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SEAN O'CASEY AND THE ABBEY THEATRE, DUBLIN

"All art is a collaboration"
J. M. Synge[1]

I

Irish writers and comics, possibly begrudging Sean O'Casey's exceptional popularity, have claimed that much of this success in his native city can be attributed to the acting of the Abbey company and the active collaboration of the theatre's directors in writing and revising his plays. I remember vividly on my first visit to Dublin in 1956 being assured by Professor David Greene—a distinguished Gaelic scholar and Professor of Irish at Trinity College, Dublin, at that time—that the "difference in quality" between O'Casey's Abbey dramas and his later ones was that Lady Gregory and other friends helped shape and revise the earlier writings. Subsequently, I discovered that this preposterous view was widely held in literary and critical circles in Dublin. Yet many other writers have written for the same company—before, during, and since O'Casey came into prominence—without achieving either the popular or the critical success that he obtained. Why could not the same combination of Abbey players and writer-directors do for other young playwrights what it is claimed was done for O'Casey? And how can the inimitable flavour of O'Casey's characters and their dialogue be explained? None of the Abbey directors, writers, or players of that time or since have shown any comparable ability in the creation of the characters and environment of the Dublin slums; and no Irish writer in any literary sphere has created an idiom anything like that of O'Casey. There are in his writings linguistic traits which occasionally sound like Carleton one minute or Joyce another, or even (as Denis Johnston is never tired of saying) like Amanda McKittrick Ros at times, but the total

impact is peculiarly his own. It is an idiosyncratic idiom that, whether we like it or not, can only be described as O'Caseyan.

It should be added, moreover, that examination of the extensive collection of manuscript and typescript material among the papers left behind by the dramatist at his death gives no support whatsoever to the theory that any other person helped write, revise, or shape O'Casey's work. On the contrary, these papers show how, from the beginning, O'Casey continually revised and reshaped his own dramas. We know from various letters by him that he took advice from the Abbey board of directors and from Abbey producers of his plays in making minor alterations (mostly cuts[2]) to his early work; but there is no evidence of any creative help or collaboration worthy of the name in O'Casey's drama.

Joseph Holloway wrote in his *Diaries*, presumably on the basis of Abbey "Green Room" gossip, that Lady Gregory had helped with the revisions made to the one-act work *Kathleen Listens In*. Yet it is clear from an aside in one of O'Casey's letters[3] to the grand old woman of Coole that he was himself responsible for the changes, which were no doubt prompted by requests from the Abbey board:

> I sent in to the Theatre the beginning of the week the Revised Version of *Kathleen Listens In*, and am again working slowly at *The Plough and the Stars*.

This extract is taken from a letter dated February 22nd, 1925, and refers to plans for the only revival (so far as I know) of the play to take place after its initial production on October 1, 1923, that is, the production which opened on March 3, 1925. It is my guess, for which there is no evidence whatsoever, that in this case the playwright was asked to add some up-to-the-moment dialogue to what was in any case a highly topical allegory.

So far as allowing cuts to be made in his work is concerned, we have evidence once again from the dramatist's correspondence with Lady Gregory. The following excerpt is taken from a letter of September 11, 1925, (as background, we must bear in mind that, long before the public riots over *The Plough* and, indeed, even before the work had been put into rehearsal, various members of the Abbey company had demanded changes in the play):

> I am going up on Sunday to Mr. Yeats to speak about some cuts in my play—he has asked me to come—and, of course, I've no objection to cuts made by him, or you or Mr. Robinson. My little song, I think, has to go.

And later, on November 1, 1925, he wrote again to her (note that it is O'Casey, and not the Theatre's directors, who did the rewriting):

> I have altered the love scene in the first act of *The Plough*, and the alteration has eliminated any possibly objectionable passage.

At no time, however, did O'Casey allow anyone else to revise his work, and cuts were restricted to the discretion of the three Abbey directors.

