishonor or infamy, which are both averted in the end. The tragic intensity of the grief of the women reaches a climax in the triumphant caoin of grief and joy with which the mother greets the news of the son's fidelity till death. Malone says of the play, "All the elements of doubt and uncertainty, pity, and helplessness are combined in this little play to make it one of the great tragic experiences of the modern theater."[2]

The three other tragedies, Grania, Dervorgilla, and Kincora have themes chosen from legendary Irish history. Most critics feel that these plays represent a great falling away from the standard of the comedies and are better suited for study than for stage production. The characterizations are not so strong as they are in the comedies, and the language in a few

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[1] Katherine Brezy, "Lady Gregory and the Lore of Ireland," Forum 48:465, October, 1912.

[2] Malone, op. cit., p. 159.

cases lapses into mechanical emptiness.[1] Edward Storer, in an article in Living Age, makes this statement:

> Lady Gregory has written comedies which are not only the best comedies of the Irish National theater, but which compare favorably with any that the English theater has produced in the last twenty years or so. Her tragedies, however, full of fine lines and strong passages they may be, are too uneven and flimsy ever to establish themselves permanently in any repertory.[2]

Grania, Lady Gregory's finest tragedy,[3] a three-act drama involving only three characters is based on the famous folk tale of Diarmuid and Grania. Lady Gregory says of Grania,

> I think I turned to Grania because so many have written about the sad, lovely Deirdre, who when overtaken by sorrow made no good battle at the last. Grania had more power of will, and for good or evil took the shaping of her life in her own hands.[4]

Grania, a beautiful peasant girl, has been chosen by the elderly Finn to be his wife. Grania, however, falls in love with the youthful Diarmuid, Finn's closest friend. Finn, learning of their love, scorns Grania; but she persuades Diarmuid to elope with her. Diarmuid promises Finn he will never take Grania as his wife; and each year that he is faithful to his promise, he will send back a whole seed-cake. If the seed-cake is returned broken, Finn will know Diarmuid has broken his promise.

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[1] "Irish Folk-History Plays," Nation 94:572, June 6, 1912.

[2] Edward Storer, "Dramatists of Today--Lady Gregory," Living Age 281:336, May 9, 1914.

[3] Malone, op. cit., p. 158.

[4] Lady Augusta Gregory, Notes in Irish Folk-History Plays, First Series, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), p. 195.

For seven years Diarmuid and Grania wander in the forest. Then one day he sees her in the arms of the King of the Foreign who has attempted to save her from falling in a stream. Diarmuid is so aroused he decides to wed Grania and to break his promise to Finn. When Diarmuid has once surrendered to her, Grania turns from him, having found charm only in his resistance. She desires to return to the world again where her beauty and charm can be adequately admired; but Diarmuid says such an action would be foolish, for they would be killed. They are about to quarrel, when Finn, disguised as a beggar, arrives. He says he is a messenger from Finn, sent to know why Diarmuid has not returned the whole seed-cake. With his accusations of treachery, the beggar so angers Diarmuid that he rushes away to kill the King of Foreign in order to prove his constancy to Grania.

Finn, undisguised, appears to Grania, accusing her of treachery. A shout is heard; and men bear in Diarmuid, wounded in battle. Grania kneels beside him, calling his name in vain. At length Diarmuid opens his eyes; but his whole thought is for Finn, his master whom he has betrayed. Dying, Diarmuid has no word for Grania, his wife. The men bear out the body, but Grania's grief has abated. She turns angrily to Finn, saying,

> It is not with Diarmuid I am going out. It is an empty thing to be crying the loss of a comrade that banished me from his thoughts for the sake of any friend at all. It is with you I will go to Almhuin. Diarmuid is no more

> to me than a sod that has been quenched with the rain. . . . As for the love I had for him it is dead now, and turned to be as cold as the snow is out beyond the path of the sun. . . . He had no love for me at any time.[1]

As Grania and Finn go out together, Finn says,

> I thought to leave you and to go from you, and I cannot do it. For we three have been seven years as if alone in the world; and it was the cruelty and the malice of love made its sport with us, when we thought it was our own way we were taking, driving us here and there, knocking you in between us like the ball between two goals, and the hurlers being out of sight and beyond the boundaries of the world. And all the three of us have been as if worsted in that play. And now there are but the two of us left, and whether we love or hate one another, it is certain I can never feel love or hatred from any woman from this out, or you yourself for any other man. And so as to yourself and myself, Grania, we must battle it out to the end.[2]

The action of the play is simple; and death takes place on the stage, an Elizabethan characteristic of tragedy. Of the three characters in the play, Finn is perhaps the most tragic; for he is the only one who has loved deeply. He tells Grania she was his "share of the world,"[3] and she deceived him. Finn, elderly and ugly in appearance, could not hope to rival the youthful Diarmuid. For years Finn neglects his kingdom, pursuing Grania relentlessly; but, by a strange irony of fate, his passion deserts him when he actually gains her; and Grania, at the close of the play, means little to him. Even Diarmuid is a more tragic character than

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[1] Lady Gregory, Grania in Irish Folk-History Plays, p. 61.

[2] Ibid., p. 66.

[3] Ibid., p. 53.

Grania. He dies heart-broken because he has deceived his master, and because Grania has not lived up to his expectations.

Grania is a character who degenerates during the play. In the first act she is a Shakespearian woman of the first order, vigorous and direct in all that she does. She does not seem the type of woman who would change and who would dissipate her love in one moment at the death-bed of Diarmuid. The "tragic defect" in Grania's character is her fickleness which leads her to turn readily to Finn after Diarmuid's death. Because of this insincere trait of her character, the reader has little sympathy for her at the end of the play.[1] Instead, sympathy goes out to Finn, whom life has cheated of all that he held precious.

Throughout the play the idea of fate or destiny is seen working out the lives of the various characters. It was fate that made Grania love Diarmuid as soon as she saw him. Finn himself sounds a fatalistic note in the play when he says to Grania, "There is no one I ever gave my heart to but was swept from me in some hard way."[2] Anticipating the sorrow that is to come, Diarmuid, now thoroughly disillusioned in love, tells Grania, "I was no better than a fool, thinking any woman at all could give love which would last longer than the froth upon the stream."[3] The conflict arises from disillusionment in love, but the tragic force is

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[1] Storer, op. cit., pp. 335-36.

[2] Gregory, Grania, p. 13.

[3] Ibid., p. 127.

clearly shown to be Fate or Destiny ruling over the lives of the characters.

Kincora, Lady Gregory's second historical play, has a much more pretentious plot than Grania. Based upon early Irish history, it tells the story of Malachi and Brian, rulers of neighboring provinces of Ireland who were constantly at strife. They finally agreed to divide Ireland between them, Malachi taking the northern half and Brian taking the southern half. Maelmora, king of Leinster, made an alliance with Sitric, leader of the Danes of Dublin, to resist Brian's authority. Brian and Malachi put down the rebellion at the battle at Glennara. Later Brian married Gormleith, sister of Maelmora, mother of Sitric and former wife of Malachi. Brian then subdued Malachi and became High King of Ireland. In later years Maelmora grew jealous and, deciding to revolt, was joined by Sitric. Brian met the two in the battle at Clontarf, where both he and Maelmora were killed; but the Danes were driven out from Ireland forever.[1]

Act one opens in the palace at Kincora, where Malachi and Maelmora have met with Brian to sign a treaty of peace. Brian is determined to have peace at any cost, but his wife Gormleith is not eager for peace. She was formerly the wife of Malachi before she married Brian, and she is determined to punish Malachi. By subtle contrivings she succeeds in stirring up her brother Maelmora to unite with her son Sitric against Brian and Malachi in the hope that Malachi will be killed. At the battle of Glennara, however, Brian and Malachi are victorious.

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[1] Gregory, "Notes," in Irish Folk-History Plays, pp. 200-203.

Sitric and Maelmora are brought before Brian and Malachi to be judged guilty of treachery and put to death. Gormleith begs for their lives, and Brian finally relents. Not long after this event, Malachi tries to raise an army against Brian; but when he finds that all are loyal to Brian he surrenders his kingdom and is content to rule under Brian. Thus, Brian becomes High King of Ireland.

In the third act Gormleith persuades Brian to call the army together for exercise, hoping that she can persuade him to war. Fearing that her power over Brian is lessening, she says, "His mind is as if slipping away to some place I cannot reach, some place that I do not know."[1] When Sitric comes to tell her that he has invited the Danes to attack Brian, Gormleith's first impulse is to tell Brian. Sitric asks her to sign a pledge agreeing to join with the Danes. Realizing that if she tells Brian of Sitric's treachery, Sitric will be killed, Gormleith is torn between two forces. She tries to warn Brian indirectly to have his army ready at Clontarf for the battle. He has had a dream in which a voice said, "Only at Clontarf will you come again to that vision and that perfect peace."[2] Gormleith tells him there will always be war because humanity is not perfected.

Brian laughs at her, telling her he plans to disband the army, giving each man a bonus. Leaving her, he tells her to cast the darkness

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[1] Gregory, Grania, p. 126.

[2] Ibid., p. 141.

from her "vexed, unhappy mind."[1] Gormleith, thoroughly angry, conspires against him, signing the pledge with the Danes. Maelmora, coming in, agrees to join with the Danes against Brian. When Malachi accuses her of treachery, Gormleith seeks to appease Brian, saying,

> I did it and I did not do it, Brian--I was not entirely to blame. I thought myself to be wise, to drag things here and there, to do some great thing, moving men with big words. Oh, I have pulled down the rafters of the roof that sheltered me![2]

Brian sorrowfully sends her to wander out on the road, a broken woman, a scorned queen. Heart-broken, Brian murmurs "War, war, keening and treachery, Ireland red again, red and stained through and through--trouble and treachery and war."[3] Then he recalls his dream telling him that he would find peace at Clontarf. He says,

> My place is already among the generations. . . . All the race of Lugardh reigned in this place, and went out of this door for the last time; and the traitors that betrayed them, and the women they loved. Give me my sword. (Malachi takes it and gives it to him.) It has another battle to win.[4]

The real tragic character of the play is Brian, whom Gormleith deceived and left saddened by her treachery. He is the idealist, seeking to bring everlasting peace and the Golden Rule to all Ireland. His tragedy is that he is far ahead of his time; Ireland in 998 was not prepared for such doctrine. The tragic forces working against him are those that work against all idealists--treachery, deceit, jealousy, and selfishness of

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[1] Ibid., p. 143.

[2] Ibid., p. 151.

[3] Ibid., p. 153.

[4] Ibid., p. 154.

great leaders, circumstances too strong for him to overcome. One feels that Brian, riding out to his death at Clontarf, will find only there the great peace for which he is seeking.

Dervorgilla, Lady Gregory's third historical tragedy, is concerned with the story of Dervorgilla, wife of O'Rourke, King of Breffny, who was taken away, willingly or unwillingly, by Diarmuid MacMurrough, King of Leinster, in the year 1152. O'Rourke invaded Leinster; and in the war that followed Diarmuid, driven from Ireland, appealed to Henry II of England for help. He was given an army under Strongbow, to whom Diarmuid promised Leinster as reward. By this means the English were first brought into Ireland. Dervorgilla, who lived to an old age, is said to have died at an abbey near Drogheda, in the year 1193.[1]

In her drama Lady Gregory has chosen the last episode of Dervorgilla's career as dramatic material. Dervorgilla is an old woman, and with her beauty and youth, has faded her fascination over men. When she brought the English into Ireland, she gained the endless hatred of her countrymen. Now she is hidden in a convent where no one except her two trusty servants, Finn and his wife Mona, know her true identity. To the countryside she appears as a Lady Bountiful, gracious of mein, queenly in dignity, a friend to the poor, and a rewarder of virtue. One day a beggar comes to the convent, singing a song about the wicked Dervorgilla. Unwittingly, Dervorgilla, through a slip of the tongue, reveals her identity. The

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[1] Gregory, "Notes," in Irish Folk-History Plays, pp. 180-1.

young men standing nearby are horror-stricken. In a silence that is truely impressive, one by one those to whom she has given prizes and favors lay them down at her feet and depart.

> Dervorgilla (Stands up with difficulty.) Since you were born and before you were born I have been here, kneeling and praying, fasting and asking forgiveness of God. I think my father God has forgiven me. They tell me my mother the church has forgiven me. . . . You are young. You will surely forgive me, for you are young. (They are all silent. . . . The lads lay down their gifts.). . . Do not be afraid to give back my gifts, do not separate yourself from your companions for my sake. For there is little of my life but is spent, and there has come upon me this day all the pain of the world and its anguish, seeing and knowing that a deed once done has no undoing, and the lasting trouble that my unfaithfulness has brought upon you and your children forever. . . . There is kindness in your unkindness, not leaving me to go and face the Scales of Judgment wrapped in comfortable words, and the praises of the poor, and the lulling of psalms, but from the swift, unflinching, terrible judgment of the young! (She sinks slowly to the ground holding to the chair. The stage begins to darken.)[1]

The action of the play is very simple, but Dervorgilla stands out as a great tragic character. She has erred, but she is willing to pay the price for her sin; and her repentance is deep and lasting. The theme of the tragedy, then, is the harsh, unflinching judgment of the younger generation upon an individual who has once erred. Dervorgilla's efforts to do good, to attempt to compensate in some way for the terrible wrong she has done her countrymen, are doomed to end in entire frustration. The conflict is a universal one--the struggle of an individual to regain his reputation; whereas the tragic force which constantly pushes him down

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[1] Gregory, Dervorgilla in Irish Folk-History Plays, First Series, pp. 185-86.

is the power of public opinion.

Malone praises the play very highly, considering it the best of the tragic folk-history plays. He says,

> No audience could remain unmoved as the tragedy of the Queen unfolds itself; there is strength, power, and nobility which will bear comparison with plays by Ibsen, Strindberg, or Hauptmann.[1]

As a writer of peasant tragedy, Lady Gregory has been very successful. Malone has said of her portrayal of peasant characters: "They are the product of a rich humanity, a keen sense of the ridiculous, and an unconscious snobbery, served with a garnishing of dialect speech which is magnificently effective for stage use."[2]

Summary

Lady Gregory, although known primarily as a writer of comedies, has written four plays that are distinctly tragic in tone. Three of the plays are based on legendary characters from Irish history, but the fourth play is an incident taken from contemporary Irish life. The Gaol Gate is a one-act tragedy showing the grief of a mother and a wife for a son who has been hanged for political reasons. Following the modern conception of tragedy, this play emphasizes the thought that the death of a loved one who has died honorably is much easier to bear than the death of one who has died branded as a traitor. The conflict here is one between

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[1] Malone, op. cit., p. 160.

[2] Ibid., p. 158.

pride of family name and public opinion, the tragic force being infamy or disgrace rather than death itself. Grania has as its conflict the disillusionment of love, and the tragic force is clearly shown to be Fate or Destiny striving to rule over the lives of the characters; in this respect the play resembles Greek tragedy. Kincora is a drama showing the conflict which arises when Brian, an idealist, attempts to bring everlasting peace to all Ireland. The tragic forces here are the treachery, deceit, dishonor, selfishness of great leaders, all of which strive against Brian and prove to be circumstances too powerful for his control. In Dervorgilla, Lady Gregory has shown the power of the judgment imposed upon an individual who has once erred by her discriminating fellowmen. The conflict here is between public opinion and the efforts of Dervorgilla to compensate for her crimes. Following the modern conception of tragedy, all of the plays are simple in action; and in only one, Grania, does death occur on the stage. The general tone of the plays is wholly tragic, showing no comic elements or situations. Thus Lady Gregory may be considered a writer of peasant and historical tragedies.

Padraic Colum

Among the dramatists of Ireland, Padraic Colum, poet, novelist, dramatist, and author of children's stories, has been well known as a portrayer of Irish peasant life. Born in County Longford in 1881, Colum

was brought up in the counties of Longford and Cavan; and as he grew up, he absorbed folk-lore and popular songs until he became fairly steeped in the traditional native culture of the Irish people. Colum's literary beginnings are connected with The United Irishmen, a journal edited by the founder of the Sinn Fein movement, and with the National Theater Movement in Dublin.[1] His plays were among the first produced by the Irish Theater; Broken Soil was given when he was only twenty-one. In 1911 Colum was one of the founders of the Irish Review, and he was its sole editor during 1912-1913.

In 1923 Mr. Colum went to Hawaii at the invitation of the Hawaiian legislature to make a survey of native myths and folk-lore. The following year he published two volumes of Hawaiian folk-lore. Colum now makes his home in New Canaan, Connecticut. In 1930 he received a Guggenheim Fellowship and sailed for France that year.[2] Living Authors, in summarizing his contribution to Irish literature, makes this comment:

> Padraic Colum typifies the best in the Irish Renaissance. The mixture of gaiety and shadow, which is so much a part of the Irish heart, is his, and with that subtle twist of English speech which only the Irish give it, he writes poetry, dramatic legends, and children's stories which have won him a high place in English literature.[3]

As a dramatist, Colum is always interested in some problem of the land. "He is a realist, a writer essentially of prose plays and a

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[1] "Young Irish Playwright," Bookman 44:29, September, 1916.

[2] Tante, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

[3] Ibid., p. 79.

penetrating analyst of Irish social conditions."[1] He has attempted to interpret the conflicts which exist in the minds of repres ntative Irish peasants and is a peasant playwright in a strict sense of the word.[2]

Harriet Monroe, in Poetry, has said this of him:

> Padraic Colum is wholeheartedly a man of the people, who walks along the common roads of his niggardly little island and shares the common gaieties and privations. The people are poor, but no poorer than he; they are humble and insignificant--he is on their level without condescending to them. He loves their speech, their ways, shares their meager food and enforced fasts, believes in their fairies and half-pagan dreams. And thus he gives us the very flower and odor of their simple life, a life as primitive as anything to be found among men.[3]

In all of his plays Colum gives vital expression to some problem of Ireland. The family system, the question of the land, or the hard selfishness of youth when driven into revolt against its elders are always the themes. There are but two ideas common to both his poetry and his plays--wanderlust and the love of the soil.[4]

In Colum's first play, Broken Soil, written in 1903 and revised in 1907 under the title, The Fiddler's House, Colum is presenting a typical conflict between the individual and that which in Ireland has much authority, the family group. He shows the life of a rural people with artistic and aristocratic tradition.[5]

The scene is a farmer's cottage in the Irish midlands. Conn

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[1] Carl and Mark Van Doren, American and British Literature Since 1890, p. 297.

[2] Loc. cit.

[3] Monroe, op. cit., p. 284.

[4] Herbert S. Gorman, "Padraic Colum," New Republic 11:339, July 21, 1917.

[5] Padraic Colum, Three Plays (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1916), pp. vii-viii.

Hourican is an artist by profession and a wanderer by inclination. He and his fiddle have been in strange places, and he cannot be content with the humdrum life of a small farmer. His elder daughter, Maire, has been the prop of the small family since her mother's death and has acted as a mother to her younger sister Anne. Conn has promised Maire to give up the wandering life of the road; but he frequents the local tavern, seeking the applause of those whom he despises, and stooping to petty, mean tricks when the occasion demands it.

Anne is loved by James Moynihan, son of a neighboring farmer; and Maire loves Brian MacConnell. James writes verse for Anne; but Brian goes to the public-house, quarrels with his brother, and lures Conn to play in the bar. Maire is hard with her father; she remembers the life of the road and regards his fiddling as mere vanity done in exchange for praise. She has battled a long time for a home--a "shelter"; and now all effort is to come to nothing.

Gradually, however, sorrow softens her. She comes to understand her father and to sympathize with him; and she realizes that her strong-willed lover, Brian, has failed her. She has played a losing game; and when Conn desires to go to the Feis at Ardagh, she brings him his famous violin and declares she will go with him. Anne and James will be married at Ardagh, and Maire and Conn will deed to them the farm. Maire will share with her father the wandering life of the road. Even Conn, preparing to leave, has feelings of sentiment for the home he has known so

intimately; for he remarks:

> Well, here's Conn Hourican the fiddler going on his travels again. No man knows how his own life will end; but them who have the gift have to follow the gift. I'm leaving this house behind me; and maybe the time will come when I'll be climbing the hills and seeing this little house with tears in my eyes. I'm leaving the land behind me, too; but what's land after all against the music that comes from the far, strange places, when the night is on the ground, and the bird in the grass grows quiet?[1]

Maire Hourican typifies the new generation. She goes back to the wandering life with her father because life with her lover would be impossible. Woman of the new generation will not recognize the old system of the man at the head of the family. Man and woman must meet on equal terms. The wanderlust calls to her father, and he must needs leave his home down to be off again on the wandering road. This play, like others of Colum, ends in a breaking down of old traditions.[2]

Although the tragedy is subdued and restrained, it is none the less moving in its simplicity of emotion. Maire is a true tragic character, in that all her efforts to achieve a house and family life have failed because of Conn's inborn love for the wandering life, a circumstance which is entirely beyond Maire's control. Ernest A. Boyd says of the tragedy, "The struggle whose climax closes the play has taken place on a purely intellectual plane, as moving in its restraint as the tragedy of Ibsen's Nora."[3]

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[1] Colum, The Fiddler's House in Three Plays, p. 75.

[2] Gorman, loc. cit.

[3] Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 113.

The Fiddler's House, however, contains a ray of hope which is not found in most Irish plays. Maire is a girl of great promise, high principles, in love with life and eager for life. "Her heart is broken; yet she finds a new sympathy, and she attains, as do many of the heroes and heroines of high tragedy, an almost resigned calm, a clear-eyed realization of the meaning of life."[1] She attempts to explain something of this feeling to Brian:

> Maire. There was never a man but failed me some time. They all leave me to face the world alone. . . . I thought you were different but I see now you are only a man who forces himself to harsh behavior. I have my own way to go; my father wants to go back to the roads, and it's right that I should be with him, to watch over him.
> Brian. What shelter will you have on the road?
> Maire. I'll have the quiet of the evening, and my own thoughts, and I'll follow the music; I'll laugh and hold up my head again.[2]

Although the material of The Fiddler's House is ordinary, almost sordid; and in other hands it might have degenerated into tragedy of the most unpleasant sort, Colum has written the play in a poetic, deeply moving style. "He has infused his rude material with the glow of poetry. It is intensely Irish in its scene, but the yearning of Conn Hourican for the open road and the appreciation of his kind is common to all poetry."[3]

In Thomas Muskerry Colum has tried to show the same conflict

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[1] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 395.

[2] Colum, The Fiddler's House, in Three Plays, pp. 70-71.

[3] Malone, op. cit., p. 167.

working out more tragically in the play of middle-class life.[1] The play is "a study in the Ibsen manner of a man being brought to ruin by the pressure of his family."[2] The scene is Garrisowen, a town in the Irish Midlands, where Thomas Muskerry is master of the Garrisowen Workhouse. He has been master for thirty years and is now a man well over sixty--"a large man, fleshy in face and figure, sanguine and benevolent in disposition. He has the looks and movements of one in authority."[3] For many years Muskerry, although hard-hearted in many respects, has done his duty and has sacrificed for his family. Now he dreams of the time when he can retire from office and seek a cottage near his boyhood home in the country, where he can live comfortably on his pension.

His daughter and grandson are eager for him to retire and come to live with them so that they may obtain the use of his pension. James Scollard, who is to marry Anna, Muskerry's granddaughter, has been selected by the family as the new master of the workhouse. A few rumors have been breathed about Muskerry's inefficiency: he is late in the mornings and forgets to attend Mass; some of the guardians of the workhouse are beginning to question his fitness to check stores. The inciting incident of the tragedy comes, however, when the family discover that Muskerry has allowed the guardians to pay for a hundred pounds of coal

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1 Colum, Three Plays, p. viii.

2 Malone, op. cit., p. 168.

3 Colum, Thomas Muskerry in Three Plays, p. 147.

when only fifty were delivered. Muskerry has failed to take into account the pounds of coal already found in the stores. For such carelessness Muskerry could be dismissed without a pension.

As a result of this action, Muskerry attempts to hand in his resignation before he is discovered. At this time his daughter's family loses its entire fortune through a bad loan. The only money left is eighty pounds, which is Anna's portion; but James Scollard refuses to marry her without the money. Thus, when Muskerry cannot make up the loan, his pension is taken from him.

The third act finds Muskerry an inmate of the Workhouse, the institution over which he once ruled. When he prepares to leave the Workhouse, he finds he cannot be dismissed without the doctor's orders; and his daughter persuades the doctor to keep her father in the Workhouse. Muskerry is heart-broken when the new master, as a last bit of degrading indignity, forces him to sleep in the pauper bed.

Despite the fact that the death of Muskerry is told in a restrained, quiet fashion, the scene is highly emotional. Myles Gorman, the blind piper, an inmate of the Workhouse when Thomas was master, has served his time and is now preparing to leave to go on the roads.

> Muskerry. Can you go down the stairs, Myles Gorman? I tried to get down the stairs and my legs failed me.
> Gorman. One of the men will lead me down. (He stands up, takes pipes, and is ready to go out. Muskerry becomes more feeble. He puts himself on the bed.)
> Muskerry. Myles--Myles Gorman--come back.
> Gorman. What can I do for you, Master?

Muskerry. Say a prayer for me.
Gorman. What prayer will I say, Master?
Muskerry. Say "God be good to Thomas Muskerry."
Gorman (taking off his hat). "God be good to Thomas Muskerry, the man who was good to the poor." Is that all, Master?
Muskerry. That's--that's all. (Gorman goes to the door.)
Gorman. In a little while you'll hear my pipes on the road. (He goes out. There is the sound of heavy breathing from the bed. Then silence.)[1]

A few minutes later the clear call of Myles's pipes is heard outside. The piper symbolizes for Muskerry the freedom which he has never known and gives the play its real significance. When the skirl of pipes is heard on the road in joyous celebration of Gorman's freedom, one feels that Thomas Muskerry has been set free to live the life he would have chosen.[2] Again, in this play, the note of hope is found, hope that Muskerry's death will bring to him that freedom which he so greatly desired.

> The piping of old Myles brings a note of poetry into the play. As we listen to his melodies, we enter into another world, and in the last act when his ditties sound fainter and fainter as he passes over the moorlands we are insensibly led away from the depressing reality of life into another world of more beautiful, because more spiritual presences.[3]

Thomas stands out as a great tragic character, whose every attempt to gain happiness ends in utter frustration. He is an ironic tragedy that

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[1] Ibid., pp. 221-22.

[2] Carl and Mark Van Doren, American and British Literature Since 1890, p. 296.

[3] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 396.

makes him seem almost a King Lear of Irish village life; the happiness of the grandfather is sacrificed to the selfishness of the younger generation.[1] His tragedy comes, not from any innate weakness of his own, but from the avarice and selfishness of his grasping relatives, "all arising out of the exploitation of kindness in the name of family solidarity."[2] Herbert S. Gorman, in an article in the New Republic, makes this comment concerning the tragedy:

> The play brings to mind certain moods of the Russian writers. It is tragedy but strangely tender tragedy. The conflict is not violent but measured. Thomas Muskerry, who for thirty years has been the Master of the Workhouse, finds age upon him and his family awaiting eagerly his dismissal. Such is the irony of Fate that he dies an inmate of the place where he once ruled. The last scene of Thomas Muskerry's death in the pauper-bed is the best thing that Mr. Colum has done in the Three Plays. The book is closed in silence.[3]

Summary

In his two plays, The Fiddler's House and Thomas Muskerry, Padraic Colum has portrayed the tragedy of peasant and middle-class life. The conflict in both plays arises from a clash between the different members of the family group. In The Fiddler's House, Maire's love for a "shelter" and her father's desire for the life of the open road strive against each other, and Maire fights a losing battle; in Thomas Muskerry

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[1] Lloyd R. Morris, "Pardaic Colum, Poet and Playwright," Outlook 13: 118, May 17, 1932.

[2] Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 341.

[3] Gorman, loc. cit.

the conflict arises from the selfish and grasping motives of the younger members of the family to which the happiness of Thomas is sacrificed. The general tone of both plays is wholly tragic, showing no lighter comic situations; but in both plays there is a distinct ray of hope, which relieves the tragedy to a certain degree. In The Fiddler's House the tragedy is of the restrained, more intellectual type; whereas Thomas Muskerry involves a death on the stage. But both plays are noted for their subdued, highly repressed emotional situations. The characters in both plays reveal Colum's clear understanding of and sympathy with the Irish social conditions, and he may thus be considered a portrayer of the tragic side of realistic Irish life.

