

Skylar Grieco and Paul Gary

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Sean O' Casey Report

Skylar: Hello there everyone! My name is Skylar Grieco.

Paul: And I'm Paul Gary. We're here to give you a crazy little report!

Skylar: Just how crazy is it gonna be Paul?

Paul: Oh I think you know Sky.

Skylar: Oh, I know?

Paul: Oh, I know.

Skylar: Well hey, let's get this show on the road then, shall we?

Paul: Sounds like a plan to me!

Skylar: So just who exactly is this report on Paul?

Paul: Great question! This report is on the Irish playwright, Sean O'Casey.

Skylar: That's right, Paul! Sean O' Casey was born on March 30th 1880 in Dublin, Ireland.

Paul: But he wasn't always known as Sean. His given name is actually John Casey.

Skylar: Indeed it was Paul. And did you know that O'Casey's father died when Sean was just six years old?

Paul: Ya, don't say?

Skylar: I do say! He died leaving his mother to raise the thirteen children.

Paul: Thirteen children!?

Skylar: Yep! Thirteen children! Obviously, this meant O'Casey would need to work to help support his family. He went to work at a young age, leaving school when he was just fourteen. He worked a wide variety of jobs, including things such as railway man, Eason's, which is essentially a wholesale bookstore, and newspaper distribution. He was actually fired from newspaper distribution because he refused to remove his cap when receiving his wages

Paul: Isn't that just the wackiest thing? Now, O'Casey was a very proud nationalist. He joined the Gaelic league and learned about the Irish language. This is when he changed his name to Sean! It was also during this time that he became a founder and secretary of the St. Laurence O'Toole Pipe Band.

Skylar: He went on to join the Irish Republican Brotherhood and became heavily involved in the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. This union was established to represent the best interests of unskilled laborers who inhabited Dublin. (Beat) Paul, this is all great stuff, but what about his theatrical career? Did you know that O'Casey and his older brother would often put on performances of plays by Dion Boucicault and William Shakespeare in their own home?

Paul: In his own house?

Skylar: That's right. He and his brother would put on these plays for fun at home! He was drawn towards drama from a very young age, and clearly had a strong mind to comprehend such adult themes and issues.

Paul: So what would you say he primarily wrote about?

Skylar: "Ireland, the Irish character, and Irish civilization are basic themes in Sean O'Casey's finest plays, so the man and his work are best understood if they are

related to the period in which he lived, the most momentous in the history of his nation." (Armstrong 5.)

Paul: So he wrote about the Irish working class, and the world in which he grew up.

Skylar: Yes! In a way he almost wrote FOR the Irish working class. His works were often controversial, but always seemed to be standing up for the working man in some way.

Paul: We now move ahead to the year of our lord 1917!

Skylar: Well what happened in 1917 Paul?

Paul: In 1917, Thomas Ashe, a close friend of O'Casey's, died in a hunger strike. This event inspired O'Casey to write. This event prompted him to write two lamenting poems.

Skylar: And then he was on a roll! O'Casey worked on his writing for years to follow. In 1918, following the deaths of both his sister and mother, he was commissioned by The St. Laurence O'Toole Pipe Band to write *The Frost in the Flower*. The play was ultimately not produced by the club though. They feared that it was too satirical and might be considered offensive by certain churchgoers. It was because of this rejection that O'Casey submitted his play to the Abbey Theatre, which might have been just the best thing that could have happened for him.

Paul: Now the Abbey Theatre also rejected *The Frost and the Flower*, but O'Casey was not deterred. He was simply more motivated to press on. O'Casey's first successful production with the Abbey Theatre was *The Shadow of a Gunman* in 1923. He then went on to have a number of other very successful productions with the Abbey theatre including *Juno and the Paycock*, and *The Plough and the Stars*.

Skylar: *The Plough and the Stars* actually caused riots! People were offended by the language and depictions of sex and religion to the point of violence.

Paul: O'Casey traveled to London in order to receive an award and to oversee the West End production of *Juno and the Paycock*. It was there that he fell in love with Eileen Carey. They were married in 1927 and remained married until his death. The couple had three children.