Moreover, while he accepted constructive criticisms from the Abbey directorate, O'Casey maintained a firmly independent critical stance at all stages of his relationship with the theatre's board. For one thing he retained a good number of the Abbey cuts in the published texts of his work—the "little song" at the end of Act II of *The Plough* is an obvious example among many others in that play alone. And for another, there is his clearly stated opposition to the board's judgements at various times. His fierce and courageous defence of *The Silver Tassie* against W. B. Yeats in 1928 is well known; but some critics have argued that his attitude in that situation was an arrogant one made by a writer whose head by this time had been turned by public applause. What is not known, however, because correspondence between the playwright and the Abbey board has never been fully published, is that even before a single one of his plays had been accepted for performance at the Abbey, O'Casey had freely expressed certain significant disagreements with the directors' dramatic values. When his full-length *The Crimson in the Tricolour* was rejected in 1922, after various hints that it might be accepted, Lennox Robinson sent to O'Casey a letter from W. B. Yeats (without naming the poet) containing criticisms of the play. O'Casey's response was determined, unequivocal, and fully in accord with his subsequent action over *The Silver Tassie* six years later. Here is part of his reply to Robinson, dated October 9th, 1922, (the "reader" is Yeats):

> I was terribly disappointed at its final rejection, and felt at first as if, like Lucifer, I had fallen never to hope again. I have re-read the work and find it as interesting as ever, in no way deserving the contemptuous dismissal it has received from the reader you have quoted. Let me say that I do not agree with his criticism. . . . What could be more loose and vague than life itself? Are we to write plays on the framework of the first of Genesis; and God said let there be light and there was light; and he separated the light from the darkness and he called the light day, and the darkness he called night; and the morning and evening were the first Act. It is the subtle vagueness in such writers as Shaw and Ibsen that—in my opinion—constitute their most potent charm.[4]

One could hardly call this respectful timidity! Yet, written by a manual labourer who had never had a play staged or published and who had seldom seen a play performed, it was addressed to an author whose writings had had

considerable success in performance as well as in print and who had been responsible for numerous stage productions at the Abbey since he had served a practical apprenticeship under Bernard Shaw at the Court Theatre, London. At no time in his life, in fact, did O'Casey show any undue regard for or deference to anyone's reputation.

Subsequently, once he had become an "Abbey playwright", he saw little to make him change his earlier outlook. Indeed, increased theatrical experience served to confirm his views, and he came to believe that, in some cases, the judgement and advice of the Abbey directors regarding certain of his plays had been harmful if not misleading so far as he was concerned. One particular example, to O'Casey's mind, was when Lennox Robinson made him delete the death scene near the end of *Nannie's Night Out.* The playwright substituted for it a short incident in which Nannie is arrested by the police, but to the end of his life he insisted (I think rightly) that the original version was the better one.

In any case, right or wrong, he went his own way: when his one-act *The Cooing of Doves* was rejected by the Abbey, the dramatist built the play into *The Plough and the Stars*, virtually as it stood, as the second (and very effective) act of that drama. This use of material decisively rejected by O'Casey's supposed mentors and the way in which he re-submitted it to them in an even more ambitious work shows his critical as well as artistic independence and his growing confidence in his own writings. Lady Gregory herself acknowledged how fine *The Cooing of Doves* showed itself to be within the much admired larger structure—she recognised the earlier rejected play, as she admitted in conversation with the playwright—and Yeats, too, was of the same opinion about the second act, though whether he recollected that that particular act comprised an earlier repudiated play is uncertain. We do know that Yeats fought hard within the board of directors to protect *The Plough and the Stars* (and especially the second act) from cuts demanded by George O'Brien and some of the actors in the play; and the poet's opinion of the second act was given in one of his letters quoted by Lady Gregory in a journal entry for September 20, 1925 (while the pre-production censorship fight was in progress): "The scene as a whole is admirable, one of the finest O'Casey has written".