George Fitzmaurice

Although George Fitzmaurice has never been popular in the sense that Synge and Lady Gregory have, the work of Fitzmaurice has been outstanding among the folk dramatists of Ireland. Malone, in his discussion of Irish drama, makes this comment:

> George Fitzmaurice is the one important Irish folk-dramatist whose work has been almost consistently ignored in Ireland, and yet remains unknown abroad. . . . He has written comedy, tragedy, and fantasy without in any way suggesting that he has been influenced by any other dramatist; his peasantry is true to life, and his dialogue is rich and copious.[1]

[1] Malone, op. cit., pp. 169-70.

For the majority of his themes, Fitzmaurice has stayed close to the peasant life of Ireland. The Pie-Dish, his first play, a one-act drama written in 1908, summarizes the tragedy of the artistic soul. Leum Donoghue, a Kerry peasant, has given his whole life to the molding and perfecting of a wonderful pie-dish; but old age and infirmity have finally overtaken him. Fearing that their father will die without the blessing of the church, Leum's daughters hasten to bring the priest. Leum, however, refuses to hear a word concerning death; he is interested only in finding new ornaments for his pie-dish. Struggling from his bed to the table, he holds the pie-dish in his hands, murmuring to himself:

> My wonderful pie-dish! It's my heart's blood is in you, my pie-dish! 'Tis little more will crown it, and then it's for old Moll of Carraweira you will go, and Black Jack of Scartaglen, and old Teigue of Glounancista--to come and see it in all its glory. Them is all that's left of the friends of my youth; and 'tis a lot are gone and cold surely, since I first gave under making my pie-dish twenty years ago.[1]

At this moment the priest, Father Troy, and Leum's daughters arrive. Father Troy tells Leum to think of his soul, for his time is fast dwindling. Leum curses angrily, for his masterpiece is still unfinished.

> Father Troy. My poor man, give yourself up now to the good God and to His Holy Mother, and put all of these sinful thoughts from your heart entirely.
> Leum. It's my pie-dish I'm thinking of, I am telling you.

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[1] George Fitzmaurice, The Pie-Dish in Five Plays (London: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1914), p. 148.

Father Troy (soothingly). My poor old man, what concern is it to you now, a miserable pie-dish? Leum Donoghue, let me administer to you the last rites of our Holy Mother, the Church.

Leum (screams and throws off priest). 'Tisn't to be anointed I will. Go from me. (Bends toward pie-dish and catches it.) My pie-dish! My pie-dish!

Father Troy (sternly and loudly). Leum Donoghue, your hour has come!

Margaret. Your hour has come, old man!

Johanna. His hour has come! Saints in heaven, pray for him before it is too late entirely!

Leum (giving a dazed look around him). Was it the priest said my hour has come? (Straightens himself up suddenly, holding pie-dish between his hands. He goes a step towards the corner of the table.) It's black lies he is telling me. 'Tisn't my hour that has come to me. Good God above in heaven, 'tisn't without mercy you would be and to take me out of the world like this! oh, the pain that's through me! Good God, give me time--it's surely you'll give me time--I pray for time to finish my pie-dish! Isn't this a terrible pain entirely? (Shaken.) God above, isn't it time I will get after all? Ah, 'tis killing me that pain is. Good God in heaven, it's time I must get--if it isn't time from God I'll get, maybe the devil will give me time to finish my pie-dish, and it's his I'll be for ever more, body and soul! (He shakes. The pie-dish falls and breaks. He screams and falls back on the chair.)

Johanna. There it's in bits now, and what it was or what wasn't no one in the wide world will be a pin's point the wiser for ever more.[1]

The priest, finding the old man dead, pronounces utter doom upon him; but the daughters are grief-stricken because they feel they have been unkind to their father.

The Pie-Dish represents the highest type of tragedy, the struggle of an individual against circumstances stronger than himself; and death finally overtakes him in his struggle. Malone, in discussing the play,

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[1] Ibid., pp. 153-54.

says, "In no other Irish play is there elaborated the theme of the frustration of the artist in Ireland and the struggle between the paganism of the artist and his Christian environment."[1]

In its closing lines the play rises to great dramatic heights, Leum's passionate plea for more time in which to finish his masterpiece reminding one of the struggle of Dr. Faustus against the fate to which he must eventually succumb. Following the modern conception of tragedy, the play is simple in action; like Elizabethan tragedy, it ends in death on the stage.

In his portrayal of character, Fitzmaurice reveals a deep understanding of peasant life. The fact that Leum's daughters fear their father will die without the blessing of the church and that his talk about his "masterpiece" will be displeasing to the priest shows the high regard that the Irish peasantry have for their priest and the strong pride in family name.

Although The Pie-Dish is obviously a tragedy showing the frustration of ambition, it has always been received with hilarity at the Abbey Theater. The only reason that can be given to account for this attitude is the fact that the old man used the artistic forces of his nature to make a pie-dish rather than a statue or some other equally artistic piece of work. In a large measure, The Pie-Dish, since it was Fitzmaurice's first play, may have helped to account for his unpopularity as a dramatist.[2]

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[1] Malone, op. cit., p. 171.

[2] Loc. cit.

For his next play, The Moonlighter, Fitzmaurice chose his theme from Irish history--the struggle between the Irish and the English over the evils of the land system. The plantation system originated in the time of Edward VI as a means of making Ireland wholly subordinate to England. Under this plan, whenever the English government wished to be rid of a troublesome Irish chief, his entire estates were confiscated and his tenants were turned out of their farms and homes. The whole land of the tribe was given to an "undertaker," who received it on the condition that he would bring over English colonists and plant them on the confiscated lands. This system of "plantations" was continued for many generations, causing great loss, suffering, and misery to the dispossessed tribesmen.[1]

Between 1652 and 1654 nearly all Ireland was confiscated. During the Cromwellian confiscation, thousands of persons, driven out from their homes, passed through dire hardships, wandering in winter along unknown roads, till they came to the miserable little tracts of land alloted them in the barren western province.[2]

Because of the oppressive measures passed by England during the early part of the eighteenth century, the trade of Ireland was completely ruined. Social and economic conditions in Ireland were as bad as could be imagined, and the increase in population far exceeded production. When, in 1845 and 1846, the entire potato crop failed, the misery of the country

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[1] Johnston and Spencer, op. cit., p. 131.

[2] John G. Rowe, The Romance of Irish History (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1914), p. 88.

was complete. One quarter of the population, or eight million, died of starvation. No western country has ever suffered a calamity equal to that of the "Black Forty-Seven."[1]

In the years following the famine, tenants were reduced to dire poverty; but the landlords still insisted on exacting the full arrears of rent. The consequence was that acts of violence on the part of the Irish peasantry sprang up. The movement was carried on chiefly by secret societies called the "Moonlighters." Its adherents, called "Moonlighters," held secret meetings, where cases of extreme justice were discussed and where swift punishment was decreed against the perpetrators. Landlords and their agents were murdered in solitary places, and there developed a system of organized terrorism which eventually led to the granting of the first Land Purchase Act by England in 1885.

Fitzmaurice's play The Moonlighter shows this organization in operation and reveals the intense hatred that existed in the heart of the peasantry because of the evils inflicted by the Land System. Peter Guerin, a member of the dairy-farming class, has strong patriotic ardor, though the years have taught him prudence and have limited his activity. Eugene, his son, constantly parades his nationalism, thus arousing the skepticism of his father. As a result, Peter opposes his son's ambition to join a moonlighting expedition against a neighboring English farmer. Eugene and his closest friend, Tom Driscoll boast of their activities against the

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[1] Johnston and Spencer, op. cit., p. 310.

English police.

> Eugene. . . . It's a grand day's work for Ireland this horn is after doing, and it calling to her children from far and near to do battle against those devils for hell, the police and the bailiffs. (Peter laughs sardonically.)
>
> Tom. We had a grand time surely, Peter Guerin, and don't be talking. The people were there in hundreds, and pebbles flying like sixty! The peelers were savage, but I'm thinking Sergeant Curtin has a pain in his head from the riser of the stone he got in the ear from Andy Sofine.
>
> Eugene (blows). A glorious day for Ireland!
>
> Tom (laughing). A bigger shout went up when Barton the bailiff got a kettle of boiling water down his neck from Kate Horan and he starting to work with the battering ram. Oh, 'twas great sport.
>
> Eugene (blows). A glorious day it was, and to hell with the enemies of Ireland![1]

That night in a lonely part of the glen, Eugene is sworn in as a moonlighter in an organization full of fervent patriotism. However, at the last moment, before entering on a raiding expedition, Eugene flees to the city. When he returns a year later, his companions are in conflict with the police because of the murder of some neighboring landlords; but Eugene has lost sympathy with physical violence. He has become merely a craven time-server without a spark of patriotic sentiment.

During his absence conditions have altered greatly. Eileen, Eugene's younger sister, has died; and Maura Driscoll, Tom's sister, has gone insane through worrying over Tom, who is wanted for murder. When Tom, escaping from the police, seeks shelter in Peter Guerin's home, Peter protects him, despite his disapproval of the moonlighters. Tom, however,

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[1] Fitzmaurice, The Moonlighter in Five Plays, pp. 72-73.

is no longer afraid to face death because he feels he has made his peace with God. Peter, stirred by Tom's bravery and convinced that all men are not cowards like Eugene, rushes out to defend Tom. The women, left inside, are helpless in the face of the impending catastrophe. Shots are heard outside, and in a few minutes Peter and Tom are borne in on stretchers. Eugene attempts to comfort his mother and to justify his own cowardice; but Malachi, his uncle, silences him, paying a great tribute to Peter:

> When all is over, we will be comforting her that way, Eugene. But now it's other words she wants to hear, and she thinking of the great soul that was in Peter Guerin. And, indeed it's now I know, and maybe I knewit a long time, that all who rose up and fought for Ireland, howsoever they fought for Ireland, were the great-hearted and the kind. And 'tis like the red sun myself and Peter would be seeing rising above the blue hills and we going to the fairs on the frosty mornings, like the red sun rising up before us to the east chasing away the blue haze of dawn, so will the fame of Peter rise grandly to the coming time--and it's a long day of glory will be on Peter surely.[1]

In this situation, as in all others of its kind, the women are left to bear the real brunt of the tragedy. Peg, Tom's mother, has had superstitious forbodings concerning Tom's fate since the opening of the play; for superstition is common to all Irish people. She dreamed she saw "rivers of blood going past the door" and her son Tom hanging from the gallows, "a pale, dead corpse."[2] Ellen, Eugene's mother, likewise, describes her intense grief, saying she has been "tormented from every abuse of the world, whirled about like an old, bruised and battered tin-

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[1] Ibid., p. 133.

[2] Ibid., p. 133.

can."[1] At the close of the play Breeda Carmody, Tom's beloved, is left mourning over his body, repentant because she has deceived herself into thinking she did not love him and because she denied him the comford of her love while he was alive. Above all other characters, however, Ellen, Peter's wife, stands out as the truly tragic figure of the entire play. Her daughter Eileen has died; Peter, her husband, is shot down before her very eyes; and, as a last bit of degrading indignity, her only son Eugene, despite his courageous words, has proved himself a coward of the lowest type, placing himself and his physical comfort before everything else.

In this play Fitzmaurice has shown clearly the enormous part that history has played in shaping the tragic spirit of the Irish. One feels throughout the drama the intense, fiery patriotism that has led Ireland on, giving her inspiration to persevere in her bloody struggle for independence. When Peter chides one of the moonlighters for his bloody deeds, the man turns on him thus:

> 'Tis me has words to say to him first, with his comfortable times and his comfortable house and his good bed to lie on for himself. 'Tis he can be alluding to us as dirty moonlighters, for it wasn't Peter Guerin or them belonging to him that were thrown out on the road in the depth of raw red winter to live or die under the frozen canopy of heaven! 'Tisn't he ever slept with his five brothers on a matress on a cold floor, they pulling the bit of blanket from one another, the cold going through them and the perishing breeze! 'Tisn't Peter Guerin had to be looking at a well-reared mother and she silent and grieving on a neighbor's hearth; and 'tisn't he saw a brother and two sisters go down into their graves from the want and the starvation! O God, be with Timothy and Bridget and Lucy this

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

> hour! And (slapping his chest) here's the man has gone through all this suffering he'd be calling a dirty murdering moonlighter--a dirty murdering moonlighter, and my land going to be grabbed by Big William Cantillon, and that hound of hell will have the house I was born in and my very heart's blood between the mortar of its stone! (Uttering a fiendish scream.) Ah, if I could only have these fingers around the grabber's throat, choking him, murdering him! Ah, wouldn't it be a handsome sight to see his face swelling red and blue, and the big eyeballs lapping out of the sockets! May Jesus send him in my way till I'll batter the dirty life out of him on the stones, to be screeching with joy and I dancing a jig on his dirty bloody corpse![1]

Padraic Colum, in commenting on the play, believes that this tragedy could be felt most deeply only on an Irish stage. He says that the passage quoted above is charged with the instincts and traditions of a people forced back to a bare existence upon the land, and that the play allows the reader to see the passion, working through murder, outrage, and intimidations, facing the jail and the gallows, the passion which made a vast change in Irish conditions. "The play reveals, as only an Irish play could, the Irish mind in its integrity and its intensity."[2]

As a writer of peasant tragedy, George Fitzmaurice has been successful in producing, in a realistic way, the speech and the characterizations of the peasant life he sought to portray. Malone, in commenting on the dialogue in Fitzmaurice's plays, says:

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7.

[2] Colum, "The Irish Literary Movement," *op. cit.*, pp. 146-47.

> In every play that George Fitzmaurice has written there is displayed the perfection of dialogue that delights the artist in words. The wealth of effect which can be gained from a close fidelity to Irish peasant speech is magnificantly exemplified.[1]

Summary

George Fitzmaurice, in his volume of Five Plays, has written two plays that are distinctly tragic in tone. In all of his plays the material is taken from incidents in the life of the Irish peasant. The Pie-Dish is a one-act tragedy showing the frustrated ambitions of the artistic soul whom death overtakes before his masterpiece is completed. The subject matter for The Moonlighter is a phase of Irish history showing the rebellion of the Irish against the evils of the Land System. Both plays are simple in action and, following the classical conception of tragedy, show no comic elements or situations; the tone of both plays is wholly tragic, pointing the way to the destructive end. The conflict, in each case, is a clash of wills with circumstances that are beyond the control of the leading characters. In The Pie-Dish the tragic force is Death, and in The Moonlighter it is the avarice and cruelty inflicted upon the Irish people by the Land System. Both plays end in deaths on the stage, The Moonlighters involving the death of two out of the three leading characters. Thus George Fitzmaurice may be considered as a writer of tragic peasant dramas.

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[1] Malone, op. cit., p. 172.

Joseph Campbell

Joseph Campbell is known primarily as a poet of the Irish Renaissance; but the only drama he has written, Judgment, is a realistic portrayal of the tragedy in Irish peasant life. In this sense, he may be considered a peasant dramatist. Campbell, who was born in Belfast in 1881, is an illustrator by profession, doing his work under the name, Seosamh MacCathmhaoil. Most of his illustrations involve figures taken from Ireland's heroic age.[1]

For his play Judgment, written in 1912, however, he has not chosen figures from antiquity. Instead, he rejects historical characters and, as he says in the preface, has used "peasants as. . . protagonists instead of kings--who, like Pharoah, are 'but a cry in Egypt,' outworn figures in these days with no beauty and no significance."[2] The play is based on a story told to the author by a peasant who knew Peg Straw and who was present at her wake; the incidents concerning the loom and the birth were added as symbols of Destiny and of the wonder and persistent newness of human life.[3]

Peg Straw, the leading character of the drama, is an worn old woman of the roads whom the people hold as little better than a witch, even attributing to her the power given to witches in folk-tales of turning themselves into hares. Her nickname "Straw" indicates the nature

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[1] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 247.

[2] Joseph Campbell, Jud ment (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1912), p. 1.

[3] Loc. cit.

of the mild dementia that sets the children and idlers at her heels. She goes about picking up "straws" until "she'd have a bunch in her hand . . . every little stalk bit off as neat as neat, and it like a scrubber or dandy brush you'd put to a horse."[1]

During the play Peg speaks no word at all, coming into sight only to die; but she is always in the background. Talk of Peg comes up early in the first act. The scene is a poor cabin interior, where Owen Ban, a weaver, is working late to finish his web. His wife, Nabla, is bitter because Owen is poorly paid and mistreated by Toal, the grasping landlord. Owen, however, is a true philosopher. He repeats to Nabla the words of Father John, the village priest:

> . . . . But did you hear what Father John said at Cross a'Monday? (Emphasizing the words.) That it was a bad thing to have a bad word for anybody. "It's not for us to judge," says he, "but to be quiet in our minds," says he. Oh, I'm telling you, Nabla, it's not for the likes of you or me to judge Toal.[2] [sic.]

The neighbors come in, bringing with them the talk of Peg Straw, the "tinker's woman," whom Nabla has turned away from the door only that morning. The neighbors tell how they saw Peg going down the street, a crowd of children pulling at her and shouting, "Peg Straw, the Light Woman," while the police sat and did nothing. Toward the end of the first act Kate, a neighbor woman, rushes in to say the tinkers are killing Peg Straw; and her screams from down in the hollow rise higher and higher.

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1 Campbell, op. cit., p. 9.

2 Ibid., p. 2.

At the end of the first act, Owen, hearing a moan on the door-step, opens the door. "A heap of rags crawls in, lamenting loudly. It is Peg Straw. She is on her hands and knees. Her hair is dishevelled, and blood is streaming over her temples."[1] Nabla, heavy with her first child, and nervous because of her condition and fearful of the birth, would keep out the outcast; but Owen bathes Peg's face and hands with clear water and attempts to make her comfortable. When Owen leaves for the police, Peg dies, shocking Nabla so deeply that her child is born prematurely.

In the next act Peg lies in sight in the room just off the stage with tall, white candles at her head and feet, bringing into the drama the horror and the dignity of death. The neighbors have gathered for the wake, and the voices of the women can be heard repeating prayers. A drunken stranger enters and listens while Ferry Cam, an old, old man, tells the cause of Peg's madness; but when Cam repeats what for years has been the gossip of the countryside, Peg's supposed killing of her child, the stranger rises angrily to his feet:

> It's bloody lies he's been telling, man of the house. (Several men rush at him and bustle him into the kitchen. The women try to separate them.) Let me go! Bloody lies! (To Owen.) He says she did away with the child. . . . (Solemnly.) Myself that's standing before you now. . . . Well, that the God in heaven may strike me dead if I'm not that woman's son![2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 13.

[2] Ibid., p. 31.

The priest arrives, and the stranger is speedily sent out on the road again. Owen feels that the whole situation is meant to show that people should not judge each other, but should leave such judgment to God alone. The priest repeats the Biblical text of the entire play, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man be justified."[1]

Throughout the drama the theme of "judgment" is skillfully woven in. Owen, in the first act, expresses the theme in the words of the priest. Then the situation itself is used to exemplify the point and to bring out the lesson as it appears to the Irish folk mind. Birth and Death take place almost at the same time, symbols of the Destiny that is continually working out, always beyond the control of man; and the play closes with a highly reverent note, when Father John raises his arms, saying, "We're all ignorant--all. . . . It's a strange end. The hidden things of His wisdom God makes plain to us. . . . We pray and dream; the mystery remains dark."[2]

To realise fully the tragic note of the play, one must understand something of the Irish folk mind. The son is ejected from the house and denied the privilege of attending the wake for his dead mother, a summary judgment upon him for his neglect. In the eyes of the Irish peasantry, to whom death and the family are the profoundest facts of life, this is a

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 34.

[2] _Loc. cit._

tragedy indeed:[1]

> That the son, for any motive at all, should be turned out of the house where his mother lies dead, even though he has not stood by her living, is hard enough in the estimation of any people, but in the estimation of the Irish peasant it is intolerably tragic.[2]

Although little is known about Peg and her son, the Stranger, they stand out as true tragic characters. Always in the background, Peg is shown to be a character who has been much discriminated against. She is the woman to whom no one would lend a helping hand and whom the world has judged harshly. All Peg's desires or efforts to be a better woman have ended in frustration because of the cruelty of her fellowmen. The Stranger, too, appears in the play for only a few minutes, time enough to help his mother's honor and to be sent out again for decency's sake. He has repented too late, and all his efforts to help Peg living are in vain.

Judgment represents a high type of tragedy, showing the harsh judgment of the world upon the individual who has once erred. Following the modern conception of tragedy, the action is simple; but the death of Peg, in keeping with Elizabethan tragedy, occurs on the stage. The conflict is a universal one--the struggle of the individual who seeks to overcome his former reputation of evil against the judgment of the world, a circumstance which, in Peg's case, is too strong for her to overcome. Boyd, in commenting on the drama, makes this statement:

> It is a genuine folk tragedy, deeply rooted in soil, and characterized by a perfect control of peasant idiom. It shows

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[1] Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 174.

[2] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 249.

a sincere sympathy for his people and a deep insight into the manners of the Ulster countryside.[1]

Summary

Joseph Campbell, in his only drama, Judgment, has written a tragedy based on a Biblical theme, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified." The play is a true peasant drama in that the characters are all peasants, and the material is taken from an incident in the life of the Irish peasant. Following the modern conception of tragedy, Judgment is simple in action; and death occurs on the stage, a characteristic of Elizabethan tragedy. The play is wholly tragic, showing no comic elements or situations. The conflict of Peg, the tragic character, occurs when she attempts to rise above her station in life, that of "a tinker's woman," a wanderer upon the roads; and the tragic force is the power of the judgment imposed upon her by her discriminating neighbors. The play has a deeper significance in that Birth and Death take place almost at the same time, showing the thread of Destiny behind all lives. Both theme and characters show Campbell's clear conception and sympathetic understanding of the tragedy in much of the peasant life.

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[1] Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, Loc. cit.

Rutherford Mayne

Rutherford Mayne, one of the more recent Irish dramatists, is a peasant playwright in that he seeks to portray the life of the peasant in North Ireland. Although he was not born in Ireland, he has a deep sympathy and understanding of the tragedy present in much of the Irish peasant life. Mayne, who was born in Tokio, Japan, in 1878, received his early education there. He later attended the Belfast Royal Academy and was graduated in Engineering at the Royal University of Ireland. One of the founders of the Ulster Theater in Belfast in 1904, he has been an active member of that Company since that time. His interest in the theater has led him to join William Mollison's Shakespearian Company as an actor, and he has played many roles in both the Ulster and the Abbey Theaters. His most recent success in acting was in O'Neill's _Emperor Jones_, in which he played the title part at the Abbey Theater. He is married to the former Josephine Campbell, sister of the poet, Joseph Campbell. In 1909 he joined the Irish Land Commission and is now Land Law Commissioner in the Free State.[1]

The theme of _The Turn of the Road_, Mayne's first play, written in 1906, is similar to that of Fitzmaurice's _The Pie-Dish_ in that it shows the struggle of the artist against the puritan hostility which his gift

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[1] Curtis Canfield, editor, _Plays of Changing Ireland_ (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), p. 478.

encounters.[1] William John Granahan, an Irish farmer, has two sons, Samuel James and Robbie John. Robbie has a real gift for music; but the family discourage him from playing his fiddle, for they fear it will lead him far afield. He loves Jane Graeme, the daughter of a neighboring farmer; and because her father will never tolerate a wandering fiddler, Robbie is forced to burn his fiddle.

One day a tramp stopping by the Granahan home leaves Robbie a famous old violin. Since Robbie has promised the family never to play it again, the fiddle is left hanging on the wall. Samuel, however, slyly urges Robbie on in the hope he will play it and be disinherited and that he, Samuel, will inherit everything. Realizing that Robbie will never be content to lead the life of a farmer, Jane tells him to take his fiddle and to go on the road; she will wait until he has earned enough money to marry her. When Robbie's father learns of his decision, he forces him out on the roads, saying angrily:

> Then stick by the fiddle. And know if ever you are wearied or ahungered or in want ye need never look to me for any help. (Shouts.) Out you go! Out! Don't dare one of you so much as take his hand. Out! Out the same as the begger man, with the curse of your father on you! (Robbie John goes toward back and stands a moment as if in silent appeal at the open door. Mrs. Granahan rushes forward to her husband as if to entreat mercy. He angrily puts her away.) Out! Out you go![2]

The next scene is an epilogue occuring the same night about midnight. Outside there is a violent storm. Wind, rain, and hail thunder

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[1] Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 368.

[2] Rutherford Mayne, The Turn of the Road in The Drone and Other Plays (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1912), p. 112.

against the windowpane.

Grandfather. (Thunder and lightning.) D'ye hear? To think of that poor soul with his wee bit of a coat out in the cauld and wet. If any harm come to him, Samuel James, know this, you were the cause of it.

Samuel James. It was his own choosing.

Grandfather. His own choosing? Who flattered him and led him on? Who kept the fiddle hanging there and would let no one take it down, a continuing temptation to him? And you, William John Granahan, with your lust for money. Aye. Lust for money. You couldn't abide him heartening up the house with a tune or two, but ye'd break the boy's heart sending him out to work again, and him working as much as two of Samuel James here. Ye thought he was wasting time and money. D'ye think there's nothing in this life beyond making money above the rest. I tell you it's not the money alone makes life worth livin'. It's the wee things you think nothing of, but that makes your home a joy to come back to, after a hard day's work. And you've sent out into the cauld and wet the one that was making your home something more than common. D'ye think them proud city folks will listen to his poor auld ballads with the heart of the boy singing through them. It's only us--it's only us, I say, as knows the long wild nights, and the wet and the rain and the mist of night on the bog-lands--it's only us I say could listen to him in the right way. (Sobbing.) And ye knowed, right well ye knowed, that every string of his fiddle was keyed to the crying of your own heart.

William John Granahan (half sobbing.) There. There. God forgive me, my poor auld boy. I did na know. Whist, Maybe if I say a word or two--Oh, God forgive us in this night our angry words, and have mercy on our wayward son, O Lord, and keep him safe from harm, and deliver him not into the adversary. Amen.

Grandfather. Amen. Aye. Aye. Ye done well. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.

William John Granahan (going to the door.) It's a coarse night. (Pauses.) I'll leave the door on the hasp. (He unbolts the door.)[1]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 113-14.

The struggle of Robbie John is the struggle of the artist against the hostility which his gift encounters among practical minded individuals. He faces a world in which the love of art is not only an economic, but a moral heresy.[1] The tragic force, then, is the attitude of his family toward his music; and the catastrophe occurs when he is forced to leave home to pursue his music. The tragedy, however, is mitigated by the fact that Robbie's father has relented to a large degree and has unbolted the door so that Robbie may return. One feels that the play is not complete; that some day Robbie may return home and again be accepted as a member of the family circle.

The theme of The Troth, written in 1908, is the shooting of a landlord by two peasants whom his agents are to evict on the morrow. Ebenezer McKie, Protestant, and Francey Moore, Catholic, are neighboring tenants who are unable to pay the fifty pounds of rent that are due on the following day. McKie goes to his sister for the money, but she refuses to help him because he once cheated her of some money that was rightfully hers. Moore is driven to desperation because his wife is dying and he is powerless to help her.

> Moore. Two years ago you mind there was a bad harvest. We prayed to the landlord to be easy. He told us no. Why? Why? Because, I tell you, Ebenezer McKie, and I know. He had debts of his own--gambling debts--debts of honor as the quality calls them. Next year it was worse. No one got in the crops. They lay rotten in the fields. You and

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[1] Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 368.

me and the rest went to him again. We might as well have been praying to the big stones up yonder on Slieve Dubh. (With a sob in his voice.) Then the sickness came and the wee children--they slippit away one by one. One that was to be called after you, McKie of Ballyhanlon, and two of my own wee children--couldn't call them back to you now. No--not if all the rents of the world was poured into your hands.

McKie (tremulously.) Don't, man, don't.

Moore (his voice trembling with intense passion.) A pound or two might have saved them. Aye. Only a pound or two. And now they're lying rotten under the sod, but their wee souls is crying. You can hear them in the wind crying--crying to the God that made them for vengeance.[1]

The two men swear a troth that they will lie in wait for the landlord, Colonel Frothingham. They have begged him for time, but he has paid no attention to their demands. They agree that if one escapes, the other who is arrested will not tell who his companion was and will look after the wife of the one convicted. McKie's wife, finding he has gone and has taken the gun with him, is very much frightened. A neighbor rushes in to tell her that Moore's wife is dead. When a shot is heard off the stage, Mrs. McKie realizes what has happened; for she knows that the landlord was to come up the glen that evening. She prays frantically, "Oh, Lord God, preserve my husband, save him from evil, save him from the shedding of blood. Save him, oh, God, my Saviour, save him."[2]

McKie comes in and hastily extinguishes the candle. From the window Mrs. McKie sees men carrying a bundle up the road. A neighbor stops to tell them Moore has shot the landlord and has been taken by the police.

