SEVEN PLAYS BY SEAN O'CASEY

Seven Plays
by
Sean O'Casey
A Students' Edition

*Selected, with an
Introduction and Notes by*

RONALD AYLING

Professor of English at the University of Alberta

palgrave
macmillan

Play texts © Eileen O'Casey

Introduction and editorial matter © Ronald Ayling 1985

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 4LP.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Published by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10010

Companies and representatives throughout the world

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN is the global academic imprint of the Palgrave Macmillan division of St. Martin's Press, LLC and of Palgrave Macmillan Ltd. Macmillan® is a registered trademark in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries. Palgrave is a registered trademark in the European Union and other countries.

ISBN 978-0-333-36431-4

ISBN 978-1-349-17977-0 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-17977-0

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

*To Wole Soyinka
true heir to Sean O'Casey's legacy*

Contents

List of Plates	viii
Acknowledgements	x
Introduction	xi
Textual Note	xxxi
Sean O'Casey: A Chronology	xxxiv
<i>The Shadow of a Gunman</i>	1
<i>Juno and the Paycock</i>	45
<i>The Plough and the Stars</i>	103
<i>The Silver Tassie</i>	177
<i>Red Roses for Me</i>	257
<i>Cock-a-Doodle Dandy</i>	335
<i>The Bishop's Bonfire</i>	409
Notes on the Plays	497
Select Bibliography	540

List of Plates

1. Michael Pennington as the tenement poet Donal Davoren in the 1981 Royal Shakespeare production of *The Shadow of a Gunman* at The Warehouse, London, directed by Michael Bogdanov. Photograph © Donald Cooper.
2. Sara Allgood as Juno with her indolent paycock played by Arthur Sinclair in *Juno and the Paycock* at the Royalty Theatre, 1926. Photograph © Mander and Mitchenson, Theatre Collection.
3. Gerard Murphy as Johnny Boyle and Judi Dench as Juno in the Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Juno and the Paycock* at the Aldwych Theatre, 1980, directed by Trevor Nunn. Photograph © Donald Cooper.
4. *The Plough and the Stars*, directed by Bill Bryden at the Olivier Theatre, 1977, with J. G. Devlin (Peter Flynn), Anna Manahan (Bessie Burgess), Harry Webster (Barman), Cyril Cusack (Fluther Good), Carmel McSharry (Mrs Gogan) and Bryan Murray (the Young Covey). Photograph © Donald Cooper.
5. *The Plough and the Stars*, directed by Bill Bryden at the Olivier Theatre, 1977, with Susan Fleetwood (Nora Clitheroe) and Nora Connolly (Mollser). Photograph © Donald Cooper.
6. The Fortune Theatre programme for the first performance of *The Plough and the Stars*, 1926. Photograph © Mander and Mitchenson, Theatre Collection.
7. The 1972 production of *The Silver Tassie* at the Abbey Theatre, directed by Hugh Hunt. Photograph © Fergus Bourke.
8. The Royal Shakespeare Company production of *The Silver Tassie* at the Aldwych Theatre, 1969, directed by David Jones. Bruce Myers (Barney Bagnal), Robert Oates (3rd Soldier), Ben Kingsley (The Croucher), John Kane (1st Soldier) and Richard Moore (Harry Heegan). Photograph © Donald Cooper.
9. *Red Roses for Me* at the Lyric Theatre, 1972, directed by Mary McCracken. Photograph © Lyric Theatre.

10. *Red Roses for Me* at the Abbey Theatre, 1980, directed by Hugh Hunt. Photograph © Fergus Bourke.
11. A scene from the English Stage Company's production of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* at the Royal Court Theatre, 1959, with Norman Rodway (The Messenger) and Berto Pasuka (The Cock). Photograph © Mander and Mitchenson, Theatre Collection.
12. The design by Michael O'Herlithy for Act I of *The Bishop's Bonfire*. Photograph © Mander and Mitchenson, Theatre Collection.

Every effort has been made to trace all the copyright-holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

Acknowledgements

In the compilation of 'Notes on the Plays' I am especially appreciative of the invaluable assistance of Michael J. Durkan and of significant hints as well as helpful information from four of my colleagues in the English Department at the University of Alberta – Professors Christopher Gordon-Craig, Raymond J. S. Grant, Gerry McCaughey, and Hassan Qureshi – as well as from Mr Craig McLuckie. Professor W. A. Armstrong's Notes to *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, in *Classic Irish Drama* (London, 1964), the *Notes on Sean O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock* by Valerie L. Barnish (London, 1971) and the York Notes to *Juno and the Paycock* compiled by Dr Barbara Hayley (London, 1981) have also been most helpful. Last but not least, I am grateful for the much tried patience as well as the kindly encouragement of Sarah Mahaffy.

R.A.

Introduction

I

It is perhaps surprising that only one really comprehensive selection of plays by Sean O'Casey appeared in print during a long playwriting life that spanned the forty-seven years from 1917 to his death in 1964. That collection, entitled *Selected Plays of Sean O'Casey*, was chosen by the author himself – supposedly to celebrate his seventieth birthday, though it came out four years too late for that anniversary; published in New York in 1954, its circulation was limited and mostly within the United States. However restricted its readership, we shall subsequently return to the contents of this anthology in order to consider the aesthetic validity of the selection.

A number of other one-volume collections of O'Casey's dramas were printed during his lifetime: most notably, *Five Irish Plays* in 1935, *Three Plays* in 1957, *Five One-Act Plays* the following year and, in 1965, *Three More Plays*, which, though it appeared after O'Casey's death, had been approved and supervised through the press by him. A quick glance at the contents of each of these books, however, reveals that none of them was meant to be either representative or truly comprehensive, though each collection had an immediate rationale. O'Casey had produced for publication only five Irish plays up to 1935 and five one-act works up to 1958; the edition of *Three Plays* gathered together for the first time his trilogy of full-length Dublin dramas centred round the internecine Anglo-Irish conflict and the subsequent Civil War (covering, in the three writings, many of the major historical events in Ireland during the fateful years from 1915 to 1922); finally, *Three More Plays* was the playwright's first opportunity to publish *Purple Dust* and *Red Roses for Me* in revised versions that embodied a number of significant changes made since their publication in 1951 in the third volume of his *Collected Plays*. Though each of these gatherings had its own rationale, then, none of them could be said to make a sustained attempt to encompass either the various creative periods through which O'Casey's drama had progressed or to

realise the rich variety of thematic and formal preoccupations that characterised it at different times. Only the *Selected Plays of Sean O'Casey*, indeed, can be said to have made an effective (though possibly, unconscious) shot at both objectives.

In a foreword to the volume O'Casey was vague about his own self-selection, saying somewhat ingenuously of the plays concerned,

I don't know why I selected them any more than I know why I wrote them. To explain these things would be to explain life and that [neither] you, nor I, nor anyone else can do. For better or worse, they are part of the Will to life. The nine plays represent my varying mood in outlook on life and in the varying manners and techniques of the stage.

In theme and form alike, this variety is certainly well realised. The nine works (seven full-length and two one-act dramas) include five of the seven plays in the present anthology (the dates are of first publication): *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1925), *Junó and the Paycock* (1925), *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), *The Silver Tassie* (1928) and *Red Roses for Me* (1942). In addition, O'Casey chose to include *Within the Gates* (1933), *Purple Dust* (1940) and two late one-act dramas: *Bedtime Story* and *Time to Go* (both first published in 1951).

