



Women in the plays of Sean O'Casey: An Incarnation of Life Sustaining Principle

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Women are the most significant part of social structure, but despite this fact, they usually face a number of obstacles in their way to avail their rights. Power, prestige and status should be given to the women with their rights of jobs, skills, education, security, health, better standard of living etc. Both the men and the women are born on the earth with biological and psychological differences but they are equal in their capabilities and instincts. Man is free to live his life while woman is suppressed and treated as a second sex. She is refused to live life.

The Irish playwright Sean O'Casey presents true picture of women as the representative of 'Life Force'. He is right in asserting that woman is the very embodiment of vitality, joy and freedom. She is stronger than man emotionally; infuses him with courage in adverse circumstances; capable to revitalise the deceased soul of man. Despite this woman is harassed at her own home. She is marginalised in this patriarchal society. However, the existence of this world is beyond imagination without 'Naari Shakti' or 'Matra Shakti'. That's why Adam suffered with Eve for her sin. Empower woman, empower humanity. In the play, Juno and Paycock the unique personality of Mrs Boyle is a blend of near callousness and universal motherhood. She is an incarnation of life sustaining principle symbolised by "the goddess of domesticity, of the family hearth and the family principle of existence."¹ Her soul concern is her family caring for her shirking wastrel husband, her conceited and selfish daughter and not forgetting the meals etc. her son needs in his state of nervousness, the cause of which (i.e. betrayal and possibility of its reprisal) he doesn't even confide into his mother. Mrs Boyle has to fret about, in addition to her caring responsibilities, looking for awareness for some source of sustenance for the family.



She is practical woman, a down-to-earth realist. She is mother to her response to Bentham's high-sounding philosophy shows in the crucial scene when she is leading the funeral procession of her young son, through her dance and drink party celebrating her inheritance of a large sum bequeathed by a distant relative shows the reprehensible dark spot in her psyche. But when a similar catastrophe overtakes her, her vision of the truth is the clearest and of a universal appeal in the manner of a true tragic protagonist's perception of a higher truth attained through suffering: "Ah, what can God do against the stupidity of man!"²

She emerges as the saviour of his family when trouble engulfs. The will promised by Bentham is a wash-out; Mary, now pregnant is rejected by her lover and not accepted by her earlier admirer; the room, which was decorated with items brought on credit, is emptied; Mary in her broken condition has lost faith in both divine and human dispensation; the father and brother of Mary reprimand her want her to thrown away, even though they are bigger sinners because of their cowardice and betrayal of established values of loyalty and familial bond.

There is an atmosphere of an unredeemable gloom which has engulfed the life of this miniature human race. God can do no miracles. Humans are too cowardly to help each other. All sources of sympathy—social, neighbourly and familial—seem to have dried up.

It is emergence of Juno as a hope for the continuity of human goodness and survival. She appears as a surrogate mother for the child of Mary and promises to her daughter to have a fresh and promising start for a new life. She appears as an embodiment of the renewal of life and human relational bonds.

In the play *The Silver Tassie*, Mrs Heegan appears as an embodiment of universal motherhood. Jessie, the fiancée of Harry, the protagonist, is portrayed in terms of a virile physical being, "responsive to all the animals impulses of life. Ever dancing around, in and between the world, the flesh, the devil... she gives her favour to the prominent and popular"³. She symbolises the *Life Force*, and is presented as the worshipper of animalistic strength her priestess-life "elevating the chalice" "joyously rather than reverentially" presents the chalice not as a religious symbol but as what Harry says "a sign of youth, sign of strength, sign of victory."



⁴There is consistency in her character in the changed attitude she takes towards her earlier in the last two Acts, when Harry is completely maimed. Application of any moral or emotional norms to decay her betrayal of her lover would be unnecessary and even detrimental to the symbolic and mythic implication of her person.

Jassie is portrayed as an embodiment of vitality, urge for procreation and joy which we see *Life force* in her character when she crosses over to the side of a less heroic but bodily able man to leave Harry.

In the One-Act play *Nannie's night out*, Nannie deserves a serious consideration. Nannie has just come out of prison where she has done two months for the assaulting a policeman. She has been sentenced to present a number of times in the past also. But Nannie would not be tamed by these terms of imprisonment. In her drunkenness she asserts her indomitable spirit:

**I'm tellin' you the 'polis is making' a mistake if they think they can tame Nannie's;
Nannie's not like some O' the` Judies that`s**

**knockin` about that has as much gizz in them as if they war after a hundred days` hunger
strike. Nannie gizz in her, gizz in her, gizz in her.'**⁵

Nannie's behaviour, when she appears on the stage like a hurricane, is Dionysiac which makes her "recklessly merry... near to hysterical tears," she cares for "a short life an` a merry wan" and wants to "die game." Her defiant abandon of the worries of life which she tries to drown in "spunk" is contrasted with the balled singer's obsessive anxiety to his destitute family going. Nannie's wild behavior symbolises that she is the very embodiment of *Life Force*. But premonitions of death are present in her speeches as a subterranean current in the flow of her affirmative of the fleshly existence. Her song, dance and forceful assertion of the joy of life in the midst of chill poverty and beggary present a complex picture of human existence. But her condition of utter destitution economically counter points her strong resolve to live life to the



full. Her wild screaming-“I’ll die game,”⁶ - is contrapuntal with the balled singer’s complaint about the cruelty of life.

Her rejection of sleep as an escape from her exhaustion is based on her belief that life is the moment lived and not slept away. She symbolical of the flame which keeps existence going and the flame should not be allowed to slow down or die out even temporarily: what does Irish Nannie want with sleep... its merriment Nannie wants... singin` an` dancin` an` enjoyin` life... what`s the use of bein` if you`re not merry ? (screaming) Merriment, merriment, merriment: we`ll be long enough dead. Nothin` like keepin` up th` oul` heart,ay?⁷

In the spirit of Tennyson’s Ulysses she would go on asserting the efficacy of the vitality of her inner self against all external odds of life.

To recapitulate, it can be asserted that in almost all his plays Sean O` Casey portrays his people caught between to opposed forces – negative and positive. Men are bound to the constricting canon of religion and dehumanizing effects of any type while women have innate human urge for the life of joy and fertility, thus making way to live life to the fullest’

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3. Sean O` Casey: *Collected Plays*, II, p.26.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Collected Plays, V, p.508.
6. Collected plays, V, p.508-9.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 509-10.