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[1] Rutherford Mayne, The Troth in The Drone and Other Plays (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1912), pp. 139-40.

[2] Ibid., p. 143.

Mrs. McKie, terrorized, turns to her husband.

> Mrs. McKie. Ebenezer! Ebenezer! Was it you or him done it? (Voices outside the house now come very near.)
> McKie (standing where the darkness of the kitchen almost hides him.) Hold your tongue, woman. Are they passed yet?
> Mrs. McKie (looking out.) Not yet. (She turns to him with a gesture of horror.) It was you. I can see it in your face. You killed him.
> McKie (breathlessly.) Whist. Are they passed yet?
> Mrs. McKie (as the sound of the voices does away.) They're gone. (She goes forward, looks into his eyes, and then involuntarily shrinks back.) It was you that killed him.
> McKie. Peace, woman. (He stretched out his hands toward her appealingly. She makes no movement.) Moore has no wife.[1]

In this play Mayne has shown clearly the intense, fiery hatred of the Irish peasantry for the English landlord class, a hatred so violent that it leads them to commit murder with little fear of the consequences. Moore, doomed to death for murder that he did not commit, is a tragic victim of the persecutions of the landlord class. He has been forced to stand by powerless while his wife and children starve to death. In the final struggle with the landlord, both Catholic and Protestant are brought together to make one last stand against the enemy.[2] The tragic force, then, becomes the avarice and the cruelty inflicted upon the Irish by the Land System. One critic, in evaluating the tragedy of the play, has made this comment:

> The tension of the last scene is almost unendurable. His wife's questioning of McKie, her agony in her knowledge of his guilt when she sees his face on his return, the

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[1] Ibid., p. 144.

[2] Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 370.

man's terror, are handled with masterly firmness and sure-
ness. To see this scene on the stage in the hands of
actors worthy of it must be to know real tragedy.[1]

Red Turf, written in 1911, is a melodramatic story of the results of a peasant quarrel over land. Martin Burke and Michael Flanagan have quarrelled over their claims to a certain strip of land. Flanagan says that when he bought the land from Mary Burke, Martin's wife, he was given the promise of land on the bog below and was shown the location of the land on a map. Mary is greatly incensed over the quarrel. A neighbor, hearing about the quarrel, remarks to Mary, "It's great turf entirely you have, Mrs. Burke. Black stone turf. It has the great red color when the fire is on it so. Turf in dispute aye burns red they say."[2]

A few minutes later Martin comes in, decidedly angry at the settlement.

It's the greatest wrong in the world they have been doing
on me. Split my fine stone bank in two and give Flanagan
the big half and left me the far end drownded in water,
the ould dirty red turf they left me.[3]

Then Flanagan himself appears to know whether it is to be war or peace between the Flanagans and the Burkes.

Martin (coming closer.) You can take the word back with
you, and tell your wife and your children, and all your
connection there is a black scourge on the land, that it's
war---aye, and bloody war it'll be--between us. So let
you be feared of me from this day out.

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[1] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 238.

[2] Rutherford Mayne, Red Turf in The Drone and Other Plays (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1912), p. 121.

[3] Ibid., p. 123.

Flanagan. Afeared of you, is it? (He laughs grimly.) No, not if all the dykes were full of Burkes on a dark night and them with red murder in their hands would I be feared. So lay to when and where you may, I care not that for ye. (He snaps his fingers contempuously.) I have the right of you and the law of you and what's more, I and my sons are going to start the facing of our bank today. So take ease and comfort to your mind with that. (He slams the door and goes away. Martin Burke stands trembling with anger in the kitchen. His eyes light on the gun, and he stares as if fascinated, moves toward it slowly, and then suddenly grips it in his hands. Mary Burke opens the door of the inner room and stands staring aghast at him.)[1]

Perceiving his purpose, Mary clutches hold of him, trying in vain to stop him.

Martin. Hold off me. (He throws her roughly aside, pulls the door wide open and shouts.) Let you all be feard of me now, Mike Flanagan. (There is a derisive shout in answer.)

Mary (struggling with him again.) Ah, for the love of Almighty God, Ma tin Burke, is it the gallows you'd be making me a widow with. (He breaks her grasp with brutal strength, and throwing her inside the kitchen slams the door to.)

Martin (without.) D'ye come off that bank, Mike Flanagan, before I blow your soul to hell.

(There is a laugh, then the report of a gun. A cry of horror from the younger Flanagans.)

(Mary Burke falls senseless toward the door. The child in the room off, awakened, begins to cry softly. There is no other sound.)[2]

In this one-act, swiftly-moving drama Mayne has shown the hot, fiery temperament of the Irish peasant that has often led him into fierce and bloody battles. The struggle, in this case, arises from the conflicting claims of two hot-tempered Irish to the same narrow strip of

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[1] Ibid., pp. 127-28.

[2] Ibid., p. 127.

land. The tragic force, however, is not so much the actual claims as it is the weaknesses within the characters themselves, their quarrelsome traits of character. The catastrophe occurs when Burke, in a sudden fit of anger, shoots his neighbor Flanagan. In this situation, as in others of its kind, the women are left to bear the real brunt of the tragedy; and at the close of the play Mary Burke is left senseless on the floor.

As a writer of peasant drama, Mayne has sought to portray the tragedy arising from the violent emotions of the Irish peasantry, emotions that have led them to commit murder and outrage without fear of punishment. Mayne has studied carefully the speech and manners of the Ulster peasant, and his plays are faithful reflections of Irish conditions as modified by prosperity and Protestantism. "Rutherford Mayne has made himself master of a speech whose force and quiet charm are visible in the printed text."[1]

Summary

Rutherford Mayne has written three dramas in which the material is taken from the tragic incidents in the life of the Irish peasant. The Turn of the Road is a one-act play showing the conflict between the artistic individual and the materialism of the Irish peasant, and the catastrophe occurs when the father orders his musical son to leave home,

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[1] Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, pp. 370-71.

never to return. The Troth shows the shooting of an English landlord by two Irish tenants who are to be evicted on the following day; the tragic force here is the persecution inflicted upon the Irish by the unfortunate land system. Red Turf depicts the quarrel of two Irish neighbors over their conflicting claims to a narrow strip of land, a quarrel which ends in the death of one of them. In none of the plays does death occur on the stage, but The Troth and Red Turf involve deaths which do not appear in the play. All three plays are wholly tragic in tone, showing no lighter elements, and they reveal Mayne as a realistic portrayer of contemporary peasant life.

CHAPTER IV

TRAGEDY IN NON-PEASANT DRAMA

With the death of Synge in 1909, the first period of the work of the Abbey Theater came to a close. The dispersal of the original company and variations in the management helped to accentuate a change in the type of drama that came to be played in the theater.[1] During the first ten years in the life of the Irish Theater, the dramatists were interested chiefly in a portrayal of the life of the Irish peasant with its pathos and its tragedy. The drama in the next ten years, however, was more cosmopolitan in tone and resembled the social drama of England. Irish dramatists were no longer concerned with the tragedy of the peasant, but sought rather to portray the life in the cities and small villages. For this reason the later tragedies in the study will be referred to as non-peasant drama. For the most part, these dramas were not more national in temper or more Celtic in spirit than the cosmopolitan dramas of the great European cities.[2] The influence of Ibsen and Shaw led to problem plays of propaganda and social protest.

In this chapter on non-peasant drama the plays of seven non-peasant dramatists will be discussed. An attempt will be made in each case to point out the type of tragedy portrayed and to show its tragic elements.

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[1] Williams, op. cit., p. 220.

[2] Andrew E. Malone, "The Decline of the Irish Drama," The Nineteenth Century 97:582, April, 1925.

Edward Martyn

Edward Martyn, one of the founders of the Irish Theater, is known primarily as a writer of fantastic, symbolic drama. He was an individual with a wide variety of interests. Although he was a landlord in County Galway, he had no sympathy with his class in its treatment of the struggling small farmer. Always his sympathy was with the unfortunate and the downtrodden. Although he was a Deputy Lieutenant in his county, he actively opposed recruiting for the British Army at the time of the Boer War. In religion he was a devout Catholic, and in politics he was a Political Nationalist by instinct and conviction. He took a prominent position in the Sinn Fein movement in the beginning and was president of that organization for a short time.[1] In addition to his other interests he was a discriminating critic and lover of music, particularly mediaeval church music. He donated fifty thousand dollars to the founding of a Palestrina Choir in the Catholic Church in Dublin.[2]

Martyn was of an unusually shy and retiring disposition. Malone has described him thus,

> Edward Martyn was one of the very rare Irishmen who had no gift for the limelight, as he had neither the desire nor the capacity to make himself conspicious. He lived in the most secluded manner, frugal almost to the point of misery, and intimate with only a small number of people. His life was almost monastic in its austerity, and there was in him everything that would have made him an exemplaty member of a contemplative order. He was a man of some

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[1] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, pp. 61-62.

[2] Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 12.

wealth who chose to live as one of the poor.[1]

The theme of all his plays was his conception of the never-ending conflict between materialism and idealism, between the utilitarian and the artistic. He himself was definitely on the side of the artists and against the utilitarians, who he thought would destroy the fine and romantic in life. Despite his wide interests, Edward Martyn never seemed to have any continuous contact with the ordinary affairs of life. One critic has said of him,

> He seemed to live in a world of his own with the ideas and abstractions which he loved and could understand, but from the raw, crude, hustling, materialistic daily life of the modern world he shrank, and he avoided contact with it as much as possible.[2]

Martyn cared little for his own physical comfort. He died in 1923. He had directed that his body be given to a medical school for use and afterwards buried in the cheapest possible way. This was the last gesture of a spirit that had always been in revolt against that materialism which is dictated by the needs of the body.[3]

Because Martyn was so much in tune with romance, poetry, and mysticism, he was out of touch with peasant humor and peasant speech, which are the ground-work of the folk play. He was more at home representing the educated and middle class of Ireland than the peasants; consequently his work is not so distinctly national as the works of several other Irish

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[1] Walter E. Malone, Irish Drama, p. 61.

[2] Ibid., p. 62.

[3] Ibid., pp. 63-64.

dramatists.[1] He was more concerned with the form, the dialogue, and the presentation of the drama than he was with its content.[2] An ardent admirer of the works of Ibsen, he sought to apply Ibsen's method to the portrayal of character and the interpretation of Irish life. In the propaganda aspect especially, his plays resemble those of Ibsen.[3] Williams, in commenting on the influence of Ibsen on Martyn, has said,

> He dramatises the bourgeois and middle class life of his country in the present day; his peasants, if they are introduced, are but foils to the other characters; his art is learned not from Yeats and Synge but from Ibsen; and his dialogue approximates to Ibsen in his most serious lapses from truth to character.[4]

The Heather Field, Martyn's first drama, published in 1899, was one of the plays presented on the opening night of the Irish Literary Theater, May 9, 1899. The theme of the drama is the conflict felt by an Irish landowner whose reality is his dream-world but who is forced by circumstances to undertake the administration of his estate.[5]

Carden Tyrrell, Irish landowner, has one besetting ambition in life, a desire to reclaim a large tract of land from the heather in the belief that it can be made to yield rich crops of hay and corn. The opposition of his brother Miles and his wife only serve to make him more

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[1] Williams, op. cit., p. 199.

[2] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 68.

[3] Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 19.

[4] Williams, op. cit., p. 200.

[5] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 257.

determined to carry out his scheme. His desire gradually developes into a mania. Mortgaging his property to carry on the project, he becomes oblivious to everything except the scheme. Barry Ussher, Carden's friend, warns him about the outcome of the project.

> Ussher. Ah, Carden, do you not know the soil in such places is very wild and untamable? If heather lands are brought back into cultivation for domestic use, they must be watched, they must have generous and loving treatment, else their old wild nature may avenge itself. . . . The wild heather may break out again soon.[1]

Grace, Carden's wife, becomes so alarmed that she endeavors to control affairs and to prevent bankruptcy. She developes an intense hatred for Carden and plans to have him restrained. In a scene that reminds one of Strindberg's The Father, she seeks to have her husband declared insane. The doctors are on the point of giving her verdict when they are dissuaded by Tyrrell's close friend, Barry Ussher.

As time goes on, Carden becomes more and more imaginative. Several times he has a presentiment of evil about to overtake him, and he begs Miles never to leave him.

> Tyrrell. Somehow I feel that persons and objects are receding from me and becoming more unreal in these later times. Do you know, Miles, I think that my life of pain and unrest is only a dream after all.
> Miles. And like a dream this suffering will pass away, Carden, let us hope never to return.
> Tyrrell (Sadly.) No--oh no--It would be too much to expect that. A dream--a bad dream (as if suddenly illumined), yet with intervals of wakefulness now and then--
> Miles (Approaching him.) Of wakefulness? What do you mean? When are those intervals?

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[1] Edward Martyn, The Heather Field (London: Duckworth and Company, 1899), pp. 7-8.

> Tyrrell (With enthusiasm.) When I am out in the heather fields--the great mountain fields out there, that it was my ideal to bring to fruitfulness--There I awaken to true life indeed, as I stand looking over the Atlantic; and see winds sweep against my feet the young grass in its matchless Irish green that gleams an golden green in the autumn sun today. There I am haunted by those departed joys of my youth--again and again.[1]

As the work progresses, Tyrrell's ambitions soar until he feels a creative urge to reclaim all the waste land in Ireland. The catastrophe, however, has been only temporarily averted. Driven by creditors, Tyrrell becomes a hard landlord. He turns to the eviction of tenants to cover his own mismanagement. The tenants oppose violently, and Tyrrell is finally forced to get police escort; but he finds he prefers to remain indoors, brooding and planning, with any actual contact with the land.

In this solitary state his dream deepens. He remembers the heather field of his boyhood, where the woods and the colors were a riot of beauty. Into his dreams one day comes his little son with a handful of heather, the only flowers he could find. He has gathered them in the heather field, and Tyrrell's dream is shattered. Nature has triumphed once more, and the land he had wanted to much to reclaim has become waste land once more. The ideal is gone, and Tyrrell's mind returns to his boyhood to remain there for the rest of his life. He believes his son to be his younger brother, Miles; and, speaking to him, he says,

> Oh, we must go to Lorlei as last year, where the river is lit with gold. (Pointing out at back.) See even now the sky is darkening as in the storm scene of the old

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[1] _Ibid._, pp. 19-20.

> legend I told you on the Rhine. See, the rain across a saffron sun trembles like gold harp strings, through the purple Irish Spring.[1]

Taking his son by his hand as they look at the rainbow, Carden says, with fearful exaltation, "Oh, mystic highway, of man's speechless longings! my heart goes forth upon the rainbow to that horizon of joy."[2]

The play closes with the last speech of Ussher, "The wild heath has broken out again in the heather field."[3]

Throughout The Heather Field one feels a quality of Ibsen pervading the play. There is a background of nature and thought that is beautiful in a way that is truly Ibsen.[4] Carden is a man with a "life-illusion", and when it is shattered, life becomes meaningless. Weygandt feels that the characters, although less rigid than those in later Martyn plays, are "characters chosen to interpret an ideal rather than characters of the imagination or portraits done from observation of life."[5]

The conflict in the play arises from the vast difference lying between ambition and its final realization. Tyrrell's dreams mount to such lofty heights that they cannot fail to meet with frustration in actual life. Because of his inability to realize that he can never succeed in actual life with his foolhardy project, Tyrrell is a great tragic character. He is a protagonist who comes to ruin through a weakness inherent in his own character, his inability to see life clearly. When

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1 Ibid., p. 91.

2 Loc. cit.

3 Ibid., p. 92.

4 Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 86.

5 Ibid., p. 82.

the cares of life become pressing, Carden seeks escape in his dreams of the heather field. His half-frantic fear lest the world recede from him entirely makes him a pitiable character.

The symbolism of The Heather Field is really two-fold in nature. Ireland itself is symbolised in the actual field, and the hopes and fears of an ardent patriotism are given voice. Because of the intense patriotism, the play has been very popular among the Irish. The symbolic value of Tyrrell's struggles to retain the heather field needs no explanation in a country whose devotion to ideals, even at the cost of ruin and death, has long been a familiar phenomenon.[1] The second part of the symbolism is found in the struggle between Tyrrell and Grace, a struggle between man the idealist and woman the materialist. This story becomes the story of absorption by an ideal. Carden's ideal, or his "life-illusion," as Ibsen calls it, is his firm belief that the heather field can be successfully reclaimed. When this ideal is shattered, all is lost; and Carden's life is filled with misery and becomes only an empty mockery.[2]

Maeve, Martyn's second play, also written in 1899, shows the idealism of the visionary individual as contrasted with the practical values of the practical person.[3] Maeve O'Heyne, a daughter of the hereditary Prince of Burren, is an idealist who has submitted to betrothal with a wealthy Englishman, Hugh Fitz Walter, in order that the wealth of

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[1] Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 295.

[2] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 19.

[3] Ibid., p. 259.

the Englishman may be used in re-establishing the impoverished fortunes of the family. Hugh is tolerant, easy going, giving complete freedom to the moody temperament of Maeve. Always a worshipper of beauty, Maeve pores over books on Grecian art, seeking to identify, through their unreal beauty, the brotherhood of the Greek and Celtic races.

Peg, Maeve's old nurse, believes a peasant legend that identifies Maeve with the great Queen Maeve of the Irish story. She believes that the present Maeve has undergone transformation at the hands of the fairies one night on the mountainside. Maeve herself is very willing to believe the story. When the old woman invites her to go to the mountain to meet the legendary figures and the noble lover of her dreams, Maeve forgets it is the night of her wedding and goes. Entranced, she remains for hours on the mountainside.

When Maeve returns hime, her whole being is disturbed by the ecstasy of her vision. The spirit world opens before her, and Queen Maeve with all her retinue passes before her. The Queen offers Maeve eternal beauty in a far, cold land.

> Maeve. Queen, I have seen that land afar.
> Queen Maeve. You also have seen Tir-nan-ogue?
> Maeve. In my dreams, in my day-dreams--
> Queen Maeve, Daughter, it is passing sweet when our day-dreams come true.
> Maeve. Oh let me see the beloved of my daydreams.
> Queen Maeve. Your Prince of the hoar dew, when he comes, will give you rest, rest in beauty--a beauty which is transcendently cold--. You shall see him in the Northern lights of the Tir-nan-Ogue.
> Maeve. And his beauty shall be my joy in an ideal land.

Queen Maeve. Beauty in the midst of all beautiful things.
Maeve. Oh, take me to that land.
Queen Maeve. I am waiting for you, poor, weary child. See the Northern lights are passing before the dawn. We must not tarry. Come with the Northern lights, beautiful ice-maiden.
Maeve. I shall see my beauty--my love--! (Half swooning she falls on the neck of Queen Maeve.)[1]

When the spirit procession returns to the cairn, it carries with it the soul of Maeve. With the coming of dawn the whole scene is found to be covered with a thick coating of hoar frost. Maeve's sister, Finola, coming to prepare Maeve for her wedding, finds her sitting cold and lifeless.

In Maeve Martyn has given free rein to his poetic fancy. Maeve is a tragic character who seeks to escape the bonds of convention and materialism in order to gain an idyllic happiness. The tragic force which oppresses Maeve is the power of convention, the weight of materialistic considerations; her marriage to Fitz-Walter is a self-sacrifice on her part in order to aid her poverty-strickened family. Maeve's tragedy is that in order to gain her ideal beauty she must die. Dying, she says, as the procession of Queen Maeve passes before her, "I see them now, and I see others who have lived long before them, and are buried in that green cairn. Oh, I am dying because I am exiled from such beauty."[2] There is a universality about the character of Maeve that makes her akin to everyone. George Moore has described her character thus, "Maeve is made of

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[1] Edward Martyn, Maeve (Dublin: The Talbot Press, Ltd., 1917), pp. 43-44.

[2] Ibid., p. 45.

moonlight and hoar frost and light of morning. We do not discover her among our acquaintances, but everyone discovers her when he wills to do so in his own heart."[1]

Because the play is somewhat cold and slow in movement, and because Maeve is so thoroughly a visionary character that she appears to have few earthly qualities except her great beauty, the entire tragedy is not so poignant and so moving as the tragedy in The Heather Fields. The entire tone of the play is tragic; but the action is more supernatural and less convincing, for that reason, than the action of The Heather Field. The vision of Queen Maeve that comes to the young girl is a climax which can never be forgotten when once it is witnessed.[2]

Like The Heather Field, Maeve has a two-fold symbolism. The play symbolizes Ireland's choice between English materialism and her own national idealism.

> The lesson is that it is better for Ireland to be depopulated in her pursuit of national individuality, of ideal beauty, than to drift along to complete Anglicanization, even though it may bring riches, peace, and content.[3]

The second part of the symbolism expresses the belief that every individual soul must choose between the materialism of everyday life and the natural idealism of the individual. Finola, Maeve's sister, symbolizes materialism; while Maeve herself is idealism.[4]

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[1] Quoted from Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 260.

[2] Loc. cit.

[3] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 85.

[4] Loc. cit.

Although Grangecolman is closer to real life than most of Martyn's plays, it is believed by most critics to be inferior to either Maeve or The Heather Field.[1] One critic has said of the play,

> Grangecolman is a picture of life as we know it, and there is in it a fidelity of purpose that gives it a kind of effectiveness. There is not in it, however, any keenness of vision, any real reading of life, any great underlying emotion, to relieve its abject sordidness. There is no gusto, no beauty, no intensity of bitterness even, to make its sordidness interesting in any other than a pathological way.[2]

The scene of the drama is an ancient countryhouse near Grangecolman, an ancient county seat near Cublin. Michael Colman, an elderly man who spends his life in tracing out the pedigrees of important families, has a young and beautiful secretary, Clara Farquhar. Catherine Devlin, Michael's daughter, is an individual highly reminiscent of Ibsen's Hedda Gabler. Catherine is a dissatisfied, vaguely ambitious woman, the "product of the emancipation and unrest of modern feminism."[3] During her lifetime she has pursued varied interests, only to fail in all of them. She has been strongly interested in women's rights, has studied medicine, and has failed at the profession, and has finally married Lucius Devlin against her father's wishes. Lucius, who has proved to be as much of a failure as Catherine, is constantly unemployed.

Catherine, sensing her father's growing attachment for Clare and realizing that such a marriage would mean Clare could inherit a large

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1 Nicoll, op. cit., p. 416.
Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 261.
Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 92.

2 Loc. cit.

3 Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 301.

share of Michael's property, resolves to break up the intimacy before it has gone too far. Pretending to have a great interest in her father's work, Clare endeavors to become his secretary. In a high-handed fashion she dismisses Clare.

Clare, heart-broken, seeks Michael; and he asks her to marry him. Catherine is angry at the miscarriage of her plans and determines to break up the intended marriage. That evening at dinner Clare and Michael discuss the family ghost, a tall woman in white, who is known to appear on auspicious occasions. Michael is afraid of ghosts; but Clare laughs, saying she will fire at the ghost if she ever sees it. Catherine decides that, even if she cannot prevent the marriage, she will at least make Michael and Clare unhappy for the rest of their lives.

That night the ghost appears. Lucius and Colman are frightened, but Clare calmly reaches for the pistol.

> Clare. Who are you? Stand, and say who you are, or I shall fire. You won't. Here then. (She fires several times. There is silence as both she and Lucius stand back from the door. Then Catherine, in a white sheet, with her face and breast covered with blood, totters into the room. As she falls, she is caught by Lucius.)
> Colman (frantically.) Catherine, my child! My own child! Oh, what have I done?
> Lucius (bewildered.) She is dead!
> (The revolver drops from Miss Farquhar's hand. She stands overwhelmed. No one heeds her.)[1]

Grangecolman shows stronger characterization than most of Martyn's other plays. All the characters seem to be stifled by disappointments and

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[1] Edward Martyn, Grangecolman (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1912), p. 47.

understandings. Michael has been disappointed in his daughter Catherine, who has persistently refused to take any interest in his beloved life work. Clare confesses to Michael that her rather lonely life has been spent with a stepmother who has never understood her. Lucius is a dreamy individual who goes about waving the banner of work and yet refuses to work. Catherine herself is a bitter, barren woman of the suffragette type who has alienated herself from all by her selfishness and discontent.

Clare and Michael are tragic characters in that their happiness is forever blasted through no fault of their own. As Catherine had intended, her death will remain forever as a detriment to their happiness. Catherine herself is a tragic character who carries within her own personality the cause of her downfall. Her tragedy, however, is not as keenly felt because a deep interest in her as a human being has never been aroused.[1] The tragic force is the discontent, the unhappiness in Catherine's disposition that makes her determined to wreck the happiness of others. The play, as a whole, is sordid and contains no beauty of intensity of feeling that would elevate it to the position of truly great tragedy.[2]

Martyn's work has not influenced Irish drama to any great extent, since everything he has attempted has been done better by someone else. He was, however, the only dramatist of the Irish Literary Theater who sensed the possibilities of portraying a contemporary life in Ireland

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[1] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 27.

[2] Loc. cit.

outside the peasantry. The two plays, Maeve and The Heather Field, will give him an abiding place in the theater; but it was as an inspirer, a courageous and sympathetic critic, a pioneer, and not a dramatist that Martyn has most influenced those about him. His real strength, however, lies in the strange union of reality and enchantment. Few dramatists have succeeded as he has in welding together the two spheres as a complete whole.

Summary

Edward Martyn has written three plays which are outstandingly tragic--The Heather Field, Maeve, and Grangecolman. The characters in all three plays are chosen from middle class life, and the conflicts are all universal ones. The Heather Field and Maeve, showing the influence of Ibsen, portray the conflict between the idealism of the visionary individual and the materialism of the worldly person. The Heather Field shows the tragedy of Tyrrell, whose chief ambition is to reclaim the waste land of the heather field, a project too large for one man to undertake alone. The catastrophe occurs when the wild heather asserts itself again upon the land, and Tyrrell goes insane. The tragic force is within Tyrrell's own character--his inability to fact the situation clearly and to perceive the foolishness of his project. In Maeve the conflict arises when Maeve, the idealist, is engaged to marry the

materialistic Englishman with the prospect of settling down to a quiet, well-regulated life. The tragic force opposing Maeve is the weight of convention or the materialistic considerations of life. Grangecolman shows all humanity stifled by disappointments and misunderstanding. The conflict is between the selfishness of Catherine and the love which Michael and Clare feel for each other. The tragic force is the elements of discontent found within Clare's own disposition. The catastrophe occurs when Clare unintentionally shoots Catherine. The general tone of all three plays is wholly tragic, showing no lighter comic situations. In two of the plays, Maeve and Grangecolman, deaths occur on the stage; but the tragedy in Grangecolman is not nearly so deep as it is in the other two plays. All three plays show an extensive use of the supernatural, and reveal Martyn's ability to blend together reality and enchantment in the writing of tragic drama.

Lord Dunsany

Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, known as Lord Dunsany, was born in 1887. He is an Irish romantic dramatist, who has chosen for his subject-matter the fabulous gods of ancient Egypt rather than the traditional Celtic material that other dramatists have used. His favorite theme is the conflict between man and the gods.[1]

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[1] Clayton Hamilton, Problems of the Playwright (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1917), p. 194.

The early reading of Dunsany influenced his style of writing a great deal. The books with which he was most familiar were Grimm's and Anderson's Fairy Tales and the Bible. He himself said that for years no style seemed to him as natural as that of the Bible.[1]

During the South African War he served in the Coldstream Guards, and in the World War he was Captain of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. He went at the head of his company to Gallipoli, returning safely to Ireland, only to be wounded in 1916 in the Dublin riots.[2]

Yeats, in 1909, encouraged Dunsany to write drama for the Abbey Theater in Dublin. The first play, The Glittering Gate, was produced in that theater on April 29, 1909. Yeats gave Dunsany a bit of advice in regard to the writing of plays, a suggestion that was followed in the other plays. "Surprise," said Yeats, "is what is necessary. Surprise, and then more surprise, and that is all."[3] As a result of this suggestion, almost all of Dunsany's plays involve a surprise ending that reminds one of the termination of the short stories of O. Henry. In February, 1911, King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior was produced at the Abbey Theater; and in June, 1912, The Gods of the Mountain was produced at the Haymarket Theater in London. Other plays were soon being successfully produced in a large number of Russian and American cities.[4]

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[1] Tante, op. cit., p. 112.