The two full-length plays chosen by O'Casey in 1954 but excluded from the present collection are *Within the Gates* and *Purple Dust*. Today we can see the former to be one of the more ponderous of the dramatist's experiments, a historically significant large-scale exercise in collective (and occasionally choric) drama and his most ambitious attempt to harness expressionist techniques to realise group experience. Though several remarkable poetic effects resulted from this experiment – particularly in some of the revue-like song-and-dance routines – the modified but none the less challenging expressionism of *The Silver Tassie* and *Red Roses for Me* seem, with hindsight, to be much more successful in practice. *Within the Gates*, for all its difficult and laborious genesis and its subsequent radical revisions, remains an honourable experiment that is now chiefly of value, aesthetically, because its radical features bore fruit in later allegorical writings by the dramatist. Before he could perfect his technique, however, he had to proceed by trial and error. The sprightly stylisation in later plays such as *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* may well owe much of its lightness of touch to the protracted writing and rewriting of *Within the Gates* and

the less anguished but none the less large-scale revisions to *Purple Dust*.

The exclusion of *Purple Dust* from the present collection may be more surprising, for it has received a good deal of critical commendation in recent years and a number of successful stage productions; indeed, its lengthy off-Broadway presentation at the Cherry Lane Theatre from 1956 to 1957 – where it ran for over four hundred performances – became the longest run for any of O'Casey's plays (*Junio and the Paycock*, whose 1925–6 run of 202 performances in London's West End remains the most successful O'Casey production in England to date, had previously held the record for the longest O'Casey run anywhere). The crucial importance of *Purple Dust* for the playwright's subsequent creative development cannot be overstressed, yet what it led to has, I believe, more intrinsic aesthetic value. Written from 1938 to 1940, it is basically a series of revue-like sketches employing songs, comic routines, and some hilarious pantomimic dialogue and action. It is very funny at times, but its major value lies not in its own worth but in the new direction to which it points: its admixture of satiric knockabout and stylised fantasy – in exaggerated actions as well as in stage setting – was an original vein of theatrical expression to which O'Casey would return in later more assured dramatic pieces like *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* and *The Bishop's Bonfire*. The attendant return to an Irish locale and a largely Irish cast of characters was also of great value to O'Casey's artistry because, as he was to acknowledge in an essay on *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* when it was first staged in New York in 1958, 'like Joyce, it is only through an Irish scene that my imagination can weave a way'.¹ Though *Purple Dust* has its advocates among the critics and has received significant stage productions from such prestigious theatre companies as the Berliner Ensemble and the Théâtre National Populaire as well as off-Broadway box office success, it is essentially a minor if often funny fantasy.

The two works in the present volume that are missing from the 1954 *Selected Plays of Sean O'Casey* are *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* (1949), then O'Casey's most recent full-length play, and the then still-to-be-published *The Bishop's Bonfire* (1955). Otherwise, for all his disavowal, it can be seen that the author's choices were indeed intended to present a representative selection, not only of varying moods, manners and techniques, but of all stages of his playwriting career from 1923 until 1954. If the omission of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* – which

he often referred to as his own especial favourite among his dramatic creations – be thought surprising, the reason may in part be explained by the reluctance of his American publisher but five years previously to print that title because he feared that its satire might give offence to some Roman Catholic readers in the USA; this supposition may perhaps be buttressed by the omission of another play earlier refused publication in New York – that is, *The Star Turns Red* (1940). However, the exclusion of the latter work, as of *Oak Leaves and Lavender* (1946), may more properly have been his own recognition of their limited success as overtly didactic dramatic experiments that are far too strongly tied to the particular social and political circumstances from which they sprang.

Still, the omission of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* remains a puzzle; without it, the *Selected Plays* edition lacks a significant dimension in so far as O'Casey's late period of avant-garde experimentation is concerned. It is true that the inclusion in the anthology of two late one-act pieces written since *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* and – in the case of *Time to Go* – sharing that allegorical satire's thematic concerns and stylisation, may well have been O'Casey's attempt to realise in the selection something of the flavour and technique of the last phase of his playwriting. *Time to Go* does, indeed, realise on a small scale the symbolic conflict within this original form of modern morality play as well as something of the hilarious Aristophanic satire of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*. For the present selection, however, *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* is included as the finest example of the last phase of O'Casey's dramaturgical exploration. It is perhaps best approached in conjunction with *The Bishop's Bonfire*, the major work that immediately followed it and with which it shares many of the same ideas and formal preoccupations; indeed, the two plays realise variations on related themes, depicting fluctuating attitudes of hope and despair in the face of Ireland's immediate post-Second World War obscurantism and its retreat from many of the realities of modern life. The quiet (and somewhat bittersweet) Chekhovian atmosphere of *The Bishop's Bonfire* is effectively juxtaposed to the boisterous verve and gusto of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*; together, the two comedies effectively represent the series of plays written in his last years that embody his lifelong love-hate relationship with his native land. *The Drums of Father Ned* (1960) may afford a more optimistic vision and a more expansive gallery of comic characters, *Behind the Green Curtains* (1961) a more savage indictment of moral and intellectual cowardice in an Ireland

still living in isolation from the modern world, but neither they nor the other two plays of O'Casey's last period (*Figuro in the Night* and *The Moon Shines on Kyleneamoe*, both first published in 1961) begin to approach either *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* or *The Bishop's Bonfire* in comic ingenuity, depth of compassion or sheer variety of theatrical invention. To appreciate fully the artistic superiority of the seven plays assembled in the present volume, however, it may perhaps be best to approach them in the context of O'Casey's dramatic evolution.

II

Four earlier apprentice plays by O'Casey² had been turned down by the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, before *The Shadow of a Gunman* was submitted to the same theatre in November 1922, accepted in February 1923, and staged in April. Subtitled 'A Tragedy in Two Acts', the play is set in the slums of Dublin in 1920, during the Anglo-Irish War that followed the Easter Rising of 1916, when brutal raids and counter-raids by the Irish Republican Army and the Black and Tans viciously tore apart Dublin's teeming tenement world – a community long battered by poverty, disease and the close-packed living conditions only too familiar to O'Casey, his neighbours and fellow workers. *Juno and the Paycock*, a three-act play whose background is the civil war of 1922, appeared on the Abbey stage early in March 1924 and was published with *The Shadow of a Gunman* in 1925. The two main characters in *Juno and the Paycock* are 'Captain' Jack and Mrs Juno Boyle, whose family's dissensions, struggles and eventual disintegration parallel the national situation. The play shows even more clearly than its predecessor the hardships suffered by Dublin's tenement dwellers; though the civil war, which followed hard upon the Anglo-Irish guerrilla war, seriously exacerbated the situation, it is apparent that the city's slums had long been the setting for a horrifying dehumanising process in which poverty, malnutrition and disease ravage the slum dwellers.

Soon after *Juno and the Paycock* was completed O'Casey began to write a play about the Easter Rising of 1916 to complete a trilogy centred on the war of independence. An ironic attitude to patriotic hero worship and a bitter juxtaposition of ideals and actuality were integral to the earlier works; the playwright's disillusionment with

nationalist politics in the wake of the civil war was, however, epitomised in *The Plough and the Stars*, a four-act drama first staged at the Abbey Theatre in February 1926. Presenting political and social events in Dublin immediately before and during the Easter Week Rising of 1916, this chronicle play is a group drama which focuses upon the inhabitants of a large tenement house. As with the two previous works the play's life-enhancing values are embodied in various tenement women while the majority of the menfolk attempt to escape from harsh reality in alcoholic fantasies, gambling and nationalistic dreams. While both of the earlier dramas had ended with violent death and a grotesque atmosphere bordering on farce, the final curtain in *The Plough and the Stars* falls on a devastated tenement attic room, from which Dublin is seen burning in the distance while the British soldiers, who have occupied the tenement at the point of a bayonet, sit drinking tea onstage to the accompaniment of a chorus from the popular First World War song 'Keep the Home Fires Burning'. The horrifying impact of the fighting and of slum life is graphically realised in the action, but O'Casey's critical attitude towards the revolutionary soldiers (as well as the 'invading' government troops) and the aims and ideas they profess in the course of the action occasioned hostility in the Abbey during the play's first week's run in February 1926.

