

The Irish Daughter in O'Casey's *Within the Gates*

Kumiko Yamada

Introduction

Sean O'Casey abandoned the realism of his earlier plays and experimented with expressionism¹ in *The Silver Tassie* (1929), which marks a transition in O'Casey's themes and technique. *Within the Gates* (1934)², O'Casey's work after *The Silver Tassie*, is depicted by using the expressionistic techniques of music and symbolic dance. Katharine Worth observes that O'Casey's technique was derived from Yeats:

He [O'Casey] was the coloniser of the Yeatsian theatre and in a way the populariser too, for although his experimental drama did not achieve popularity in his own time, being too far ahead of it he gave a massive demonstration in the thirties and forties of how the Yeatsian dance drama could be opened up into popular forms and serve many purposes, including social satire, without necessarily losing the 'interior' dimension.³

We can say with certainty that O'Casey's works after *The Silver Tassie* are similar to the theatre technique of Yeats. It is, however, obvious that O'Casey was unsympathetic to Yeats because *The Silver Tassie* was refused presentation at the Abbey Theatre as a 'bad play' by Yeats, and O'Casey moved to London deeply

1 According to the definition in Jack A. Vaughn, *Drama A to Z* (New York: Frederick Unger, 1987), dramatic expressionism opposed realism on the grounds that surface reality does not represent truth as it is known by the subconscious mind. William A. Armstrong describes: "O'Casey was acquainted with some of the expressionist plays of Strindberg, Ernst Toller, and Eugene O'Neill, but he would probably have evolved expressionist techniques even if he had knowledge of earlier examples of them." [*Sean O'Casey*, (London: Longman Group, 1967) 17-18.]

2 At first *Within the Gates* was written as a film scenario whose title was "The Green Gates". *Within the Gates* was published in 1933.

3 Katharine Worth, *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (London: The Athlone Press, 1987) 220.

grieved. Hugh Hunt states that there was only one way open to him--to fight the man [Yeats] himself,⁴ while Worth mentions that O'Casey never lost his admiration for the poet Yeats even after the refusal of the play. Here, perhaps it is right to say at the outset that *Within the Gates* is paradoxically a written challenge to Yeats's plays.

O'Casey once criticized Yeats's plays for being influenced by the techniques of Noh plays with dance and musical instruments, and O'Casey wrote the following in his autobiography:

. . . Yeats's idea of a Noh play blossomed for a brief moment, then the artificial petals faded and dropped lonely to the floor, because a Japanese spirit had failed to climb into the soul of a Kelt.⁵

Although one of the common themes of O'Casey and Yeats is "the soul of a Kelt" in their plays, O'Casey thought that a Noh play was not suitable to express "the soul of a Kelt." It seems, however, that O'Casey became interested only in the technique after he saw Yeats's play *At the Hawk's Well* (1917),⁶ because O'Casey's later plays can be seen as similar to Yeats's technique, which Worth points out. Therefore, we can assume that in *Within the Gates*, O'Casey tries to portray "the soul of a Kelt" with the same theatrical technique as the challenge to Yeats. If this play is O'Casey's challenge to Yeats, O'Casey represents "the soul of a Kelt," namely the Irish spirit, into which O'Casey thought Yeats failed to climb. The purpose of this paper is to show that the Young Woman is a woman who has the Irish spirit and is thus an antithesis to Yeats who "had failed to climb into the soul of a Kelt". Therefore, the point I would like to argue is that the Irish spirit is represented by a female character, the prostitute called the Young Woman.

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⁴ Hugh Hunt, *Sean O'Casey* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980) 66.

⁵ Sean O'Casey, *Inishfallen Fare Thee Well* (London: Macmillan, 1949) 289.

⁶ O'Casey saw *At the Hawk's Well* in 1924.

In *Within the Gates* the characters have no names except for allegorical titles, for instance, the Young Woman, the Atheist, the Bishop, the Old Woman and the Dreamer. It is significant that the central character is a woman who searches for salvation. O'Casey expresses his sympathy for the weak in his plays, and although the weak are not always women, the Young Woman as the weak person is emphasized in this play. This emphasis is explained by indicating two points, 1) being a woman and 2) being a prostitute in society. A woman is a weak person in a patriarchal society. We will first examine how a patriarchal society is emphasized throughout the play.