[2] Loc. cit.

[3] Edward Hale Bierstadt, Dunsany the Dramatist (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1917), p. 17.

[4] Ibid., p. 8.

All of Dunsany's plays represent a desire to escape from the ordinary world of reality to a world of romanticism. More interested in ideas than in people, he has an outlook that is almost entirely cosmic. He has created a very hierarchy of gods whom he has enshrouded in the glowing colors of the fabulous East; and he has permitted them complete freedom in controlling the destinies of the characters.[1] The literature of the Golden Age of Greece has exerted a strong influence on his writings; and even in his earliest plays is found his favorite theme, the tragic failing of a hero who has set himself against the gods. In this conflict fate, or the eternal law, conquers any temporary rebellion. In his grappling with the recurrent riddle of destiny, Dunsany agrees with Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.[2] His philosophy of man in relation to the gods and to the cosmos is essentially Grecian. His most characteristic effects are almost always connected in some way with the most trenchant and overwhelming of the emotions--fear.[3]

> In all these plays there is a profound inter-weaving of the things of destiny, a sense of great forces beyond mortals, that must be propitiated, an ironic melange of exquisite poetry and the most modern realism, a jewel-like beauty of phrase, a succinct and graphic power of exposition, and a power of creating moods in a few phrases that have never been surpassed.[4]

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[1] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 249.

[2] Hamilton, op. cit., pp. 194-96.

[3] Odell Shepherd, "Lord Dunsany--Myth-maker," Scribners 69:595-96, May, 1921.

[4] Emma Garrett Boyd, "Lord Dunsany, Dreamer," Forum 57:500, April, 1917.

The scene of The Glittering Gate, Dunsany's first one-act play, written in 1909, is a Lonely Place "strewn with large black rocks and uncorked beer-bottles, the latter in great profusion."[1] At the back in a wall of granite overhanging an abyss hung with stars, is the golden Gate of Heaven. There are only two characters, Bill and Jim, both burglars, who have died recently. Jim, who has been there only six months, wearily opens one beer bottle after another, only to find each one empty. When Bill arrives, he displays a tool which he decides to use in opening the gate of Heaven. There he hopes to find his mother, and Jim is eager to meet a girl he once knew. They discuss what they expect Heaven will be like. Bill thinks they will see "old saints with their halos shining and flickering like windows o'wintry night and angels thick as swallows along a cottage roof";[2] but Jim hopes for a glass of beer, a dish of tripe and onions, or a pipe of tobacco.[3]

> (At last there is a noise of falling bolts; the gates swing out an inch and are stopped by the rock.)
> Bill. Jim! Jim! I've opened it, Jim. I've opened the Gate of Heaven! Come and help me. . . . (looks down into the abyss that lies below the Lonely Place) Stars. Blooming great stars. (Then he moves away the rock on which he stood. The gates move slowly. Jim leaps up and runs to help; they each take a gate and move backward with their faces against it.)
> Bill. Hullo, mother! You there? Hullo! You there? It's Bill, mother. (The gates swing heavily open, revealing empty night and stars.)

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[1] Lord Dunsany, The Glittering Gate in Five Plays (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1930), p. 89.

[2] Ibid., p. 97.

[3] Loc. cit.

Bill (staggering and gazing into the revealed Nothing, in which the far stars go wandering.) Stars. Blooming great stars. There ain't no Heaven, Jim. (Ever since the revelation a cruel and violent laugh has arisen afar off. It increases in volume and grows louder and louder.)

Jim. That's like them. That's very like them. Yes, they'd do that! (The curtain falls and the laughter still howls on.)[1]

The Glittering Gate is a grim satire on the eternal hope that is the very basis of human life.[2] Bill and Jim, although they are burglars and have broken the law of man, still hold to a tenuous hope that they will eventually reach Heaven. There is distinct irony in their conception of Heaven in terms of their earthly habits and practices.[3] Jim is frankly a cynic; while Bill is more trusting; but then one remembers that Jim has been dead longer.[4] They are both materialists, and it is in keeping with their lives that after death they should still believe that there is nothing too strong or too sacred to be bent to their pleasure. Individuals such as Bill and Jim, however, would be distinctly out of place in a Heaven paved with gold. Their tragedy arises when they attempt to go against the eternal gods; and the tragic force is clearly shown to be fate, which causes the frustration of their desires to gain admittance to Heaven. The mocking laughter which attends their frustration seems, to the reader, fitting retribution for the kind of life they have led; and again poetic justice is achieved.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 98-99.

[2] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 249.

[3] Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 361.

[4] Bierstadt, op. cit., p. 28.

> Surrounded by empty beer-bottles, fitting symbols of their material life, and hounded by the mocking laugh of Nemesis, Bill and Jim can only vent their own spleen in a last bitter outcry against the eternal. The old and endless balance of things is achieved, and the law is accomplished.[1]

The theme of man in conflict with the gods is again used in the play The Gods of the Mountain, written in 1911. The scene is the outside wall of the city of Kongros, where six beggars seated in the dust lament their poverty and regret "that the gods are drowsy and all that is divine in man is dead."[2] Agmar, with the aid of his servant Slag, contrives a plan by which they will go to the city as gods. He tells of seven jade idols seated on the mountain of Marma; they will impersonate these gods. He sends a thief to fetch the green raiment, and another beggar is added to make up the necessary seven.

In the Metropolitan Hall of the city of Kongros the beggars disguised as gods seat themselves, and the citizens question them. When doubt is raised, meats are brought for sacrifice. All the beggars except Agmar eat hungrily. To the citizens they seem like hungry men, but they wonder that Agmar abstains. He says that he, the eldest of the gods, never eats, leaving that to the younger gods who have learned bestial habits from lions. By his conversation he intimidates the citizens; and when wine is brought in a final test, Agmar pours it upon the ground. The citizens retire; and Agmar eats, posting Slag at the door as a sentinel.

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1 Ibid., p. 26.

2 Lord Dunsany, The Gods of the Mountain in Five Plays (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1930), p. 4.

In the third act the beggars are seated on seven thrones hewn from rock. All are very much pleased over the wines and meats that have been brought to them. Then the Thief rushes in to say that three days before two men had been sent to Marma to see whether the gods were still there. The citizens enter with two messengers who announce that the gods have left their position at Marma. Reassured, the citizens prepare feasts for the beggars; but Agmar is puzzled because something has happened that he has not foreseen.

Ulf has a dream which frightens him very much. Then a frightened man rushes in and throws himself down before them. He describes green gods, whom he believes to be the beggars--all green, blind, and groping. Agmar feels that his grasp on the situation is slipping; he feels the presence of some force which is superior to him, and he is filled with fear. There is the sound of a heavy, measured tread approaching. Ulf springs to his feet, crying out in fear.

> Ulf (in a loud voice, almost chanting.) I have a fear, an old fear, and a boding. We have done ill in the sight of the seven gods. Beggars we were and beggars we should have remained. We have given up our calling and come in sight of our doom. I will no longer let my fear be silent; it shall run about and cry; it shall go from me crying. like a dog from out of a doomed city; for my fear has seen calamity and has known an evil thing.
> Slag (hoarsely) Master!
> Agmar (rising) Come, come!
> (They listen. No one speaks. The stony boots come on. Enter in single file through door in right of back, a procession of seven green men, even hands and faces are green; they wear greenstone sandals; they walk with knees extremely wide apart, as having sat cross-legged for centuries; their right arms and right forefingers point upward grotesquely. Halfway to the footlights they wheel left. They pass in

front of the seven beggars, now in terrified attitudes, and six of them sit down in the attitude described, with their backs to the audience. The leader stands, still stooping.)

Oogno (cries out just as they wheel left.) The Gods of the Mountain!

Agmar (hoarsely) Be Still! They are dazzled by the light. They may not see us.

(The leading Green Thing points his forefinger at the lantern--the flame turns green. When the six are seated the leader points one by one at each of the seven beggars, shooting out his forefinger at them. As he does this each beggar in his turn gathers himself back on to his throne and crosses his legs, his right arm goes stiffly upward with forefinger erect, and a staring look of horror comes into his eyes. In this attitude the beggars sit motionless, while a green light falls upon their faces. The gods go out.

Presently enter the Citizens, some with victuals and fruits. One touches a beggar's arm and then another's.

Citizen. They are cold; they have turned to stone. (All abase themselves, foreheads to the floor.)

One. We have doubted them. We have doubted them. They have turned to stone because we have doubted them.

Another. They were the true gods.

All. They were the true gods.[1]

The tragedy of The Gods of the Mountain arises from a conflict between man and the gods. Again the play resembles melodrama in that there is more interest in the plot than in the characters. The characters are not particularly individualized, but Agmar stands out from the other beggars as a true personality. He is the leader; he would have made a great prophet, a captain, a leader of men, but for one thing. He is wholly lacking in spiritual quality. He is a mental giant, an imaginative genius; but he does not have those inner feelings of fear which Ulf has. He pays no heed to premonitions, and if there is a tragic defect in his

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[1] Ibid., pp. 36-38.

character, it is the void of the spiritual quality which other persons may possess.[1]

Over the whole drama hangs a definite feeling of inevitability. One knows what the outcome must be because the crime has been committed, and a suitable retribution must be made. The forbodings of Ulf give the drama its fatalistic note. Through the terrifying dreams of Ulf the dramatist prepares the reader for the terrible doom which must come upon the beggars. The tragic force, then, becomes the power of the gods to punish those who break the divine laws. In conception the play is gigantic. The only thing that Agmar has failed to take into account is the power of the gods themselves. That which is beyond and above the grasp of mere mind has crushed him with an ease and an implacability which he could never forsee. When he is confronted with the gods whom he sought to imitate, his whole plan is shattered in an instant. Humanity proves to be fallible; only the gods are omnipotent.[2]

A Night at an Inn, written in 1916, is considered by critics to be a practically "perfect one-act play."[3] The curtain rises on a room in an old English inn, where The Toff, a dilapidated gentleman, with his three sailor followers, Sniggers, Bill, and Albert, are spending the night. Only a short time before he and his followers had raided an Indian

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[1] Bierstadt, _op. cit._, p. 44.

[2] _Ibid._, pp. 48-49.

[3] "_A Night at an Inn_--Lord Dunsany's 'Perfect' Melodrama," _Current Opinion_ 63:91, August, 1917.

temple and robbed the idol of its single eye, a huge ruby. Before they left the country, their two companions were killed. Even now the three priests of Klesh are following after the fugitives in order to visit their retribution upon them and to regain the ruby. The sailors grow restless; they fear no danger, and they desire to be off with their booty. Then they see that the priests, who have followed them all the way from Hull, eighty miles away, are waiting for them in the hall. The Toff, who has expected this, tells them they must kill the priests if they expect to enjoy the ruby in peace. Through his cleverness the priests are trapped one after another and murdered. The four then celebrate their victory; but Sniggers goes out for a pail of water and comes back pale and shaking, disclaiming any part in the ruby.

(Dead silence, only broken by Sniggers' sobs. Then steps are heard. Enter a hideous idol. It is blind and gropes its way. It gropes its way to the ruby and picks it up and screws it into a socket in the forehead. Sniggers still weeps softly, the rest stare in horror. The idol steps out, not groping. It steps move off, then stop.)

The Toff. O, great heavens!

Albert (in a childish, plaintive voice.) What is it, Toffy?

Bill. Albert, it is that obscene idol (in a whisper) come from India.

Albert. It has taken the eye.

Sniggers. We are saved.

A Voice Off (with outlandish accent.) Meestairs William Jones, Able Seaman.

(The Toff has never spoken, never moved. He only gazes stupidly in horror.)

Bill. Albert, Albert, what is this? (He rises and walks out. One moan is heard. Sniggers goes to the window. He falls back sickly.)

Albert (in a whisper.) What has happened?

Sniggers. I have seen it. I have seen it. Oh, I have seen it! (He returns to the table.)

The Toff (laying his hand very gently on Sniggers' arm, speaking softly and winningly.) What was it, Sniggers?

Sniggers. I have seen it.

Albert. What?

Sniggers. Oh!

Voice. Meestaire Albert Thomas, Able Seaman.

Albert. Must I go, Toffy? Toffy, must I go?

Sniggers (clutching him.) Don't move.

Albert (going) Toffy, Toffy. (Exit.)

Voice. Meestaire Jacob Smith, Able Seaman.

Sniggers. I can't go, Toffy, I can't go. I can't do it. (He goes.)

Voice. Meestaire Arnold Everett Scott-Fortescue, late Esquire, Able Seaman.

The Toff. I did not foresee it. (Exit.)[1]

As in other plays of Dunsany, The Toff and the three sailors are characters who have dared to oppose the gods or fate. Their tragedy, then, is that they must die as punishment for their crime; and the theme becomes hideous impiety inexorably revenged. The tragic force is the blind idol, Klesh, who seeks to avenge the wrong done him. Again the lesson is enforced; the gods are all-powerful, and whoever opposes them must come to ruin.

In _A Night at an Inn_, almost pure melodrama, Toff and the three sailors become integral parts in the working out of the plot rather than actual individuals, and the blind idol Klesh is a melodramatic device used to heighten the impression of terror. The climax in the last part of the play when Klesh comes to claim his eye is remarkably built up and sustained. One critic has said of the play:

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[1] Lord Dunsany, _A Night at an Inn_ in _Plays of Gods and Men_ (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), p.

> It is one of the most thrillingly powerful one-act plays of the contemporary stage, and its popularity throughout the English speaking world is only what is deserved and might be anticipated. As an exercise in the technique of the one-act form of the play is flawless, slowly concentrating its effects for the cumulative terror of the last few minutes.[1]

The Laughter of the Gods, written in 1917, shows worldly persons and unbelievers overwhelmed by the forces which they have flouted.[2] The scene is a jungle city of Thek in the reign of King Karnos about the time of the decadence of Babylon.[3] The courtiers of the king have persuaded him to leave his city, Barbul-el-Sharnak, and to bring his people to the city of Thek to live. One day the ladies of the court go down a narrow little street and find themselves in the jungle. Vain and foolish creatures that they are, they are heartbroken when they learn that there are no shops where they can buy new hair or other bits of personal adornment. They then decide they must force their husbands to persuade King Karnos to return to Barbul-el-Sharnah, where new hair is easily bought.

The King, however, is so charmed with the city of Thek that he cannot be persuaded to leave. The men conceive the plan that the King must leave because he is obeying a prophecy. The men then threaten Voice-of-the-Gods, the only prophet left, with death unless he predicts falsely. Although he firmly believes that the gods cannot lie, they force him to

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[1] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 254.

[2] "The Mood of Spiritual Passion in Lord Dunsany," Current Opinion 66:176-77, March, 1919.

[3] Lord Dunsany, The Laughter of the Gods in Plays of Gods and Men (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), p. 51.

do their will. He warns them they will be punished for this impious deed, but they laugh at his fears because they do not believe in gods. He prophesies before the King, saying,

> In three days' time the gods will destroy this city for vengeance upon some men, unless all men desert it. . . . Why . . . there will be a sound as the riving of wood. . . a sound as of thunder coming up from the ground. A cleft will run like a mouse across the floor. There will be a red light, and then no light at all, and in the darkness Thek shall tumble in.[1]

The King laughs at the prophecy. He tells Voice-of-the-Gods that if his prediction is false he himself must die on the third day at sunset.

The Queen is apprehensive of a coming doom. Even when there is seemingly nothing to fear, she is frightened. Now, trembling, she appears before the King; for she has heard the lute heard only by those who are going to die. To reassure her, the King tells her that he, too, has heard it, but that it is only a man of the court passing by her window with his lute. She refuses to be consoled, saying:

> O, do not speak of the gods. The gods are very terrible; all the dooms that shall ever be come forth from the gods. In misty windings of the wandering hills they forge the future even as on an anvil. The future frightens me. . . . Men laugh at the gods; they often laugh at the gods. I am more sure that the gods laugh too. It is dreadful to think of the laughter of the gods. O the lute! the lute! How clearly I hear the lute. But you all hear it. Do you not? You swear that you all hear it.[2]

Again the King assures her they have all heard it, but the servant returns

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[1] Ibid., p. 6.

[2] Ibid., pp. 103-4.

to report that no man playing a lute can be found outside her window.

As the third day draws to an end, the excitement of the court becomes more pronounced. The Executioneer is very eager to kill the prophet, for he has invented a new stroke he desires to use. Sunset comes, and the Voice-of-the-Gods cries out.

> Voice-of-the-Gods. The gods have lied!
> King Karnos. The jungle is sinking! It has fallen into the earth. (The Queen smiles a little, holding his hand.) The city is falling in! The houses are rolling toward us! (Thunder off.)
> Ichtharion. They are coming like a wave and a darkness is coming with them.
> (Loud and prolonged thunder. Flashes of red light and then total darkness. A little light comes back, showing recumbent figures, shattered pillars and rocks of white marble. The Prophet's back is broken, but he raises the forepart of his body for a minute.)
> Voice-of-the-Gods (Triumphantly.) They have not lied!
> Ichtarion. O, I am killed. (Laughter heard off.) Some-one is laughing. Laughing, even in Thek! Why the whole city is shattered. (The laughter grows demoniac.) What is that dreadful sound?
> Voice-of-the-Gods. It is the laughter of the gods that cannot lie going back to their hills. (He dies.)[1]

The conflict in this play is again one between man and the gods. Voice-of-the-Gods has been forced to prophesy falsely, but his words must come true because the gods cannot lie. There is irony in the fact that destruction comes upon the people through their worldliness--the foolish vanity of a few women. The tragic force is again the power of the gods which dwarfs man into insignificance; and again the conflict must end in death. Men who attempt to break the power of the gods are doomed to frustration.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 126-29.

Although Dunsany chose the fabulous cities and the ancient gods of a far-away Egypt for his subject matter instead of the traditional Celtic legends, his adventures are as stirring to the imagination as any recounted by the Gaelic legend. In this sense, his work belongs to the literature of the Irish Renaissance; for it is "a rekindling of the flame which has invested the Irish world with the glow of Celtic vision. The marvels he describes take on the glamor and mystery which the Celt has at all times descried in nature."[1]

> Lord Dunsany has given us much that we stand greatly in need of. . . . In an all too wordid day and age, when the romance of the open road seems to have given place to the romance of the accounting-house, he has opened anew for us the door of wonder. Dunsany has played the perfect host for us in a magic land; he has given us of his best; and we ha e found that his best is truly beautiful. He has done a fine, it may not be too much to say a great work, and he has done it with the deftness of the perfect craftsman.[2]

Summary

Lord Dunsany has written four plays that may be classed as tragedies--The Glittering Gate, The Gods of the Mountain, A Night at an Inn, and The Laughter of the Gods. Because the interest of the reader lies in the plot rather than in the characters, these plays are melodrama rather than pure tragedy. All of the plays are wholly tragic,

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[1] Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 168.

[2] Bierstadt, op. cit., pp. 115-16.

showing no comic or lighter elements. In The Gods of the Mountain, A Night at an Inn, and The Laughter of the Gods death occurs on the stage; but A Night at an Inn involves other deaths which do not occur on the stage. All of Dunsany's plays show a conflict between man and the gods, and the tragic force is always shown to be the power of the gods. Man's efforts to break the will of the gods must end in utter frustration. The Glittering Gate is a dialogue between two burglars outside the door of Heaven; they force the door open, but find on the other side only a night of empty stars. Thus, efforts of materialistic individuals who desire to force their way into Heaven end in utter frustration. The Gods of the Mountain shows the tragedy of seven beggars who impersonate the green idol gods that sit on a nearby mountain. When the real gods arrive, the imposters are turned to stone. A Night at an Inn reveals the tragedy of four sailors who have stolen the eye of an Indian idol--a famous ruby. The idol, Klesh, returns to claim his eye; and one by one the sailors are called out to meet a hideous death. In The Laughter of the Gods a prophet of the gods is made to prophecy falsely the downfall of a city; but, since the gods cannot lie, the prophecy must come true, and the inhabitants of the city are destroyed. Through all of Dunsany's plays runs the theme of impiety revenged hideously and horribly. As a writer of highly individualistic melodrama, Lord Dunsany is well known.

George William Russell

Among the leaders in the Celtic Renaissance one of the most outstanding is George Russell, Irish poet, philosopher, painter, essayist, editor, politican, and economist. He is also a playwright in that he has written one drama--a prose version of the heroic legend of Deirdre. Russell is perhaps better known by the penname, "AE," with which he signs most of his writings. When he first began to write for the reading public, he used the penname "AEon." The printers could decipher only the first two letters--AE. Characteristically, Russell accepted this incident as an omen. From that time on he has written under the shortest pseudonym in Irish literature.

Russell, who was born in the County Armagh in 1867, was a student at the Dublin School of Art at the time that he met W. B. Yeats and became identified with the Irish Literary Movement. In 1897 Russell became organizer for the Irish Agricultural Organization Society, organized to spread teachings of cooperation throughout Ireland. Traveling the roads of Ireland on a bicycle, he organized poultry and creamery societies, exposed the tricks of money lenders, and helped to convert Irish peasants to a gospel of cooperation, which proved rich in tangible gain to the rural population.[1]

After some years as organizer, Russell became assistant secretary to the Irish Agricultural Organization Society. In 1905 he was appointed

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[1] Tante, op. cit., p. 351.

editor of its official paper--The Irish Homestead, parent of The Irish Statesman. From an early age he wrote verse from the sheer drive of inspiration. The art of painting, too, came to him easily; and he soon gained a name for himself as a landscape painter.

Russell has always been highly regarded by his Irish countrymen. The fame of his wisdom and goodness spread throughout Ireland; and he came to be the center of the brilliant, intellectual life of Dublin. In the founding and management of the Irish Theater, he also played an important part.[1]

In 1901 two young actors, Frank and William Fay, came to Russell, asking him to write a play for a small company of amateur actors with which they were connected. Russell, who had always been a lover of the old Gaelic legends, decided to use as his material the well known story of Deirdre. On April 2, 1902, the Irish National Dramatic Company presented Russell's play Deirdre and Yeats's drama Cathleen ni Houlihan at Saint Teresa's Hall in Dublin.[2]

George Russell has told the story of Deirdre in a simple, yet highly poetical fashion. The beauty of Deirdre, prisoner of Concobar, is "so great that it would madden whole hosts."[3] Following the old story, Deirdre dreams of her love, a tall hunter who stood "like a flame against the flameless sky, and the whole sapphire of the heavens seemed to live

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[1] Ibid., p. 362.

[2] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 39.

[3] George Russell, Deirdre (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1907), p. 12.

in his fearful eyes."[1] Then Lavarham, the old nurse, realizes that the prophecy of the Druids is being fulfilled, that through Deirdre, "but not through her sin, will come the destruction of the Red Branch."[2]

When Naisi comes, he realizes Deirdre is his true love; and together they flee to Scotland. Concobar, angry when he hears of their departure, swears a great vengeance.

> Concobar. I swear by Balor, Tethra, and all the blood of demons, I will have such a vengeance a thousand years thereafter shall be frightened by the tale. . . .
> Lavarham. O King, the doom of the Red Branch has already gone forth, when you suffered love for Deirdre to enter your heart.[3]

The next scene shows Deirdre and Naisi in the woods. Fergus appears, bringing news that Naisi is free to return home. Fearing treachery, Deirdre pleads with Naisi to stay; but he laughs at her fears. Broken-hearted, she prepares to leave, saying:

> Farewell, O home of happy memories. Though thou art bleak to Naisi, to me thou art bright. I shall never see thee more, save as shadows we wander here, weeping over what has gone. Farewell, O gentle people, who made music for me on the hills. The Father has struck the last chord on the Harp of Life; and the music I shall hear hereafter shall be only sorrow. O Mother Dana, who breathed up love through the dim earth to my heart, be with me where I am going. Soon shall I lie close to thee for comfort, wher many a broken heart has lain, and many a weeping head.[4]

In the third act Lavarham seeks to appease Concobar's anger by

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[1] Ibid., p. 15.

[2] Ibid., p. 19.

[3] Ibid., p. 27.

[4] Ibid., p. 36.

telling him that Deirdre's great beauty has gone from her. Then one of the sons of Fergus brings news of Deirdre, whose beauty is so great that all passing by pause to look at her; for "she moves among them like one of the Shee, whiter than ivory with long hair of gold, and her eyes, like the blue flame of twilight, make mystery in their hearts."[1]

While Deirdre and Naisi are playing chess, a servant brings the news that Naisi must die or give up Deirdre. Naisi rushes out to defend Deirdre and returns a few minutes later wounded. Dying, he has a vision of eternal glory; and he begs Deirdre to accompany him to the promised home.

> There was music a while ago. The swans of Lir, with their slow, sweet faery singing. There never was a sadder tale than theirs. They must roam for ages driven on in the Sea of Moyle, while we go hand in hand through the Country of Immortal Youth. And there is Mananaun, the dark blue King, who looks at us with a smile of welcome. Illatrach is lit up with the shining mountains, and the golden phantoms are leaping there in the dawn! There is a path made for us. Come, Deirdre, the god has made for us an island in the sea.[2]

Deirdre proudly refuses to flee from Concobar. She says:

> I do not fear Concobar any more. My spirit is sinking away from the world. I could not stay after Naisi. The earth has grown dim and old, fostermother. The gods have gone far away, and the lights from the mountains, and the Lions of the Flaming Heart are still. O fostermother, when they heap the cairn over him, let me be beside him in the narrow grave. I will still be with the noble one.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 40.

[2] Ibid., p. 51.

[3] Ibid., pp. 51-52.

Laying her head on the body of Naisi, Deirdre, too, dies. Concobar, realizing the great wrong he has done, is saddened. He speaks slowly, after a long pause, "I have two divided kingdoms, and one is in my own heart. Thus do I pay homage to thee, O Queen, who will rule, being dead."[1]

Throughout the whole drama a sense of the impending fate is shown. Lavarham remarks to Deirdre, "The harp has but three notes; and, after sleep and laugh, the last sound is of weeping."[2] Deirdre knows that the words of the Druids spoken at her birth were that she would bring destruction on the members of the Red Branch. When she dreams of her lover, she tells Lavarham, "The harp of life is already trembling into sorrow."[3] Then Deirdre and Naisi, fleeing from Emain, hear the birds of Angus, whose "singing brings love and death."[4]

Deirdre, in Russell's version of the play, stands out as a great tragic character. In keeping with the old legend, her tragedy is the passing of happiness. The tragic force is not so much the desire for revenge on the part of Concobar as it is Fate or Destiny tampering with the lives of the characters. Lavarham herself strikes the tragic note when she says, "My darling, it was fate, and you were not to blame!"[5] When Naisi desires to return to Emain, birds with bloody plumages wheel over the heads of the lovers; and a few drops of blood fall on Naisi as

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[1] Ibid., p. 53.

[2] Ibid., p. 9.

[3] Ibid., p. 13.

[4] Ibid., p. 22.

[5] Ibid., p. 51.

a symbol of the death that is to come. Deirdre begs Naisi to stay, telling him,

> In this lonely place there is peace, and the doom that Cathavh the Druid cried cannot fall. And, oh, I feel, too, there is One here among us who pushes us silently from the place of life; and we are drifting away--away--from the world, on a tide, which goes down into the darkness! . . . O, children of Usna, there is death in your going! Naisi, will you not stay the storm bird of sorrow? I forehear the falling of tears that cease not, and in generations unborn the sorrow of it all will never be stilled![1]

Although Russell's play Deirdre has some finely conceived dramatic situations, his best and most outstanding work has been his poetry. One critic has said of the play:

> Despite its intensely dramatic situations, it is, however, essentially a decorative rather than a dramatic play, and its exalted prose is seldom true dramatic speech. But you carry from it a memory of beautiful pictures, and a feeling that something noble has passed your way, to enter into and become a part of you.[2]

Summary

George Russell, in his only drama, Deirdre, has written a tragedy based on the legendary story of Naisi and Deirdre. Following the modern conception of tragedy, Deirdre is simple in action; and the deaths of Naisi and Deirdre occur on the stage, a characteristic of Elizabethan tragedy. The play is wholly tragic, showing no comic elements or lighter situations. Deirdre is a true tragic character whose conflict arises

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[1] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

[2] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 118.

from the passing away of happiness, and the tragic force is clearly shown to be Fate or Destiny as formulated by the Druids in a prophecy at Deirdre's birth. Both theme and characters show Russell's sympathetic portrayal of the tragedy in the old Gaelic legend.