II

While there is no doubt that O'Casey during the 1920s was fortunate in having a talented ensemble like the Abbey Theatre company to interpret his work, it is equally true to say that seldom has a theatrical group in the

finest flowering of its genius had so gifted and responsive a playwright to write for it. Ernest Blythe, for many years managing director of the Abbey Theatre, has, in the course of defending the theatre from its many detractors, put this point in a succinct manner:

> The existence of a permanent company of trained and talented players is an aid to certain dramatists. The members of a standing group whose personalities and whose range and powers of variation are well known, can help an author to draw vivid and convincing characters, somewhat as a model helps a painter. And some dramatists, including the very greatest, have had individual players in mind even when they were in part depicting characters known to them in real life.[5]

Though Blythe makes this claim without reference to any specific playwright, he may well have been thinking of O'Casey when he wrote it; the observation is certainly correct in his case. While, throughout O'Casey's writing career, he drew upon actual people he knew, situations he had experienced, and snatches of dialogue he overheard or had had reported to him (his notebooks bear overwhelming testimony to this) he also wrote with specific members of the Abbey company in mind. Of course he had already evolved a highly personal, even idiosyncratic style of dramatic expression by the time he came to compose *The Shadow of a Gunman*, and this style (only intermittently apparent in the sole surviving play of his early period of apprenticeship, *The Harvest Festival*) was, naturally, maintained for the rest of his working life. Even so, once he had seen *The Shadow of a Gunman* on the Abbey stage and had come to know the company personally as well as professionally, he did definitely identify certain players with particular character parts in his work.

Before *The Shadow of a Gunman* was staged in April 1923 at the Abbey, O'Casey had not been able to afford playgoing there: it seems likely that he had attended no more than three performances up to this time and he knew none of the performers there. Afterwards, when he could always slip into a spare seat or pay out of forthcoming royalties without having to have the cash in his pocket (for he was still very hard up until the London run of *Juno and the Paycock* started in November 1925) O'Casey witnessed virtually every production at the theatre until he left Ireland in March 1926. Moreover, he often visited the Green Room in the evenings even when he didn't watch the performance; it became for him, as it were, his "club" where he could chat about literature and drama and everything under the sun with interested and knowledgeable people. In particular, he made friends with Barry Fitzgerald,

F. J. McCormick (for a short while), and Gabriel Fallon, three younger actors at the Abbey, and saw a certain amount of them outside the theatre.

Thus we may say that although *The Shadow of a Gunman* owed nothing to personal or professional knowledge of a particular theatrical company, each of the subsequent four plays (*Kathleen Listens In*, *Juno*, *Nannie's Night Out*, and *The Plough*) was assuredly influenced by this consideration, as, indeed, was *The Silver Tassie*, which was written with the Abbey company in mind, though it was not performed by that company until seven years had elapsed after the play's publication. The latter fact may be taken for granted since, though O'Casey wrote *The Tassie* in London, he intended it for production by the Abbey. The supposition is borne out by the following aside in a personal letter written to Ivor Brown in reply to the latter's review of *The Silver Tassie* when it was first published in 1928:

> By the way, the part of Sylvester Heegan was written for Barry Fitzgerald of Dublin, who, I think, could play Arthur Sinclair off the stage. How I wish you could see him play a Demon in Yeats's *Countess Kathleen*, Bloomfield Bonnington in *The Doctor's Dilemma* or Boyle in *Juno*.[6]

There is evidence that, from an early stage in the composition of *Juno*, O'Casey envisaged Barry Fitzgerald as "Captain" Boyle, Sara Allgood as the heroine, and F. J.McCormick as "Joxer", and this circumstance, while possibly making little difference to the scope and purpose of the work as a whole, no doubt accounted for certain details in its characterisation and, perhaps, even its shape and dramatic proportions to some extent. It is most likely that the existence in the theatre company of a magnificent full-blooded comedian like Barry Fitzgerald encouraged the dramatist to give full expression to his love of idiosyncratic characters and speech and to make Boyle's role as prominent as it is. McCormick's adaptability as a "character" actor may account for the creation of a parasitical person who has little dramatic justification other than as the foil to, and "feed" for the Captain and yet acts as a splendid support for the leading male figure and, indeed, becomes a distinct personality in his own right. Certainly, the scenes between Boyle and Joxer are invariably characterised by dramatic writing of a high order and provide the comic highlights of the play.