First, to some extent, O'Casey's female character, the Young Woman, is like Electra in a Greek tragedy or in Eugene O'Neill's *Morning Becomes Electra*, which influenced O'Casey, as he acknowledges in the stage direction of the *Within the Gates*. Electra killed her mother who had betrayed her father and thus showed loyalty to her father. From a feminist point of view, there is fairly general agreement that the mother had to be killed by her daughter for the purpose of maintaining patriarchy, because the existence of Mother⁷ was strong and important. The Young Woman is a 'father's daughter' who has an Electra complex because she despises her mother and tries to rely on her father. Therefore, we can say that the existence of the Young Woman as Electra reflects upon the patriarchal society, although this question will be further explored later in the paper.

Second, the background of the play is Hyde Park in London, where many kinds of people walk and gather, which symbolizes a microcosm of modern Britain. O'Casey's central thrust in *Within the Gates* is that bourgeois capitalism and institutionalized Christianity have caused both economic and spiritual depression in western society by repressing rather than celebrating life.⁸ Two elements, bourgeois capitalism and the century-long oppression of Christianity, are situated on the apex of the patriarchal society.

Third, in the play Hyde Park has an atmosphere of a Christian world, which symbolizes Eden over which God dominates, where the Bishop has a great influence, as God's messenger, over many kinds of people. Thereby a prostitute, the Young Woman, takes the role of Eve created by God, the figure who ate the forbidden fruit and precipitated the fall of human kind out of innocence into sin.

⁷ Bachofen insists that matriarchal society existed earlier the society which Father ruled. In ancient Celtic myth, mythology, many important and powerful figures were goddesses.

⁸ Doris DaRin, *Sean O'Casey* (New York: Frederick Unger, 1976) 158.

The Young Woman knows how to attract a man by using her physical attributes. When the Readers reading papers in the Park try to drive her away, she raises her skirt and scorns the Readers with "don't look at me long, for there's only venom for a woman in the things ye think of her. The dear joy of a sin ye turn to a sting and a bruising."⁹

Within the Gates has a background of a patriarchal society and, therefore, the Young Woman is a weak woman who lives in a patriarchal society. She is, moreover, a prostitute who lives in the worst of society. We will discuss the role of the Young Woman, who symbolizes every woman with whom O'Casey sympathizes. The following is O'Casey's explanation about the symbol of the Young Woman:

'The Young Whore', symbol of those young women full of life and a fine energy, gracious and kind, to whom life fails to respond, and who are determined to be wicked rather than virtuous out of conformity or fear.¹⁰

Here, attention must be paid to the fact that the name of the character is not the Young Woman but the Young Whore. The Young Woman of *Within the Gates* has a pure spirit and energy, although she is also a prostitute who is normally regarded as a wicked woman. However, the image of the Young Woman is not really that of a cold-hearted prostitute who is a wicked woman; nor is she a virtuous woman with a decadent spirit who is a hypocrite. Therefore, the point O'Casey wishes to make is that the Young Woman as a Whore is a wicked woman on the surface only, but the Young Woman's mind is still pure. In *The Plough and the Stars*, O'Casey also depicts Rosie with sympathy as a prostitute who had pride. It seems that O'Casey sympathizes with a woman in the lowest position of society whom many may condemn as a wicked woman.

Doris DaRin insists that the Young Woman symbolizes every man and woman:

⁹ Sean O'Casey, *Collected Plays II, Within the Gates* (1951; London: Macmillan, 1967) 186. Subsequent references are to this edition and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

¹⁰ Sean O'Casey, *Blasts and Benedictions: Articles and Stories*, selected and introduced by Ronald Ayling (London: Macmillan, 1967) 114.

Symbolically, the dying Jannice [the Young Woman] also stands for every man and woman in search of salvation in a trying world.¹¹

The above indicates as the theme of the play as long as the Young Woman stands for every woman, but the Young Woman as a symbol for every man and woman is debatable. O'Casey's plays are marked by sympathy for the weak, and in the play the weak is the oppressed woman, not a man. Therefore, the Young Woman stands for every woman. In this section the main stress falls on an oppressed woman "in search of salvation in a trying world" of a patriarchal society. The woman who departs from the role prescribed for her by patriarchal society is one of the most popular figures in Western Literature.¹² The woman of O'Casey's *Within the Gates* is true for this view.