Sheumas O'Kelly

The name of Sheumas O'Kelly is practically unknown outside of Ireland, but in Ireland his work has had a fairly wide appreciation. His death at an early age in 1919 removed one of the most promising of Irish dramatists. Although he is best known as a novelist and a short story writer, he has contributed two great tragedies, The Shuiler's Child and The Bribe. A journalist by profession, he edited provincial newspapers for several years before he settled in Dublin, in 1912. The Shuiler's Child, staged in Dublin in 1909, made a great impression on the literary and artistic circles. In November, 1910, the play was produced by the Abbey Theater and became known to the larger playgoing public.[1]

The Shuiler's Child is a drama of renunciation, a social problem set forth in stark terms. In Ireland the "shuiler" is a familiar figure; he is the wanderer, the tramp, the tinker, the roving gypsy of England. Moll Woods, the "shuiler" or vagrant beggar, sings from door to door for

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[1] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 195.

a livelihood. One day she comes to the home of Andy and Nannie O'Hea, a childless couple who have adopted a little boy from the workhouse. Moll immediately recognizes the boy Phil, whom she has been forced to abandon to the workhouse. She longs to have him return to her, but the foster-parents have come to regard the boy as their own and are reluctant to let him go.

An inspector from the workhouse arrives and is dissatisfied with Phil's health. She goes away, threatening to remove him from Nannie's care and to send him back to the workhouse. Determined to save her son from the workhouse, Moll goes to the authorities herself to claim the child she has abandoned. By law her request must be complied with; and when the boy is restored to her, she takes him out on the road with her. Fearing Phil will be hungry and cold, Nannie grieves a great deal and becomes more and more depressed. Then Moll appears again with her child, bringing him back to the home of the O'Heas. Her motive was to take Phil from the workhouse and to dispose of him as she saw fit.

> Shuiler. It didn't do me good to walk up the roads of Derryvogue. When I saw the gables of my father's house black and bare against the sky, the courage failed me. All of a sudden I grew afeared for the child. Then I thought of this place.
> Nannie (with dawning hope.) You thought of bringing him back to me?
> Shuiler. We came back along the roads, and then crossed the fields.
> Andy. Is it that you are going to leave him with us?
> Shuiler. He will have the comfort of a home here, and the sure roof over his head.
> Nannie. Oh, Andy! (She runs to Phil, hugging him.)

Andy. God directed you to the best, Moll Woods.
Shuiler. It will be lonesome on the roads now. I will be without courage or pride.[1]

Andy tries to reassure her, telling her she may see the child as often as she pleases; and he will try to get her a position with a nearby farmer. Just then the police arrive to arrest Moll Woods on the charge of child-desertion. They ask her to come quietly, without violence; but she attempts to curse the police. Andy tells her to be courageous for the sake of the child.

> Shuiler (going to Nannie, and holding out to her brown Scapulars she has taken from her neck.) Put these about the child's neck. They are my pair of brown Scapulars. I heard him in my prayers. (She moves away from Nannie.) When I sing again the child will not be afeared. My songs will be heard up and down narrow streets. There will be great miles of shining roads between me and my child. (Going to Andy.) May God always be about your house, Andy O'Hea, and everyone under your roof. That is the prayer I leave behind me. We won't be minding that journey up to the farmer's house.
> Andy. Your child will be waiting here for you.
> Shuiler. I'm going to leave my pride behind me, to miss my step in the march of the angels. (She goes out slowly, hesitating once or twice with a gesture of despair.)[2]

In the person of Moll Woods, O'Kelly has created a character that has gripped the public greatly. Moll is more the victim of circumstances than of any inner weakness. Deserted by her husband and forced to go to the workhouse, she early prefers the wandering on the roads to life in the workhouse. In the workhouse she meets all types of women, some meekly subordinate and others wildly rebellious. She tells Nannie, "A

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[1] Sheumas O'Kelly, The Shuiler's Child (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1912), p. 44.

[2] Ibid., pp. 52-53.

scent of wasting and withering. Well, that's the way it is in the wards of the workhouse. Poor, old, crippled creatures gathered in one place to die."[1] For the child she is willing to give up all. Her tragedy is that of a cruel and unrelenting public that interprets her desertion of her child as a wanton cruelty rather than as a pure, unselfish devotion. The tragic forces are public opinion and the harsh circumstances that force her to become an inmate of the workhouse. To save her son from a similar condition, she stumbles out of the cottage to the prison to which the law condemns her, and to that life of vagabondage, misery, and remorse to which she condemns herself.

The Bribe, a drama showing strongly the influence of Ibsen, has a strong social theme--the evils of the bribery system. Two home-town doctors, Dr. Jack Power O'Connor and Dr. Luke Diamond, are striving for the same appointment, the position of dispensary doctor. Jack is the son of a wealthy doctor in the community who is willing to buy his son's appointment if it is necessary; whereas Luke is the brilliant young son of Maggie Diamond, who sells herrings and onions from a small cart. There is little doubt that Luke is the better man of the two, and he has stooped to buy no votes. He comes to John Kirwain, a shopkeeper, to ask votes. Kirwain is chairman of the Garrymore Union, the organization that is to decide the appointment; and it will be Kirwain's vote that will decide the matter in case of a tie. Kirwain agrees to vote for Luke, but he learns

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

his wife has mortgaged his business and that the store will be taken from him if he cannot pay the mortgage, which is coming due in a few days. The temptation is too great; and when Dr. O'Connor offers him the price of the mortgage in return for his vote, Kirwain agrees.

At the meeting that evening the vote is a tie, one to one; and Kirwain is forced to untie it. As a result of his vote, Jack O'Connor becomes community doctor. Judgment comes upon Kirwain, however, when his wife Mary becomes ill; and O'Connor attends her. Always a poor physician, O'Connor is helpless when Mary takes a turn for the worse. Luke arrives, but is too late; for Mary is already dead.

> Kirwain. It's not true. I was speaking to her two hours ago. Where is that fellow, where is Power O'Connor? By the Lord God, I'll take him by the throat and choke him.
> Diamond. Now, John, you have only to face this like a man.
> Kirwain. You came, Diamond.
> Diamond. I came too late. I'm sorry, very sorry, God knows.
> Neighbor. It's a judgment. The poor little children that were so fond of her!
> Kirwain (calm but dazed.) I can't realize it, Luke. But I'll do as you say--I'll try to bear up like a man.
> Diamond. I'm sorry I could not have done more for you.
> Kirwain. Mary is dead. . . . If you were in time could you have saved her?
> Diamond. I could not have saved the life of the child. . . . But the mother's life--don't press the question, John. (Kirwain groans as he sinks into a chair.)[1]

In its strong socialistic theme The Bribe is highly reminiscent of Ibsen. For many years the buying of votes was the outstanding vice of Irish public life, and against this evil the play is directed. Kirwain's

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[1] Seumas O'Kelly, The Bribe (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, 1914).

conflict is between his honesty and his desire for the money with which to pay off the mortgage. He choses to be dishonest, and he is severely punished by the death of his wife. In this case the tragic forces lie within his own character as well as in the outward circumstances. A trait of dishonesty leads him to accept the bribe, but it is fate which creates his pressing need for the money at this particular time. The Bribe is a powerful presentation of a lamentable state of affairs, and it has been exceedingly popular with Irish audiences.[1]

Although O'Kelly wrote at least four one-act comedies, they did not reach the creative level of his tragedies. His mind was essentially tragic, and the somber aspects of life attracted him. In his tragedies he depicted with great dramatic power phases of Irish life in his own time.

> In method he is thoroughly realistic, his men and women are those amongst whom he lived and whom he knew intimately without romantic glamor of any kind. He dramatised the problems of his time in terms of the people whom he knew, and none who would know Ireland can afford to ignore his plays.[2]

Summary

Seumas O'Kelly has written two tragedies that were important among the productions of the Abbey Theater. Both plays are wholly tragic, showing no lighter elements; one play, The Bribe, shows death on the stage. The Shuiler's Child, a drama of renunciation, shows the tragedy

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[1] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 197.

[2] Ibid., p. 198.

of Moll Woods, a roving gypsy of the woods, who gives up her child in order that it may have a comfortable home, while she herself is condemned to jail and then to the wandering life of the roads. Here the tragic forces are the power of public opinion and the wanton circumstances which first drew her to the workhouse. The Bribe shows the tragedy of John Kirwain, who, during an election for community doctor, sold his vote in exchange for money. The catastrophe occurs when his wife dies through the incompetency of this same doctor. The tragic forces here are the dishonesty, the weakness within Kirwain's character and the circumstances by which his need for money becomes most pressing. Both dramas show the influence of Ibsen and are plays with a thesis. In The Shuiler's Child the dramatist exposes the disgraceful conditions within the workhouse, and The Bribe shows the evils of the system of bribery. In his presentation of the tragedy arising from lamentable conditions in contemporary Ireland, O'Kelly is a thoroughly realistic dramatist of outstanding merit.

Lennox Robinson

Lennox Robinson, one of the younger dramatists of the Abbey Theater, is a realist who has written problem plays, each involving a theme that is basic in Irish life. Robinson, the son of a Protestant clergyman, was born near Cork in 1886 and was educated at the Bandon Grammar School. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Abbey Theater and was manager of the theater from 1910 to 1914 and from 1919 to 1923, when he became

producer.[1] His interest in the drama of other countries has led him to become one of the founders of the Dublin Drama League, which produces the plays of the leading European and American dramatists in Dublin. An actor of distinction, he has also appeared in the productions of this organization. Robinson, a member of the Irish Academy of Letters, has written extensively on the drama and has served for a time as a critic on the staff of a leading London newspaper.[2] The author of several novels and one biography, he is well-known as a lecturer in the United States and has conducted classes in the drama at the Universities Michigan and Montana. All his plays have been produced at the Abbey Theater.[3]

The Clancy Name, a one-act drama written in 1908, is a bitter tragedy of Irish pride.[4] Mrs. Clancy is a firm, self-assured woman who has managed the farm exceedingly well after the death of her shiftless husband. She is exceedingly proud of her only son John. She has just succeeded in paying off a five years' loan; and she stands without a debt of any kind, her farm all her own, and the Clancy name respected throughout the county. On this day of her triumph, when she is planning a rich marriage for John, he cannot rejoice with her. When she questions him as to his moodiness, he blurts out that he is the man who killed

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[1] Canfield, op. cit., pp. 474-75.

[2] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 175.

[3] Canfield, op. cit., p. 475.

[4] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 389.

James Powers, whose unexplained disappearance is the mystery of the countryside. He and James had quarreled; John had struck him on the head, and James had fallen and had lain quite still. Worse yet, John insists that he give himself up to the authorities. Mrs. Clancy is horrified, for John will disgrace the Clancy name. She tells him:

> I'm not going to let you disgrace me and the Clancy name, John. Think of your father's three brothers, all priests; think of your aunt married to a gentleman in Dublin; think of me, a poor widow woman, who's always been respected and looked up to by the neighbors. You'll not disgrace me, John, say you won't. . . . I'll never bear it. 'Twill kill me--they'll point at me as "the mother of John Clancy, the murderer." They'll have me up in court, and there'll be police about the house where I was always proud to say no policeman ever put his foot. If you go to the police, John, I'll never hold up my head again. . . . And what good will it do you at all? 'Twan't bring Jamsey back to life to go telling the police. You'll only kill me, and 'tisn't one murder but two that you'll have on your soul.[1]

At length she persuades him not to tell. He begs to go away, but she says that people will think it queer if he leaves. Just then a drunken farmer rushes down the road on his horse. A child playing in the street stands helpless. John pushes him out of the way, but in so doing he himself is trampled beneath the horse's hoofs. The neighbors bring John to his mother's house, where he raves incoherently of the murder. Mrs. Clancy is apprehensive lest he give away his secret. When he mutters about the police, she assures the neighbors he means the drunken driver should be taken before the police. A few minutes later she announces,

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[1] Lennox Robinson, _The Clancy Name_ in _Two Plays_ (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1911), pp. 76-77.

with a great deal of relief and satisfaction, that John is dead and will never speak again. The priest tries to soothe her grief by words of praise for the bravery of her son.

> Father Mahoney. Ah, Mrs. Clegg, 'tis you should be the proud woman this day. I know well how proud you are of the Clancy name--you're a Clancy yourself--and how sorry you are to think your son has left no one to carry it on. But of all the Clanceys, and they're a great family and a respected family, I venture to say that in years to come the greatest and most respected member of them will be your son, John Clancy, who gave his life to save a little child.
>
> Mrs. Clancy (in a low voice, kneeling at John's side.) I'm sure it's very good of your reverence to say such things; I think God neither I nor my son has ever brought disgrace on the Clancy name.
>
> Father Mahoney. You haven't indeed, Mrs. Clancy. You should be proud this day to be the mother of John Clancy. (A short pause. He looks round on the little crowd of men and women.) Let us pray for the soul of John Clancy. (They all fall on their knees.)[1]

The Clancy Name is a tragedy showing the strength of family pride. Throughout the play one feels the tireless energy, the strong purpose of Mrs. Clancy. John, who has killed his neighbor in a fit of anger, is harassed by a terrible sense of his own guilt. Only by giving himself up to the police can he obtain the relief which he seeks, but Mrs. Clancy steadfastly refuses to let him tell. The tragic force leading John to take his own life is the pride of his mother. Even though he is sacrificed, the Clancy name must be kept unsullied. Then John saves the life of a child, but in so doing is killed. To John, who is dying, Mrs. Clancy still refuses him the privilege of atoning for his crime by confession.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 83-84.

The Cross-roads, written in 1909, is a study in marriage.[1] It is the story of Ellen McCarthy, a woman who hates the talk of patriotism and the lack of doing anything tangible for Ireland. In Dublin she has worked her way up from servant to assistant in a bookshop; but she goes happily to the country to give her sister a chance in town such as she had, thinking that perhaps she can lead her people into better ways of farming and of ordering their lives generally, through the knowledge she has received in town.

When Ellen returns home, a match is made for her with Tom Dempsey, a nearby farmer. Ellen desires this match very much, for this is just the farm on which to try the new methods that shall bring prosperity to the people of the valley and so stem the emigration to America. She does not love Tom, and she does love Brian Connor, whom she had known in Dublin; but when Tom comes to ask her to marry him, she agrees, although she knows he is brutal, because as his wife she can do the work for Ireland that she dreamed of for so many years. From the very beginning, however, everything goes wrong with the farm; the cattle die, the hens refuse to lay eggs, the crops fail, and the whole household slowly deteriorates. Ellen has lost her two boys by fever; and although she has brought untold blessings to the other farms nearby, she has lost the appreciation of her husband. Seven years later her winning personality is gone; and she has become a drudge, a slattern, a grey-haired, hopeless woman, almost hated by her brutal husband.

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[1] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 176.

Into this scene of misery comes Brian Connor, now a successful novelist. When he realizes the conditions of things, he falls, in spite of his intended restraint, into a fight with Tom, whom he would have choked to death but for Ellen. Brian urges Ellen to go away with him; but, after a moment's faltering, she refuses to go. Tom, who has heard Brian's proposal and his wife's rejection of it, comes slowly into the room.

> Tom. Oh! You're a clever woman!
> Ellen. (in a low voice.) Don't be hard on me now, an' I after saving you from being murdered.
> Tom. Was it me you saved or was it the young man? When you pulled him off me, did you save me or was it him you saved from being hung? Tell me that, Ellen McCarthy. (Silence.) Ah! 'tis aisy seen. (Puts his hat on and goes to the door, and takes the key out of the lock.)
> Ellen (looking round.) What are you doing? (Frightened.) What are you doing?
> Tom. I'll tell you what I'm doing. I'm locking the door the way you won't go out after that young man; an' I'm going to step down to the village now for a sup of drink. An' then--I'm coming back; an', by God, I'll make you pay for this night's work, Ellen McCarthy, till you'd wish you were dead--for the black curse you brought on this farm, an' for the liking you have to the young man. (Goes out. Ellen remains sitting at the table, staring in front of her with sad, hopeless eyes. The key turns in the lock with a sound of dreadful finality.)[1]

In the play <u>The Cross-Roads</u> Robinson is suggesting that a loveless marriage entered into solely for political reasons blights the lives of both husband and wife. All Ellen's attempts to better the farming conditions of Ireland end in frustration, and the tragic force which

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[1] Lennox Robinson, <u>The Cross-Roads</u> (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1909), pp. 58-59.

assails her is the continued brutality of her husband. To her suggested improvements and her efforts to change the routine of farm life he remains unmoved. When Ellen's chickens for a time continue to lay in winter, a neighbor remarks, "Is it right for hens to be laying that way so early in the year?"[1] Tom resents her efforts to change the ways of his father; he tells Brian, "Before she went up to the city, she was a fine, strong country girl, with no notions at all, content to do as her mother an' her grandmother had done before her."[2] He accuses her of ruining the farm with her new ideas. Ellen's struggle seems a totally hopeless one, and when she gives up her lover to stay with her husband, he merely becomes more brutal than ever. At the close of the play her fate is worse than death, for she is left to live on in utter despair.

The theme of Harvest, Robinson's third play, written in 1910, is the evil consequences of applying to a rural population a type of education which unfits them for any but an urban life.[3] All the members of the Hurley family have been educated at great expense, except one, Maurice, who is destined to run the family farm. Patrick has just become private secretary to a British Cabinet Minister and no longer acknowledges his own family. Bob is a solicitor with too many expenses of his own to give any assistance to his home. Timothy is a priest, and Mary is a typist in London.

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[1] Ibid., p. 21.

[2] Ibid., p. 52.

[3] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 177.

When the play begins, Jack, a chemist in London, has arrived with his wife Mildred to spend their honeymoon at his home. Maurice and his aged father run the farm, but the cost of educating the family has been so great that the farm has been mortgaged; and old Hurley is in bad financial condition. Jack, who was prepared to borrow sixty pounds to prolong their honeymoon, is shocked to find the true condition of affairs. Then news comes that Mary, who has not written for three years, is expected home.

Since none of the other members of the family can or will send money, Jack decides to stay and help with the farm work. Mildred attempts to learn dairying, but is quite unsuccessful in her work. One day while he is working in the fields, Jack has a sunstroke. The nature of his city experience has rendered him unfit for farm work. Driven to desperation by the inability or the unwillingness of his family to help him, the old man commits arson for the sake of the insurance money. Deeply ashamed, Jack refuses to let his father report the loss to the insurance company.

When Mary returns home, Jack is horrified to learn that she has been leading the life of a prostitute and that she expects to return to London. He begs Mildred to ask Mary to stay with them; but she, disillusioned about the entire family, refuses. Mary gives her father fifty pounds which she says has been sent to her by Patrick, but in reality it has come from her lover. At the close of the play Mildred quarrels with Jack and returns to her own home, never to return. Jack himself, bitter because of his experiences, leaves the farm, hoping never to see his home again. He tells Maurice:

> Yes, I'm going, never fear, and you can do what you like about the blasted money. I hope I'll never see this cursed place again; before a month there'll be a thousand miles of clear salt water between me and Ireland! I hate the very word![1]

Throughout the play the old and the new methods of education are contrasted. Lordan, the old type schoolmaster, flatters himself on how much he has done for the Hurley family. He feels that through education he has helped to broaden their outlook on life and has lifted them out of their narrow lives. The present schoolmaster, however, favors the education of the younger generation so that they will be able to remain on the farms. As a part of the school work he attempts to teach the proper methods of farming.

The tragic force, as shown in the play, is the unfortunate system of education which does not fit the members of the family for anything except life in the city. Because of this education, the members of the Hurley family are led to false ideals and false standards of conduct; and they desert their father and his farm in a moment of crucial need. All, in a sense, are tragic characters; they are drifting, unhappy individuals. Maurice and his father, however, are the two characters for whom one has the most sympathy. The father is heart-broken when he learns that none of his children are able to help him, and the catastrophe occurs when he burns his farm buildings in order to collect the insurance.

Most critics feel that the probability of the tragedy in the play <u>Harvest</u> is strained and that cynical bitterness tends to weaken the

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[1] Lennox Robinson, <u>Harvest</u> in <u>Two Plays</u> (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1911), p. 59.

impression. It is an overstrained idea to assume that education is evil in every case. "The author has allowed cynicism to take the place of a higher, more humane, and kindlier tragic emotion."[1] Malone also feels that the thesis breaks down, as it is difficult to believe that the educational system can fairly be blamed for the snobbery, ingratitude, immorality, and physical weakness of the members of the Hurley family. It is probable that the agitation against the Irish educational system rather than the humane qualities of the Hurleys attracted the author to this theme.[2]

Patriots, written in 1912, has as its theme the satire that cuts into the sham agitation of political leagues--agitation that is only talk, with little real action.[3] James Nugent, who has been in prison for eighteen years, regrets the passing of the romantic conception of Irish patriotism. In Nugent's day deeds, not words, were the accepted weapons of the Irish politicians; but the new generation has accepted the parliamentary agitation. After eighteen years of prison life, Nugent returns home to his wife Ann and his daughter Rose, born after he was taken to prison. Although he is an old, white-haired man, Nugent's political fervor is as strong as ever. His two brothers-in-law, Bob and Harry, try to assure him that much has been done in his absence. All that

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[1] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 391.

[2] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 178.

[3] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 231.

Nugent is interested in, however, is learning how well-armed the country is and how many attempts for liberty have been made in the past. When he learns the League has no arms, he is bitterly disappointed.

Ann, Nugent's wife, does not share his patriotism. During his absence she and her daughter Rose have made a happy life for themselves; Ann has made the store pay and has laid by money for Rose's future. Now James with his talk of revolutions comes back to shatter their well-ordered existence. Against Ann's wishes Nugent determines to speak at the meeting of the League to arouse parliamentary agitation. Rose and Willie, her lover, arrive early at the hall, but find no one there. When Nugent finally appears, no one else has arrived. Even Willie, his one staunch supporter, is called home by the news that his father and mother are penniless and that he must support them.

When Ann arrives, she finds James heart-broken. She tells him she is tired of hearing about patriotism. When she married him, she admired his patriotism, his strength of purpose; and something of his ardor aroused her. Because she overtaxed her strength going on campaigns with her husband, Rose, her only daughter, was born crippled. Still determined, James decides to go to Dublin to arouse great crowds; and Rose will accompany him. Ann begs him to come hope with her where they can live peacefully and happily. At length, James, a broken, old man, is forced to agree. Only the two caretakers are left in the hall.

James (getting up--and he moves and looks like an old man--he catches Ann's arm.) I've killed a man, I've crippled a child, I've got myself shut up for eighteen

years--God knows what good came of it all--but I meant--
I tried. . . . I know I meant right--and in prison my cell
used to be filled with the sad faces of men like me who had
given everything for Ireland--they wouldn't have come to me,
would they? if I hadn't been of their company. They are
here now--I see them all around me--there is Wolfe Tone, and
there is . . . oh, quiet, watching faces, I have tried--tried
as you have tried--and been broken. . . . (James, Ann, and
Rose go out.)

Bob. That's all right, Jim; don't forget now, six o'clock--
you can put the lights out. . . . Good-night. There isn't
going to be any meeting.

Jim. Good-night to you. (Looks at watch.) Only twenty
minutes past eight. I can go and see the picture after all.
(He switches off the light by degrees. When the stage is
quite dark, the curtain falls.)[1]

The tragedy of James Nugent is that the romantic conception of Irish patriotism has passed while he suffered in prison for it. The climax of his tragedy is reached when no one can be found to attend his meeting.[2] Both Ann and Rose are tragic characters who have both suffered for Nugent's patriotism. One critic feels that Patriots comes nearer to tragic intensity than any other drama the author has ever written. At the end the sense of darkness and despair in the old man's heart is excellently portrayed. The irony of tragedy is brought out by the fact that the doorkeeper, tied by duty to the hall, is only too glad to switch off the light and hurry away to the twilight of the films. Nicoll feels that this cynicism ruins what might have been a great tragedy.[3] Malone, however, feels that Patriots is one of Robinson's best plays. "All the people in it are alive and real, and the disillusionment of James Nugent

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[1] Lennox Robinson, Patriots (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1912), pp. 48-49.

[2] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 178.

[3] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 391.

is a tragedy of the most poignant kind."[1]

Patriots has shown that Robinson could deal with a high theme of Irish political conditions in a truly tragic manner.[2] The author is against the patriotism that resorts only to words, as well as against the patriotism that resorts to violence. He points out the uselessness of an enthusiast's battle against odds, a struggle which brings him only personal disaster and which fails to advance his cause.[3] The play is a vivid presentation of a turning point in Irish politics, emphasizing a condition which even then was near at hand, the time when grievances would be settled by the parliamentary method of agitation.

For his next play, The Dreamers, written in 1915, Robinson has chosen as his theme the final episode in the career of Robert Emmet, the attempted rebellion in 1803. Instead of treating the subject in the traditional idealistic way, he presents a very depressing account of the uprising and of those who participated in it.[4]

When the play opens, Robert Emmet has gained two of his staunchest followers, Robert and Martin Brady, brothers of the shoemaker, John Brady. John, who participated in the rebellion of 1798, has learned through experience that blatant patriotism is not enough. Drawn into the rebellion against his will because his wife, a sympathizer with the rebels, hid

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[1] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 179.

[2] Ibid., p. 179.

[3] Chandler, op. cit., p. 261.

[4] Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 167.

weapons in the house, John was arrested; and when he returned from prison his wife was dead, and his home and business had been destroyed. Now John learns that Emmet seeks to draw to him John's youngest brother, Martin, who is very dear to John. He tries to tell Emmet why such a rebellion cannot possibly succeed in Ireland.

> Emmet. There are finer things than peace, John. The dead have that. There is a peace that is shameful, a calm that is cowardly, and--
> John. And there's war that is only pillage and murder and treachery and--
> Emmet. No. You mustn't say that. It isn't true. I know no man suffered more than you did from the late rising, but it doesn't give you the right to bring charges of murder and treachery against the men who died in '98.
> John. I'll say no more, only don't be led away by a boy's dream. I don't know what your dream is, but believe me, Mister Robert, there's something perverse in this unfortunate country. 'Tis better that we should be governed than that we should govern ourselves. I believe that, with God's help, the English will doit better than anyone else. . . . There's something wild and unstable in the country, Mister Robert, you can't get behind or beyond it.--What I saw in the uprising only confirmed my opinion. I saw courage and uprightness and daring on the rebels' side--I don't deny it--but it was all brought to nought. You'll say it came to naught for want of arms or leaders or one thing or another, but I say it came to naught because there's something rotten in us, something unstable, 'tisn't in our nature to succeed. . . . Or maybe it came to naught because it's God's will that it should. Because he knows more about the needs and weaknesses of this poor country than you or I. . . . Can you think of anyone who touched the accursed thing in '98 who wasn't punished for it fifty or a hundred fold? Think of your own family. Think of me--I . . . These are hard things for a young man like you to listen to, but they're the truth.[1]

Sarah, Emmet's sweetheart, attempts to persuade him to give up the

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[1] Lennox Robinson, The Dreamers (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, 1915), pp. 6-7.

struggle, but he will not listen. The uprising is to start from Dublin; supplies have been laid in the depot. Suddenly the news comes that there has been an explosion in the depot on Patrick Street, and Emmet and his followers hasten to move the supplies before they are discovered. His men beg him to delay the attack because preparations are not entirely adequate, but he refuses. Every moment of delay means more chance of discovery by the English. For the sake of safety no man must know who are the leaders in the other towns. The messenger trusted to take the news to Wicklow fails to deliver the message. Hence one whole group of men is cut off. At this crucial moment several followers desert; but Emmet, undaunted, refuses to give up the attack.

The third act shows the results of the rebellion. Martin Brady has received a severe head wound, Robert is dead, and Emmet is wanted by the police. Sarah comes to see Emmet, who is hidden in a nearby house. He, however, is undaunted; for he plans a second rebellion that he knows will be successful. When Robert dies, John curses Emmet for having caused the death of his brother. While Emmet is talking, the police close in upon him; and he is taken away to prison. Sarah remarks sadly at the close of the play, "This is the end. If I ever see him again it will be on the way to the scaffold."[1]

Throughout the play the young and enthusiastic Emmet stands out as a tragic victim of the shiftless futility of his following.[2] John Brady

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[1] Ibid., p. 68.