The first of O'Casey's full-length plays to embody to a perceptible degree non-naturalistic devices and stylisation of language and action, *The Plough and the Stars* survived the immediate protests and extensive attacks in the press to become the most often revived play in the Abbey Theatre's history; elsewhere, throughout the world, the play comes a close second to *Juno and the Paycock* in the frequency of stage revivals, despite its large cast of characters and ambitious scene changes. *The Shadow of a Gunman* became popular with Abbey audiences after an initial run of only four performances in April 1923; *Juno and the Paycock* eclipsed its popularity, however, becoming an immediate box-office success the following spring. For the first time in the history of the Abbey a play's run was extended for a second week. Like the first staged play, *Juno and the Paycock* was often revived in subsequent seasons. It has since become the second-most popular play in the Theatre's repertoire. The immediate and persisting popularity of O'Casey's Abbey Theatre trilogy has not been confined to Ireland alone: *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and the Stars*, in particular, are very often performed in other English-

speaking countries and, in more recent years, have had marked theatrical success in Europe, especially in West and East Germany.

Throughout its stage history outside Ireland, *The Shadow of a Gunman* has been overshadowed by its two immediate successors; and this phenomenon has even extended to its publishing record. The play was the last of the trilogy to be performed in London – it did not appear in the West End until late in May 1927, following well in the rear of *Juno* and *The Plough*, works that had been critically well received there in, respectively, November 1925 and May 1926 – and was immediately as well as unfavourably compared with the other two works, which reviewers, unaccountably, took to have preceded it in order of composition. I say ‘unaccountably’ for dramatic critics should, presumably, be expected to know something of the recent stage history of works they review, but it is only fair to admit that, were commentators to have consulted the first printed edition of *The Shadow of a Gunman* for such assistance, they would have received no help whatsoever. O’Casey’s first book of plays – published in both London and New York on 10 February 1925 – was entitled *Two Plays*; both on the title-page and in the order of presentation within the volume itself, *Juno and the Paycock* preceded *The Shadow of a Gunman*. The dates of the first stage productions of both plays were omitted from the first edition of *Two Plays* though they were added to later reissues of the work. Subsequent reprintings of *The Shadow of a Gunman* in various collections of his dramatic writings invariably placed it out of chronological order. In *Five Irish Plays* (first published in 1935), in the first volume of O’Casey’s *Collected Plays* (1949), as well as in the much reissued paperback collection *Three Plays* (1957) and, finally, the latest (and the first fully comprehensive), five-volume edition of *The Complete Plays of Sean O’Casey* (1984), O’Casey’s first staged play appeared, in each case, second in the order of succession, after *Juno and the Paycock*, written eighteen-months later. It is therefore hardly surprising that many readers have assumed that its illustrious successor preceded it in order of composition.

Published in New York in 1954, the *Selected Plays of Sean O’Casey*, to which reference has already been made, is the only anthology published in the playwright’s lifetime in which *The Shadow of a Gunman* appears first, in its correct chronological order. The present selection of *Seven Plays* is the first English edition to follow suit, allowing the play to be seen as O’Casey’s brilliant if still somewhat

uncertain earliest study of internecine strife and guerrilla warfare in Dublin's slum tenements. In its smaller-scaled structure (its two-act form was to be followed by the three acts of *Juno* and the four acts of *The Plough*, *The Silver Tassie* and *Red Roses for Me*) as well as in its basic theme and characters, it provides a lively as well as instructive introduction to its author's dramatic *oeuvre*. Each of these plays, deeply rooted as they are in Dublin working-class life, realises an idiosyncratic portrait-gallery of almost Dickensian proportions at times, saturated in an imaginative tenement idiom heightened by the inimitable bluster and blarney that became O'Casey's linguistic trademark.

In recent years *The Shadow of a Gunman* has begun to attain critical acclaim somewhat similar to that accorded the other two early Abbey Theatre plays, really coming into its own in 1980 when important and critically well-received stage revivals in England and Ireland became a significant part of celebrations commemorating the centenary of its author's birth.³ Immature it may be, in places, and the pantomimic elements are overdone at times, but in no way is it theatrically naive; indeed, O'Casey's innate sense of stagecraft is immediately apparent in performance, and the still impressive interweaving of farcical elements with more serious, and at times potentially tragic, experience – particularly towards the end of the second act of *The Shadow of a Gunman* – realises in a minor key an original technique subsequently used even more masterfully in *Juno and the Paycock*, *The Plough* and *the Stars*, *The Silver Tassie* and *Red Roses for Me*.

What is perhaps the most remarkable feature about these dramas, viewed like this as a sequence in order of composition, is not so much the audacious enlargement of scope in itself in each new work as it is the author's courageous willingness to experiment in so varied and ambitious a manner with each of them. Having mastered a predominantly realistic mode in *Juno and the Paycock*, each subsequent play attempts, in varying ways, to open up the drama to realise wider and more disparate experience and encompass something of an epic dimension. The move is from restrictive tenement interiors and private domestic concerns to larger and more public settings and group experience – or, rather, in the plays after *Juno*, to set the one world against the other: to juxtapose the experience of a massed political rally outside a well-patronised tavern in Act II of *The Plough* with the domestic world of the Clitheroe family elsewhere in the play or, as in the second act of *The Silver Tassie* (the four-act drama that immediately followed *The Plough*), to throw into relief the mass

horror of the trenches in Flanders during the First World War against a microcosm of squabbling small-time tenement life in the play's other three acts. In a final analysis, the enduring dramatic qualities of the first three plays rest primarily upon their highly original tragi-comic structure, range of grotesque characterisation, and vivid idiomatic speech. Each shows an increasing impatience with stage naturalism.

O'Casey's growing desire to broaden theme and form in his stage writings was given ambitious scope in *The Silver Tassie*, which must surely rank as the most crucial of his plays since it severed his connections with the Abbey Theatre and left him a playwright without a theatre. Started toward the end of 1926 and completed at the beginning of 1928, it was his first play to be written outside Ireland (he had settled in London in 1926); it also marked another departure in containing the first stage setting located outside his native land. A searing indictment of the First World War and its terrible effects on the minds and bodies of its many victims, three of its four acts are situated in Dublin settings and most of its characters are Irish men and women, mostly of slum origin. The second act, however, takes place just behind the British front line in Flanders; the characters there are a combination of Cockney and Dublin soldiers, the language is a mixture of realistic demotic speech and stylised plainsong chant, while the drama encompasses a *melange* of disparate styles and expressionistic techniques.

This mixture appears to have disconcerted the Abbey Theatre directors when the play was submitted to them in the summer of 1928; their refusal to produce it was followed by a heated controversy from which W. B. Yeats's original letter of rejection and O'Casey's impassioned counterattack have become famous.⁴ Yeats's attack on propaganda in drama is an excellent piece of criticism, but it seems curiously wide of the mark in relation to *The Silver Tassie* – and his objections to the intrusion of the author's views into the drama could apply as much to O'Casey's earlier Abbey plays (which Yeats praises in his critique) as to the play on the First World War. Here, as in Yeats's subsequent onslaught on Wilfred Owen's war poetry, strong personal attitudes towards the European conflict seem to have coloured his outlook. In turn, his rejection not only prevented the Abbey's production of *The Tassie*, but, widely publicised in the press, the criticisms of a Nobel Prize winner (the poet had been so honoured but four years previously) did enormous damage to O'Casey's reputation and for many years impeded critical recognition of his later experimental dramas as well as financial backing for their stage

presentation in Britain and the United States. In the case of *The Tassie*, however, there was only an initial wait of eighteen months before the work was produced on an ambitious and lavish scale by the celebrated impresario C. B. Cochran; the result was a critical success but a box-office failure, the production lasting only twenty-six performances. This presentation at the Apollo Theatre, London, in October 1929 was remarkable in many ways: directed by Raymond Massey and starring Charles Laughton, the striking set for Act II was designed by Augustus John while Martin Shaw supervised the choral interludes that were an impressive feature of the second act. George Bernard Shaw, who in correspondence with Lady Gregory had earlier defended the play against Yeats's criticisms, was greatly impressed by the London première, as was T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia) and also Lady Gregory, who wrote to Yeats from London: 'I am troubled because having seen the play I believe we [at the Abbey] ought to have accepted it.' On 12 August 1935, seven years after its original submission to the Abbey Theatre and three years after Lady Gregory's death, the play was performed there, and Yeats and O'Casey were reconciled.

