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THE STAGE IRISHMAN

AS CREATED BY

DION BOUCICAULT AND SEAN O'CASEY

BY

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Fig.1 THE WILD IRISHMAN



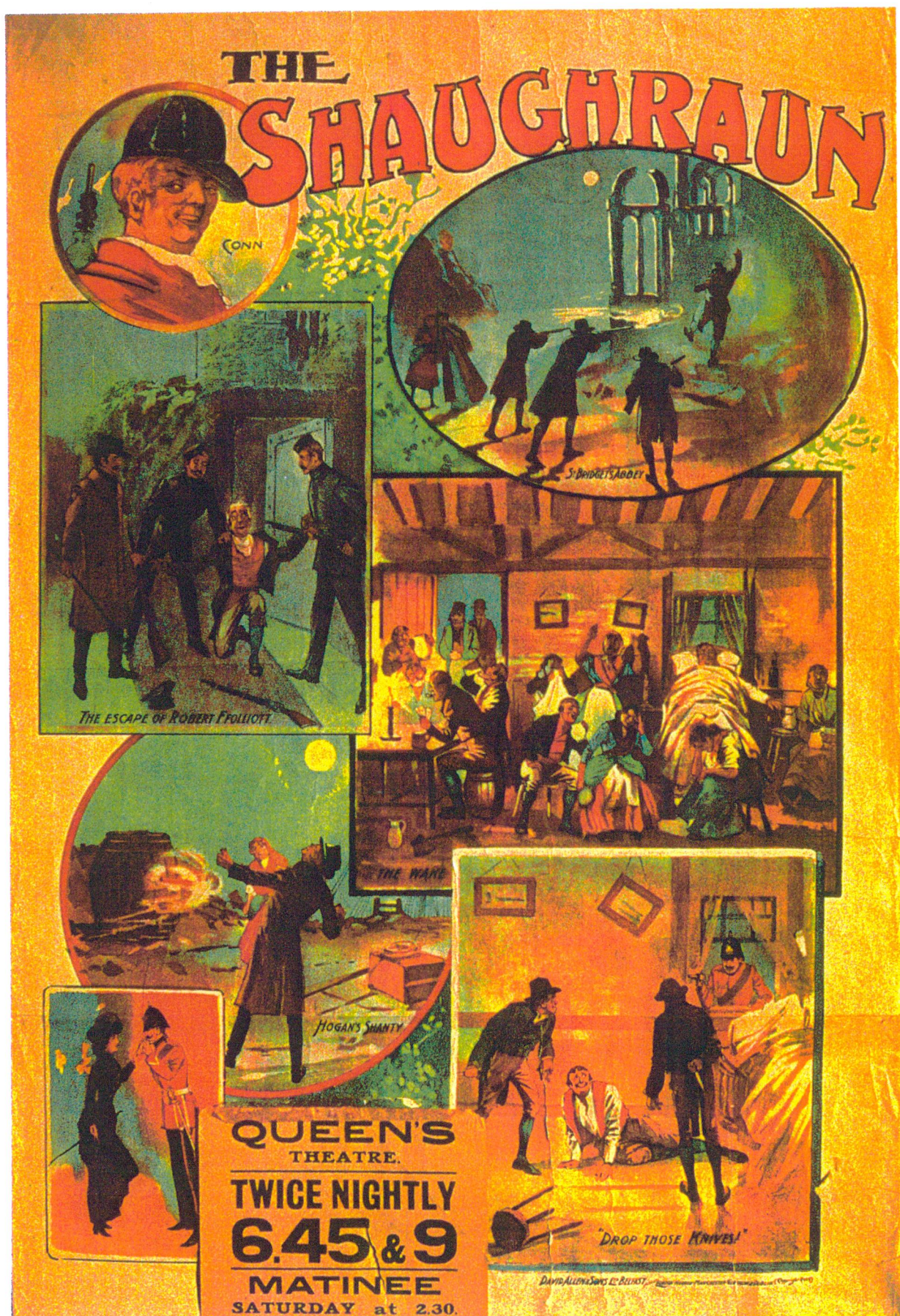


Fig.2 PROGRAMME COVER ILLUSTRATION FOR THE SHAUGHRAUN





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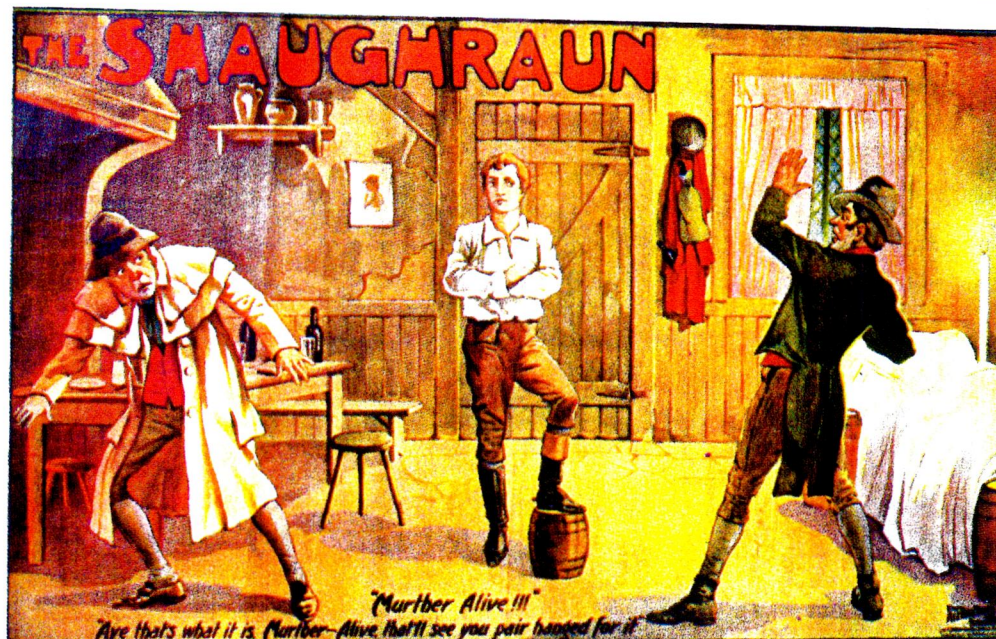