[2] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 179.

told Emmet the reason for the failure of the Irish rebellions long before Emmet led his attack. Emmet is pictured as a man totally devoted to Ireland and prepared to risk everything for success. The tragic force is the shiftlessness, the dishonesty, and the untrustworthy traits of his followers; and it is through them that Emmet meets his death.[1]

One critic in evaluating the play, has said:

> Nowhere perhaps so clearly as in this play has been depicted the continual yearning and idealism of the Irish revolutionaries, and although there enter in here some features of cynicism the action does not depend fundamentally upon bitterness. It is a sincere attempt to display the workings of a fervent passion for a seemingly hopeless ideal in the midst of actual life.[2]

Summary

Lennox Robinson has written five tragic dramas, each involving some problem that is basic in Irish life. The Clancy Name is a one-act drama showing the strength of family pride. In order to save the family name, Mrs. Clancy prevents her son John from confessing a murder he has committed, thus forcing him to commit suicide in order to gain relief from his heavy sense of guilt. The Cross-roads shows the unhappiness of a loveless marriage entered into purely for political reasons. Harvest depicts the evil effects of a type of education which fits persons only for life in the cities and leads them to snobbery, ingratitude, and immorality. Patriots portrays the tragedy of James Nugent, who regrets that the romantic conception of Irish patriotism has passed and that

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[1] Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 167.

[2] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 392.

people who were once participants in bloody revolutions are now content to fight their battles through parliamentary legislation. The Dreamers, the story of the unsuccessful rebellion of Robert Emmet in 1803, reveals as the tragic force the shiftlessness, the untrustworthiness of the followers. In only one play, The Clancy Name, does death occur on the stage; The Dreamers involves a death which does not happen on the stage. All the plays are wholly tragic, showing no comic situations or lighter elements. In all of his plays Robinson has portrayed, in a thoroughly realistic fashion, the tragedy in conetmporary Irish life.

T. C. Murray

T. C. Murray is best known as a dramatist of Catholic Ireland, for a deep religious feeling forms the undercurrent of all of his plays. He was born in a small town in County Cork in 1873 and was educated at local schools. In St. Patrick's College in Dublin, he studied to become a teacher. At the end of two years he was qualified to teach as a National schoolmaster and has taught in various schools in his native country. After his plays had attracted the favorable attention of critics, he was appointed to a school in Dublin.[1]

His first play, The Wheel of Fortune, a one-act ironic comedy, was produced by an amateur company in Cork, in 1909. The play was afterwards revised and presented by the Abbey Theater in 1913. His two greatest

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[1] Barrett H. Clark, The British and American Drama of Today (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1915), p. 208.

plays, however, are tragedies--Birthright and Maurice Harte. The first of these was staged at the Abbey Theater in October, 1910; and throughout the years it has retained its place as one of the most popular plays in the Abbey Theater's repertoire.[1] Maurice Harte was also produced in the Abbey Theater, in June, 1920.

In his technique Murray is a realist, presenting real people in real situations; but he is interested in no particular social problem. He has portrayed the very heart of Irish Catholic life successfully on the stage.

Birthright, Murray's first tragedy, is a variant of the tale of Cain and Abel, told in terms of Irish conditions and character. The Morrissey family consists of Bat Morrissey, a dull, hard-working, tyrannical farmer, his wife Maura, and his two sons, Hugh and Shane. Hugh, the elder of the sons, is the favorite of his mother. A sportsman, full of life and spirit, with little inclination for the humdrum life of the farm, he is something of a popular hero in the neighborhood. Shane is the pride of his father, whom he resembles in his love for the farm; and he has a complete lack of interest in everything which does not add to the prosperity of the farm.

Since there is not enough income to support two adult sons, Shane, the younger, must go to America. When the curtain rises, he is ready to

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[1] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 187.

depart. Bat resents the necessity for the departure of his favorite son; and as the play progresses, every act tends to increase and strengthen his resentment against Hugh. When Hugh's services are needed on the farm, he is found to be absent at a hurling match. When Maura attempts to tell Bat he has always been too hard with Hugh, he replies angrily:

> I'm hard, am I? I've been out in the darkness before the dawn, an' remained stuck in the trench an' the furrow all day, till the black darkness came on me again, and the moon came up, and the faintness on me that I couldn't walk into the house for staggering no better than a cripple or a man that would be drunk. An' for what, I ask you? For what, Maura? For my brave Hugh, for an idler and a-a-a worthless blackguard! I'm hard, Maura, am I?
>
> Maura. Whisht, sure I didn't mean it. I didn't mean it at all. I didn't, indeed, Bat.
>
> Bat. I'm hard, am I? 'Tis your son is hard, and you know it. The sweat o' my body an' my life is in every inch o' the land, and 'tis little he cares, with his hurley an' his fiddling an' his versifying an' his confounded nonsense! . . . I tell you again--an' mind my words for it--'tis the black look out for this place when he gets it, an' only for your talk, an' your talk, an' your crying, 'tis that blackguard's name an' not his brother's would be on that trunk there this night. . . . 'Tis you have helped to make him the kind he is. Your blood is in him. I see it in every twist and line of his and every wild foolish thing coming from his mouth. . . . Good God, woman, will his grand rhymes an' his bits o' meedles an' his pictures and the people's talk pay the rent for us?[1]

The music of a band and the shouts of a cheering crowd, applauding Hugh's victory, so frighten Bat's favorite mare that she injures herself and has to be shot. Then Hugh is asked by the priest to preside over the entertainment of the visiting team and is unable to remain at home for the evening. On hearing this, Bat goes to Shane's trunk which stands nearby

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[1] T. C. Murray, Birthright (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1911), pp. 14-15.

and cuts from it the label bearing the name. In its place he puts Hugh's name, remarking to himself, "Now, my fine captain, you may feast and drink to the devil."[1]

The second act opens at midnight of the same night. Hugh is still absent, and the unfortunate coincidence of a sow farrowing keeps Bat and Shane out of bed. Hugh returns and explains that he has been detained by the rowdy conduct of some of his visitors. Tired and angry, his father shouts the news that he, and not his brother, must go to America. Hugh is shown the label, and he jumps to the conclusion that Shane has played a trick on him. He calls Shane "a dirty grabber"; and Shane accuses Hugh of being drunk and then goes on to accuse the mother of persistent favoritism, saying that Hugh always had the best of everything when they were small children. Both get furiously angry and grapple with each other; and before they can be separated, Shane strangles Hugh.

> Hugh (passionately) You're a coward, and you're a grabber! That's what you are, and nothing else.
> (At the sound of the word "grabber," Shane rushes wildly at Hugh. They get into handigrips and begin to struggle passionately. Maura rushes to the door calling Bat.)
> Maura (frantically.) Bat! Bat! For God's sake, run! They're killing each other!
> (The two men reel and stagger blindly. Shane is seen to stumble and fall. He struggles on to his feet in an agony of shame and rage, and seizing the hurley leaps at Hugh. The latter tries to ward off the terrible blow, but without success. He is felled to the ground. Maura bends distractedly over him, crying, "Hugh! Hugh!" Shane looks on the prostrate figure. He is dazed and horrified. The hurley falls from his hands, and he staggers out into the night.)[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 28.

[2] Ibid., p. 43.

In the play Birthright one sees the climax of a long tale of opposing natures. Shane represents the heavy, stolid peasant type, serious and hard-working; whereas Hugh is the gentleman, genial and good-natured, well-liked by the entire countryside. It is this conflict in natures which eventually leads to a struggle, both mental and physical, which ends in a catastrophe---the killing of Hugh. This fundamental difference in dispositions, however, goes back even farther. Bat and Maura are quite unlike. Bat resents the fact that Hugh is unlike his mother, whose blood was gentle; whereas Shane, like himself, is a grubber of the earth.[1] To understand completely Hugh's intense anger at Shane, one must realize that the custom of primogeniture, by which the eldest son inherits all the property, is a fixed rule in Ireland. For Bat to break this ancient law and to disinherit Hugh is a revolutionary act and shows the depths of his passion.

In a sense all the characters of the play are tragic; for the catastrophe, when it comes, engulfs the entire family; and Bat and Maura are crushed with sorrow. Shane and Hugh are both protagonists who come to ruin through weaknesses within their own natures. The tragic forces, then, are the fundamental differences of temperament and the obvious favoritism of their parents. Hugh meets death; but Shane is left to a worse fate, to live and to repent of the murder of his brother.

One critic, in commenting on the play, has said:

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[1] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 217.

> In the simplicity of this drama lies its strength. There is a majesty in it shared by but few of the domestic dramas, and the sense we have that this is but the culmination of a long-standing grievance and misunderstanding helps to bring the atmosphere to a requisite tragic height.[1]

Maurice Harte, Murray's second tragic drama, is a play showing thwarted ambitions and misplaced hopes.[2] Maurice, who is being trained for the priesthood, is the pride of the Harte family; and every nerve is being strained to pay for his education. To this one great ambition his parents have sacrificed themselves and their other son Owen. When the play opens, however, the end is in sight. Maurice will be ordained in a short time; and then he will perform the marriage ceremony for his brother and Bride Burke, whose dowry will clear the farm from debt. Maurice, a youth of twenty-two, is home on a holiday from Maynooth; and he tries to tell his mother that he has no vocation* for the priesthood and that it would be sacrilege for him to take orders without it. His courage fails him when he tries to express his agony; and he finally begs the parish priest, Father Mangan, to break the desolating news to the family. When the priest tells of the boy's decision not to return to Maynooth, mother and father and brother all insist that he return. His mother tells him that h s withdrawal now will cost his brother his bride and her dowry and that the family will be left penniless.

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[1] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 394.

[2] Ibid., p. 393.

* Throughout the play, the word "vocation" is used in exactly this sense.

Mrs. Harte. . . . God knows, I wouldn't be hard with you at all, but look at the great load o' money that's on us this day, and mostly all on your account.

Maurice. Mother, don't make my cross harder to bear.

Mrs. Harte. An' would you be seeing a heavier cross put on them that did all that mortal man and woman could do for you?

Maurice. Look! I'll wear the flesh off my bones, but in pity spare me?

Mr. Harte. You'll go back? 'Tis only a mistake?

Maurice. Great God of Heaven! . . . You'll kill me.

Mrs. Harte. (passionately) If you don't how can I ever face outside this door or lift up my head again?

Maurice (piteously). Mother!

Mrs. Harte. How could I listen to the neighbors making pity for me, and many a one o' them only glad in their hearts? How could I ever face again into the town of Macroom?

Maurice. Oh, don't!

Mrs. Harte. I tell you, Maurice, I'd rather be lying dead a thousand times in the graveyard over at Killnanartyra--

Maurice (with a sudden cry). Stop, mother, stop! . . . (There is a tense pause.) I'll--I'll go back--as--as you all wish it. (He sinks into a seat with an air of hopeless dejection.)[1]

Nine months pass between the first and second acts, and at the end of that time Maurice has taken first place in his final examinations and is on the eve of ordination. His father has arranged to be present for the ordination ceremony and will bring Maurice back with him to marry Owen and Bride Burke. All hope is centered in these two great family events. Then word comes that he cannot be ordained because of illness. Close upon this bad news comes Maurice himself, broken down mentally from the strain of driving himself to do what he knows to be wrong--from the strain of committing what he believes to be a sacrilege. Father and

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[1] T. C. Murray, Maurice Harte (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1912), pp. 38-39.

mother and brother all realize that it is they who have driven him mad. The brother fears that Bride will not come into a home so disgraced; and his mother, her dream for her youngest son gone, is struck dumb with terror at the thought of what her life will be from this time on.

> (Mrs. Harte takes Michael's overcoat from the table and hangs it up, sighing deeply. There is something inexpressibly touching in the action. She removes each of the other parcels one by one. There is a tragic significance in every movement. As she spreads the tablecloth Maurice is heard suddenly speaking to himself in a voice and manner startling in their indefinable strangeness.)
>
> Maurice. I can't! I can't, mother! . . . I'll wear the flesh off my bones. . . . A life of sacrilege. . . . Would you, would you, Father?
>
> (There is a great silence. Maurice drops suddenly into the same attitude of absorption and aloofness as before. The priest goes to Mrs. Harte and tries to break the spell that seems to hold her. As he speaks to her, Maurice is seen to open his breviary, and to read a portion of the day's office. His voice, as he reads, is an audible whisper.)
>
> Michael (in a low voice that hides a sob.) His mind, that's gone, Father. . . .'Twas wrong to force him the way we did. . . . (Piteously) 'Tis the punishment of the Almighty on us, I know it.
>
> Father Mangan. No, no, Michael. Don't think that. . . . How could you have known?
>
> Owen (to himself, desolately.) She'll never come into this house now.
>
> (Maurice is seen to rise from the chair abstractedly. With his eyes deep in the book, and still reciting fragments of his office in fitful whispers, he goes out the open door very slowly.)
>
> Father Managan (in a low voice.) Follow him, Michael. (Michael goes out.)
>
> Mrs. Harte (tottering toward a seat.) My God! My God!
>
> (The priest looks at her with a pained sense of his own helplessness. The curtain falls very slowly.)[1]

The full significance of the tragedy of Maurice's fate can be

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[1] Ibid., pp. 59-60.

realized only by those who know intimately the ambition that is hugged close to the heart by the Irish Catholic mother. The greatest glory that can come to such a peasant mother is to give one of her sons to the priesthood.[1] The tragic forces here are plainly parental ambition and parental interference. At no time in his life has Maurice felt a desire to be a priest, but he is sacrificed to the will and pride of his mother. She would rather have him commit a sacrilege than to have her pride hurt by her son's withdrawal from entering the priesthood.

Although all the members of the Harte family are tragic individuals in that all their hopes to make Maurice a priest have ended in frustration, Maurice himself is the real tragic character. Even in the midst of their grief the other members of the family are worrying about their own selfish ends more than about Maurice's actual grief. His catastrophe is worse than death; for he is left demented, doomed to worry over what he believes is the unpardonable sin--the committing of sacrilege. In the insistence upon the rights and importance of the family and the subordination of the rights of the individual, the play is intensely Irish. From his earliest childhood, Maurice has been taught to respect the family; and his tragedy is the result of this attitude.

Although Murray is essentially a religious dramatist, he does not attempt to sit in judgment on his plays. All of his characters and his situations are surprisingly true to life. He is known as "the dramatist

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[1] Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 221.

of quiet desperation," for he displays in all of his dramas the darkness of real life.[1] He has a tenderness and pity, a deep love for frail humanity which is revealed in his realistic portrayal of Catholic Ireland.

Summary

In his two plays, Birthright and Maurice Harte, T. C. Murray has written two realistic dramas showing the tragedy of contemporary Irish life. Both of the plays are wholly tragic, showing no lighter elements or situations. In Birthright Hugh is strangled to death on the stage, and in Maurice Harte the leading tragic character becomes demented. Birthright, following the old story of Cain and Abel, shows the conflict between two brothers of fundamental varying dispositions. When Hugh accuses Shane of stealing his inheritance, Shane, in a fit of anger, kills his brother. The tragic forces are the fundamental differences in temperament of the two brothers and the obvious favoritism of one or the other of the parents. Maurice Harte shows the struggle of Maurice, the son of Irish peasants who have sacrificed everything in order that he may become a priest. Maurice's worry because he feels no vocation causes him to lose his mind. The tragic forces here are parental ambition and the insistence on the rights of the family, a typically Irish attitude. Both plays show parental pride to be stronger than parental love. In each play the powerful struggle is physical as well as

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[1] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 393.

mental. Murray is known primarily as a portrayer of the tragedy present in Irish Catholic life.

St. John G. Ervine

St. John G. Ervine, dramatist, critic, and novelist, is one of the younger group in the Irish movement who have turned their attention to the realistic depiction of life in the cities and small towns.[1] His favorite theme is the hard conventions and perverted idealism of a narrow society, powerful forces in the present-day class war.[2]

Ervine, born in Belfast, Ireland, in 1883, was the son of a printer, from whom he inherited a love of literature. Beginning to write at an early age, he contributed much to newspapers; and in 1911 he became dramatic critic for the Daily Citizen. His first play, Mixed Marriage, written in 1910, was produced at the Abbey Theater in 1911. Jane Clegg was performed at the Gaiety Theater, in Manchester, in 1912; and John Ferguson, at the Abbey Theater in 1916. During the World War Ervine served as a trooper in the Household Battalion. In October, 1917, he was wounded and sent home to Ireland.[3]

Soon after the outbreak of the war, he offered his play John Ferguson to the Abbey Theater. Yeats, who was unwilling to agree to the conditions which Ervine made concerning its production, refused the play.

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[1] Clark, The British and American Drama of Today, p. 215.

[2] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 383.

[3] Tante, op. cit., p. 118.

Ervine, angry at the refusal, withdrew the play from the Abbey Theater. Then he became manager of the Abbey Theater for a short time, and the play was successfully produced in 1919. On the opening night of the play, the leading actor became ill; and the dramatist was forced to play the part himself. Strange to say, he could not remember the words; but he became astonishingly ingenious in hiding the book of the play during the time he was on the stage.[1]

After he had resigned as manager of the Abbey Theater, he went to London, where he came under the influence of George Bernard Shaw and the Repertory Theater movement.[2] He made several visits to America, and in 1928 and 1929 he spent seven months in New York as visiting dramatic critic of the <u>World</u>. Here, as in the Abbey Theater, his independence and plain speaking offended several of his readers; for he expressed his opinion that the American theater, as well as the English theater, was distinctly on the downward path.

The plays of Ervine have been acted all over the English-speaking world and have been translated into German, French, and Japanese. Two of them were performed by the Theater Guild in New York City in 1919. <u>John Ferguson</u> established the fortunes of that organization; and <u>Jane Clegg</u>, which was produced two years later, was enthusiastically received.[3] In all of his plays Ervine concerns himself with the struggle of character

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[1] Louis J. McQuilland, "Mr. St. John Ervine and His Work," <u>Living Age</u> 305:46-47, April 3, 1920.

[2] Malone, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 198.

[3] Tante, <u>op. cit.</u>, pp. 118-19.

with character, Protestant and Catholic, youth and age, prejudice and freedom. His power lies essentially in the portrayal of human character.[1]

Mixed Marriage, Ervine's first play, is a drama depicting the violence of the religious prejudice existing between Protestant and Catholic Ireland. The house of Rainey is divided against itself. John Rainey, Protestant, stands on one side, barricaded behind his religious and political principles. Always strongly against Catholics, he has joined a strike of Protestant workers to demand higher wages of the master. Opposing him are his sons, Hugh and Tom, who are conscious of new principles and of a broader outlook than their father has. Mrs. Rainey, John's wife, is a gentle woman, one "patient, with the awful patience of a woman who has always submitted to her husband's will, without ever respecting him."[2] She believes that "a wumman has no right to be choosin' sides";[3] but her comments indicate that her sympathies are not with John. The conflict arises when Hugh desires to marry Nora, his Catholic sweetheart. John opposes the marriage violently, telling Hugh:

> A sudden have a son o' mind marry a Cathlik fur all the wurl'. A've nathin' agin the girl, but A believe in stickin' t' yer religion. A Cathlik's a Cathlik, an' a Prodesan's a Prodesan. Ye can't get over that. . . . A'm agin mixed marriages.[4]

His wife tries in vain to oppose him, saying,

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[1] Clark, The British and American Drama of Today, p. 213.

[2] St. John G. Ervine, Mixed Marriage in Chief Contemporary Dramatists, Second Series (Thomas H. Dickinson, editor; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), p. 129.

[3] Ibid., p. 145.

[4] Ibid., p. 132.

A wondher if ye'll iver larn any sense? What differs does it make what religion is, s' long as she's a good wife til him. D' ye think if A cudden cook yer dinner fur ye an' keep the house clane an' bring yer childher up, it 'ud be anny consolation t' ye that A wuz a Prodesan. A can see ye goin' about the house, an' it all dirty, tellin' yerself it dussen matter about the muck scause yer wife's a good Or'nge-wumman. Och, man, don't talk blether.[1]

A new idea is arrayed against John in the person of Michael O'Hara, a young and enthusiastic propagandist of Labour principles, who has an ideal of a unified Ireland in which race prejudices will all be forgotten. Michael attempts to tell John something of his ambitions.

Michael. A tell ye, Mr. Rainey, the employers have used religion to throw dust in wur eyes. They're eggin' us on t' fight one another over religion, so's we shan't have time til think about the rotten wages they give us. They set the Cathliks agin the Prodesans, an' the Prodesans agin the Cathliks, so's ye can't get the two to work thegither fur the good o' their class. . . .

Rainey. There's a differs.

Hugh. . . . A sometimes think what a fine thing it 'ud be if the workin' men o' Irelan' was to join their han's thegither an' try an' make a great country o' it. There wus a time whin Irelan' wus the islan' o' saints. By God, da, if we cud bring that time back agin.

Rainey. It's a gran' dream.

Michael. To see the streets full o' happy men an' weemen agin, their faces shinin' wi' the glory o' the Lord God, an' the childher runnin' about in the sun an' none o' them sick wi' hunger. Aw, if on'y we wud hould thegither an' not be led astray be people that want to keep us apart.

Rainey. It'll never be. . . . There's such a quare differs atween a Cathlik an' a Prodesan.

Mrs. Rainey. Och, sure what differs does it make so long as ye act up to yer religion?[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 145.

[2] Loc. cit.

The mere suggestion that his son marry a "Cathlik" is too much for John Rainey, and he will break any strike rather than have the two religions engaged in one project. His influence is so great among the workers that the flare of religions bigotry is easily started. Riots result, and outside the voice of the English "peelers" can be heard as they attempt to put down the uprising by force. Michael goes out to stop the fight, but stones are hurled at him. Nora becomes hysterical, telling Hugh that they, not Michael, are the real cause of the disturbance. Just as the soldiers start to shoot, Nora rushes out into the street. A stray bullet strikes her, and she drops d ead. Hugh carries her into the house where Rainey and his wife are talking.

> Rainey (as if dreaming.) A wus right. A knew A wus right.
> Mrs. Rainey (weeping a little, and patting him gently.) Aw, my poor man, my poor man.[1]

When Ervine wrote the play Mixed Marriage, he had a distinct social purpose in mind. He wanted, first of all, to make a plea for a united Ireland, an Ireland tolerant of religious differences. Secondly, he wanted to express the current religious war in an artistic and dramatic form.[2] The conflict then is between the religions of Nora and Hugh Rainey, Catholic and Protestants. The tragic force is the power of John Rainey, representing the narrow-minded bigotry of an Ireland that is unable to forget her personal prejudices and to merge herself in a larger cause--

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[1] Ibid., p. 164.

[2] "Mixed Marriage," Outlook 127:50, January 12, 1921.

the freeing of the country. Ervine feels that the reason for Ireland's failure to gain her freedom from England can be found in this situation, that she has never been able to unite her people sufficiently long enough to effect a real rebellion. The tragedy, too, resolves itself in terms of individual issues.[1] There is the conflict of will with will, Hugh Rainey fighting his father in order to marry the girl he loves. Mrs. Rainey for years has opposed John, but in the end she has always been worsted in the battle and has never been able to change John's opinion in the least.

The greatest tragedy occurs in the quiet words of John Rainey, when he says, "A was right. A knew A was right." The dramatist carries the thoughts of the reader past the catastrophe that destroys Hugh's dream of love and focuses them on the deep inward tragedy that lies in the heart of the old couple.[2] John Rainey is unshaken in his belief concerning a "mixed marriage," and Nora's death only confirms his opinion. Youth has battled with the hardened prejudices of the age and has been vanquished. At the same time Ireland's dream of unity is entirely shattered.[3]

In the drama Jane Clegg Ervine has dealt with the depressing and soul-destroying aspects of lower middle class life.[4] Although the play is not particularly Irish in tone, the tragedy is a universal one.

Jane Clegg, the character for whom the drama is named, is the wife

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[1] Clark, A Study of the Modern Drama, p. 356.

[2] Alice Lothian, "Plays and Novels of St. John Ervine," North American Review 215:648, May, 1922.

[3] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 154.

[4] Nicoll, op. cit., p. 384.

of Henry Clegg and the mother of two children. When the play opens, Jane and her mother-in-law are anxiously awaiting the arrival of Henry, who is often late. They are discussing Henry's last affair, and Henry's mother is horrified when Jane calmly announces she would have left Henry years ago if she had had the money with which to support herself and her two children.

> Jane Clegg. Isn't it simple enough? Johnnie was four and Jennie was two. Henry had a good situation. If I had left him, I should not have earned more than a pound a week at best, and I couldn't have looked after the children and worked as well. I don't suppose I should have got work at all here. A woman who leaves her husband on moral grounds is treated as badly as a woman who runs away with another man.
> Mrs. Clegg. Well, of course, it isn't right to leave your husband. Till death do you part, that's what the Bible says. I wasn't hintin' at anything of that sort. I only suggested that you should be firm with 'im.[1]

Returning home late that evening, Henry finds a check for the company made payable to him. Jane has inherited a sum of money from her father, and Henry asks her to lend him the money in order that he may make an investment which he cannot reveal to anyone. Jane steadfastly refuses to lend the money for any unknown purpose. A little later a "bookie," called Munce, comes to collect a debt that Henry owes him. Henry does not have the money; and he tries to put off Munce, who threatens to tell Jane he has seen Henry with another woman in a nearby restaurant. Henry, in desperation, finally agrees to pay Munce on the next day.

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[1] St. John G. Ervine, Jane Clegg (London: Sedgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1914), pp. 10-11.

On the following day Mr. Morrison from the firm where Henry works, stops to see Jane. He reveals that Henry has not been at work all day and that he has never reported to the cashier the check he received from the other firm. When Henry appears, he is finally made to confess he has cashed the check. Jane offers to repay the money. Henry will then resign from his job, and they will go to Canada to start again.

After Morrison leaves, Henry reveals that he has spent the money to pay a debt; but he will try to do better in the future. Munce appears for his money, and Jane learns that Henry was lying when he said he used the money to pay a debt. She then demands to know what he has done with the money. Angry because Henry has not kept his word about paying, Munce blurts out that Henry has another woman whom he has been taking to see a doctor. Henry, in desperation, tries to rationalize his actions to Jane.

> Jane Clegg. You are an absolute rotter.
> Henry Clegg. I don't know. I'm not a bad chap, really. I'm just weak. I'd be all right if I had lots of money and a wife that wasn't better than I am. . . . Oh, I know, Jane! You are better than I am. Any fool can see that! It doesn't do a chap much good to be living with a woman who's his superior, at least not the sort of chap I am. I ought to have married a woman like myself, or a bit worse. That's what Kitty is. She's worse than I am, and that sort of makes me love her. It's different with you. I always feel mean here. Yes, I am mean. I know that, but it makes me meaner than I really am to be living with you. (He sits down at the table and begins to fill his pipe.) Do you understand, Jane? Somehow, the mean things I do that don't amount to much, I can't tell to you, or carry 'em off as if they weren't mean, and I do

> meaner things to cover them up. That's the way of it.
> I don't act like that with Kitty.[1]

At the close of the play, Jane, taking affairs in her own hands, sends Henry to Canada with Kitty, his friend; and she remains with the children and Henry's mother.

Throughout the drama Jane stands out as a great tragic character. All other persons in the play seem small, even contemptible in comparison with her strength and purpose. Her tragedy is that she has married a man who is dishonest, unworthy of her in every way. The tragic force in Jane's life is the weakness of Henry's character, and from this fatal defect the whole tragedy develops. When she discovers he is not the man whom she thought she married, her disillusionment is great. All her efforts to strengthen Henry and to make a man of him end in utter frustration. Jane Clegg is a great protagonist in a dramatic conflict arising from the strength in her own character as contrasted with the weakness in Henry. One critic has described Jane in these words:

> As a drama the whole would have seemed too sordid and too depressing were it not for the figure of Jane Clegg herself. Borne down in many ways into the mire that surrounds her, she rises superior to her circumstances, a human soul filled with that divine fire which irradiates and consumes. No idle dreamer of things impossible, no fettered woman craving for independence and adventure, she is a stern realist staring life full in the face and rising to the heights of her moral nature in the presence of disaster. She watches her husband fall; she looks through him and sees the meanness and littleness of his character; and, in doing so, she comes to realize her duty.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 104-5.