The Abbey's rejection of *The Tassie* in 1928 severed his last personal as well as professional links with Ireland. Henceforth he was an experimental dramatist without a theatre workshop, and his subsequent plays for many years usually received either neglect or mediocre productions. The 1930s was a decade of experimentation for him. *Within the Gates*, published in 1933, was staged in London and New York the following year. Two plays followed in print in 1940: *The Star Turns Red* and *Purple Dust*. The first is an impassioned but strident piece of revolutionary rhetoric, the second an essentially lightweight romp. In these plays of O'Casey's 'middle period', as it might be called, the overriding ambition is to broaden the imaginative horizons for drama, which O'Casey believed had been narrowed by slice-of-life realism and the 'sober and exact imitation of life' naturalism that the playwright associated with the William Archer school of dramatic criticism. Believing that the 'beauty, fire and poetry of drama' had 'perished in a storm of fake realisms', O'Casey wanted a 'new form in drama' that would

take qualities found in classical, romantic and expressionistic plays, . . . blend them together, breathe the breath of life into the

new form and create a new drama. It will give rise to a new form of acting, a new form of production, a new response in the audience. . . . Gay, farcical, comic or tragical, it must be, not the commonplace portrayal of the trivial events in the life of this man or that woman, but a commentary of life itself.

Above all, the dramatist wanted to reach beyond the individual and the personal to a more universal experience, believing as he did that there is 'a deeper life than the life we see with the open ear and the open eye, and this is the life important and the life everlasting. And this life can be caught from the group rather than from the individual.'⁵

As might be expected, the fortunes of O'Casey's later plays on stage have been varied and unpredictable. The varying admixture of disparate styles has undoubtedly troubled many stage directors; in addition, the extravagant demands made of set-designers, coupled with the need for good ensemble acting (often with a large cast) including, at times, choral incantation and other highly specialised requirements, have restricted both the number and success of performances of *The Silver Tassie*, *Red Roses for Me* and *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*. Indeed, the increasingly high cost of mounting productions that will do adequate justice to the author's imaginative demands makes such theatrical ventures less viable today than when the plays were originally conceived.

A controversial drama throughout its history (in print as well as in performance), *The Silver Tassie* is probably O'Casey's most challenging and expansive play, in artistic and financial terms alike. If it has given rise to heated critical debate from the very beginning, it can also be argued that its few stage appearances have included several memorable productions that have in themselves provoked critical commentary of an unusually high order. Several of the more venturesome spirits in the theatrical world have been provoked to tackle the work by its very unusual qualities. The 1929 world première in London was a case in point, though it was to be another twenty-four years before a similarly ambitious stage presentation of the play was to be undertaken. In formal audacity and unusual admixture of styles, O'Casey's drama was for many years ahead of the theatrical practice of his time; more recently, however, practical as well as theoretical advances have been reflected in much praised innovative productions of several of these experimental works. Of

writings in this collection, *The Silver Tassie* has undoubtedly benefited the most from these developments. Fritz Kortner's Berlin presentation of this play in 1953 can now be seen as the imaginative start for subsequent large-scale German exploration of O'Casey's more radical work. Full-scale critical revaluation of *The Silver Tassie* as a viable stage play, however, has proceeded from more recent English-language productions, particularly those by the Royal Shakespeare Company, in London in September 1969, and by the Abbey Theatre Company in Dublin three years later; the reception accorded the former presentation by the leading English dramatic critics was especially interesting in that many hitherto hostile views were modified and a new awareness shown for the richness of the drama for an ensemble company familiar with 'epic' or Brechtian staging.

It is quite a different matter in so far as the stage realisation of the three later plays in the present anthology is concerned. The variety of inventiveness is perhaps the most striking feature of these writings: vaudeville routines mingle with lyricism, pantomime is juxtaposed with expressionist or agitprop effects, and more conventional tragic experience is to be found alongside unabashedly melodramatic elements. While the present-day theatre shows itself to be increasingly competent in handling such disparate material, *Red Roses for Me*, *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* and *The Bishop's Bonfire* have yet to receive imaginative stage presentations in the English-speaking world in any way comparable to those later productions of *The Silver Tassie* that have just been cited, or, indeed, worthy of comparison with European productions of these later works. There are several honourable exceptions – including the work of the Lyric Theatre in Belfast, particularly in its two stagings of *Red Roses for Me*, and of the Abbey Theatre in its productions of *The Star Turns Red* and *Purple Dust* – but these are not enough.

After completing *The Star Turns Red* and *Purple Dust* in 1940, O'Casey turned aside from both knockabout fantasy and polemical allegory to look back with some nostalgia to scenes from his early manhood. *Red Roses for Me*, published in 1942, is his most directly autobiographical play. Its leading figure, Ayamonn Breydon, is an idealised self-portrait whose relationships with his mother and the local clergyman, together with his troubled love affair with a timid Roman Catholic girl, are autobiographical ingredients drawn from

O'Casey's life within the Protestant community of Saint Barnabas in the somewhat isolated East Wall district of Dublin's dockland. The plot of *Red Roses for Me* is similar to that of *The Harvest Festival*, one of the early apprentice plays that preceded *The Shadow of a Gunman* on the Abbey stage. At a time of widespread hardship and industrial unrest the Protestant worker-hero is killed helping to lead a strike of railway workers. His friend, the local Protestant rector, wants to hold the funeral in his church, but in order to do so, he is forced to clash with bigoted parishioners who side with the employers in the violent struggle. In *The Harvest Festival* a similar conflict within the Select Vestry led to the defeat of the vicar and to the funeral held within the trade-union community; in *Red Roses* the minister overcomes strong opposition to keep the church open to all men of goodwill, whether or not their political and social views coincide with his or with those of the majority within the church.

Red Roses for Me, though perhaps too self-consciously literary in dialogue at times, has several moments of intense poetic beauty; its symbolism is often dramatically effective while the transformation scene in Act III (where song, dance and lighting are used to project a heightened visionary experience somewhat akin to a Joycean epiphany) is a successful fusion of expressionism and more traditional theatrical modes. In this episode, which takes place close by a bridge spanning the River Liffey, the setting sun literally and symbolically transforms the visual drabness of the scene as the accompanying dance sequence concretely embodies the change from despair to joy for the beggars on the bridge. Similarly, the revolutionary hero's words and actions subsequently transform, however briefly, the passive hopelessness of the slum dwellers into resolute resistance to the brutality of the strike-breaking police forces. Though there are several scenes of uproarious comedy (especially in Act II), a quieter elegiac atmosphere that is new to O'Casey's drama suffuses the later episodes, especially the final closing scene outside the darkened church that holds Breydon's coffin. The subtle mood created in such scenes was not to resurface in his work until he wrote *The Bishop's Bonfire* ('a sad play within the tune of a polka') twelve years later.

Red Roses for Me was O'Casey's first play for seventeen years to have its stage première in his native city (he had to wait another twelve years for the next); it was produced at the Olympia Theatre, Dublin, in March 1943. Its first professional presentation in London, in

February 1946, was not only a modest box-office success, but it also enabled O'Casey to see it onstage – the first time he had been able to see one of his new plays in performance since *Within the Gates* in 1934 – and, as a result, to make practical alterations that were incorporated in the revised edition of the play printed in the third volume of his *Collected Plays* in 1951.