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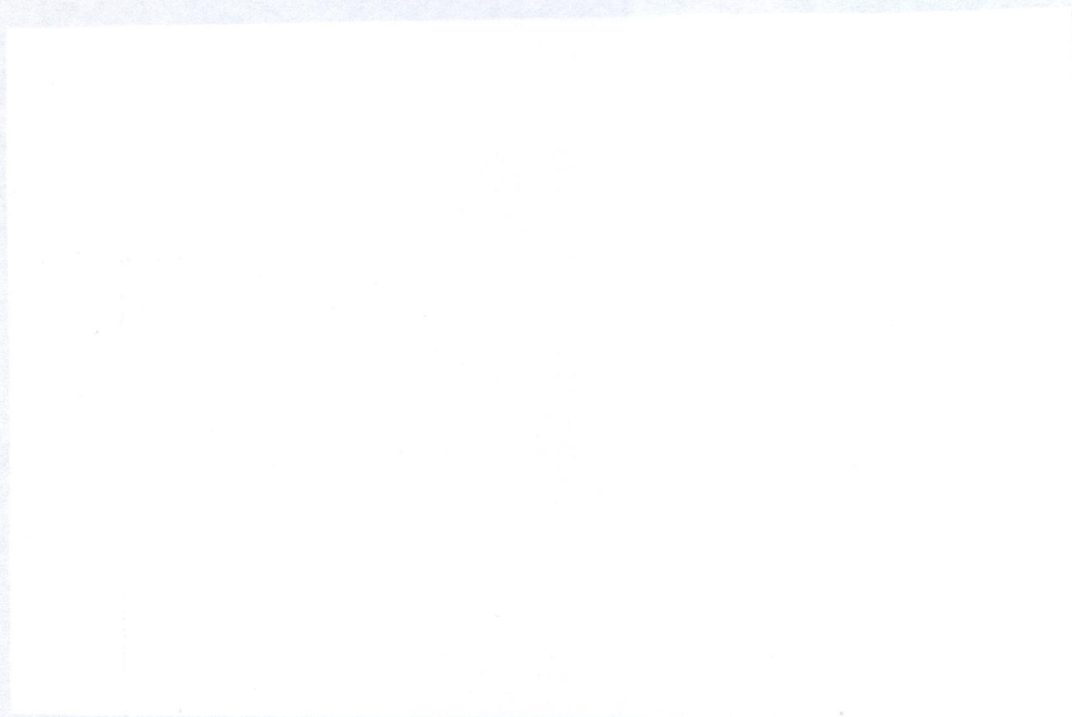




Fig.5 SCENE FROM JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK





Fig.6 BARRY FITZGERALD AS FLUTHER GOOD IN
THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS



The Stage Irishman habitually bears the general name of Pat, Paddy or Teague. He has an atrocious Irish brogue, perpetual jokes, blunders and bulls in speaking, and never fails to utter by way of Hibernian seasoning, some wild screech or call of Gaelic origin at every third word: he has an unsurpassable gift of blarney and cadges for tips and free drinks. His hair is of a fiery red; he is rosy-cheeked massive and whiskey loving. His face is one of simian bestiality with an expression of diabolical archness written all over it. He wears a tall felt hat (bollock or wideawake) with a cutty clay pipe stuck in front, an open shirt collar, a three caped coat, knee breeches, worsted stockings, and cockaded brogue shoes. In his right hand he brandishes a stout blackthorn, or a sprig of shillelagh, and threatens to belabour therewith the daring person who will tread on the tails of his coat. For his main characteristics (if there is any such thing as psychology in the Stage Irishman) are his swagger, his boisterousness and his pugnacity. He is always ready with a challenge, always anxious to back a quarrel, and peerless for cracking skulls at Donnybrook Fair! (3 pp.288-289)

INTRODUCTION:

Throughout the centuries the Irishman became a type rather than an individual. He was presented as the 'brash buffoon' of English literature and appeared to be a more modern adaptation of the court jester from Medieval Ages. He has been complimented for his charm, wit and courageous manner; his roguery, volubility and sense of fun are constantly reshaped for characters on stage. He was also notorious for his 'brogue' an Irish-English that generated much humour on stage. Later adaptations of the farcical comedy he was renowned for are Laurel and Hardy and Charlie Chaplin with their slapstick humour.

During the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century he was represented as the 'wild Irishman'. The phrase 'the wild Irish' was in use from the fourteenth century, explained by the remoteness of Ireland and the perception of the Irishman as a slave in the western plantations of Britain. Many Irish travelled to England to work in this period and were considered an object of curiosity. Duggan describes as follows;

'Their saffron-coloured linen shirts, their close fitting bright blue trousers, so tight to their figure as to be regarded indecent and over all, the typical Irish mantle, their thick shock-head of hair was typical of "the wild Irishman"'. (3 p.167)

They were notorious for their objections to following skilled occupations as tradesmen for example. They preferred callings where wit and cunning of mind, rather than hand, were essentials, therefore many of them had their trade in contraband.

Many of the Irish began to seek a career on the stage where it had been noted that,

'an Irishman on the stage livened up a dull and correct play'(3 . p.148)

Playwrights such as Farquhar (1678), Thomas Sheridan (1719), Richard Cumberland, Arthur Murphy (1727), Hugh Kelly (1739) and John O'Keefe introduced Irish characters to their plays, usually in the shape of the sham Irishman, alias the Englishman masquerading as the Irishman. Thomas Dekker's play 'Old Fortunatas' (1600) disguises the main character as an Irishman for part of the plot and has him quote lines such as,

'I love shamrocks, bonny clabbo, soft bog,
a great many coves, a garron, an Irish
harpe, cleene trosses and a dart'(3 . p.184)

'The Coxcomb' by Beaumont and Fletcher (1625) also disguises the main character as an Irishman, although here he is made a target of abuse and referred to as the 'thatched head' or 'hobby-headed rascal'.

These were caricatured portraits of the Irishman and were normally only minor parts in the plays, it was these minor parts that were the openings for young Irish talent.

The plays in London that involved Irish characters and actors travelled from London to Dublin as it was considered essential for the final success of the play. Duggan cites a criticism of their acting.

'They have been accused of playing to the gallery, over-stressing the characteristics, presenting a travesty of the real article'.

(3 . p.173)

But Duggan feels that the Irish would not have stood for such caricatures of themselves. Farquhar explains this opinion in 'Love and a Bottle'.

'As travel does the men of mode refine,
so our stage-heroes did their tour design.
To mend their manners and coarse English
feeding,
They went to Ireland to improve their
breeding' (3 . p.173)

During the last half of the eighteenth century John Moody, Owenson and Spranger Barry were the most famous Irish actors. They played the parts of Major O'Flaherty in Cumberland's 'West Indian', Teague in 'The Committee', Sir Patrick Neale in 'The Irish Widow'.

One of the most sought after parts was Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan' in 'Love a la Mode'. He was described as a great boyish figure or a man of spirit.