III

Shortly before *Juno* was first staged, W. B. Yeats—the managing director of the Abbey—wrote a brief public tribute to the theatre's leading lady, Sara

Allgood, in which he urged Irish playwrights to provide her with dramatic material commensurate with her talent. At the same time he disclosed that Sean O'Casey had written a rewarding part for her in his latest play, which was then in rehearsal:

> Miss Sara Allgood is a great folk-actress. As so often happens with a great actor or actress, she rose into fame with a school of drama [early in the twentieth century, at the beginning of the Abbey's history]. . . . It has been more difficult in recent years to supply her with adequate parts, for Dublin is a little tired of its admirable folk-arts, political events having turned our minds elsewhere. . . . I am looking forward with great curiosity to seeing her in [Sierra's] *Two Shepherds*, which is just now going into rehearsal, and one of our Irish dramatists, Mr Casey [sic], has in his new play, *Juno and the Paycock*, given her an excellent part.[7]

Miss Allgood, who, as Yeats reminded his readers, was the dominant female personality in the early years of the little theatre in Marlborough Street, had returned to Dublin and to the Abbey Theatre only a few months before this article was written. She had been many years abroad and was not with the Abbey when O'Casey's first play was staged there in April 1923; moreover, though she was in the company shortly before his second one, *Kathleen Listens In*, was performed in October of the same year, she was not cast for it nor was there a part written for her in it. Her work must soon have come to the attention of the writer, however, and with some force because the female leads in each one of his next three plays—*Juno and the Paycock*, *Nannie's Night Out*, and *The Plough and the Stars*—were definitely written with her in mind.[8] Moreover, it can be argued that, although *Kathleen Listens In* bears a woman's name in the title, neither that drama nor the preceding one contains any really important women's parts, at least from an acting point of view. O'Casey realises the women's standpoint with great sympathy and understanding in *The Shadow of a Gunman*, but it is the men who have the most rewarding stage roles. In the three plays that followed *Kathleen*, though, the leading women's parts are arguably the best in each work. Certainly, Juno Boyle, "Irish" Nannie, and Bessie Burgess each possesses a depth and stature unapproached by any of the author's earlier female figures, and it is assuredly not an accident that this new dimension in his writing makes its appearance at the moment that Sara Allgood returns to the company.

One cannot say that the character of Juno would never have been written had not Miss Allgood re-emerged on the Dublin theatrical scene. An earlier sketch is found in the mother of the hero in *The Harvest Festival* and a

much later one in *Red Roses for Me,* both written without Sara Allgood in mind. But it is surely no exaggeration to claim that the knowledge that a mature actress of her stature was available to play such a part must have helped encourage the change of emphasis in O'Casey's characterisation at this particular time. In both *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and the Stars* there are several other fine women's parts, too. Mrs. Maisie Madigan, though her role is a brief one, provides something of a tour de force for an actress for the period she is on-stage in Act II of *Juno.* Mrs. Jinnie Gogan is designed as a very effective foil to Bessie Burgess in the following play. The actress Maureen Delany, who took the part of Mrs. Madigan in the Dublin premiere of *Juno,* was no doubt originally intended by the playwright to create Jinnie Gogan. With Sara Allgood away in London, playing Juno in the English premiere of the work, the way was clear for the younger woman to take over the role intended for the Abbey's leading lady. Miss Delany played Bessie in the world premiere of *The Plough,* went on to re-create the role on many later occasions in and outside Ireland, and also regularly took the part of Juno Boyle in subsequent revivals of the earlier work.