After the Second World War came to an end in 1945 O'Casey went on writing his autobiography, completed a play on the Battle of Britain entitled *Oak Leaves and Lavender*, and revised his two most experimental 'middle period' dramas, *The Silver Tassie* and *Within the Gates*, in the hope that new stage versions of them would be published once the wartime paper restrictions were lifted. (These versions were printed in the second volume of his *Collected Plays*, issued in 1949.) While engaged in these activities, the playwright found his mind continually preoccupied with contemporary events in his native land, where he saw a heightened sense of puritanism inhibiting life and sexual relationships and creating a literary censorship stricter than anywhere else in western Europe. During the 1940s and 1950s O'Casey followed developments in Ireland with something approaching horror as well as disgust. He was bitterly disappointed that the country, after a quarter of a century of independence, had become what to his mind was a backward-looking and predominantly bourgeois theocratic state deliberately isolated from the more progressive social and political developments in the post-war world. Though understanding why the Republic had remained neutral during a war whose anti-Fascist nature made him a committed partisan, O'Casey became increasingly impatient with the renewed spirit of Jansenist puritanism there, together with a revival of what was in his view a dangerously superstitious religiosity and concomitant hostility to the socially ameliorative welfare programmes everywhere apparent in Britain and elsewhere after 1945. This impatience pervades all his late dramatic writings.

The new atmosphere of fear and clerical domination was reminiscent of certain experiences he had had as a young man in the Gaelic League, when Roman Catholic priests had interfered with League dances and similar social occasions, and when otherwise courageous citizens had capitulated without a struggle to clerical pressure. News reports from Ireland in 1947 also spoke of witch-hunts (actual witches being in question), a superstitious fear of the traditionally held magical power of women still being strong in many rural areas;

moreover, such superstitious beliefs were in some cases supported rather than opposed by the local clergy. O'Casey wrote to the American drama critic George Jean Nathan on 10 September 1947 that his new play would, 'if it be successful, hit at the present tendency of Eire to return to primitive beliefs, and Eire's preoccupation with Puritanism. I hope it will be gay, with a sombre thread of seriousness through it', adding later (in a letter of 31 October to Nathan): 'I've almost finished my play . . . it's a kind of Morality play, with Evil and Good contending with each other, but, I think, on different lines [from orthodox morality drama]. In fact, I'm thinking of giving it the subtitle of "An Immorality Play in Three Scenes".'

O'Casey sought to realise this atmosphere in a drama whose main thrust is primarily satirical. *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, first published in 1949, presents the rumbustious world of vaudeville knockabout comedy as well as Aristophanic fantasy. Temporarily abandoning any attempt to realise in action a positive social transformation such as was seen at the end of *The Star Turns Red* or in the Liffey bridge scene in *Red Roses for Me*, O'Casey concentrates on satiric exposure of the negative and life-denying forces in modern Irish life. In this respect the move is towards the mode of burlesque and comic exaggeration found originally in *Purple Dust*, though there is subtler handling of diverse theatrical modes in *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*. There is, too, a finer structural control – the work is rigorously designed, in fact – a more supple poetic language is made use of, and the characterisation is varied and vigorous. In an article, entitled 'O'Casey's Credo', published in the *New York Times* on 9 November 1958 (and intended to introduce the play to New York theatre-goers) he declared: 'The play is symbolical in more ways than one. The action manifests itself in Ireland, the mouths that speak are Irish mouths; but the spirit is to be found in action everywhere', adding, 'The Cock in the play, of course, is the joyful active spirit of life as it weaves a way through the Irish scene.' O'Casey emphasised in the same essay that 'in spite of the fanciful nature of the play, almost all the incidents are factual'. A letter of 27 December 1949 to Nathan substantiates this claim and concludes: 'I've records of them all. Poor oul' Eire!'

All O'Casey's late plays, from *The Bishop's Bonfire* in 1955 to his three last plays published in 1961, are, similarly, studies of the stultifying conditions of contemporary life in rural Ireland. Each one contains a good deal of satire directed at the narrow-minded materialism of the middle-class businessmen running the country

with the support of the Church establishment. As in *The Star Turns Red*, there are courageous priests who stand out against the heavy repressive measures of the organised powers in Church and State (Father Boheroe in *The Bishop's Bonfire* and the spirit of Father Ned in *The Drums of Father Ned*, for instance), but these are merely isolated examples. O'Casey's outlook in these works varies from optimistic vision – as in *The Drums of Father Ned* and *Figuro in the Night*, where the younger generation gains a new freedom from political and sexual repression – to varying degrees of realistic recognition of the powerful entrenchment of the reactionary forces. In *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* and *The Bishop's Bonfire* the more enlightened young people are forced to leave the country, after various unsuccessful attempts to liberalise the way of life in their rural communities. The bonfire to celebrate the return to Ballyoonagh of a local man who has become a bishop is, symbolically, to be fuelled by banned books.

One of the more forward-looking characters in *The Bishop's Bonfire* speaks of the Irish Republic as 'a fly-away country'. It is not surprising that, in a nation seeking to retrench the rights and privileges of long-established vested interests, and one invariably looking to a reactionary colonial past for its social ideals, emigration should exact a heavy toll among the more venturesome citizens. In such a country, the combination of small-time businessmen with organised powers of Church and State successfully stifles what visionary dreams and aspirations still exist among the few adventurous spirits that remain. In the same play, attempting to combat what seems like a universal apathy and a sense of hopeless compliance with the powers-that-be, one of the more liberal priests urges his countrymen to resist; having been successful thirty years earlier in liberating themselves from colonial domination, they now need to free themselves from a small-time huckster mentality that seems to coexist naturally with a complacent pietism (the speech recalls the lament of W. B. Yeats more than forty years earlier when, in the poem 'September 1913', he wrote that 'Romantic Ireland' was 'dead and gone' in an increasingly mercantile-mad world whose values were merely to 'fumble in a greasy till/And add the halfpence to the pence/And prayer to shivering prayer'). 'You've escaped from the dominion of the big house with the lion and the unicorn on its front', says O'Casey's Father Boheroe, 'don't let yourselves sink beneath the meaner dominion of the big shop with the cross and shamrock on its gable.'

Starting with *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, O'Casey's last nine plays may, loosely, be said to constitute the final period of O'Casey's playwriting career. Each of them offers variations on similar social themes. Artistically, they are a mixed bag: *The Drums of Father Ned* and *Figuro in the Night*, for all their infectious spirits and comic gusto, are lightweight works while *Behind the Green Curtains* is weighed down by its overly didactic message. In *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* and *The Bishop's Bonfire*, on the other hand, there is a brilliant synthesis of varied dramatic styles, a renewed interest in celebrating the contradictory nature of the human spirit, and subtle variations of mood and atmosphere that deserve recognition alongside the earlier Dublin masterpieces.

Ireland has altered a great deal in the twenty years following the playwright's death and many of the changes would have pleased him. However different the moral and social climate nowadays, the better plays from this period retain their literary and dramatic relevance if for no more than the theatrical vivacity of their satire and of the various non-illusionist techniques devised to project the crazy kaleidoscope (as O'Casey envisaged it) of post-war Irish life, let alone the vitality of the dialogue and of characterisation. If the first five plays in the present collection are 'chronicle' plays embodying the recent past in what is now the Irish Republic (in the first three works, this troubled past also approaches something akin to the hideous present in Northern Ireland), the later writings are symbolic plays whose thematic and aesthetic concerns are timeless, invoking as they do the worlds of the medieval morality play and of Aristophanic comedy as well as elements from the music-hall and vaudeville traditions.