The English particularly enjoyed seeing him disguised as an aristocrat or professional man. In some cases they saw him in their own positions, the absurdity of which must have greatly appealed to them. The English enjoyed the Stage Irishman because through his blunderings they could remain comfortably superior. G.C. Duggan makes the comment that,

'the Englishman sees the Irishman as a kind of anti-self upon whom he projects repressed instincts and desires or in whom he sees tendencies that he fears in himself'. (3. P.188)

The later Stage Irishman of the mid-nineteenth century possessed three excellent qualities, undoubted courage, buoyancy of disposition, and a natural simplicity, he was described as,

'A Celtic composite of Robin Hood, Monte Cristo and Robin Goodfellow'. (9. P.274)

He was attributed with a contempt for civil law and a skilful avoidance and manipulation of most forms of authority. He also had a highly flirtatious nature and a particularly rich imagination that he used as his defence against reality.

These appear to be the characteristics that associate him with these fictional characters. Potatoes, whiskey, the cabin, pigs and love-making were also ingredients in any play involving a Stage Irishman. This caricature was part of the hero image that became associated with the Stage Irishman in Boucicault's and later playwrights' work. It was part of an attempt to show the character as more cunning and intelligent than the foolish ignoramus that was being portrayed previously. This constant development of the character is evidence that he has been one of the most popular characters on the stage from the sixteenth century. My thesis deals with the Stage Irishman of Boucicault in the mid-nineteenth century and his influence on the playwright Sean O'Casey of the twentieth century, as well as O'Casey's own adaptation of the Stage Irishman. I have dealt with this through their respective Irish trilogies, *The Colleen Bawn*, *Arrah-na-Pogue* and *The Shaughraun* by Boucicault; *The Shadow of a Gunman*, *Juno and the Paycock* and *the Plough and the Stars* by O'Casey.

CHAPTER I

Dion Boucicault

CHAPTER I

The earliest Stage Irishman is said to be Macmorris in Shakespeare's 'Henry V', who was described as an ignorant character with well intentioned rustics and Maurice Gibbon Fitzgibbon from George Peele's 'The Battle of Heazar' (1594). But Fitzgibbon as Archbishop of Cashel was not quite the stereotypical Stage Irishman, who was generally considered to be a person of less exalted rank. Irish writers of the eighteenth century introduced characters that anticipate the characterisation of the Stage Irishman, such as Farquhar's Roebuck and Forgard (1702), Thomas Sheridan's, The Brave Irishman, Charles Mockler's, Captain O'Callaghan (1738) and O'Keefe's, Dermot and Darby (1764). They were considered 'plum parts' by actors of the period and were favourites with the audiences. Examples of the English playwrights' early Stage Irishman include, Howard's, Teague in 'The Committee' (1665), Colman's, Captain O'Cutter in 'The Jealous Wife' (1761), Garrick's, Sir Patrick O'Neale in 'The Irish Widow' (1770) and Cumberland's, Major O'Flaherty, in 'The West Indian' (1771).

Tyrone Power (1797-1841) was to extend the range of the Stage Irishman, along with the more famous Dion Boucicault (1822-1890). They developed the character of the Stage Irishman from a 'brash buffoon' to a more 'cunning rogue'. It is because of the work of these two playwrights that the mid-nineteenth century is credited with the invention of the Stage Irishman. The growth of middle class audiences in larger cities and the accessibility of America as an outlet for plays and players, resulted in their work reaching a vast public. Power played many minor Irish roles in plays, and as he became more famous he expanded these characters by creating his own leading roles in Irish comedies. Power's plays are slight affairs, with titles such as 'O'Flannigan and the Fairies', 'Paddy Carey the boy from Clogheen' and 'The Irish Attorney' or 'Galway Practise'; his plays are reputed to have some theatrical merit but little literary value.

'Audiences went more to enjoy his familiar brand of character-acting than to see the play; his writing was a mere vehicle for his own talent'. (4. p.95)

Dion Boucicault was born in Dublin in 1822. He was one of the most dominant forces on stage during the late nineteenth century. He wrote and adapted over one hundred and fifty plays during his fifty-odd years in the theatre, performing both in Europe and America.

Boucicault extended the

'Stage Irishman from the inebriated buffoon that was the Irish naturalization of the parasite slave, and the braggart who was likely to be a soldier or ex-soldier that boasted of seeing a great deal of the world when he has probably been no further from his own country than some English barracks or camp, and who was an adaptation upon the 'miles gloriosus' of classical comedy'.

(4. p.95)

Boucicault's Stage Irishman combined both, he was a rogue-hero who was characterised by self-interest and a desire for freedom and autonomy. He lived for the day, never worrying about tomorrow. He was entertaining, high-spirited and flirtatious. He was the very antithesis of Victorian respectability, lazy, fun-loving, with a 'devil-may-care' personality. He had the 'gift-of-the-gab', being able to talk his way out of any situation. This was his main method for outwitting his formidable opponents, although force in the most comic manner was also used. One of Boucicault's main achievements with the character was his use of language. The 'brogue' he used was not just limited to the basic vocabulary of 'Irishisms', he also helped himself to a generous assortment of syllables for their sheer sensory pleasure. The Irish-English used by Boucicault was not only comical but witty and imaginative also.

1780

This winning vagabond was the motive of his play, he is heroic and defined, mischievous and child-like, entertaining and high-spirited, and he was the main source of Boucicault's popularity.

'His gift of discerning what the public wanted was matched by his inexhaustible facility in supplying that want.' (16 p.103)

Like Power, Boucicault was reputed to have more theatrical talent than literary merit. He yearned after literary success, which eluded him mainly because of his constant anxiety to get the next play written and produced, but also because many of his works were translations and adaptations from works of other writers. Although reviewers did note that Boucicault showed real talent as a writer when he attempted original material.

Boucicault's plays were suited to most types of audience. His characters were alive, his plots move swiftly and the dialogue is fresh and racy. The plays were melodramatic and sentimental with a vigorous sense of humour. He was actually known as the master of melodrama and became enormously popular with the Victorian audiences for whom he performed. The theatre of Boucicault was categorised as 'impure' theatre, which was described as embodying

'a combination of comedy and melodrama, farce and sentiment, song and burlesque, sensational and gothic elements.' (9 p.227)

Impure theatre was a sensational and lurid drama that was very popular with Victorian audiences. He followed the 'Victorian formula' of seeing the play in its entirety and concentrating more on the visual effects than the acting. The plays were written on the assumption that 'vice was punished and virtue rewarded', with a large amount of action involved in between.

'It was after all the heyday of melodrama when audiences expected fast-moving plots, sensational rescue scenes, recognisable heroes and villains, pretty and virtuous women, as well as songs and dances, jokes and buffoonery to enliven the performance.'

(3. p.396)

But Boucicault was never simply a showman, and although he was not interested in any serious analysis of Irish history, his melodramatic schemes are always shaped by a real political consciousness. While he did nothing to question or criticize the audiences' traditional values or their sentimental attachment to the old Catholic, Gaelic world, he was, nonetheless, very aware of the plight of the peasant in Ireland. By the nineteenth century the ordinary peasant was so completely stripped of his rights under the system of land tenure that he had lost all personal sense of autonomy. Many emigrated and those who remained accepted the notion that because they were ignorant and poor they were inferior.