II

In *Within the Gates*, the Bishop, the Atheist and the Dreamer take important roles which affect the Young Woman. In this section we will discuss the transformation of the Young Woman's spirit by examining the relationship between them and her.

The relationship between the Young Woman and the Bishop is told by the Atheist in Act One. When the Bishop was a student of theology, he deserted her and her mother, the Old Woman, without marriage, and the Young Woman was left in a convent. The mother married an Irish dragoon, but he died in battle. After that, her mother married the Atheist and the Young Woman was taken from the convent. However, the couple, the Old Woman and the Atheist, did not get along well, and the Young Woman ran away from home and became a prostitute. Therefore, the Young Woman has two fathers, her natural father, the Bishop, and her stepfather, the Atheist. Among the many men surrounding the Young Woman, her fathers affect her unconsciousness.

¹¹ DaRin, 159.

¹² Carol and Katherine Pope, *The Female Hero in America and British Literature* (New York: the R R Bowker, 1981) 79.

First, we will begin by exploring the relationship between the Young Woman and her fathers. The Bishop is the conventional authority, and the Atheist, paradoxically, is a real believer in God. The Young Woman's mind, faced with a crisis, hovers between the two fathers, and she asks them to help her search for salvation. The Bishop, regarding her as a morally fallen woman, refuses her, "I'm afraid I can help only those whom I know." (159) This statement helps to demonstrate the Bishop's hypocrisy.

On the other hand, the Atheist also refuses the Young Woman. When the Young Woman tries to rely on him as her father, he refuses her, although he had previously taken her from the convent. The Atheist does not accept her as his daughter any more. His refusal is shown in the conversation with the Young Woman as follows:

The Young Woman. [persuasively catching hold of his arm] I want you to help me, Dad; I'll go mad if I have to live alone any longer.

Atheist. No, no; no more that. Live your own life. I'm not your father, so cut out the daddy business.(141)

In either case, her attitude toward the two fathers symbolically shows her dependence on the power of fatherhood. There can be no doubt that a father has power over his daughter. The refusal by the Atheist, however, forces her to become independent and to live her own life, not relying on a father. All this time, from the Atheist's point of view, she does not stand in the sphere of his influence.

The Bishop's compromise with her as her father is to send her to the convent again, namely the sphere of the Authority, although the Young Woman had previously left it with the Atheist's help. In short, judging from the depiction of her and her two fathers in the play, their relationship reflects the power of a father and the powerlessness of a daughter in a patriarchal society. At the end of the play the Bishop is a changed man, for Jannice's [the Young Woman's] tragic death has brought him around to a more compassionate view of life.¹³ The fact that the Bishop guides her hand as she makes the sign of the cross, however, proves the father's power in this world.

¹³ David Krause, *Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work* (New York: Macmillan, 1960) 153.

On the other hand, the relationship between the Young Woman and her mother, the Old Woman, is an estranged one. The first thing one notices is that the daughter never relies on her mother, and the Young Woman thinks that her miserable life is due to the sin of her mother. While her mother does not take a noticeable role as her mother, there is no story of their relationship in the play. Although the Old Woman is oppressed by her former lover the Bishop, the Young Woman does not sympathize with her. The invaluable figure of the mother with her daughter never threatens the father's power in a patriarchal society. The daughter, holding a father's sense of value in common, respects her father and despises her mother. These examples help show that the Young Woman is a 'father's daughter' like Electra.

The Dreamer is the most important person in the drama. The Dreamer is never defeated by the Authority, and as a poet he leads the soul of the Young Woman to joy. O'Casey's philosophy for the poet can be explained by Donald Davoren in *The Shadow of a Gunman*.

I am a pioneer in thought.¹⁴

. . . to the poet the end of life is the life that he creates for himself; life has a stifling grip upon the people's throat--it is the poet's musician. The poet ever strives to save the people; . . .¹⁵

The Dreamer has the principle of an artist in common with Donal Davoren. It seems that this principle is that of O'Casey himself as a playwright.