Sara Allgood knew that the part of Bessie Burgess had been written for her portrayal at the Abbey, and she was piqued that the London success of *Juno and the Paycock* should rob her of creating the part on its initial stage appearance. She seems to have expected that the Abbey should delay producing *The Plough* until *Juno* came to an end in London. One can hardly blame the Abbey in this matter, however. There was no knowledge how long *Juno* would last in England (in fact it ran for 202 performances in the capital) or, indeed, whether the Irish Players would not be tempted to tour the English provinces afterwards with their production of the play. Instead of this, they staged *The Plough* with Maureen Delany as Mrs. Burgess, opening a few months after the Abbey's world premiere of the work. Besides, *The Plough's* completion and its submission to the Abbey Theatre were facts widely known in Dublin and its production by the theatre was perhaps the most eagerly awaited event in the history of that theatre. It was quite impossible for the production to be delayed indefinitely until Miss Allgood returned to Dublin.

Writing to the actress from Dublin shortly before *Juno* opened in London, the playwright attempted to console her in his usual kindly way:

> It can't be helped that you aren't here to play Bessie; you'll surely add laurels to my fame where you are. I haven't the slightest doubt that *Juno* is going to be a big success, and that the Company will 'quit themselves like men' (as St. Paul would say). If the O'Casey banner be lowered in Dublin it's only that it

may be raised in London, and, since we cannot divide you into two equal parts, 'we must be satisfied' (as Synge would say). . . . *The Plough* will not be going on [in Dublin] till after Christmas (November 7, 1925).

A month later, following the critical and popular success of *Juno*—his first play staged outside Ireland—the dramatist wrote to the actress again:

A dramatic success is as big a nuisance as a dramatic failure.[9] I have been flooded with letters, till I feel like Job, I could curse God and die! All the same, Sally, I'm delighted that *Juno* is going so well, and sincerely hope she may have a long and useful life. I hope you are pleased with the grand notices you are getting; while they may make your heart flutter, I hope they won't fill your head with contempt for your poorer brothers and sisters. The best way is to take them quietly and murmur—Well, what the hell else could they say. I cannot offer you congratulations, for you have done nothing that I did not know was in you to do. I'm sorry I can't send you MS. of *The Plough and the Stars*, had only 3 copies; one at Abbey, one to the Agents, and one to Macmillan & Co. who are going to publish it. As soon is it is published, you will have one of the first copies (December 7, 1925).

Miss Allgood was clearly determined to stake a definite claim to the part of Bessie in any forthcoming production outside Dublin, however, as we learn from a further letter by the dramatist:

Thanks for letter, and glad to hear that *Juno* is still winning your laurels which you needn't hesitate to wear. Hope W[inston] Churchill liked the play—[though I] don't care a damn whether he did or not. The American Rights of *The Plough* are in the hands of Curtis Brown. J. B. Fagan has written offering terms for the English and American rights; I have replied to him—I should like if possible to contract with him—and I haven't heard from him yet. I don't know that I could stipulate that you should play Bessie B. in England and in N.Y. If we could lop you in two there would be no difficulty, but, alas, we can't, and even Sally can be in one place only at a time! (December 21, 1925).

These quietly evasive tactics were evidently unsuccessful, judging by the author's next letter, written within a week of the last one (what a pity that her letters have not survived!) It opens: "Now, now, now, Sally!" and continues:

'Provided I think you're good enough to play Bessie Burgess'. There's a little bit of a joke in that, Sally, but I'll forgive you since Christmas is behind us. My difficulty is this: it's almost certain that I shall come to terms with J. B. Fagan for the English rights of *The Plough*, and, possibly, the American Rights as well; plus a possible tour of *Juno* in the Provinces; Bessie in New York and both [Juno and Bessie in England]. And the same difficulty arises with A.

> Sinclair, M. O'Neill and others of the London Co. You see, Sally, a great artist is both a blessing and a nuisance: he or she can only be in one place at a time. That you will play Bessie somewhere, is certain; or Drama will lose a genius, for if you refused, there'd be a death, and it wouldn't be mine! . . . I'm busy now looking over typescript of *The Plough* for the Publishers. I see where Robbie [Lennox Robinson, who directed the first Dublin production of *The Plough*] read the last act of the play at a lecture he gave in the Liverpool University. He thinks the last act splendid, and Bessie has a fine part in it. I'm looking forward to seeing you enthrall audiences in the interpretation (December 28, 1925).