The Bishop's Bonfire was given its world première in Dublin in February 1955; directed by Tyrone Guthrie and with Cyril Cusack in the lead, it was given a favourable reception by visiting London critics and an extended stage run, despite clerical disapproval. In December the same year *Red Roses* opened in New York, the first O'Casey play on Broadway in twenty-two years. In November 1958, New York was to see *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* on the stage of the Carnegie Hall Playhouse. It was, unfortunately, a poor production and it was not until a full decade after its initial appearance in print and on the amateur stage that the work received a presentation in any way worthy of its imaginative powers: this was the 1959 production by George Devine for the English Stage Company, then still riding a crest of

fame for its championing of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* three years earlier. Designed as a special presentation for the Edinburgh Festival – where it achieved critical as well as popular success – *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* was given a London run later in September 1959 at the Royal Court Theatre. Notable revivals of the play since then include the German-language version by the Berliner Ensemble in January 1971 and Irish productions by the Lyric Theatre, Belfast (November 1975), and, in August 1977, the Abbey Theatre. London theatregoers saw *The Bishop's Bonfire* in a weak production at the Mermaid Theatre in July of 1961. It is still very much an open question whether or not either of these late plays has yet received a presentation fully matching the imaginative challenge they extend to the contemporary theatre: certainly, in the English-speaking theatre one looks in vain – as yet – for the audacious flair of Peter Brook's famed staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to be exhibited in an O'Casey production. Yet it is some such response that these late plays clearly demand.

In an editorial written specifically for the O'Casey Centenary Number of the *Irish University Review* (Spring 1980), Christopher Murray made the justifiable claim that the 'reputation of Sean O'Casey . . . remains at a consistently high level', instancing the frequency and range of stage productions, translations of his writings and the growth of critical and scholarly attention paid to his work. Four years later – and twenty years since the playwright's death – this claim, if anything, is strengthened by recent developments. A new unabridged edition of the autobiographies, published in 1980, has been followed by the appearance of the first *Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey* in five volumes (1984), while the present anthology is the first fully annotated edition of seven major plays that are in the forefront of O'Casey's achievement as a dramatist. On the continent the entire corpus of dramatic writings has been (and is) receiving theatrical revaluation;⁶ in England, recent productions of the first three plays and of *The Silver Tassie* by the two London-based national companies – the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company – have occasioned considerable critical reassessment;⁷ in Ireland, north as well as south, the Lyric and Abbey Theatres have set about redressing the persistent theatrical neglect there of all O'Casey's dramas since *The Plough and the Stars*. At long last things are moving, but there is still a long way to go in theatrical as well as critical exploration.

NOTES

1. Sean O'Casey, 'O'Casey's Credo', *New York Times*, 9 November 1958; reprinted in *Blasts and Benedictions* (London and New York, 1967) pp. 142–5.
2. These plays of O'Casey's 'apprenticeship' are *The Frost in the Flower* (probably two-act; written c. 1918–19, rejected by the Abbey Theatre in 1919; rewritten the same year and again rejected in January 1920), *The Harvest Festival* (three-act; 1919, rejected in January 1920 and partially revised in 1920), *The Crimson in the Tricolour* (three-act; written 1920–1, rejected October 1922 and considered subsequently for possible rewriting as a comedy), and the one-act *The Seamless Coat of Kathleen* (1922, rejected April 1922).
3. Two productions of *The Shadow of a Gunman* were particularly important during the O'Casey centenary celebrations: The Royal Shakespeare Company's presentation that opened at The Other Place in Stratford-upon-Avon on 26 March 1980 and that by the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, that opened on 8 May 1980.
4. Both articles may be found in the first volume of *The Letters of Sean O'Casey*, vol. 1: 1910–1941, ed. David Krause (New York and London, 1975) pp. 267–8 and 271–3.
5. These quotations are taken from O'Casey's essay 'From Within the Gates', first published in the *New York Times*, 21 October 1934; reprinted in *Blasts and Benedictions*, pp. 113–14, 116.
6. There is as yet no adequate account of the full extent of this exploration but knowledge of the many German productions in recent years is salutary: see Manfred Pauli's *Sean O'Casey: Drama, Poesie, Wirklichkeit* (Berlin, 1977) pp. 250ff.; this book is also valuable for the many photographs of these productions.
7. Many instances of such critical revaluation could be given but it may be sufficient to quote the following examples: on the NT's *Juno and the Paycock*, see Sean Day-Lewis, *Daily Telegraph* (23 April 1966), Hugh Leonard, *Plays and Players* (June 1966) and *Times Educational Supplement* (10 June 1966); on the RSC's *The Silver Tassie* see Irving Wardle, *The Times* (11 September 1969), and another special article by him entitled 'A Neglected Masterpiece' in *The Times* (13 September), Peter Lewis, *Daily Mail* (11 September 1969), Caryl Brahms, *Guardian* (11 September 1969), J. W. Lambert, *Sunday Times* (14 September 1969) and Frank Marcus, *Sunday Telegraph* (14 September 1969); on the RSC's *Shadow of a Gunman* see Michael Billington, *Guardian* (2 April 1980) and T. P. Matheson, *Times Literary Supplement* (11 April 1980); on the RSC's *Juno and the Paycock* see Ned Chaillet, *The Times* (8 October 1980) and Derek Mahon, *Times Literary Supplement* (17 October 1980). Many more reviews could be instanced, as well as quite contrary critical opinions, of course.

Textual Note

Something should be said about the textual provenance of these seven plays. In each case the text is the latest or 'final' edition approved for publication by the dramatist. Six of the seven texts are to be found in the versions that are printed in the *Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey* (1984); the seventh, that of *Red Roses for Me*, appears in the fourth and last version of the play authorised by the playwright shortly before his death.

For the first three plays – *The Shadow of a Gunman*, *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and the Stars* – the text printed here is virtually identical with that printed in the first volume of O'Casey's *Collected Plays* (1949) and subsequently reprinted in 1957 in the paperbound edition entitled *Three Plays*. Only a few very minor alterations were made to the first editions of each of them. There seems little doubt that the reason for this was that, before each one of the first three full-length plays made its appearance in print, it was given a major stage production (with the playwright in close attendance) by a Dublin acting company then at its peak of achievement as an ensemble acting group; the dramatist was thereby enabled to incorporate changes, made in the light of practical theatre conditions, into the text of the first editions of each of them – in the *Two Plays* of 1925, for *The Shadow of a Gunman* and *Juno and the Paycock*, and in the 1926 edition of *The Plough and the Stars*.

The case was quite different for several of the later plays, however, where publication preceded stage performance: *The Silver Tassie* and *Red Roses for Me* – first printed in 1928 and 1942, respectively – were both subsequently revised after the playwright had seen professional productions of them in London. *The Silver Tassie* appears in the present collection in the 'stage version' (as it was described by the author) first printed in the second volume of his *Collected Plays* in 1949. In each of the four acts there are a number of changes from the text first printed in 1928; these alterations, though made between 1946 and 1947, were based primarily on observations of the 1929 London première and on the production ideas of Raymond Massey,

its stage director, with whom the dramatist worked closely at the time. The 'stage version' differs in about thirty instances from the first edition; about half of these alterations are embodied in the stage directions, a strong indication of the influence of practical considerations on O'Casey's stagecraft. Two of the more significant revisions are, first, the addition of O'Casey's 'Notes' to facilitate stage production (which, in the present edition, as in the 1949 version, precede the actual text of the play itself) and, secondly, the fairly extensive rewriting of the conclusion to the final scene of the drama.¹

Red Roses for Me has an even more complicated textual history. There are in print four different versions of the play, though only three of them warrant much attention, textually. These three versions are the first edition of 1942, the thoroughly revised text first published in 1951 in the third volume of O'Casey's *Collected Plays* (this is the text retained for the *Complete Plays* edition of 1984) and the slightly amended version of this text that was first printed in *Three More Plays* (1965); it is the last text, which, though it was published a year after the playwright's death, was in fact approved and supervised through the press by him, that is followed in the present collection.