> In sending this weak, depraved, cringing creature from her house she is doing the only thing possible. In that moment she becomes truly tragic in her inner majesty.[1]

John Ferguson, written in 1911, is unquestionably Ervine's finest play and one of the great plays of the modern theater.[2] In this play is to be found his greatest character--John Ferguson. John, an Ulster Protestant peasant, is both a religious fanatic and a stoic. He accepts his religion as a living, vital thing and believes sincerely and wholeheartedly that all events in the universe, whether good or bad, happen according to some destined plan of God. His religion is such that he would sacrifice his life for his ideals. His faith braces him to face the facts of life, but for his wife Sarah it lacks potency even as a drug to deaden sorrow.[3] Frail in health and unable to work, John is held in the grip of Henry Witherow, a brutal tyrant, the local miller to whom his farm is mortgaged. Andrew, John's only son, educated for the ministry, does not make a success of farming. Witherow threatens to foreclose, but the family expect help from John's only brother in America. When no help arrives, the last hope vanishes. Sarah despairs, but John encourages her with some of his own religious philosophy.

> . . . Do you think that God doesn't know how to look after His own world? (The severity of his voice relaxes.) Everything that happens is made to happen and everything in the world, the commonest wee fly in the bushes before

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[1] Nicoll, loc. cit.

[2] McQuilland, op. cit., p. 49.

[3] Lothian, op. cit., p. 649.

> the door there, has a purpose and a meaning. There's things hid from you and me because we're not fit to know them, but the more we fill ourselves with the glory of God, the better we get to understand the world. It's people that's full of sin, that can't see or understand. That's sin--not knowing or understanding! Ignorance is sin. Keeping your mind shut is sin. Not letting the sun and the air and the warmth of God into your heart--that's sin.[1]

Another hopeful prospect opens when Jimmy Caesar, an obnoxious, mean little creature but a wealthy grocer, who hates Witherow with a burning hatred, offers to clear the mortgage if Ferguson's daughter Hannah will marry him. Although the offer is tempting to John, yet he does nothing to persuade Hannah to marry Caesar. She, feeling the whole future of the family, rests upon her sacrifices, consents; but she soon realizes the impossibility of marrying a man she despises. John accepts her decision and sends Hannah to Witherow with instructions that he is to foreclose.

Then Witherow seduces Hannah, and Jimmy Caesar declares passionately he will murder him. John endeavors to dissuade Caesar, but in vain. When Caesar plunges out into the night, John, a sick man, goes after him in an effort to save Witherow from death and Caesar from perdition. John fails to find Caesar, and next morning Caesar returns in woebegone state after having spent the night cowering under a hedge. He has failed to murder Withdrow because he is too much of a coward. Whining in his debasement, he says:

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[1] St. John G. Ervine, John Ferguson (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1915), p. 14.

I'm always imagining myself doing grand things, and seeing people clapping me and making speeches about me, and printing things in the paper because of my greatness and my gallantry; but if a cow was to make a run at me in the fields, I'd be near scared to d ath. It's bad enough, Andrew, to know that other people are ashamed of you, but it's hell to be ashamed of yourself, the way I am this minute, and it's hell to have dreams of yourself doing big things, and you knowing rightly you'll never have the pluck to do a wee thing let alone a big one. . . . I'm full of hate, and I want to hurt them that hurts me, and I haven't the courage to do it.[1]

News comes that Witherow has been shot dead, and Caesar is arrested. Stricken with terror, he swears his innocence; but no one believes it. Then a letter arrives from America with the money needed to save the farm. John's brother explains that he has mistaken the date and has missed the mail by a day. Hannah's faith crumbles into ruins at this event.

Hannah (bitterly). God's late, da!
John (feeling the blow to his faith). Don't, daughter, don't.
Hannah (getting up and going to the window). Oh, it's wicked, it's wicked.
Sarah. If it had only come by the last mail!
John. There must be some meaning in it. There must be! God doesn't make mistakes.

. . . .

Hannah. Where's the right in it, da? Where's the right in it? It's not just! . It's not fair! . . . There would have been none of this if we hadn't forgotten the right day, none of it. . . . Oh, da, da!

. . . .

John. We can't understand everything. It's no good trying to puzzle it all out. We must just have faith. . . that's all! Just have faith.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

Hannah. One man's dead and another's in jail in danger of his life because my uncle Andrew forgot the mail-day.[1]

Then comes the greatest blow to John's faith. Andrew confesses that it was he, not Caesar, who shot Witherow. He had known Caesar was too cowardly to do it and so had made the revenge sure by committing the deed himself. He cannot let an innocent man suffer in his place; he will go to the police and confess. At this point the faith of John Ferguson totters. He urges Andres to escape to America. Hannah and Andrew, however, bring back John's faith; and Andrew, with Hannah, goes to the police.

John Ferguson and his wife are left alone. Then John picks up the Bible which is always by him, saying, "Come here, Sarah! Sit down, woman, here by the side of me, and give me a hold of your hand. . . . Listen to God's word, Sarah, and that'll strengthen you."[2] He reads of David receiving the news of Absalom's death,

> And the King was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept; and as he went, thus he said, "Oh, my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son . . . my son!" (His voice ends in a sob. The Bible falls from his hands. He sits staring into the fire. There is a low moan from his wife.)[3]

Throughout the drama John Ferguson stands out as an intensely tragic character. It is he who makes the play great. He stands like Lear against the buffets of life; and at the end his head is "bloody,

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1 *Ibid.*, pp. 99-101.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 112-13.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

but unbowed." His body may be frail, his life-work ruined, but nothing can break his "unconquerable soul."[1] Like Job, John has led a blameless life; and he experiences the progressive tortures of a blameless man by a god who he believes is not only just in judgment, but also kindly in intention.[2] To realize John's tragedy fully, one must understand something of the Irish attitude toward morality. Ireland has always had the highest respect for the chastity of woman; and for Hannah to be betrayed is the height of tragic indignity.[3] The fact that Andrew is a murderer strikes very close to John, for his son is his dearest possession.

In a sense, all the characters are tragic. Sarah is perhaps even more tragic than John, although her struggle is not so great because she is not so powerful a character as John. Unlike John, she has no deeply rooted faith to sustain her through trying experiences. Hannah is another victim of the same relentless fate that pursues the other members of the family. Although she is bitter and questioning of God, she faces the issues of life squarely and does her duty to the best of her ability. Andrew, too, only a boy of nineteen, takes on his shoulders the avenging of his sister's wrong. According to the Irish viewpoint, his action is noble and heroic.

Throughout the play there runs a sense of the extreme futility of life. Fate has played havoc with the lives of these little characters.

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[1] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 205.

[2] Clayton Hamilton, Seen on the Stage (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), p. 174.

[3] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 95.

As Hannah herself points out, a man is murdered and another is sentenced to die for his murder all because an uncle in America was a day late in mailing a letter. Hannah's cry, "God's late, da!" is one of the most terrible and tragic lines in modern dramatic literature.[1] Fate, the tragic force, manifests itself in the narrow life of the village, in lust, cowardice, intense desire for revenge, and finally murder.[2]

The tragedy, however, goes a shade deeper. Hannah raises the abiding question that none of the prophets nor the poets have yet been able to answer to the satisfaction of the seeking soul. Why should God be late if God is both omnipotent and all-powerful? Preachers say that God knows best, that God works through righteousness; but this sounds like something to quiet children. Viewed as a great philosophical question, the drama becomes a tragic struggle between a great man and an apparently unjust God.[3]

One critic, in commenting on the strength of the characters, says,

> These Fergusons are little people, but they show life great, life tragic, as well as kings and the aristocrats. Their stoicism is enobling to the audience, even if they wear no crowns and work with their hands.[4]

The power of Ervine's work as a dramatist lies in his vivid insight

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[1] Hamilton, Seen on the Stage, p. 175.

[2] Lothian, op. cit., p. 680.

[3] Hamilton, Seen on the Stage, p. 174.

[4] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 200.

into the beauty and pathos, the humor and the tragedy of the lives of common men and women. The experiences out of which he writes are universal ones that are shared by each individual. Through his concept of the tragedy in ordinary life, he has interpreted the ideals of a new Ireland.[1]

Summary

St. John Ervine has written three plays that arehighly tragic in tone--Mixed Marriage, Jane Clegg, and John Ferguson. All the plays are wholly tragic in tone, tending to show no comic situations at all; and in only one play, Mixed Marriage, is there death on the stage. John Ferguson, however, involves two deaths which are not seen on the stage. Mixed Marriage portrays the conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism in a narrow, bigoted Ireland. Here the tragic force is the power of intolerance, of the hatred for Catholics that prompts John Rainey to destroy the love between Hugh and Nora. Jane Clegg is a more restrained tragedy in which the conflict is between Jane, a strong, clear-eyed woman, and Henry Clegg, her weak despicable husband. The tragic force is the contemtible streak in his nature which eventually leads Jane to put him out of her life forever. John Ferguson is a great tragic drama showing the conflict of an extremely religious man and his family against a cruel, relentless Fate. Like King Lear, this tragedy has a universal

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[1] Lloyd R. Morris, "An Ulster Realist," Outlook 125:389, June 23, 1920.

scope and become the conflict of a just man and an apparently unjust God. John Rainey, Jane Clegg, and John Ferguson all stand out as great tragic protagonists. These three plays reveal Ervine as a supreme analyst of character and an excellent portrayer of tragic drama.

Sean O'Casey

Sean O'Casey, the great discovery of the post-war Irish theater, is significant in the evolution of the Irish dramatic movement in that he is the first outstanding dramatist to portray on the stage the life of the Dublin slums.[1] O'Casey, who was born in 1883 in a Dublin tenement house, has lived a life of privation and has gazed at sights of physical and moral degradation.[2] His father died when he was three, and his mother was forced to work to support the family. For nine years he was half-starved. According to his own statement, "We had dry bread and a drink of tea in the morning, and that again at night, if we were lucky."[3] He did not attend school; but he received his education in the streets of Dublin, where he sold newspapers to earn a livelihood. He worked for a big news agency for nine shillings a week and had to be at work at four o'clock in the morning. He did not learn to read until he was thirteen.[4]

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[1] P. S. Hegarty, "A Dramatist of New Born Ireland," North American Review 224:321, June, 1927.

[2] Walter Starkie, "The Plays of Sean O'Casey," Nineteenth Century 104:226, August, 1928.

[3] Quoted from Cunliffe, op. cit., p. 114.

[4] Tante, op. cit., p. 302.

Like most residents of the slums, O'Casey drifted into the occupation of "general laborer," engaging in any kind of work offered him. He has been a dock-laborer, a hod-carrier, a stone breaker on the roads, a railway workman, and a builder's laborer. For over fifteen years he remained as an unskilled laborer, out of work, overworked, fighting, drifting, always longing for books.[1]

When he was twelve, he began to teach himself to read. The first book he bought was Shakespeare. He learned many passages by heart and acted many scenes from the plays in his room.[2]

In an effort to organize his fellowmen, O'Casey was for a time connected with the Irish Transport Workers' Union. He went with the workers through the great strike of 1913, wearing a pair of shoes frequently re-soled with cardboard. His first book, which was never published, was written to interest the strikers and to hold them together. He also helped to organize the Irish Citizen Army, which fought in the streets of Dublin in 1916 under James Connelly.

As an amateur he began to write drama in the hours of leisure following the day's work. A regular attendant at the Abbey Theater in Dublin, O'Casey learned his technique by watching the plays produced there. Eight of his plays were rejected before _The Shadow of a Gunman_ was staged at the Abbey Theater in April, 1923. It made his Dublin reputation in a single night. For weeks the theater was packed with an enthusiastic

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[1] _Loc. cit._

[2] Cunliffe, _op. cit._, p. 115.

audience, and hundreds of people were turned away every night. O'Casey then became connected with the Abbey Theater, and his forthcoming plays were watched with much interest.

On February 8, 1926, The Plough and the Stars was staged. It played to an intensely interested house on the first night, but on the second evening there was a hostile demonstration by a group of hysterical women who alleged that he defamed the names of the men who were executed in 1916. During the uproar W. B. Yeats rushed out without his hat and returned with a crowd of friends who applauded vigorously from the gallery, encouraging the players to proceed.

The same year O'Casey received the Hawthornden prize for Juno and Paycock. This British prize of one hundred pounds sterling is given to the best work of imaginative literature produced during the year by a writer under forty. In that same year the play was presented in New York and London.

The Silver Tassie, written in 1928, produced a rift between Yeats and O'Casey. Because Yeats objected to the expressionism of the play, it was rejected by the Abbey Theater. Following a run in London, the play, however, was produced in America in October, 1929, at Greenwich Village Theater.[1]

O'Casey's plays all tend to be serious. He attempts to show the influence of catastrophe on plain, but passionate people, by placing his

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[1] Tante, op. cit., pp. 302-3.

drama within the shadow of tragedy. He conceives tragedy in terms of a disruption of human life and relationships. In each of his plays the leading women characters, with their maimed and broken lives, become figures of tragic stature.[1]

The Shadow of a Gunman, O'Casey's first play, takes place during the Anglo-Irish War, which began in January, 1919, and closed in May, 1921. This conflict was characterized by guerrilla warfare, in which policemen were shot as they moved about the countryside. In June, 1920, armed soldiers from England arrived; they were called the Black-and-Tans because of the color of their uniforms. A period of terrorism followed, during which the police or those suspected of being spies were shot. Many homes were burned, and so many murders were committed that a wholesale competition in crime arose.[2]

The scene of the play is a Dublin tenement house in which live Sheumas Shields, a pedlar, and Donal Davoren, a poetic dreamer. Shields is a loquacious patriot, a hero in speech and a coward in action. Davoren tells him, "Your religion is simply the state of being afraid that God will torture your body in this world."[3] Davoren, who feels himself above and outside the battle, is believed by the neighbors to be a "gunman on the run"; and he is respected accordingly.

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[1] Florence Codman, "Sean O'Casey," Nation 138:476, April 25, 1934.

[2] "History of Ireland," Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th edition, XII, 615.

[3] Sean O'Casey, The Shadow of a Gunman in Two Plays (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 123.

Maguire, pseudo-pedlar and a friend of Shields, stops one morning and secretly leaves a bag in the corner of the room. Minnie Powell, another resident of the tenement house, falls in love with Davoren because of her admiration for his bravery in opposing the police. She treasures carefully a scrap of paper on which Davoren has written her name and his.

News comes that Maguire, the pedlar, has been shot in a nearby town by the police. Seumas has a premonition of disaster. All night long he has heard knocking on the wall. The owner of the tenement house says the noise comes from a nearby stable where bridles are being put on the horses, but Shields believes the noise that he hears is the manufacture of bombs. He is tired of the eternal warfare and the constant unrest of the country, and he tells Davoren,

> "I wish to God it was all over. The country is gone mad. Instead of countin' their beads now they're countin' bullets; their Hail Marys and paternosters are burstin' bombs--burstin' bombs, an' the rattle of machine guns; petrol in their holy water; their Mass is a burnin' buildin'; their De Profundis is "The Soldiers' Song," an' their creed is, I believe in the gun almighty, maker of heaven and earth--an' it's all for the glory o' God an' the honor o' Ireland.[1]

Several hours later Davoren opens the black bag that Maguire has left in his room and finds it is filled with bombs. Just then Minnie rushes in with the news that the Black-and-Tans are going to raid. Panic-stricken, Davoren and Shields search for a hiding place for the bombs. Minnie takes the bag to her room, hoping the soldiers will not find it

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[1] Ibid., pp. 166-67.

there. Her hopes are in vain, however; for the soldiers find the bag, and she is taken to jail. A few minutes later Mrs. Grigson, another roomer, brings the news that Minnie has been shot while trying to escape.

> Mrs. Grigson (falling down in a sitting posture on one of the beds.) What's goin' to happen next! Oh, Mrs. Davoren, isn't it terrible, isn't it terrible! Minnie Powell, poor little Minnie Powell's been shot dead! They were raidin' a house a few doors down, an' had just got up in their lorries to go away when they were ambushed. You never heard such shootin'! An' in the thick of it, poor Minnie went to jump off the lorry, an' she was shot through the buzzum. Oh, it was horrible to see the blood pourin', an' Minnie moanin'! They found some paper in her breast, with the name Minnie written on it, an' some other name they couldn't make out with the blood; an' the officer kep' it. The ambulance is bringin' her to the hospital, but what good's that when she's dead! Poor little Minnie, poor little Minnie Powell, to think of you full of life a few minutes ago, an' now she's dead!
>
> Davoren. Ah, me, alas! Pain, pain, ever, for ever! It's terrible to think that little Minnie is dead, but it's still more terrible to think that Davoren and Shields are alive! Oh, Donal Davoreen, shame is your portion now till the silver chord be loosened and the golden bowl be broken. Oh, Davoren, Donal Davoren, poet and poltroon, poltroon and poet!
>
> Seumas (solemnly.) I knew something ud come of the tappin' on the wall.[1]

In this play, as in all that O'Casey has written, a woman is sacrificed to the cowardice of men; but the play is little more than a chronicle of events, with a satirical commentary.[2] Minnie, like some martyr of old, willingly lays down her life in order to save Davoren, the man whom she loves. There is distinct irony in her mistaken patriotism.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 198-99.

[2] Walter E. Malone, *The Irish Drama*, p. 216.

She believes Davoren is a great hero, one who dares to fight the police; and she dies with her "life-illusion" unshattered. The tragic forces are war and the miserable conditions brought about through her mistaken patriotism. Minnie's tragedy is that she dies for a crime which she has not committed. The lesson arises from an ironic speculation on the way of life. The innocent are goaded to destruction by the men of words, the speech-makers and the poets, who live to be known afterwards as "the men who won the war."[1] Throughout the drama the quiet heroism of Minnie is contrasted effectively with the garrulous cowardice of men like Shields and Davoren. Although they mourn Minnie's death, one feels that her self-sacrifice will soon be forgotten in the horror of the war and that the same situation will occur again and again.

Although The Shadow of a Gunman is deep tragedy, O'Casey has mingled the comic and the tragic elements in a way which reminds one of Shakespeare, whom O'Casey says he early took for his master.[2] He fills all his plays with a crowd of characters--up-stairs and down-stairs neighbors--persons who in themselves furnish the farcical and tragic elements.[3] In this play one meets Tommy Owens, a drunken neighbor, who staggers in to say he would willingly die for Ireland if he ever had the chance; but, although terrorism reigns on all sides, he, like Miniver Cheevy, feels he has been born too late. The two most comic characters, however, are Mrs. Grigson and her

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[1] Loc. cit.

[2] Cunliffe, op. cit., pp. 114-15.

[3] Padraic Colum, "Sean O'Casey," Theater Arts Monthly 9:400, June, 1925.

husband, Adolphus Grigson, who inhabit the basement of the tenement. Grigson, a drunken sot as fat as his wife is thin, prides himself on his bravery and his knowledge of the Bible. When the police arrive, he is, in reality, thoroughly terrified, being a born coward. The soldiers drink his whisky and force him to sit up in bed to sing "In the Sweet Bye and Bye." When he recounts the story for the benefit of his neighbors, however, he embroiders the tale with incidents calculated to enhance his own reputation. He nonchantly lights his pipe and tells Davoren,

> Excitin' few moments, Mr. Davoren; Mrs. G. lost her head completely--panic-stricken. But that's very natural, all women is very nervous. The only thing to do is to show them they can't put the wound on you; show the least sign of fright an' they'd walk on you, simply walk on you. Two of them came down--"Put them up" revolvers under your nose--you know, the usual way. "What's all the bother about?" says I, quite calm. "No bother at all," says one of them, "only this gun might go off an' somebody--do you hear me?" says he. "What if it does?" says I. "A man can only die once, an' you'll find Grigson won't squeal." "God, you're a cool one," says the other, "there's no blottin' it out."[1] [sic.]

Juno and the Paycock, O'Casey's finest play, is a tragedy of disillusionment showing a slice of life in the strictest and most literal sense of the term.[2] "Captain" Jack Boyle, otherwise known as the "Paycock," his wife Juno, with Mary and Johnny, their two children, live in a two-roomed flat in a Dublin tenement house. Jack Boyle is the public-house lounger, a drunken sot who got the title of "captain" from being "only wanst on the wather in an oul' collier from here to Liverpool."[3]

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[1] O'Casey, op. cit., pp. 195-96.

[2] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 212.

[3] Sean O'Casey, Juno and the Paycock in Two Plays (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 18.

His other title, "the paycock," was bestowed upon him by his wife who thought he was as useful and as vain as a peacock. She remarks contemptously, "I killin' meself workin', and he sthruttin' about from mornin' till night like a paycock!"[1] Juno herself is so named because everything of importance in her life has happened in June. As Boyle himself explained,

> You see, Juno was born and christ ned in June; I met her in June; we was married in June, an' Johnny was born in June, so wan day I says to her, "You should ha' been called Juno," an' the name stuck to her ever since.[2] [sic.]

Juno and her daughter support the family while Boyle struts the floor or lounges drunk in a public-house. As soon as a job of work is offered to the Paycock, he immediately develops an acute case of rheumatism which so cripples him that he cannot stir a single step, except down to the public-house. Mary is on a strike against the victimization of a fellow-worker. When Juno upbraids her for leaving her work and depriving the family of a necessary income, Mary retorts that the principle of the matter is in question. Johnny, Juno's son, is an invalid, who was "only a chiseleur of a Boy Scout in the Easter Week, when he got hit in the hip; and his arm was blew off in the fight in O'Connell Street."[3] As Juno disconsolately remarks, "I knew he was makin' a fool of himself. God knows I went down on me bended knees to him not to go agen the Free State."[4] As a result of his patriotism, Johnny is left a querulous invalid whose

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[1] Ibid., p. 53.

[2] Ibid., p. 40.

[3] Ibid., p. 39.

[4] Ibid., p. 9.

face shows a look of infinite fear. "Joxer" Daly is the "butty," or drinking companion, of Jack Boyle. He is the typical Dublin wastrel of the worst kind, a lazy, deceitful, hypocritical, yet engaging individual. Thoroughly detested by Juno, he avoids her as much as possible; and he and Boyle meet in public-houses or at Boyle's home during Juno's working hours.

Mary Boyle is courted by Jerry Devine, a decent chap who dreams of being a great leader of labour and a champion of democratic freedom. Into the Boyle household comes Charlie Bentham, a young school-teacher who is studying law. He brings news of a legacy left to Jack Boyle by a distant relative. Typical of those who cannot accept prosperity in a calm manner, the Boyles buy new furniture, including a gramophone, and give a party to their neighbors to celebrate the good fortune. The festivities are interrupted by the funeral of the son of another resident in the house, another "patriot" whose body has been found on the road-side "beyant Finglas, riddled with bullets."[1]

The entire party goes out to view the procession and to attempt to console Mrs. Tancred, mother of the dead boy. Only Johnny, the crippled boy, remains behind; he cannot bear the sight of suffering or death. To him comes a message "to attend a Battalion Staff meetin' the night afther to-morrow."[2] Johnny passionately refuses.

> Young Man. . . . You're to meet me at the Piller at eight o'clock; then we're to go to a place I'll be told

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[1] Ibid., p. 70.

[2] Ibid., p. 76.

of to-night. . . . They think you might be able to know somethin' about them that gave the bend where Commandant Tancred was shelterin! .

Johnny. I'm not goin', then. I know nothin' about Tancred.

Young Man (at the door.) You'd betther come for your own sake---remember your oath.

Johnny (passionately.) I won't go! Haven't I done enough for Ireland! I've lost me arm, an' me hip's desthroyed so that I'll never be able to walk right agen!

Young Man. Boyle, no man can do enough for Ireland![1]

Soon rumor begins to cast doubt on the Boyle legacy, and misfortunes begin to pile up. Unpaid bills increase; the tailor comes to take away the "Captain's" new clothes; the furniture dealers remove the furniture; and Mrs. Madigan, a neighbor, takes the gramophone to make up for an unpaid loan. Bentham has gone to London, and Mary has heard nothing from him for some time. Juno takes Mary to a doctor to learn that she is to have Bentham's child. Jerry spurns Mary, and Johnny and his father disown her for having "disgraced" the family. The Captain goes out to get drunk, vowing vengeance upon his return. As a last bit of degrading indignity, Johnny is taken away by two "patriots"; and the news is soon brought back that he has been executed as a spy because he is believed to be responsible for the death of his neighbor's son, his own chum. Mary shrieks out against this last injustice, crying, "There isn't a God, there isn't a God; if there was, he wouldn't let these things happen."[2] Even Juno's customary faith is somewhat shaken; but she tells Mary, "Ah, what can God do agen the stupidity of men!"[3] The

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[1] Ibid., pp. 76-77.

[2] Ibid., p. 107.

[3] Loc. cit.

room is desolate, cheerless, and bare, as she rises to leave.

Mrs. Boyle. We'll go, Mary, we'll go; you go to see your poor dead brother, an' me to see me poor dead son!

Mary. I dhread it; mother, I dhread it!

Mrs. Boyle. I forgot, Mary, I forgot; your poor oul' selfish mother was only thinkin' of herself. No, no, you mustn't come--it wouldn't be good for you. You go on to me sisther's an' I'll face th' ordeal meself. Maybe I didn't feel sorry enough for Mrs. Tancred when her poor son was found as Johnny's been found now--because he was a Die-hard! Ah, why didn't I remember that then he wasn't a Die-hard or a Stater, but only a poor dead son! It's well I remember all that she said--an' it's my turn to say it now: What was the pain I suffered, Johnny, bringin' you into the world to carry you to your cradle to the pain I'll suffer carryin' you out o' the world to bring you to your grave! Mother o' God, Mother o' God, have pity on us all! Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets, when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets? Sacred Heart of Jesus, take away our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh! Take away this murdherin' hate, an' give us Thine own eternal love! (They go slowly out. There is a pause; then a sound of shuffling steps on the stairs outside. The door opens and Boyle and Joxer, both of them very drunk, enter.)

. . . .

Joxer (walking unsteadily across the room, and anchoring at the bed.) Put all . . . your troubles . . . in your oul' kit bag . . . an' smile . . . smile! . . . Breathes there a man with soul . . . so . . . de . . . ad . . . this . . . me . . . o . . . wn, me nat . . .ive . . . an'!

Boyle. I'm telling you . . . Joxer . . . th' whole worl's . . . om a terr . . . ible . . . state o' . . . chassis![1]

In the play there is cruel irony. All manner of sacrifices are made for Ireland in the name of patriotism, and the Motherland is loved as an abstraction. Juno, however, the real mother of the race, is

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[1] Ibid., pp. 111-13.

compelled to live in a slum and to see her suffering ignored by all the members of her family. Her own son will fight for an abstraction instead of working for his own mother. The fact that this same irony is found in many countries makes the tragedy more nearly universal; sons the world over have forgotten the obligations due their parents when the war-drums begin to sound and the battle-flags are unfurled. O'Casey is suggesting that the same thing will happen again and again.[1]

Few characters in modern literature are as thoroughly tragic as Juno Boyle. Her face has "a look of listless monotony and harassed anxiety, blended with an expression of mechanical resistance."[2] Her tragedy consists of a cumulation of separate disgraces, each one adding its own indignity until it seems as though the victim would be crushed beneath the overwhelming avalanche of worries. The tragic forces which assail her all come through the weaknesses of her family. The Captain's drunkenness, Johnny's mistaken patriotism, and Mary's illusions of grandeur which lead her to encourage a worthless lover, all heap disgrace on the family name. Only one who knows the extent of pride in family name and the high premium placed upon chastity can realize the tragedy of Juno Boyle to the fullest extent. Even the Captain, drunkard that he is, is aroused from his customary lethargy when he learns Mary is forever disgraced. Juno, however, is not overwhelmed by her sorrows. As the

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[1] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, pp. 215-16.

[2] O'Casey, Juno and the Paycock, in Two Plays, p. 2.

great, the universal mother, she rises superior to her slum surroundings and prepares to begin her life struggles anew. She and Mary will leave the Captain, and between the two of them they will make a home for Mary's child.