Boucicault knew that popular resistance to authority was real enough, as is the response to hunted men. His audience would be more sympathetic to his Stage Irishmen who were the major characters of his plays. The melodramatic feats of his characters are portrayed with some authenticity in an effort to meet with more public approval. Although he romanticizes his revolutionaries and makes his outlaw heroes comical, he occasionally reveals the grimmer side of popular sentiment. For example in 'The Shaughraun' the informer Harvey Duff commits suicide to escape being torn to pieces by an angry mob, and so portrays the justice that would have been acceptable to his audience.

The Irish obviously enjoyed the image that Boucicault depicted of themselves as roguish charmers. His romantic dramas allowed them to forget the more brutal facts of peasant life while appealing to their sentimental patriotism.

His use of historic material contributed to the popularity of his plays not only in Ireland, but in England and America also, where there was a growing interest in Irish affairs. Boucicault's plays changed public opinion on the 'wild Irish'. The plays and characters were not just entertaining, the comic heroes were figures of exceptional courage and daring, willing to sacrifice themselves for the women

they loved or the chief to whom they owed their allegiance. Although they may stretch the truth, they are basically honest with firm loyalties and a core of moral conviction - their laziness, drinking and poaching being minor failings. These rogues are not threatening or brutal, despite their status as outlaws. Boucicault's gentle rogues confirmed the stereotype of the happy, child-like indolent Celt.

'There is no anger in any of them and no sense of irony. Instead Boucicault's comic heroes express an optimism, which completely ignores the bitter conditions of post-famine Ireland.' (17.p.55)

The Irish trilogy of 'The Colleen Bawn' (1860), 'Arrah-na-Pogue' (1864) and 'The Shaughraun' (1874) are the plays for which Boucicault was most famous. They also involve the infamous Stage Irishmen Myles-na-Gopaleen, Shaun the Post and Conn the Shaughrann. These plays helped Boucicault achieve the status and recognition in mid-nineteenth century theatre he craved for.

'The Colleen Bawn' by Boucicault was adapted from Gerald Griffin's 'The Collegians' - A tale of Garryowen' (1829). It was based on an actual murder case of ten years earlier. Ellen Hanley, a sixteen-year-old peasant girl was secretly living with a young gentleman of one of the leading county families, John Scanlan, but he had grown tired of her

and arranged to have her killed by her boatman, Stephen Sullivan. They succeeded in killing her, the body was found, Sullivan and Scanlan were brought to trial, found guilty and subsequently executed. Griffin succeeded in presenting an accurate picture of the customs and social conflicts of eighteenth-century rural Ireland, especially the injustices suffered by the peasants at the hands of the autocratic landowners of the big houses. But his characters are very one-dimensional and inconsistent. Myles-na-Gopaleen is a very minor figure in Griffin's novel and soon forgotten. In Boucicault's play he is the main character. There are only two passages in Boucicault's play taken directly from the novel. The play shows considerable freedom of invention and a large fund of originality. Eily O'Connor is now the victim of attempted murder, is rescued by Myles and in due course is reconciled to her lover. The happy ending was both convincing and popular with contemporary audiences.

"The Colleen Bawn" became the sensation of the day, and did not outwear its welcome for two years. It ran three hundred and sixty consecutive nights in London and the British provinces, a record up to that time quite unsurpassed in British play annals.' (16 p.78)

One of the sensations of 'The Colleen Bawn' was the spectacular cave scene which showed the rescue of Eily by Myles.

Transparent stage 'water' had never been seen before. A blue gauze and a lighting technique achieved this effect. When the play travelled to Paris, a French carpenter or machinist further improved upon the mechanism of the 'water cave' scene. By means of a system of mirrors ingeniously arranged below a trap, Eily appeared to sink slowly to the bottom and could be seen floating there until her rescue by Myles.

In addition to the spectacular visual effects, Boucicault's plot is expertly written. Audiences in the U.S., Britain, Ireland and France adored the comic rogue, Myles-na-Gopaleen which, incidentally, was a part Boucicault had written for himself.

'In it he epitomized everything which American and British audiences regarded as charmingly and hilariously Irish. Surprisingly, Irish audiences were no less enthusiastic, finding no harm in the parasite slave interpretation of Hibernian character.' (4.p.102)

Myles-na-Gopaleen is the one Boucicault character who came closest to a thorough rogue. He is a poacher, an ex-convict and a maker of bootleg whiskey. He is fond of playing on words and is equally artful at dodging the main issue. He is a romantic figure who broke with society by giving up his business as a horse dealer and who was hopelessly in love with Eily O'Connor.

Eily has an innocent girlish charm that appealed to Victorian audiences, but she has also been criticized by Maureen Waters in 'The Comic Irishman' as being 'self-effacing and self-sacrificing to the point of nausea.' Finally, she returns to her husband, abandoning Myles who, nonetheless, remains the most independent of rogues without wife or property.

'Arrah-na-Pogue' or 'The Wicklow Wedding' was written by Boucicault in 1864. It is an anecdotal account of the hilarious misadventures of Shaun the Post. Boucicault based his plot around the historical Rising of 1798 and the struggle for Irish independence. Along the way Shaun the Post is captured by the British and the final scene is of his escape by a mechanical effect from his cell in the old tower, followed by a climb up an ivied wall to the rescue of Arrah from the clutches of Feeney, the villain of the play. Boucicault's character, Shaun the Post, is adapted from the character Rory O'More from Samuel Lever's play, which is itself adapted from a novel entitled Rory O'More (1838). The play was also an obvious attempt to rework the kind of characters and incidents that had made 'The Colleen Bawn' such a hit. Boucicault rewrote the play numerous times; he believed that 'plays were not written, they are rewritten.'

One of the cast said to Boucicault

'Now I understand the secret of your success. It is in the indomitable perseverance and the fastidiousness that induce you to better your own work at any cost or any amount of labour.'

(16.p.103)

Often the comic vitality of the play is submerged by the sentimental treatment of the themes such as thwarted love or patriotism. Shaun the Post is a reasonably respectable mailman, only too eager to become a domesticated husband, a love-sick hero sighing for his Arrah-na-Pogue. The two heroines Arrah and Fanny devote most of their energy to weeping and self-sacrifice. They lack the playful spirit and bold humour of 'The Colleen Bawn' and Anne Chute of Boucicault's previous play.

Beamish MacCaul the romanticized Irish rebel is so earnestly occupied with his melodramatic adventures of trying to escape from the British authorities and be caught by his ever-loving Fanny that one can only put him down as a dashing hero with little substance. Colonel O'Grady was one of the most memorable aspects of Boucicault's play. Known as O'Grady, since he is the head of an ancient Irish family, he is an eccentric nobleman, generous and impulsive, always ready to defend Shaun and the oppressed peasants in a brash style. Alongside Myles, Shaun and Conn he was one of Boucicault's most popular creations.