Eventually, *The Plough* opened early in February 1926 at the Abbey while Sara Allgood was still in *Juno* in London. A further letter from O'Casey (dated February 10, 1926) shows how the actress reacted in the circumstances:

> Ah, thanks indeed to you for your very kind telegram wishing me success, and thanks again and more than thanks for your message to [Maureen] Delany [who played Bessie]. You'll never be able, Sally, to close up your warm and generous heart! The play went splendidly, and the bookings have broken all records. Maureen was really very good, and worked like a Trojan woman. We had a little trouble when the play was being cast [O'Casey is writing before the riots on the fourth night of the first week], Miss Crowe objecting to a good deal of the dialogue in her part (grand dialogue too) and May Craig had to take her place [as Mrs Gogan]. Sheila Richards was, I think, magnificent in the part of young Nora: she has, I believe, in her something of the genius of Sally Allgood—and that's saying a hell of a lot.

These letters have been quoted at some length because, quite apart from being the only surviving ones between the dramatist and his first leading lady,[10] they show the writer's keen interest in the interpreters of his work: it is a very great pity that his correspondence with Barry Fitzgerald appears to have been lost save for the odd carbon copy among his papers.

IV

It is perhaps significant that, in Yeats's article quoted earlier, the poet should emphasize Miss Allgood's genius in comedy as well as tragedy; he spoke of her as "not only a great actress, but that rarest of all things, a woman comedian; for stage humour is almost a male prerogative". Knowledge of her ability in both spheres allowed O'Casey in *Juno* to create a difficult part for a leading lady which requires her to hold the serious balance of the play—and to "lift" it at the appropriate moment into high tragedy—despite the

presence in the play of two consummate comedians with splendid comic parts. At the same time, while her major task, technically, is to prevent the play toppling into farce, she must also portray in a sympathetic way the wife who nags her husband and who is neither irritating nor boring to the audience. O'Casey makes considerable demands on the actress playing his heroine; knowledge of Sara Allgood's presence in the company gave him confidence that these demands could be more than adequately fulfilled.

I am not saying that *Juno and the Paycock*, say, would never have been written had not the author a definite and talented cast in mind—clearly, it could have been—or even that Boyle and Juno (and perhaps Joxer) would have been very difficult characters if O'Casey had not written them for realisation by Fitzgerald, Miss Allgood, and McCormick. But I do suggest that the proportioning of the play was almost certainly influenced by this consideration. The great strength of the Abbey at the time was the large number of good male actors that it contained—all of them capable of doing "character" parts—and its assured playing in comedy. In each successive full-length play that O'Casey wrote for this company there is a marked increase in the number of rounded character parts for men, and, as James Agate noticed, the larger part of each of the plays that he entitled "tragedies" was in fact taken up with his unique kind of comedy. The dramatic critic of the *Sunday Times* wrote of *Juno and the Paycock*, when it first appeared on the London stage:

> The tragic element in it occupies at the most twenty minutes, and . . . for the remaining two hours and a half the piece is given up to gorgeous and incredible fooling.[11]

It should be added, though, that in each of these plays—from *The Shadow of a Gunman* to *The Silver Tassie*, inclusive—this fooling, though it usually starts as light-hearted fun or fantasy (sometimes both, as in Boyle's description of his life as a "deep-sea sailor"), gradually becomes tinged with more and more serious overtones in the course of the action. In each case, by the end of the drama, the most absurdly farcical speeches and actions are also—*at the same time*—deeply tragic in relation to the total dramatic situation. There is most of the time a sharply serious critical purpose behind the comic action: Dublin is burning while a whole city of Neros drink and escape into fantasy.