Juno and the Paycock is a drama in which the tragic situations are mingled freely with the comic ones. The Captain and Joxer are characters who, if placed in a lighter situation, would make for farce because their drunken antics are intensely interesting to the audience. The "party" prepared by the Boyles is in itself an amusing incident. These moments of lightness serve as excellent contrast to the more intense ones and help to heighten the impression of realism. When the play was first played in the Abbey Theater, the significance of the drama did not reach the audience, which was indifferent to Juno's sufferings. Here the comic elements rather than the serious ones were emphasized, and the audience was entertained by the antics of two typical Dublin loafers as shown on the stage.[1]

One critic, in summarizing the power of the play, has said:

> O'Casey's amazing power in this play consists in not falling into a commonplace melodrama of blood and iron. . . . There is perfect equilibrium between the comic and the tragic element. It is, however, a painful play, for, in addition to the harrowing scenes, the comic parts are almost savage in their pessimism. O'Casey has that power which Chekhov possessed of painting the gray lives of those who are destined to be failures. Juno Boyle is one of the finest characters in the whole Irish theater, and her hopeless struggle is magnificent in its intensity.[2]

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[1] Walter E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 212.

[2] Starkie, op. cit., p. 236.

O'Casey's third play, The Plough and the Star, is a protest against war and mistaken patriotism. The time of the play is Easter Week, 1916. A Home Rule Bill, which provided for an Irish Parliament, but which left the taxing power to England, had been passed by the English Parliament in 1914. The Irish, however, refused to accept the bill; and the Sinn Feiners, a protest party, arose. Rebellion broke out on Easter Sunday, 1916, in Dublin; the actual fighting lasted only a week, and two thousand were killed in the street fighting.[1]

In a tenement, John and Nora Clitheroe, newly married, live under the shadow of a political strife. With them live Peter Flynn, Nora's uncle, and the young Covey, Clitheroe's cousin. Peter is a showy patriot who dresses like Robert Emmet and mouths platitudes. Covey is a class-con-scious proletarian, anti-religious and anti-patriotic. Between Peter and him there is constant conflict because of the difference in their viewpoints.

John and Nora are spending a quiet evening at home when Captain Brennan brings a message commanding Jack to lead a battalion in an attack on Dublin Castle at two o'clock that morning. Jack did not know that he had been made a commander in the Citizen Army, but Brennan explains that he himself had delivered the message to Nora two weeks before. She confesses that she destroyed, without his knowledge, the letter appointing him to the position. She begs him not to go; but Jack, thoroughly angry, departs without saying goodbye.

The next act shows the successful demonstration at the public house.

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[1] Encyclopedia Britannica, op. cit., pp. 613-14.

The soldiers and the women are both present; and even the banner of the army, bearing the "Plough and the Stars" is taken into the bar while the soldiers drink. Back at the tenement house a consumptive child, Mollser Gogan, is brought to the door to take air; and three men playing pitch and toss discuss the fighting in subdued tones. Nora Clitheroe, who has gone out on a fruitless search for her husband, is brought home by Fluther Good.

Jack Clitheroe, covering the retreat of a wounded soldier, comes to the door. Nora runs out; and, clinging to him, she beseeches him to give up the fight and to come back to her.

> Clitheroe (to Nora.) Loosen me, darling, let me go.
> Nora (clinging to him.) No, no, no, I'll not let you go! Come on, come up to our home, Jack, my sweetheart, my lover, my husband, an' we'll forget the last few terrible days! . . . I look tired now, but a few hours of happy rest in your arms will bring back th' bloom of freshness again, an' you will be glad, you will be glad, glad . . . glad!
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> . . . .
>
> Brennan. Are you comin', man, or are you goin' to make an arrangement for another honeymoon. . . . If you want to act th' renegade, say so, an' we'll be off!
>
> . . . .
>
> Nora (clinging to Clitheroe and indicating Brennan.) Look, Jack, look at th' anger in his face; look at th' fear glintin' in his eyes. . . . He, himself's afraid, afraid, afraid! . . . He wants you to go th' way he'll have th' chance of death sthrikin', you an' missin' him! . . . Turn round an' look at him, Jack, look at him, look at him! . . . His very soul is cold. . . shiverin' with th' thought of what may happen to him. . . . It is his fear that is thryin' to frighten you from recognisin' the same fear that is in your own heart!
>
> . . . .
>
> Clitheroe (to Nora.) If you won't do it quietly, I'll have to make you! . . .

Nora (pitifully.) Please, Jack. . . You're hurting me, Jack. . . . Honestly . . . Oh, you're hurting . . . me. . . . I won't, I won't, I won't! . . . Oh, Jack, I gave you everything you asked of me. . . . Don't fling me from you now! (He roughly loosens her grip, and pushes her away from him. Nora sinks to the ground and lies there.)[1]

A woman from the tenement house comes out and takes Nora in. The horrors of the play begin to multiply. A doctor is called, and a few minutes later Nora's child is born dead. A little later the consumptive child dies, and Nora becomes demented. Captain Brennan brings her a last message from Jack, who has been killed and left in a burning hotel. Soldiers come to take away the coffin, and Nora appears in a state of delirium. Bessie, the nurse who attends her, does not hear Nora as she prepares the table for a meal. The rattle of musketry awakens the sleeper and attracts Nora's attention to the window. Bessie struggles in vain to remove Nora from the window, but a bullet strikes the nurse. Shrieking with pain and fear, she drops to the floor.

Merciful God, I'm shot, I'm shot, I'm shot! . . . The life's pourin' out o' me! . . . O God, have mercy on me! . . . (To Nora.) You wouldn't stay quiet, no you wouldn't, you wouldn't, blast you! Look at what I'm afther gettin', look at what I'm afther gettin'. . . I'm bleedin' to death, an' no one here to stop th' flowin' blood! . . . (Pleadingly) Nora, Nora, dear, for God's sake, run out and get Mrs. Gogan, or Fluther, or somebody bring a doctor, quick, quick, quick! . . . (In a whispered moan.) Jesus Christ, me sight's goin'! It's all dark, dark! Nora, hold me hand! . . . I'm dyin', I'm dyin' . . . I feel it. . . She ceases singing, and lies stretched out, still and very rigid.)[2]

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[1] Sean O'Casey, The Plough and the Stars (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), pp. 99-103.

[2] Ibid., pp. 131-33.

Mrs. Gogan, a neighbor woman, finally comes and takes Nora away; the soldiers return to eat the meal Nora has prepared. Outside voices can be heard singing "Keep the Home Fires Burning," as the curtain falls.

O'Casey's message in The Plough and the Stars is the stupidity, the horror, the utter uselessness of war and mistaken patriotism. Death, destruction, suffering, waste--all these come in the sacred name of patriotism. Again the real brunt of the tragedy is borne by the suffering women and children, as they are in every war. Nora is a simple, home-loving person; but war, like a ruthless, burglarizing force, breaks in upon her happiness, changing her life to one of misery and suffering. The conflict in this play is an old one--the ties of women and home as opposed to those of country and patriotism. In the end patriotism must win, though it cost the lives of many. Mollser, the consumptive child, strikes the keynote of the play when she says, "Is there anybody goin', Mrs. Clitheroe, with a titther o' sense?"[1] Nora's tragedy is worse than death; she is left demented, deprived of her husband and child, and doomed to search all her life for her husband, who never returns to console her.

Like other plays of O'Casey's, The Plough and the Stars mingles the comic with the tragic elements. One particularly striking example of this humor is found in the portrayal of the character of Mrs. Gogan. She is the type of person who takes unhealthy delight in stories of sudden, mysterious deaths. When she hears Fluther Good cough, she

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[1] Ibid., p. 42.

frightens him with her graphic description of the hearse drawn by four horses with black plumes. She tells him,

> It always gives meself a kind of tresspassin' joy to feel meself movin' along in a mournin' coach, an' me thinkin' that, maybe, th' next funeral 'll be me own, an' glad, in a quiet way, that this is somebody else's.[1]

Although the play has many memorable scenes, it is not nearly so well unified or so tragic a play as Juno and the Paycock. The Plough and the Stars is really a series of disconnected scenes with the fighting as a background, with the theme somewhat blurred by the multiplicity of incidents.[2] In Juno and the Paycock the interest centers chiefly in one tragic character--Juno Boyle; in The Plough and the Stars interest centers in the tragedies of the lives of many characters, with the individual as a distinct personality shoved into the background. One critic has described the emotional import of this tragedy in these words:

> We feel that the tragedy has become transcendental, and that we are watching not the drama of individuals, but the tragedy of a whole race. Every element of horror is exploited--the blazing street, the mad heroine moaning helplessly as her friend lies dying on the floor, the coffin surrounded by candles as a wake and the men playing cards, the rattle of machine-gun fire and the cockney songs of the English soldiery. All this great apparatus of tragedy, he has raised in order to show the futility of war.[3]

In the play Within the Gates O'Casey has turned from intensely Irish drama to the expressionistic type of play in which both the setting

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[1] O'Casey, The Plough and the Stars, op. cit., p. 12.

[2] Starkie, op. cit., p. 229.

[3] Ibid., p. 235.

and the characters are highly generalized. He has sought, in all of his plays, to emphasize the universal significance of the experiences of mankind; and this consideration has naturally led him to the spiritual and religious problems that are dealt with in Within the Gates. This play, a dramatization of the life of the post-war world,[1] shows a panorama of life as it might appear to those who come and go through a Park during the four seasons of the year.[2] In the center of the Park stands a "War-Memorial in the form of a steel-helmeted soldier, the head bent on the breast, skeleton-like hands leaning on the butt-end of a rifle."[3] Through the entire play runs a tone of deep disillusionment; and war, unwanted, brutalising, disintegrating, hangs like a thunder-cloud over an England that has lost her confidence.[4] The characters are all generalized, each one representing a class or type of person rather than a distinct personality. No one bears a name other than the one indicating his most obvious aspect, such as Bishop, Chairman, Dreamer, and Atheist. Large numbers of characters appear on the stage; they represent life with its constant, moving throng.[5]

A slender thread of plot runs through the entire play, giving the drama a definite unity. The first scene is a spring morning; a Bishop

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[1] Codman, op. cit., pp. 476-77.

[2] Edith J. R. Isaacs, "Broadway in Review," Theater Arts Monthly 18:898, December, 1934.

[3] Sean O'Casey, Within the Gates, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 1.

[4] Codman, op. cit., p. 477.

[5] Loc. cit.

comes to the Park with his sister. She highly disapproves of a Bishop mingling promiscuousl, with the common people; but "he is anxious to show to all he meets that he is an up-to-the-present-minute clergyman, and that those who wear the stole are, on the whole, a lusty, natural, broad-minded, cheery crowd."[1] He assures her amiably, "The Church must keep alive, alive o, and up-to-date. Get amongst the people; get them to talk with us, then we can expect them to pray with us."[2]

Two Park Attendants with stiff legs sit on a bench and compare notes concerning their various aches and pains. Then the Atheist and the Dreamer come on the stage. They are discussing the step-daughter of the Atheist. She had been brought up by the nuns, but the Atheist had adopted her and had tried to make her more worldly by showing her a view of real life. He escribes the state of the girl's religious morality to the Atheist in these words, "I did my best to show 'er rahnd a bit; took awye 'eaven from over 'er 'ead, an' 'ell awye from under 'er feet; but the nuns 'ad got their claws in 'er deep, for 'er little mind was rotten with the fear of 'ell!"[3] After the mother of the girl began drinking, the daughter left home to become a prostitute. A Scarlet Woman dressed in red crosses the stage, and two nursemaids pushing carriages stop to discuss their latest love affairs. A gang of boys rush across the Park, pausing to knock over the chairs so that the angry attendents are forced to straighten them up again.

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[1] O'Casey, Within the Gates, op. cit., p. 5.

[2] Ibid., p. 6.

[3] Ibid., pp. 12-13.

The Gardner talks to the Dreamer, telling him of a new girl friend. Jokingly, he tells the Dreamer, "She thinks I'll marry her when I'm fixed on the staff, but I don't fancy marriage."[1] Two Evangelists wearing placards on which Bible verses are printed cross the stage. The Young Whore, step-daughter of the Atheist, enters hurriedly from one side. She sits down on a bench to regain her breath, for any sudden exertion is likely to bring on a severe heart attack. The Atheist comes to sit beside her; and she tells him hysterically, "If I have to die, I'll die game; I'll die dancing!"[2] She begs her step-father to take her to live with him, for she has grown desperately lonely in the life she is leading. Pleadingly, she tells him,

> I can't live alone any longer, dad. When I lie down in bed and stretch out in search of sleep, the darkness reddens into a glow from the fire that can never be quenched. Green-eyed, barrel-bellied men glare and grin at me; huge-headed, yellow-eyed women beckon to me from the glow of the fire that can never be quenched. Black-feathered owls, with eyes like great white moons, peck at me as they fly through the glow from the fire that can never be quenched. Save me, dad, oh save me![3]

Her father angrily refuses, and she goes off to beg the Gardner to marry her. Throwing her arms around his neck she becomes hysterical. A Policewoman appears, and the Young Whore is taken down to the magistrate for making a disturbance in the Park.

The next scene is summer noon in the same Park. The Bishop attempts to bless a baby the Nursemaid is wheeling, but the girl only jeers at him.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

The Young Whore appears and sits down near the Bishop. She begs him to make the Gardner marry her so that she will be saved from the life she is leading. The Bishop is horrified. He tells her to go home and live with her mother. "Work steadily, cultivate thrifty habits, and in a few years' time you'll be able to face marriage far more brightly and firmly than you could possibly face it now."[1]

The Young Whore laughs loudly, telling him her mother is always drunk. The Bishop tells her not to annoy him any more. Intensely angry, she springs to her feet, saying:

> You and your goodness are of no use to God. If Christ came again, He'd have to call not the sinners, but the righteous to repentance. Go out into the sun and pick the yellow primrose! Take your elegant and perfum'd soul out of the stress, and stain, the horrid cries, the noisy laugh of life, an' go out into the sun and pick the yellow primroses! When you go to where your God is enthroned, tell the gaping saints you never soiled a hand in Jesus' service. Tell them a pretty little whore, well on her way to hell, once tempted you to help her; but you saved yourself by the calm and cunning of a holy mind, an' went out into the sun to pick the yellow primroses, leaving her, sin-saddened, in the strain, the stain, the horrid cries, an' the noisy laugh of life. . . . A tired Christ would be afraid to lean on your arm. Your Christ wears a bowler hat, carries a cane, twiddles his lavender gloves, an' sends out gilt-edged cards of thanks to callers.[2]

The horrified Bishop has barely had time to recover himself when an Old Woman, mother of the girl, pushes her way through the crowd. She begs the Young Whore for money with which to buy liquor, then becomes

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

angry, and attempts to tear the girl's clothing into ribbons. The Bishop tries to separate the two women. The Old Woman gazes at him searchingly, hailing him as her first lover, the father of the Young Whore. The Bishop, greatly shaken, denies her accusation; but he sits for a long time on the bench with his head buried in his hands.

The next scene is an autumn evening. The Bishop meets the Young Whore to tell her that he has privately made provision for her redemption; she will be received into a pious sisterhood, where she will be strictly guarded. She interrupts him, saying, "Not for me, thank you kindly!"[1] A group of Down-and-Outs, "bent, tattered, and hopeless wrecks of old and young men and women,"[2] come to the Park. They sing a sad, monotonous song.

A young Salvation Army Officer with his band of men comes to preach. Filled with emotion, the Young Whore kneels, murmuring, "Great and merciful Redeemer, save me!"[3] While the group are praying devoutly, the Dreamer enters, calling to the girl. Slipping away, she is gone up the slope before the prayer has ended.

The last scene is a night in winter. The Bishop is still searching for his daughter, and she and the Dreamer come again to the Park. Sitting down on a bench, she breathes quickly; and in her eyes there is a fixed look of fear. The Dreamer calls the Bishop hurriedly, and in the background the chorus of the Down-and-Outs can be heard growing stronger.

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[1] Ibid., p. 105.

[2] Ibid., p. 109.

[3] Ibid., p. 119.

Game to the last, the Young Whore attempts to dance, while the Bishop prays earnestly. Soon the girl falls limp with her head on the Dreamer's shoulder.

> Young Whore (almost in a whisper.) I die, Dreamer, I die, and my soul is heavy with a great fear.
> Dreamer (standing over her, gently.) Fear nothing; God will find room for one scarlet blossom among his thousand white lilies. (The Bishop rises from his knees and goes over to where she is lying. He kneels again and takes one of her hands in his.)
> Young Whore (staring at the Bishop.) Guide the hand you hold into making the sign of the cross, that I may whisper my trust in the golden mercy of God. (The Bishop guides her hand as she makes the sign of the cross. She lies still and silent.)[1]

The curtain falls with the Down-and-Outs still chanting their song faintly in the background.

Within the Gates, like other plays of O'Casey, reveals the dramatist's protest against stupid, cruel war. In this Park where Nature continues her seasonal changes uninterrupted is the statue of the soldier, an ineffectual reminder of human folly. Almost all the characters have been touched by the disillusionment which follows a war. There is no hope for the unemployed, no faith for a prostitute who cries for it, no redemption for the Down-and-Outs.[2] In the background of the play runs the recurrent chorus of the Down-and-Outs; in the foreground of the play are the vulgarities, the cynicisms, and the tragedies of a demoralized society where truth and honor are almost entirely in the past.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 166.

[2] Godman, loc. cit.

[3] "An Irishman Looks at England and Beyond," Saturday Review of Literature 11:256, November 3, 1934.

The tragedy of the Young Whore, who seeks a new and lasting redemption, is an almost universal tragedy. In this brutal, mocking, disillusioned world no one is willing to lend a true helping hand to aid her in establishing a new set of values in a chaotic existence. In a sense she is the protagonist of the entire play. The tragic forces assailing her from all sides are the cynicism and the disillusionment arising after a brutal, useless war. Almost all the characters are tragic, but the little Whore stands out as the most pathetic one of the whole group. Her soul stresses show her as disillusioned youth personified. "Her weak heart is symbolical of a lesion in the mind which leaves her without fixity of purpose, except to die game."[1] Her courage is, perhaps, the most illuminating thing in the whole drama. One critic has said of the play,

> At the end of this stirring drama of humanitarian fantasy, one feels that there is more real hope in the little whore's game courage than in the whole lumbering machine of dialectic materialism, with its ominous promise that the next great race will create a culture by force.[2]

Sean O'Casey is a significant member of the group of young Irish dramatists in that he has been the first outstanding playwright to portray the life of the slums on the stage. In all of his plays, however, he reveals both the good and the bad side of life in the slums; for he never leaves out the humanity, the good feeling, and the humor that makes life

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[1] _Loc. cit._

[2] _Loc. cit._

worth living even in the slums. He has been hailed as "the greatest Irish dramatist since Synge."[1]

Summary

Sean O'Casey has written four plays that are outstandingly tragic in tone. Through all his writings the tragic force is shown to be the brutality, the utter uselessness, the stupidity of war; and in each case the women are the real sufferers, the victims of man's cowardice. The Shadow of a Gunman, the action of which takes place during the Anglo-Irish war, reveals the tragedy of Minnie Powell, who is killed by the English soldiers while she attempts to save the life of her lover. The Plough and the Stars also takes place during the rebellion of Easter Week of 1916. When Nora Clitheroe's husband goes to war, she becomes demented, searching always for him, although he has been killed by a bomb. Juno and the Paycock, O'Casey's finest play, is a tragedy of disillusionment. O'Casey's finest play, is a tragedy of disillusionment. Juno, the mother in the slums, is assailed by many tragic forces, all arising from the weaknesses of the members of her family--the drunkenness of her husband, the betrayal of her daughter Mary, and the death of her only son, Johnny, who dies branded as a traitor to his country. Above all her struggles she rises as a great protagonist, her head "bloody, but unbowed." Within the Gates is an expressionistic play showing the disillusionment of a

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[1] Hegarty, loc. cit.

post-war world; the Young Whore, fighting against the tragic forces of growing skepticism and disillusionment, is youth personified. Through all of the plays runs a vein of deep irony; one feels that Minnie's sacrifice will soon be forgotten, that Juno's struggle is hopeless, that Nora's dementia is worse than death, and that the little Whore dies a disillusioned character. All of the women show great courage. Juno will attempt to gather up the scattered threads of her life and rebuild anew, while the little Whore's game courage is perhaps the most illuminating thing the dramatist has written. All of O'Casey's plays mingle freely the tragic and the comic elements in the formation of tragedy. Two plays, _The Plough and the Stars_ and _Within the Gates_, show death on the stage; but all the plays involve deaths which are not shown in the play. Sean O'Casey is the first outstanding dramatist to portray the tragedy of the Dublin slums on the stage.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study has been to identify the tragic element in the drama of the Celtic Renaissance and to show the influence of environmental struggles as well as the racial and temperamental characteristics of the people upon the drama. The study has shown that much of the Irish drama is distinctly tragic in tone.

In the work of the Abbey Theater two great periods of drama are discernable. The early writers of the theater, including Yeats, Synge, Lady Gregory, Colum, Fitzmaurice, Campbell, and Mayne, are concerned with tragedy as portrayed in the peasant life of Ireland. Because Ireland is essentially a nation of agricultural people, folk drama has appealed to many of the dramatists.

William Butler Yeats, one of the founders of the Abbey Theater, has always been interested in the drama from the standpoint of a poet. In many of his plays, which are dreamlike rather than realistic, the characters are not individualized personalities, but are rather the symbols of the eternal conflict between the material and spiritual worlds. The tragic forces are often demons, fairies, or visions, The outlines of his tragedies are usually taken from Irish legend or folklore, and the characters involved are usually those of the peasant class. His purpose in the theater has always been to give Ireland a national drama of her own, and he has expressed the inner conflict in Irish life in a deeply moving way.

John Millington Synge, perhaps the greatest dramatist that Ireland has had, has shown in his plays the tragedy of loneliness, of a life passing without fulfillment. In all his dramas he sees as intense tragic forces the coming of old age and death, and the fading away of love. Riders to the Sea, one of the finest one-act plays of the modern theater, shows the sea as a relentless tragic force and is the only Irish drama which does not reveal a great struggle on the stage. Into the speech of the Irish peasant Synge has put a wistfulness and a passion all his own and has written beautiful, poetic tragedy.

In the field of legendary and historical tragedy many of the dramatists have gone back to the mythological stories of ancient Ireland. Lady Gregory, in her Irish Folk-History Plays, has treated a few of the legendary characters that are not so well known as Deirdre. In nearly all her plays the tragic force is found to be fate, working relentlessly in the lives of the characters. Most critics, however, believe that these tragedies of Lady Gregory do not come up to the standard of her comedies in their character portrayal and dramatic technique.

Three dramatists: Synge, Yeats, and George Russell, have written plays about the tragedy of Deirdre, the most famous of all legendary Irish characters. Synge's play is perhaps the greatest, for he has made of Deirdre a living character and has shown that death can prove a great benison to the fading away of love. In his poetic play Yeats has treated the last act of the traditional tragedy and has compressed it into a one-act tragedy of great dramatic intensity. Russell, in a later drama, has written a prose version that is highly poetic. Following the old legend, each of the dramas shows

the fatalistic prophecy of the Druids made at Deirdre's birth as the tragic force. All the dramas reveal the wistful beauty and the haunting loveliness inherent in the old Gaelic legend.

Padraic Colum has attempted to interpret in a realistic way the conflict in the life of peasant Ireland. His theme is the tragedy arising from the family system, some problem of the land, or the hard selfishness of youth when driven into revolt against its elders. The spirit of wanderlust and the love of the soil are revealed in all of his writings. In each case the conflict is a restrained, highly intellectual one; and at the close of each drama there is a distinct ray of hay which relieves, to a large degree, the somber aspects of the tragedy.

Joseph Campbell has written only one peasant drama, a tragedy called Judgment. The drama shows the power of public opinion, and Peg Straw, "a tinker's woman," is never allowed to redeem herself and to rise above her station in life.

George Fitzmaurice and Rutherford Mayne have treated several of the same themes in their tragedies of Irish peasant life. In their plays The Moonlighter and The Troth, they have shown the struggles of the Irish and the English over the evils of the land system. Both dramas give voice to the intense, fiery hatred that has led Ireland on, giving her inspiration in her bloody struggle for independence. The Pie-Dish and The Turn of the Road show the conflict between the artistic individual and the material-minded world. Both dramatists have portrayed the tragic side of Irish life in a thoroughly realistic way.

With the death of Synge in 1909, and the dispersal of the original

company of the Irish Theater, the first period of the work of the Abbey Theater came to a close. Variations in management helped to accentuate the break, and with these innovations there came a change in the type of plays. Irish drama became more cosmopolitan in tone and was characterised by a new realism which led to the writing of non-peasant drama. For the most part, the later tragedies of the Abbey Theater are not more national in temper or more Celtic in spirit than the cosmopolitan drama of the great European cities. The influence of Ibsen and Shaw led to problem plays of propaganda and social protest. Among the group of non-peasant dramatists whose plays were produced in the Irish Theater were Martyn, Dunsany, O'Kelly, Robinson, Murray, Ervine, and O'Casey.

Edward Martyn, one of the founders of the Irish Theater, and Lord Dunsany are known primarily for their symbolic drama. Martyn, perhaps more than any other dramatist, has been influenced by Ibsen. All of his tragedies portray the conflict between idealism and materialism, and in several of his plays he has gone back to legendary material involving the supernatural. Dunsany, for his subject matter, has chosen the fabulous cities and the gods of ancient Egypt rather than the traditional Celtic material. In all of his dramas the conflict is one between man and the gods, and the tragedy is subdued and made subservient to the gods. Both Martyn and Dunsany are intensely Irish in that their writings are filled with the haunting melody and mysticism of the Celtic spirit.

Seumas O'Kelly and Lennox Robinson each sought to portray some particular social problem in the life of contemporary Ireland. O'Kelly's

dramas reveal the evils of the workhouse and of bribery in Ireland. Robinson has shown the tragedy which arises from a false pride in family name, from the evils of the wrong system of education, and from a loveless marriage entered into solely for patriotic reasons.

T. C. Murray has treated in his drama two problems that are fundamental in the life of Ireland: the tragedy of parental ambition and interference and the fighting traits inherent in the Irish temperament. Both situations make for tragedy in the lives of the Irish people, and in his treatment of these problems Murray has been intensely realistic.

St. John G. Ervine, at one time manager of the Abbey Theater, treats in his dramas the hard conventions and the perverted idealism of a narrow society. In his plays he is making a plea for a united Ireland, an Ireland tolerant of religious differences; and he has shown that the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism can lead only to tragedy. John Ferguson, one of the greatest tragedies of the modern theater, is a conflict between a great man and an apparently unjust God.

Sean O'Casey is the first outstanding Irish dramatist to portray the life of the slums on the stage. All his dramas are an attack on the stupidity, the cruelty, the uselessness of war; and always the women are the tragic victims of man's cowardice. In his later plays he has attempted to show in an expressionistic manner the disillusionment in a post-war world. In all of his dramas the tragic and the comic elements are freely mingled.

In the writer's judgment, this study of Irish tragedy has demonstrated that certain forces in the lives of the Irish people have greatly

influenced their attitude toward tragedy. In the Celtic temperament itself there is a wistful, melancholy mysticism which often conflicts bitterly with the materialistic needs of contemporary life. The Irish character has a strain of rebelliousness, a desire for complete freedom of body and soul. In some instances this trait has led individuals to take the wandering life of the roads rather than the settled life of the farm; in other instances it has led to violent quarrels and has played an important part in prompting the people to take part in bloody and futile rebellions against the English. The power of the family in Irish life is always a strong factor, and invariably the individual is sacrificed to the needs and wishes of his family. Inherent in the Irish character there is a deep pride in the family and the family name: a high premium is placed upon chastity; a son who dies branded as a traitor is an intense disgrace to the family, while a death for one's country is a great honor. In Ireland public opinion is a great molding factor. Because of the fundamental religious differences of Ireland, Catholicism and Protestantism, many tragedies of religious intolerance have arisen. Ireland's inability to lose her personal grievances in the larger purpose of freedom is one of the reasons she has so often failed in her attempted rebellions against England. All these temperamental and environmental characteristics have played their part in the shaping of the attitude of the people toward tragedy.

History has also been a potent factor in the shaping of the tragedy of Ireland. The unfortunate land system inaugurated by the English worked great hardships upon the struggling Irish peasantry. Because of the oppressive measures passed by England, the trade of Ireland was entirely

destroyed, and thousands died of starvation in the great potato famine of 1847. All of these forces led Ireland to develop early an intense, fiery patriotism that has led her on in her struggle for independence.

This study, although not an exhaustive one, has demonstrated that the tragic note has predominated in much of the Irish drama. Further study would almost certainly reenforce this conclusion.

An interesting subject for a future study would be the tragic note as reflected in Irish novels of the soil.

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