The Dreamer saves the Young Woman from some powers oppressing her and teaches her the joy of life by fighting against suffering. She accepts him and his teachings by instinct. Her dance with the Dreamer, and the dance before her death, symbolize her passionate soul and defiance of her world. Although the Dreamer and the Atheist, who both call her Jannice when she obtains her joy in life, have the principle of salvation in common, the Dreamer is a man who does not have the power of her father, "You fought the good fight, Jannice; and you kept the faith."(231) In this case, the faith is neither Christianity nor any other

¹⁴ Sean O'Casey, *Seven Plays by Sean O'Casey*, ed. Ronald Ayling, *The Shadow of a Gunman* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985) 14.

¹⁵ O'Casey, *The Shadow*, 25.

religion, but spiritualism about life or joy in life. This faith is an integral part of O'Casey's life; its absence is the root of all tragedy.¹⁶ The Young Woman could obtain salvation in a trying world, and she found a true faith in her mind and spirit.

III

O'Casey's use of the cycle of nature magnifies the symbol of life and sexuality, as John O'Riordan concludes. Nature in O'Casey's plays is associated with sexual energies in contrast to contemporary religion,¹⁷ and thus nature can be linked to fertility. We will now extend the discussion into the relation between the Young Woman and nature.

In the beginning of the play the fertility of nature epitomizes youth, rebirth and life. As the play progresses, the seasons change from spring to winter, and the time of day from morning to evening. Although it is in proportion to the Young Woman's physical life, it is inverse in proportion to the development of her soul.

First, we shall focus on the Young Woman Jannice, and the Gardener handling nature—plants and flowers. From the Gardener's point of view, the image of the Young Woman is that of a fatal woman who has the female sexual power to attract a man and lead him to his ruin, such as described in the *Crowd of Couples'* song;

When Adam first corner'd Eve he stood bewildered
there,
for he saw beauty shining through a mist of Golden
hair;
But Eve quickly coaxed him on, and show'd him
woman's way,(137)

The Gardener does not turn his eyes to her mind and refuses her proposal. His love for the Young Woman is only selfish lust, as is proved by the Gardener's words,

¹⁶ Saros Cowasjee, *Sean O'Casey: The Man Behind the Plays* (New York: St. Martin's, 1964) 137.

¹⁷ John O'Riordan, *A Guide to O'Casey Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1984) 149.

"She'll be the honey-suckle, I'll be the bee!"(136) If a woman is a flower, the Gardener handling the blossoms is her controller. The Dreamer's words, by contrast, sound sarcastic: "I envy you the handling a flower by day and a girl by night." (136)

The difference between the Gardener's ideal and the Dreamer's, moreover, is implied in the scene before the folk dance. Ronald G. Rollins provides an appropriate account of the Gardener's ideal:

. . . it is the Gardener who carries the black maypole, ancient phallic symbol. That is to be used in the folk dancing designed to make England "merry again" Ironically, the Gardener does not really want to make things grow; he shuns marriage and so must carry a black maypole, symbolic of his denial of life's creative urges.¹⁸

From the above, we can find that the folk dance suggests sexuality and fertility. However, the Gardener's ideal only suggests sexuality. Thus, the Gardener never gives the Young Woman real joy and life.

There is one further important quality that we must not ignore. It is the existence of a woman named the Policewoman who assumes a mask of morality. She arrests the Young Woman for tempting a man. A fatal woman is considered as a fallen woman from the moral point of view in Christian society. Thus, a fatal woman, or a prostitute, becomes the target of criticism for the church in its authoritative role, and the church's position is further supported by the women who assume a mask of morality.

O'Casey did not, however, terminate the play leaving the Young Woman as an object under oppressing power. As a result, the Young Woman can find an exit by the Dreamer's help from the garden which the Gardener controls. Then the Dreamer asks her name for the first time. when she was close to understanding his principle. It seems that his asking is an image of ritual in a myth. Ronald G. Rollins explains what the name Jannice means :

¹⁸ Harold Bloom, ed. *Sean O'Casey*, Ronald G. Rollins, "From Ritual to Romance in *Within the Gates and Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*" (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987) 25.