In his book, *Sean O'Casey: The Man I Knew*, Gabriel Fallon has testified that when O'Casey first mentioned that he was writing a play about the Irish Civil War the theme that preoccupied the playwright in conversation at this time was the tragic story of the young Republican Irregular who had be-

trayed a comrade in the movement to his death.[12] There is no reason to suppose that this account is inaccurate as a recollection of the playwright's reminiscences at this time because, though the early manuscript version of the play (clearly the first draft, too) keeps Johnny Boyle's role as subservient to the main action as does the final printed version, the playright, with his mind full of the play's characters, may well have spoken about the originals of some of them and have dwelt on the betrayal theme in particular. His autobiographies show how strongly he felt about the murders and reprisals among former comrades,[13] and betrayal is a significant element in *Juno and the Paycock* itself. Be that as it may, in the play as it evolved this tragic theme and the character of Johnny Boyle who realises it in his person, though vitally important, are given much less prominence than are the actions and antics of "Captain" Boyle and Joxer Daly. The rich comic talents of Fitzgerald and McCormick, and the ability of many others in the Abbey company, too, to play Dublin "character parts" indubitably influenced O'Casey in this direction. The playwright's dramatic genius, it seems to me, is most fully realised in his comic writing, and the Abbey company, in encouraging and exploiting this aspect of his work afforded him a creative partnership in the very best sense. That the same company in later years tended to overplay the comedy and make the Dublin characterisation a good deal broader than originally envisaged is neither here nor there. It is the creative response and interaction of O'Casey and the tiny group he initially wrote for that remains of enduring interest.

NOTES

1. Preface to *The Playboy of the Western World*, dated January 21, 1907.
2. The stage version of *The Plough and the Stars*, for example, prepared for the press by O'Casey and published by Samuel French in 1932, shows a good deal of dialogue for Nora Clitheroe cut in Act III: such deletions undoubtedly help director and actress in staging the play, but the playwrgiht retained the speeches in subsequent Macmillan editions (including the *Collected Plays* text of 1949), presumably because they make the viewpoint of Nora clear on certain points.
3. This letter and others to Lady Gregory quoted in the present article are here published for the first time. The copyright belongs to Mrs. Eileen O'Casey whose generous cooperation is gratefully appreciated by the author.
4. The original of this letter is now in Southern Illinois University Library. It is a reply to Robinson's letter of September 28, 1922, which quoted Yeats's criticisms of *The Crimson in the Tricolour*. Among Yeats's comments appears the following passage which is startlingly prophetic so far as the poet's be-

wilderment when confronted by *The Silver Tassie* is concerned: "I find this discursive play very hard to judge for it is a type of play I do not understand. The drama of it is loose and vague. . . . It is a story without meaning—a story where nothing happens except that a wife runs away from a husband to whom we had not the least idea that she was married, and the Mansion House lights are turned out because of some wrong to a man who never appears in the story" (handwritten notes, dated June 19, 1922, also in Southern Illinois University Library).

5. E. Blythe, *The Abbey Theatre* (Dublin, [1963]), p. 13.
6. Letter dated June 24, 1928, here published for the first time.
7. W. B. Yeats, "Sara Allgood", *Irish Times*, January 19, 1924.
8. Information derived from conversations with the playwright.
9. The dramatist's sentiments here echo what he said in a letter he sent to Lady Gregory, dated November 1, 1925, before *The Plough* opened in London: "I have mixed feelings about the London production of *Juno*: there is loss as well as gain in the exaltation. My heart was set on Sally Allgood to play 'Bessie Burgess' in *The Plough*, and now she is gone, and the glory has departed from Israel! To me *Juno* has gone to live among the shades, while the new Play is waiting to have breathed into it the breath of life, and however great its biogenesis may be, it will feel the loss of Sally's soul."
10. The letters quoted in this essay are the only surviving ones from O'Casey to Sara Allgood, apart from two short notes (dated February 23, 1926, and November 4, 1932) of very little interest; none of them have hitherto been published.
11. *The Sunday Times*, November 16, 1925.
12. *Sean O'Casey: The Man I Knew* (London, 1965), p. 19 and p. 24.
13. There are many examples but I would particularly emphasize the chapter "Comrades", in *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well* (London, 1949).