All four acts of the first edition of *Red Roses for Me* were revised once the dramatist had an opportunity – which did not occur for four years after publication – to see the work on stage. The London première of 1946 enjoyed not only a distinct critical success but a modest box-office one as well, the production being twice transferred to theatres in the West End. O'Casey's revisions, meant to improve this production, were never in fact used in it but first saw the light of day in 1951 when the play was reprinted in his *Collected Plays* edition. Most of the changes were of a minor order, many being cuts and rewriting of dialogue to make the speech rhythms more attuned to oral delivery. A number of more significant alterations were made to Act IV, however, including the deletion of an extremely funny incident (which, despite its hilarity, was thought to impede the dramatic action) and the recasting of several other scenes. The changes tighten the action and dialogue considerably, making the version more theatrically effective, though the main outline of the work is unaffected.

Subsequently, following a New York production of *Red Roses for Me* in 1955, for which the playwright made further revisions, the Dramatists Play Service Inc. of New York brought out what might be called an acting edition in August 1956. This is a curious mixture of

material from the 1951 text with some additional revisions and, in at least one scene in Act IV, a reversion to material in the 1942 text that had been changed for the 1951 edition. This New York version was not supervised through the press by the playwright, as were each of the other three versions. The last one of these, which may be called the final authorised version, is that first printed in *Three More Plays*: it is, basically, the 1951 text with the addition of a brief episode in Act III that was first introduced into the 1956 New York edition; otherwise, none of the other departures from the 1951 text that are to be found in the 1956 script were reprinted in this final version, followed in the present anthology.²

The original 1949 text of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* remained unchanged (save for the correction of occasional printing errors, which included the attribution of a speech to the wrong character) when it was reissued in the fourth volume of *Collected Plays* in 1951; it is the latter text which is here reprinted. *The Bishop's Bonfire* appeared in only one edition during its creator's lifetime; the present anthology follows this text, which made its appearance in print in June 1955, some four months after its stage première in Dublin. O'Casey was too ill to visit his native city for this production but some changes were incorporated into the printed text in the light of correspondence between the playwright and Tyrone Guthrie, the stage director, on the one hand, and O'Casey and Cyril Cusack, who took the part of Codger Sleehaun, on the other hand.

NOTES

1. A copy of the first edition of *The Silver Tassie* incorporating O'Casey's manuscript corrections for the 1949 'stage version' is to be found in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library. Examination of the differences between the two versions affords a valuable exercise in practical stagecraft: see Ronald Ayling and Michael J. Durkan, *Sean O'Casey: A Bibliography* (London, 1978; Seattle, 1979) pp. 87–8, and Heinz Kosok, 'The Revision of *The Silver Tassie*', *Sean O'Casey Review*, v (1978) 15–18.
2. For specific details of the various textual changes, see Ayling and Durkan, *Sean O'Casey: A Bibliography*, pp. 67, 90 and 134; and also Heinz Kosok, 'The Three Versions of *Red Roses for Me*', *O'Casey Annual No. 1* (London, 1982) pp. 141–7.

Sean O'Casey: A Chronology

- 1880 (30 Mar) Born John Casey in Dublin, the youngest of a large family of whom five survived childhood.
- c. 1891 Introduced to the theatre at the age of eleven by occasional visits with his brother Isaac, called 'Archie' in the playwright's autobiography, to the Queen's Theatre, Dublin (mostly vaudeville and Dion Boucicault).
- c. 1894 Starts work at fourteen in the stockroom of a hardware shop. Had various clerical jobs until he became a manual labourer in his late teens, an occupation he kept until 1925, when he became a full-time writer. His longest job was a nine-year period as labourer on the Great Northern Railway of Ireland (GNRI), 1902–11.
- c. 1895 Acts part of Father Dolan in an amateur production of Boucicault's *The Shaughran* at the Mechanics Theatre, Abbey Street; this theatre became the Abbey Theatre in 1904.
- c. 1902 Begins work as a labourer on the GNRI.
- 1906 Joins Gaelic League and learns Irish; soon becomes branch secretary and Gaelicises name to Sean O Cathasaigh.
- 1907 (25 May) First published work an article on Irish educational system in *The Peasant and Irish Ireland*.
- 1909 (4 Jan) Irish Transport and General Workers' Union founded.
- 1911 Jim Larkin founds union newspaper, the *Irish Worker*, to which O'Casey subsequently contributes. Irish railways strike – the background to *Red Roses for Me*. Dismissed from his job at GNRI for refusing to resign from trade union.
- 1913 (15 Aug) Large-scale lock-out of union men by Dublin employers, with appalling consequences for working

- people during the seven months it lasts; profoundly influences the playwright's political and social thinking. Secretary of the Women and Children's Relief Fund during the lock-out.
- 1913 (Oct) Irish Citizen Army (ICA) formed by trade union to protect its members from police brutality.
(25 Nov) Irish Volunteers founded: a nationalist organisation with several prominent anti-labour men in its ranks.
- 1914 (Mar) ICA reorganised, with O'Casey as its secretary. He draws up its Constitution, endorsed in March. Although this document stressed the nationalist as well as socialist basis of the ICA, O'Casey opposed too-close ties with the Volunteers because of anti-union elements in the latter. He resigned from the ICA on 17 July 1914, when his motion to make the Countess Markievicz choose between the two bodies (she belonged to both) was defeated by the Executive Committee.
- 1916 (Jan) Publishes 'The Grand Oul' Dame Britannia', one of the most popular anti-war ballads in Ireland; despite its success as a broadside publication, many Irishmen join the British Army to fight in France – the background to *The Silver Tassie*. Many other satirical poems and love-songs published, off and on, from 1916 to 1918.
(24 Apr–29 Apr) The Volunteers and ICA rise in armed rebellion against the British authorities – the background to *The Plough and the Stars*.
- 1917–21 Guerrilla warfare in Ireland between the Irish Republican Army (the IRA, successor to the banned nationalist bodies) and the British forces; counter-terrorism by the Black and Tans – background to *The Shadow of a Gunman*.
- 1918 Death of O'Casey's sister Isabella in January and of his mother in November. About this time he writes his first play, for an amateur group, but its satire of the group's members prevents its production. This two-act play, *The Frost in the Flower*, was submitted to, and rejected by, the Abbey Theatre sometime during the period 1918–19.
- 1919 (Mar) O'Casey's first major publication, *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army* – much censored by the military

- authorities. Writes a second play, in three acts, *The Harvest Festival*, and revises *The Frost in the Flower* in accordance with recommendations by the Abbey Theatre.
- 1920 (26 Jan) The Abbey rejects both plays. O'Casey shares a one-room tenement flat with Michael O Maolain at 35, Mountjoy Square, the setting for *The Shadow of a Gunman*.
- 1921 Writes three-act play *The Crimson in the Tricolour*.
(6 Dec) Peace Treaty signed, partitioning the country into an independent Irish Free State and a Northern six counties within the United Kingdom.
- 1922–3 Civil War in the South over the terms of the Treaty – background to *Juno and the Paycock*.
- 1922 (28 Sept) The Abbey rejects *The Crimson in the Tricolour*.
(17 Nov) Completes *The Shadow of a Gunman* and submits typescript to the Abbey.
- 1923 (25 Feb) The Abbey accepts the play and gives it a run of four performances at the very end of its season (from 12 Apr).
- 1924 (3 Mar) *Juno and the Paycock* becomes the most popular play in the Abbey's twenty-year history.
(7 June) First visit to Lady Gregory's house at Coole Park, in Clare–Galway.
- 1925 (10 Feb) *Two Plays (Juno and Shadow of a Gunman)* published in London and New York.
(16 Nov) English première of *Juno* at the Royalty Theatre, London.
- 1926 (8 Feb) Riots during first week of Abbey production of *The Plough and the Stars*. O'Casey visits London to receive the Hawthornden Prize (for *Juno*); he lives in England for the rest of his life.
(15 Mar) American première of *Juno* at Mayfair Theatre in New York.
(Apr) Publication of *The Plough* in London and New York.
(12 May) English première of the same play at the Fortune Theatre, London.
- 1927 (27 May) The Court Theatre, London, presents the English première of *Shadow of a Gunman*.
(23 Sept) Marries Eileen Carey Reynolds.