The play enjoyed substantial success in London, while in Paris it met even better fate than The Colleen Bawn although there was criticism of the play because of its length. David Krause shows us how the Stage Irishman keeps the play alive

'It is only after Shaun is hauled off to prison and treated like a subversive rogue that he fortunately begins to act like one, resorting to such a display of guile and comic bravado that the play quickly comes alive with spontaneous mirth.' (8, p.34)

Boucicault turned to very recent Irish history in a general manner for the plot of the last play of his trilogy 'The Shaughraun', drawing on the abortive rebellion against the British during the late 1860s by the Fenian brotherhood. He could not treat the incendiary subject seriously, otherwise his play would have been suppressed as an incitement to riot. Critical opinion swayed both ways; some remarked that as a play it had faults, it violated canons and laws and wanted unity, and did many other things which it seems it was thought plays ought not to do. There was a serious political reaction to the song 'The Wearin' of the Green'. It was prohibited in England because of the tragedy at Clerkenwell prison, where, after an explosion, twenty people were killed and a row of tenement houses was levelled, both desperate efforts to free Fenian prisoners.

Boucicault was vocally an ardent Irish Nationalist and had written to Disraeli demanding the release of the Fenian prisoners.

'The Shaughraun' is reputed to be the best of Boucicault's Irish plays. It netted him over five hundred thousand dollars. Boucicault could have retired on this but he continued to work, although he was never to write another play as successful as any of the Irish trilogy.

'At sixty he still felt invincible and his restless nature kept him in harness.'

(16.p.240)

It is a wild and intricate plot, or many plots, and is even more fantastic and farcical than the previous Irish plays.

'Its Fenian rebel on the run, a police spy in league with the British soldiers and an Irish squireen, the inevitable threat of a mortgage foreclosure, separated lovers, secret letters, a brave Irish priest, a forlorn Irish mother, a Monte Cristo prison escape, mystery ships, a series of multiple chases over the bogs and cliffs of Sligo, gunshot and falling bodies, the off-stage mongrel named Tatthers who is more intelligent than most of the people and performs the heroics of a Rin-Tin-Tin, a Puckish rogue hero with an inexhaustible supply of tricks and the gallows humour of a mock-wake. It all adds up to a hilariously incredible mixture of whirlwind melodrama and merry Celtic moonshine.'

(3. p.338)

Of all the rogues of Boucicault, Conn the Shaughraun is the most addicted to knockabout comedy which proves useful in dodging the police as well as his 'ould mother'. At the height of his antics he presides at his own wake, slyly emptying the whiskey jug while the lid is raised over the corpse.

'The scene is sheer burlesque as Boucicault reflects little of the macabre found in folk tales and ballads.' (8, p.36)

The only things sacred to Conn are his freedom and the love of Moya. It has also been noted that,

'there is not a dull word or a dragging scene in it.' (8, p.213)

Conn's success in Britain was unequivocal and he kindled the same kind of success in New York.

CHAPTER II

Sean O'Casey

CHAPTER II

Sean O'Casey was born in Dublin in 1880. He lived in the grim poverty of the tenement houses about which he was later to write. This, in addition to the political forces at work in Ireland at that time were the crucial experiences of his life. His Dublin plays sprang from the contemporary dynamic forces within Irish society and an urgent need to engage in the process of history.

'It has been said that the thirty years between the death of Parnell in 1891 and the signing of the Anglo-Irish treaty in 1921 flashed with more brilliance and at the same time were riddled with more disappointment than any comparable era in history.' (15.p.263)

O'Casey was a fervent nationalist in his youth and became involved in the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The IRB was divided between those who looked forward to war and those who didn't. O'Casey supported the latter. He felt that the leaders though brave and sincere were not conscious of the problems of the common man, and that they paid little heed to the rough energy and splendour of the working class. O'Casey left Pearse and the Nationalist IRB and joined Larkin and the socialist movement which resulted in the lock-out of 1913 when thousands of workers went on strike to get better pay and conditions.

O'Casey saw Larkin as a truly heroic man, in contact with the poor and underprivileged. After this he joined the Irish Citizen Army, but resigned when Countess Markievicz was permitted to be a member. She was also a member of the Irish Volunteers. O'Casey could not reconcile the nationalism of the Volunteers with the plight of the workers. He saw the uniting of the Citizen Army with the IRB on the common policy of freeing Ireland from British rule as a betrayal of the workers on the part of the Citizen Army.

His religious beliefs were also affected throughout this period as they constantly interfered with the political situations he was involved in. In 'The Plough and the Stars' one of the main characters, Fluther, comments on religion. This is said to be derived from his own opinions on the matter

'we ought to have as great a regard for religion as we can, so as to keep it out of as many things as possible.' (11.p.143)

O'Casey's theatre concentrated on the individual because it is only through him or her that an insight into the period and the real issues that were at stake can be gained.

For O'Casey the people are the theatre, and his main theme is human nature with all its inconsistencies and ambiguities.

'his dramas are not partial to this or that side. Rather, they are a portrayal of life, a presentation of the viewpoint of many factions and individuals and a description of people and events. This method is that of vivisection, cutting away the outer layer of skin, and with greater skill, selecting and revealing the formerly concealed organs. (7, p.67)

During his early years of writing, many of his plays were rejected by the Abbey Theatre. The Abbey was the National Theatre and had opened in 1904 as part of the cultural revival movement. O'Casey considered the Abbey 'a red flower on the slums.' His first play to be accepted was 'The Shadow of a Gunman', which was written in 1923 and was first performed in April of the same year. The second play in what became known as the Irish trilogy was 'Juno and the Paycock' performed in 1924 and set during 1922. Finally 'The Plough and the Stars' was set during the Easter Week rebellion of 1916 and staged in 1926. All were set during oppressive periods in the history of Dublin. The humour of the Dublin tenement dweller was dark, ferocious and vital. O'Casey used humour in his plays as a means of survival for his characters.

O'Casey believed that the playwright should depict both the pain and the joy experienced by the individual, the way in which he or she copes in the society around them. For this reason the plays of his trilogy are neither exact tragedy nor pure comedy but a combination of both, and it is this duality that gives the plays their irony. Scenes of comedy may precede, follow, or even merge with scenes of profound tragedy. O'Casey refuses to ignore the suffering and wretchedness of the people he portrays, but he also refuses to indulge in despair. According to O'Casey on Shakespeare

'Shakespeare does not stay very long with his sorrows; he sings and dances even in the midst of them.' (12.p.294)

The first play in the trilogy, 'The Shadow of a Gunman', was set in May 1920 when Sinn Fein terror and the Black and Tans counter-terror was rampant in Ireland. It was originally titled 'On the Run' and was described as

'a series of character sketches held together by a rather tenuous thread of a plot which hardly develops until the final moments of the play.' (4,p.167)

It is set in a tenement house on the north side of Dublin.