So Jannice vacillates between two positions. At times, she is the passionate person; she would be the wanton, the scarlet lady with a *carpe diem* ethic. Another moment, she is the pious person, inhibited, introspective, and fearful of the wrath of God. Thus a duality is in her character, and hence the name Jannice, a variation of Janus, the Roman god of two faces—two moods or orientations.¹⁹

In a different essay, Rollins insists that Jannice is like the Roman goddess Diana who has two faces or two distinct aspects to her person. I agree with the former insistence that Jannice is like Janus. Janus is not only a goddess but a god, being regarded or worshipped as having power over nature, who controls human affairs. The inverse proportion to the cycle of nature and the estrangement of Jannice's soul from the Gardener does not come under the category of a goddess symbolic of the power of nature—birth, life, death.

We shall refer to a theory by Luce Irigaray here, to examine why Jannice does not take only the role of a prostitute:

*Mother, virgin, prostitute: these are the social roles imposed on woman. The characteristics of (so-called) feminine sexuality derive from them; modesty, ignorance of and even lack of interest in sexual pleasure; a passive acceptance of men's "activity"; seductiveness in order to arouse the consumers' desire while offering herself as its material support without getting pleasure herself. . . . Neither as mother nor as virgin nor as prostitute has woman any right to her own pleasure.*²⁰

Jannice, who is a prostitute primarily, has no "right to her own pleasure." However, she tried to obtain or have some right to her own pleasure in the joy and desire of her soul by dancing with the Dreamer.

¹⁹ Ronald Rollins, "Desire versus Damnation in O'Casey's *Within the Gates* and Donleavy's *the Ginger man*" *The Sean O'Casey Review* Vol. 1. No. 2. Spring, 1975. 43.

²⁰Luce Irigaray, *The Sex which is not One* Trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Cornell Univ., 1985) 186-187. Italics are by the author.

Conclusion

The people in Hyde Park are pictured as symbols of the depressed English civilization in the nineteenth century. As Heinz Kosok insists, however, the play's universality could be achieved only by using a high degree of allegory. Therefore, Hyde Park implies the various symbols which consist of one gate to three different worlds or else a three-dimensional exit.

Jannice, who found joy in life and her way in a patriarchal society, gained symbolically her eternal life by choosing one of the gates. There are three types of symbols of the gate in Hyde Park. We can summarize them as we have discussed so far. First, one of the gates in Hyde Park is symbolically a newly opened gate to an everlasting world, whereupon Jannice is released from the father's power and the patriarchal society. What is more, one of the gates is an exit from Eden as symbolized by Hyde Park. When Jannice is out of Eden, Hyde Park, she loses her female role as Eve. As a final point, one of the gates was an exit whereby the Irish daughter Jannice was released from the power of British society which Hyde Park also symbolizes. Jannice is an Irish daughter from a different view point: the prototype of Jannice is an Irish Nannie in *Nannie's Night Out*, as some critics point out. William Armstrong suggests, supporting Ronald Ayling:

... the young Woman owes much to Irish Nannie. (*Feather from the Green Crow*, p. 301) The episode just described certainly parallels the ending of *Nannie's Night Out* where the dance throws into strong relief the timidity of the men and the courage of Nannie before she collapses and dies, just as the Young Woman's exclamation, "I'll go, go game, and I'll die dancing."²¹

The figure of Nannie is at the root of the Young Woman, Jannice. The Young Woman's frustration and desire to 'die game' are more Irish than English, and the Street Ballad Singers in *Nannie's Night Out* sing the theme in common with *Within the Gates*:

²¹ Ronald Ayling ed., *Sean O'Casey*, William Armstrong, "Sean O'Casey, W. B. Yeats and the Dance of Life" (London: Macmillan, 1969) 136.

For Ireland is Ireland thro' joy an' thro' tears.
Hope never dies thro' they long weary years;²²

The above song is sung after Nannie died dancing in the last scene. The image of Ireland overlaps with Irish Nannie who has the Irish spirit. That both Nannie and Jannice died dancing means that they live fighting against suffering. We may assume that Jannice's belief is similar to Nannie's, and Jannice is an Irish daughter. Accordingly, O'Casey's "soul of a Kelt" is reflected in the Irish daughter Jannice in *Within the Gates*, although the place is shifted from Dublin to London. In *Within the Gates* O'Casey overtly challenges Yeats by depicting an Irish daughter, but his later works seem to pay O'Casey's homage, unconscious, to his great predecessor.

²² Cowasjee, 137.