- (27 Nov) *The Plough* is given its American première at the Hudson Theatre, New York.
- 1928 Son Breon born. (20 Apr) The Abbey rejects *The Silver Tassie*; (12 June) play published.
- 1929 (11 Oct) C. B. Cochran presents *The Silver Tassie* at the Apollo Theatre, London.
(24 Oct) American première of *The Silver Tassie* at the Irish Theatre, New York.
- 1930 (22 Sept) Alfred Hitchcock's film of *Juno* (with Sara Allgood) released.
- 1932 Refuses invitation by Yeats and Shaw to be a founder member of the Irish Academy of Letters.
- 1934 (Autumn) Visits USA for New York production of *Within the Gates* (published 24 Nov 1933).
- 1935 (15 Jan) Second son Niall born.
(12 Aug) Abbey production of *The Silver Tassie* provokes vociferous clerical opposition.
(29 Oct) Publication of *Five Irish Plays*.
- 1937 (5 Mar) Publication of *The Flying Wasp*, a collection of contentious articles on the contemporary theatre.
(15 Mar) John Ford's film of *The Plough*, starring Barry Fitzgerald and Barbara Stanwyck, released.
- 1939 (3 Mar) Publication of *I Knock at the Door* (banned in Eire), the first of six volumes of autobiography.
(28 Sept) Daughter Shivaun born.
- 1940 (Jan) Barry Fitzgerald and Sara Allgood appear together for the last time in a revival of *Juno* at the Mansfield Theatre, New York.
- 1942 (17 Feb) *Red Roses for Me* published in London.
- 1943 (15 Mar) Olympia Theatre production of *Red Roses* is the first O'Casey première in Dublin for seventeen years.
- 1946 (26 Feb) London production of *Red Roses* has a modest success at the Embassy Theatre and is later twice transferred to other theatres in the West End.
- 1947 (26 May) Revival of *The Silver Tassie* at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin.
- 1949 (8 Apr) *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* published; (10 Dec) its world première at the People's Theatre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
(21 July) New York revival of *The Silver Tassie* at the

- Carnegie Hall Playhouse (runs for eighty performances).
 (11 Nov) First two volumes of *Collected Plays* issued in London.
- 1950 (30 Jan) American première of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, directed by Margo Jones, in Dallas, Texas.
- 1951 (25 Apr) *Red Roses* is given its US première at the Playhouse in Houston, Texas.
 (17 July) Third and Fourth volumes of *Collected Plays* issued in London.
 (24 Sept) Abbey Theatre revives *The Silver Tassie*.
- 1953 (20 June) Berlin production of the same play, directed by Fritz Kortner, provokes protests and controversy.
- 1954 (29 Oct) Publication of *Sunset and Evening Star* brings six-volume autobiographical sequence to a close.
- 1955 (28 Feb) *The Bishop's Bonfire* produced in Dublin by Tyrone Guthrie at the Gaiety Theatre; (24 June) play published in London.
 (28 Dec) *Red Roses for Me* opens in New York at the Booth Theatre, the first O'Casey play on Broadway for twenty-two years.
- 1956 (Mar) *The Green Crow*, a collection of old and new essays, published in New York (English edition issued in Feb the following year).
 (Oct) *Mirror in My House*, a two-volume edition (and the first collected one) of O'Casey's autobiography, published in New York.
- 1957 (1 Jan) Niall dies of leukaemia.
- 1958 (Feb) Playwright forced to withdraw his latest play, *The Drums of Father Ned*, from the Dublin International Theatre Festival when Archbishop of Dublin objects to works by James Joyce and O'Casey in the programme. The Festival has to be abandoned when Samuel Beckett withdraws his mime plays in protest.
 (12 Nov) Carnegie Hall Playhouse presentation of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* is the play's New York première.
- 1959 (Sept) Presented by George Devine's English Stage Company, *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* is the success of the year's Edinburgh Festival; (17 Sept) production opens at the Royal Court Theatre, London.
- 1960 Dramatist's eightieth birthday celebrated by publication of

- two major critical studies. Refuses several honours, including a CBE and at least three honorary degrees.
- 1961 (1 June) Last three plays published.
(26 July) *The Bishop's Bonfire* is given its English première at the Mermaid Theatre, London.
- 1962 (16 Aug) O'Casey Festival opens at the Mermaid with a production of *Purple Dust*, followed by *Red Roses* (5 Sept) and *The Plough* (26 Sept).
- 1964 The Abbey Theatre presents *Junó* (20 Apr) and *The Plough* (27 Apr) in London as the Irish contribution to the World Theatre Festival.
(18 Sept) Dies in Torquay of a heart attack.
- 1966 Increased theatrical interest over several years (particularly on the continent of Europe) culminates in 1966 with production of *Purple Dust* by the Berliner Ensemble and by the Théâtre National Populaire, Paris, and of *Junó* (directed by Laurence Olivier) by the National Theatre at the Old Vic, London. Dublin eventually sees *The Drums of Father Ned* at the Olympia Theatre in June.
- 1967 (12 Jan) *Blasts and Benedictions*, a posthumous collection of essays and stories, published in London and New York.
- 1969 (10 Sept) Royal Shakespeare Company production of *The Silver Tassie* at the Aldwych Theatre, London, has great critical success.
O'Casey's papers are acquired for the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library.
- 1971 (Jan) Berliner Ensemble follows up its earlier stage success with *Purple Dust* (a production in the company's repertoire for over twelve years) by presenting *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*.
(23 Sept) Eileen O'Casey publishes memoir entitled *Sean*.
- 1975 (27 Mar) *The Letters of Sean O'Casey*, vol. I (1910–41) issued.
- 1977 (20 Sept) *The Plough* revived in London at the Olivier Theatre by the National Theatre Company.
- 1980 Centenary year sees publication of a new two-volume paperback edition of the *Autobiographies* (7 Mar) and of O'Casey's earliest extant play, *The Harvest Festival* (30 Mar); *The letters of Sean O'Casey*, vol. II (1942–54) issued late in the summer. Significant anniversary

productions in England and Ireland include the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Juno* in London (with Judi Dench as Juno) and *Shadow of a Gunman* in Stratford-upon-Avon; and new and well-received productions of *Shadow of a Gunman* and *Red Roses for Me* by the Abbey Theatre.

- 1981 (26 Mar) New edition of the *Autobiographies* (the first with an index) issued in London.
- 1984 First edition of O'Casey's *Complete Plays* published, in five volumes.

FIRST PRODUCTIONS

The Shadow of a Gunman, 12 April 1923, Abbey Theatre, Dublin
Juno and the Paycock, 3 March 1924, Abbey Theatre, Dublin
The Plough and the Stars, 8 February 1926, Abbey Theatre, Dublin
The Silver Tassie, 11 October 1929, Apollo Theatre, London
Red Roses for Me, 15 March 1943, Olympia Theatre, Dublin
Cock-a-Doodle Dandy, 10 December 1949, People's Theatre,
 Newcastle-upon-Tyne
The Bishop's Bonfire, 28 February 1955, Gaiety Theatre, Dublin