The main characters are a pedlar, Seamus Shields, and a young proletarian poet, Donal Davoren, whom David Krause has suggested is an idealized though purposely unflattering picture of O'Casey himself. Minnie Powell is a young woman who lives upstairs. The other residents in the house assume that Davoren is a gunman in hiding. Davoren is attracted to the idea as is Minnie to him because of it. A bag of bombs is left in his room, Minnie hides them for him during a raid by the Black and Tans. The bombs are found and she is taken away for questioning, and shot in a Sinn Fein ambush. There is an original quality in the depiction of the central characters as imperfect human beings, who are inspired by the nobility and resilience of the human spirit. The subsidiary characters in the play provide earthy humour expressed in rich Dublin vernacular.

'The audience, bowled over by the topicality of the political content, and by the novelty of the local colour, took O'Casey to its heart.' (4.p.168)

The Stage Irishman of the play is Shields. Shields is a more subsidiary character and has been described as,

'pretentious, tinker, republican and coward - droll and garrulous and splendidly slippery as the precursor of O'Casey's 'paycock' breed and Falstaffian figure in the later 'Captain' Boyle or Fluther Good mould (13.p.30)

'Juno and the Paycock,' set during the period of 1922, displays the Boyle family as it now humorously, now tragically, pits itself against the demoralizing and disintegrating forces of poverty. It is a more mature play and the characters are more solid; they are less garrulous and more living than in any of his earlier plays.

'Juno' Boyle is the once handsome but now sadly careworn wife of 'Captain' Jack Boyle, the eponymous 'paycock', to whom work is anathema and who prefers drinking and gossiping with his good-for-nothing crony Joxer Daly.' (4.p.168)

The Boyles have two children, Mary and Johnny. Through a series of events they believe they are to come into a fortune; unfortunately it turns out to be false and they find themselves in serious debt. Mary is made pregnant, deserted by her lover and disowned by her father. Johnny is shot by his former comrades to avenge the betrayal of his neighbour. Finally Juno must bear the accumulation of distress because no one else is able or willing to do so.

'O'Casey's main theme in this (his greatest) play is the unthinking vanity of the male in his incessant pursuit of aggrandisement. Juno, the mother-figure (as in the classical myth), is exalted by the dramatist as the ultimate source of good sense, courage and responsibility.' (4.p.168)

The final play in the trilogy, 'The Plough and the Stars', is set in the Dublin tenements during the Easter Week rebellion of 1916. It was staged in 1926, only ten years after the Easter Rising which had already assumed an almost mythical place in the Irish folk memory. The Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers had joined forces against the rule of Britain.

'It was necessary to delineate and portray, in addition to the story of the military participants, the situation of the overwhelming mass of Dubliners who prayed, cursed, wept, worked and in general tried to continue life amidst a revolutionary situation.' (7. p.66)

O'Casey was again to draw the lives of ordinary people against a background of extraordinary events. The story involves Nora and Jack Clitheroe who are expecting their first child. Jack is offered the post of Commandant in the Citizen Army and Nora tries to persuade him against it. She fails and Jack is killed. Nora, having lost her baby becomes mentally deranged. The characters also include Mrs. Gogan, a charwoman, her daughter Mollser, Peter Flynn, Nora's uncle, the Covey, a young man inspired by Communistic ideals and Bessie Burgess, a woman of forty, vigorously built, whose

'face is a dogged one, hardened by toil, and a little coarsened by drink.' (11.p.149)

Fluther Good is in the tradition of O'Casey's previous characters Seamus Shields and Joxer Daly.

'He is a man of forty years of age, rarely surrendering to thoughts of anxiety, fond of his 'oil' but determined to conquer the habit before he dies. He is square-jawed and harshly featured(11.p.136)

O'Casey's use of the tenement was probably not just because it was a familiar surrounding but also because it needs no elaborate machinery or explanations for people's presence. The scenes and events are believable because of the environment in which they are set. 'The Plough and the Stars' has a more cinematic quality, with scenes on the street, in a pub and in two rooms of the tenement; the use of different locations was a new experiment as far as Irish theatre was concerned. Another development in O'Casey's theatre was that the violent action took place onstage as well as offstage as in earlier plays. Christopher Fitz-simon says of 'The Plough and the Stars'

'the truly brave are those who are unwittingly drawn into the holocaust, and perform humane actions through ordinary kindness or goodness of heart. The play's main flaw is a sentimentality amounting to mawkishness in an early scene between Jack and Nora.'(4.p.169)

O'Casey did not glorify the slum dwellers. This is a fault which a playwright with less vision and genius than O'Casey could have easily committed.

His heart and hand were with the people with whom he had been raised. Yet an examination of his plays by Jules Koslow in 'The Red and the Green' reveals that in spite of his sympathy for them, like Chekov, he had the intellectual honesty to portray his people with all their faults. Yet following riots about 'The Plough and the Stars' and confrontations with patrons of the Abbey, along with other grievances, O'Casey left Dublin.

'Sean felt that if he stayed in Dublin, life would become embarrassing to meet. Dublin was too close to everyone. All its streets led into one square where everyone met, where hands were shaken, shoulders clapped and drinks taken to everyone's health. This sense of belonging to an extended village, the casually met friends in a crowded street, the time for idleness and venom of gossips, has got on the nerves of Dublin's greatest sons, causing a number of swift distinguished departures.' (12.p.289)

O'Casey felt let down by the country he loved, and, for all its faults continued to love, and by the theatre to which he had given his best work. After he abandoned Ireland he was never to write work of the same standard as his Dublin trilogy. He never lost his mature observation, remaining rigidly objective and the sensitive receiver of impressions. Walter Starkie in a brief biography of O'Casey states that what Goethe said of himself could be said of O'Casey

'The organ which enabled me to understand the world was my eye.' (14.p.331)

O'Casey's trilogy are all pacifist plays and the main characters are not National Heroes but the non-combatants in a city under military siege. The life of these characters is intense because death is around them. For O'Casey the drama had to tell an exciting story about people whose conflicts were colourful as well as meaningful; it had to amuse as well as amaze an audience confronted by the mundane and profound crisis of these fellow men; it had to exploit all the elements of theatrical excitement through the use of comedy, which could be wildly hilarious or pointedly satiric through the use of melodrama which could be used to turn the screw of tragic tension; it had to present a striking image of man in broad dimensions of character and language which while drawn from life were sufficiently larger than life-size to reveal an imaginative projection of reality.

