

**RESEARCH PAPER****The Use of Expressionistic Technique in O'Casey's Play 'The Silver Tassie'****Shalini Agarwal**

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Email: shaliniagarwal1900@gmail.comReceived: 9th December 2017, Revised: 5th February 2018, Accepted: 7th February 2018**ABSTRACT**

Sean O'Casey, an Irish dramatist is well known for experimenting with the theme and technique in his plays. His plays suffered adverse theatrical and critical responses but he never yielded. The play- *The Silver Tassie* was rejected by the directors of the Abbey due to the use of expressionistic technique to probe deep into the psychological reality of the characters and to unveil the face of war without any noise. The study aims to analyse that O'Casey has made a very effective use of symbol, stagecraft, colour, prop, punctuation to give heightening and widening effect. Expression through abstraction would be anathema to O'Casey's artistic vision.

Key words: Expressionistic Technique, O'Casey's Play, *Silver Tassie*

INTRODUCTION

Sean O'Casey, An Irish dramatist is well known for experimenting with the theme and technique in the plays eventually his plays have withstood adverse theatrical and critical responses ever since his first dramatic performance at the Abbey but O'Casey never yielded before anyone. In art, he would go to even antagonising W.B. Yeats, once a great admirer of his works as artistic effort, on the issue of the rejection of his play i.e. *The Silver Tassie* by the Abbey. All the directors of the theatre were against the performance of the play.

O'Casey had been introduced to the expressionism by the Dublin Drama League's presentation of Earnest Toller's *Masse Mensch*. Fallon has commented on the expressionist influence on O'Casey- 'but the play in the Drama League's repertoire which has a lasting (and some say blasting) effect on Sean O'Casey's career as a dramatist was undoubtedly Toller's *Masse Mensch* which was presented at the Abbey theatre under the title *Masses and Men*; and it was form even more than the content of the play that appealed to him'.

Krause asserts that O'Casey knew the play as early as 1924 and this play influence *The Silver Tassie* style decisively. Before entering into the discussion of the play let us first see *what is expressionism*. The term was first used in painting in Germany. Briefly summarised the main principle evolved is that expression determines form and therefore imagery, punctuation and indeed any of the formal rules and elements of writing can be bent or disjointed to suit the purpose. In fact expressionism dominated the theatre for a time in 1920s. Theatrically it was a reaction against realism and aimed to show inner psychological realities.

Expressionist Drama was concerned not with society but with man. It aimed to offer subjective psychological analysis, not so much of an individual as of a type and it made much of the subconscious; for such a study established dramatic forms and method of expression were inadequate and the expressionists threw overboard conventional structure in favour of an unrestricted freedom. The dialogue was often cryptic and patterned, now prose and was in everyday as far removed from the naturalistic prose of the realist school as can well be imagined.

In 1929, O'Casey breaks from the traditional realism and professedly enter into the dramatic workshop of bold experimentation in the *Tassie* act II has been presented through an expressionistic technique i.e. a war zone. Besides this, in act I and III O'Casey has made a significant use of non-naturalistic devices, Such as symbol, imagery, monolog etc.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

In the play the protagonist Harry Hegan, other character- Sylvester Hegan, Simon Norton have from the beginning a symbolic role. The opening stage direction unmistakably demonstrate the dramatist's use of stage itself spells out his technical intentions "The eating sitting and part sleeping room of the Hegan family, a large window at the back looks on to a quay, from which can be seen the centremost of the steamer, at the top of which gleams a white light. Another window at right looks down on a side street."

Norton the props and colour symbolism of the room suggest homeliness and comfort with a reference forward to what the terrible predicament it meted out to the Hegans are, imbued with sinister with symbolism. For example the table with the flower vase flanking the shield, above which in the corner is predominantly placed the hero's portrait suggests the sacrificial alter for the hero. The alter image is completed by the portrayal of the priestess, Susie which gives an equivocal image of her "defiantly" hiding her sexuality in religiosity by "a long dark blue skirt and bodice buttoning up to the throat," and her "polishing a Lee Enfield rifle whose butt is resting on the table"- an overt phallic symbol near the table suggesting an alter which is shown in a twinkle light in acts III and IV. Another example is Susie's Cassandra-like prophesying, though in a hypocritical manner- the destructiveness which is going to overtake the Hegans.

O'Casey's intention is satiric on the ritual of human sacrifice as enacted in the war and approved by the church. In act II, the ritual of mass becomes a Black Mass atoning death not a part of natural cycle but a conscious choice of a state and a church dedicated to war. Through Harry and other soldiers, O'Casey has tried to show the horror of war and the inner psychological reality of the soldiers who seem to be brave but actually an ordinary human being praying for their life to God in trenches. We see it in the speech of Barney-

"we're here because we're here, because we're here, because we're here!"

The painful awareness of the soldiers is expressed in Harry's bitter words, 'the Lord hath given and man hath taken away!' springs from an overwhelming sense of pity, fear and sympathy. Here is an antithesis over simplified at callous attitude towards the victim of wars- such as Harry- expressed in the form of song.

*For he is a life on the ebb,
We a full life on the flow!*

The use of quarrels and domestic turmoils convey a more universal stage of chassis through allegory and symbols. Through a metaphor he has describe 'the odious figure of war astride tumbled buildings, sniffing up the evil smell of burning ashes'.

The war zone in the second act seems to be created by the Croucher's prophetic intoning of the Biblical passage from Ezekiel, the soldiers' chanting the cause of present condition! Your king, your country and your murver as you are.

Among the ruins of a monastery, the desecrated crucifix leaning forward grotesquely, the Christ like figure stretching out an arm, the stained glass madonna made 'vividly apparent' by lights inside the ruined monastery is white faced, bearing a black robe apparently uncaring and unresponsive. The very absence of colour- the black and the white suggests the sterility of church and its remoteness of man's life.

The landscape stretching to the horizon is bleak and frightening. Here heaps of rubbish, the crisscross pattern of the barbed wire bordering the trenches mark horror.

VISION OF THE DRAMATIST

When O'Casey reached London he found the theatre dominated by Corvard, Pinero, and Sherriff type Ibsenian naturalism. Thus he was diverted from the realistic drama to experiment with something new. We quote an extract to substantiate our statement-"....no real character can be put in a play unless some of the reality is taken out of him through the heightening widening deepening of the character by the dramatist who creates them." O'Casey himself wrote, "I wished to show the face and unveil the soul of war. I wanted a war play without noise..."

To recapitulate, the play *The Silver Tassie* explores the inner psychological reality of the characters on the real and the superficial level. The war zone has been created effectively through the use of

different expressionistic devices like the stagecraft, poetic speeches of the Croucher, soldiers, colour prop, juxtaposition, montage, etc.

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