'Art is a reflection of life but it is an artificial configuration which exaggerates and distorts reality in order that the complexities and mysteries of life can be observed more sharply and with greater significance.'(9 p.339)

O'Casey's 'Stage Irishman' revolves around a series of illusions of heroism, his Stage Irishman epitomizes the triumphant anti-hero.

'an empirical conviction that a virtuous life invariably leads to dullness, an heroic life leads to death.'(9 p.246)

Within the plays the characters that fall into this category are Seamus Shields in 'The Shadow of a Gunman' (Donal Davoren has characteristics of the Stage Irishman but is too romantic and lacks the comedy of the more typical Stage Irishman 'Captain Boyle and 'Joxer' Daly in 'Juno and the Paycock' and Fluther Good in 'The Plough and the Stars'.) They are all victims of their foolishness yet they revel in their voluble absurdities. O'Casey is more concerned about the individual nature of his people than the causes they are heroic about. He has created a unique and diversified world of human comedy as well as an incisive theme. The structural pattern of his plays is loose, not tight; harmonious, not argumentative. Donal Davoren is a poet who doesn't really know who he is, but revels in the romantic notion of being a Gunman. All the tenement dwellers in the play suffer from a variety of dreams and deceptions which serve as contrasts to Davoren's self-deception and self-discovery. He is too much of a self-sufferer and egotist to be a Stage Irishman. Seamus Shields is the Stage Irishman of the play, he is a lazy blustering, amiable coward who resorts to the efficacy of prayer or the comfort of his bed when trouble comes.

Although none of O'Casey's characters are heroes, Shields must be seen as the biggest coward of them all. He is the chorus character in the guise of a bumbling clown, a wise-fool who sees the truth. He is the comic foil of Davoren, but appears to be the character who really understands the chaotic world in which they are trapped; he sees that poetic and patriotic poses will not help, and sees life as more sacred than either of these.

'Captain' Boyle and Joxer Daly are the Stage Irishmen of 'Juno and the Paycock'. The talk between Boyle and Joxer has been described as the dominant action of the play.

'idle, procrastinating talk, with a continual show of importance, in an effluent, engaging spin of fantasy.' (13.p.37)

Each character registers a distinctive personal mark. 'Joxer' and the 'Captain' are an exploitation of 'paycockery'. They are vain egotists and believable, blathering barflies exchanging curses, confidences and prayers, unable to see the irony in their words and actions. But these characters are neither heroes nor villains, but some magical mix of both. Through these three plays O'Casey finally establishes a more developed Stage Irishman, 'Fluther Good' in 'The Plough and the Stars'.

The Stage Irishman of his two previous plays have a comic foil in another character; Donal Davoren for Seamus Shields, and Joxer and the Captain work off each other, constantly needing each other's presence. Fluther has a presence of his own. O'Casey viewed the national character of the Stage Irishman with irony as well as idealism, and Fluther is his most complete character in this respect. Notice his opening description of Fluther's physical appearance.

'...nose bent...bald, save for a few peeping tufts of reddish hair around his ears...a scrubby red moustache...dressed in a seedy black suit...wears a respectable little bow. On his head a jaded jerry hat, which, when excited, he has a habit of knocking farther back on his head, in a series of taps.'

(11.p.136)

He also delivers some of the best one-liners, 'I feel as dizzy as bedamned! I hope I didn't give up the beer too suddenly', and 'I hit a man last week Rosie an' he's fallin' yet!'. Fluther has a positive image of himself and regards himself as an exemplary specimen of 'Dublin man'.

'In a terrible time of war he is too shrewd to be a patriot, too wise to be an idealist; yet in his comic anti-heroism he plays the fool for man's sake. In his vitality and humour there is a hope that man may endure.'

(9 p.221)

Between the image Fluther has of himself and the image we have of him, there is an enormous difference, the net result being one of comic relief. But Fluther is a complex character, his comic side is balanced by a courageous and affectionate one. He is a poseur and waster, but these are not entirely negative qualities. In the end of Act IV he confronts two soldiers by saying 'Jasus, you an' your guns. Leave them down an' I'd beat the two o' youse without sweatin'! This is part of the unconscious humour he has, as he makes this remark in all sincerity. Even when this mock heroism gives way to complete abandon as in the end of Act III 'Th' whole city can topple home to Hell, for Fluther!' It only makes our perception of him more realistic. After all, his world is toppling down around him and not even the rebels can do anything about it. For amid the destruction and relentless disintegration his is a positive force. He comes across as the most humane character, almost the hero, of the play. For he is the character we can identify with, whose mock heroism in the face of battle, is the true heroism of human nature.

CHAPTER III

Comparison of O'Casey and Boucicault's Stage Irishman

CHAPTER III

Boucicault influenced O'Casey from when he was a young boy. O'Casey would act parts from Boucicault's plays, particularly from 'The Shaughraun'. Many of O'Casey's melodramatic scenes and farcically comical characters have been inspired by Boucicault and there is a direct influence in his exuberant use of language. He created his own rich and dramatic idiom out of the common language he had heard spoken in the slums of Dublin, just as Boucicault had used the speech rhythms and idioms of the peasant in his plays. But there was an original vitality and method in O'Casey's plays that was uniquely his own. This is especially evident in his striking counter-balance of comic and tragic scenes. O'Casey's plays with all their melodramatic action and low-comedy antics are infinitely more than a surface photograph of the Dublin slums. It is the trenchant life beneath the surface of poverty and patriotism that interests him, and it is in this endeavour that he enlists the mock-heroic devices of satiric comedy and the sensational devices of melodrama.

'For him the drama had to tell an exciting story about people whose conflicts were colourful as well as meaningful; it had to amuse as well as amaze an audience confronted by the mundane and profound crisis of their fellow man; it had to exploit all the elements of theatrical fun and excitement, with low comedy that could be wildly hilarious as well as pointedly satiric, and with melodrama that could be used to turn the screw of tragic tension.'

(9 p.300)

Although O'Casey had more penetrating aims and greater genius than Boucicault, he still shared his fondness for light comedy and melodrama which, including the music-hall vibrancy, were considered indigenous to the drama. It was therefore evident that these playwrights pitched their dramas on a tone more suited to the lower classes of a sophisticated city life or its intellectual counterpart, presumed to be an American audience, than to persons interested in more serious drama.

Both playwrights are cited as being playwrights of impure drama. It is a drama where realistic themes are reinforced with non-realistic modes such as farce, melodrama, satire and song, where the ordinary rituals of life are often presented through an extraordinary rhetorical language. It is a diverting and disturbing drama that is usually more pleasing to popular audiences than to severe critics.

It is also described as a drama where scenes of low comedy may precede or follow, or even merge with scenes of deep tragedy.

'It is an impure drama which is inspired by the bastard muse of tragi-comedy.' (9 p.147)

Impure drama is also identified with tragi-comedy which results in a drama that is impossible to categorize.

'It has understandably been most disconcerting to those partisans of 'pure' drama, who with their aesthetic theories of their non-Aristotelian fondness for the rules of the game, protest that there are no fixed rules or conventions for a hybrid drama that is neither a tragedy nor a comedy yet is both.' (9 p.49)

Yeats felt that the pure or 'unmixed' lyric passion of tragedy is corrupted by the comic element with its intrusion of what he calls 'the daily mood' of realistic character, thus in a tragi-comedy the tragedy is lost among 'the common moments' when the comedy 'sings, laughs, chatters or looks its busy thoughts.' The writer of tragi-comedy is also concerned with the highest moral values, but because he cannot be solemn about what he feels too deeply, he must move indirectly around his subject and test the inconsistencies by a tragi-comic vision. His compassion is concealed in his irony.

O'Casey possesses the tragi-comic sense of life, for it is only by laughing with and through their characters, that they are able to cope with the overbrutal and too beautiful, or treat them with undisguised agony or idealism.

'The end of writing is to instruct, the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing. That the mingled drama may convey all the instruction of tragedy and comedy cannot be denied.' (9 p.49)

Both O'Casey and Boucicault were Nationalists and neither felt that their use of comedy or the Stage Irishman were in any way degrading of Ireland's vision of herself. But the Irish nationalists whom they came up against were not concerned with the methods of drama used by O'Casey and Boucicault. Irish idealism was their criteria for all of life and literature. To the rabid nationalist, a proud patriot like Maud Gonne, for example, (who tended to see herself as an Irish Joan of Arc), any Irishman on a stage who was the object or even the instrument of low comedy, could only be a Stage Irishman, which was tantamount to treason. At the turn of the century zealous Irishmen were so serious about their national character they were in no mood to laugh at their own image in the dramatists' satiric mirror.

Irish nationalism was at its most sensitive and pompous and therefore most vulnerable, when O'Casey chose to write his anti-heroic plays. This resulted in riots against his play 'The Plough and the Stars' and Boucicault's work was also attacked. The Stage Irishman was the target of the Nationalists, not their weapon, and they used Boucicaultian comedy as an ironic method of exposing inflated idealism. The rowdy farce and broad satire of his plays were not calculated to exalt the national ideals. As the foolishness of nationalism against the Stage Irishman increased, O'Casey found the character of the braggart-patriot, the 'Irish' Irishman of the twentieth century a more tempting character to expose. He had become as mirth-provoking a straight-man as his 'alter ego' the beguiling nineteenth century Stage Irishman against whom he had revolted.

'It is paradoxical that they are provoked to great hatred because they are motivated by great love, for there is a quality of compassionate heartbreak in their rage for a better life(9 p.327)

What O'Casey saw in Boucicault turned out to be vital to the new drama at the expense of the new nationalism.

The comic rogue created by Boucicault was, however brave, too full of mischief and irresponsibility to inspire people bent on turning their thoughts to the noble deeds of the ancient Celtic heroes they admired. O'Casey saw above all, Boucicault's 'careless Irish humour' and 'good acting comedy.', that type of music-hall comedy which had its roots in the 'personal humour' of irreverent farcical comedy, as distinct from the 'impersonal wit' of drawing-room comedy of manners which characterized the continental theatre and which Anglo-Irishmen like Oscar Wilde wrote for the English theatre.

O'Casey's bedlam of hocus-pocus miracle and prat-falls follows the traditional antics of the music-hall and circus theatre, the low comedy of Plautus and Shakespeare and Boucicault. Irish buffoons like Marthraun, Mahon, the Sergeant, the Bellman and the Porter, can be found in Boucicault and they have their Anglo-Saxon counterparts in Shakespeare. (12.p.394)

In fact, all these traditionally comic devices and characters have been reshaped and recreated with the mark of O'Casey's originality, his theatrical instinct for uninhibited fun, his mock-heroic deflation of the pompous and the absurd.

The Irish trilogies of O'Casey and Boucicault discussed here, succeeded in developing the mode stylistically, literally and practically.

The plays relate to each other through character and plot and as the plays progress they become more confident in every respect. Each of Boucicault's plays is an obvious reworking of the one previous to it. While the plots vary and while the main characters of Shaun, Myles and Conn are similar, they become more detailed studies or developments each time.

Boucicault's Stage Irishman was a theatrical fictional one, while O'Casey's is more human, with faults and misgivings. O'Casey exploited the Boucicaultian drama by colouring it with an ironic point of view.

'he wrung the sentimental suds out of
soap-operas and dipped them in a briny
solution of satire(9 p.329)

With O'Casey the action in each succeeding play is built around an ever-expanding radius of involvement. In 'The Shadow of a Gunman' the conflict arises when poet and pedlar inadvertently become involved in the war; In 'Juno and the Paycock' a whole family is caught in the cross-fire of battle and finally in 'The Plough and the Stars' all the people in the tenements are trapped by the war that now covers the whole city. The themes revolve around a series of illusions of heroism which point to the basic conflict.

His Stage Irishman, for all his whimsical humour and ingenious fantasy is full of political satire. O'Casey's philosophy of life was based on the dignity of man and the joy that can be had in the free life, unrestricted by blind prejudice, religious superstition, political cheating or human stupidity. His dramas are bitterly truthful, and because of this they stand as a portrait of an age. Just as Boucicault's dramas in relation to the Victorian era are portraits of that age, O'Casey suffered with the Ireland he portrayed, and created characters from perception of people around him.

'Sifting his experience, looking about him, he found courage amidst cowardice, laughter near tragedy and human dignity surviving in squalor.' (12.p.254)

CONCLUSION

O'Casey adapted Boucicault's tactful use of comedy to a more impressionistic form of theatre. He considered the events he was living through as necessary as the plot itself. O'Casey's plays had a much deeper message than Boucicault's. He believed that we can never fully appreciate or come to terms with human nature, but there is nonetheless the very definite belief that the individual is always superior to any set of ideals, be they social, political or otherwise. Boucicault's Stage Irishman and his ability to outmanoeuvre and manipulate the other characters in the play show the individual superiority of the same ideals. They both concentrated on character, their Stage Irishman being the most successful, not just for entertainment purposes, but for the subtle politics that lay within. For both men the politics of their respective period had enormous effect on their work. O'Casey as a playwright was primarily an entertainer and secondly a playwright who used politics in a dynamic and successful attempt to heighten the audiences' perception of what was evolving around them.

Boucicault as an entertainer used a more indirect method to create a more open consciousness in his audience towards their country. David Krause sums up their aspirations of the Stage Irishman.

'In a terrible time of war, he is too shrewd to be a patriot, too wise to be an idealist, yet in his comic anti-heroism he plays for man's sake. In his vitality and humour there is a hope that man may endure.' (9 p.221)

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