Skylar: O'Casey continued writing plays and pushing the envelope. Again, his works often revolved around working class Irish people and were often met with critical backlash or uneasiness (Malone 112)

Paul: O'Casey decided to give his blessing over to a musical adaptation of *Juno and the Paycock* by an American composer named Marc Blitzstein. The musical was a huge flop. It closed after only sixteen performances and O'Casey never actually saw the show. It was considered to be too dark for a genre, musical theatre, which were almost exclusively light-hearted comedies.

Skylar: O'Casey collected his life into a six-volume autobiography, collectively known as *Mirror In My House*. He died on September 18th 1964 at the age of 84. His death was the result of a heart attack.

Paul: Say Sky. Why don't we dive into some of his plays?

Skylar: Sounds like a grand idea Paul! Where do you wanna start?

Paul: Let's start at the very beginning. A very good place to start.

Skylar: I see what ya did there!

Paul: Mmhmm. So, one of O'Casey's early works worth noting is *Juno and the Paycock*. *Juno and the Paycock* is a part of a trilogy, known as "The Dublin Trilogy."

(Malone 17) It is the second play in the trilogy. This trilogy struck an important nerve in the history of Irish theatre, as it was among the first plays to discuss in detail the Irish working class.

Skylar: The play centers around the Boyle family: Jack, an unemployed drunk, his wife, Juno, who serves as the family's breadwinner and sole source of support, and their kids, Johnny, a former revolutionary who has been homebound since losing an arm in The Easter Rising, and Mary, their headstrong daughter, who is on strike for worker's rights.

Paul: What a loveable family. The play's intrusion comes when Charlie, Mary's fiancé, informs the family that a wealthy relative has passed away. Obviously, there is an inheritance to be fought over. Jack begins prematurely spending money, that he doesn't actually have. The family rejoices, then discovers that the will of the deceased states that they must share the inheritance with Jack's cousins, and they will not be as wealthy as they had previously hoped.

Skylar: All hell breaks loose. Completely devastated, Charlie breaks his engagement with Mary and flees the country. After leaving, Mary discovers that she is pregnant, causing a disturbance in the extremely Catholic family. Jack loses his fancy new things. Johnny is dragged out of the house by two Republican soldiers, who have discovered him as a traitor and he is murdered!

Paul: Juno, smack in the middle of it all, decides that the best course of action is to flee with Mary to her sister's house, leaving Boyle behind with nothing but his best friend, Joxer. The two end the play drunkenly fantasizing.

Skylar: Crazy right? Hey Paul!

Paul: Yeah, Sky?

Skylar: Why don't we go ahead and read a scene from this for them?

Paul: Sounds like a great idea! Let's do Act II Scene I.

Skylar: Great!

Paul: So in this scene Boyle has made a number of purchases on credit and he is discussing them with his best friend Joxer. I'll be reading Boyle.

Skylar: And I'll be Joxer.

Boyle: Come along, Joxer, me son, come along.

Joxer: Are you be yourself?

Boyle: Come one, come on; that doesn't matter; I'm master now, an' I'm goin' to remain master.

Joxer: How do you feel now, as a man o'money?

Boyle: It's a responsibility, Joxer, a great responsibility.

Joxer: I suppose 'tis now, though you wouldn't think it.

Boyle: Joxer, han' me over that attackey case on the table there. Ever since the Will was passed I've run hundreds o' dockyments through me hands—I tell you, you have to keep your wits about you.

Joxer: Well, I won't disturb you; I'll drop in when—

Boyle: It's all right Joxer, this is the last one to be signed today. (Signs) Now, Joxer, you want to see me; I'm at your service—what can I do for you, me man?

Joxer: I've just dropped in with the 3 pound five that Mrs. Madigan riz on the blankets an' table for you, an' she says you're to be in no hurry payin' it back.

Boyle: She won't be long without it; I expect the first cheque for a couple of hundred any day. There's the five bob for yourself—go on, take it, man; it'll not be the last you'll get from the Captain. Now an' again we have our differ, but we're there together all the time.

Joxer: Me for you, an' you for me, like the two Musketeers.

Boyle: Father Farrell stopped me today an' told me how glad he was I fell in for the money.

Joxer: He'll be stoppin' you often enough now; I suppose it was "Mr." Boyle with him?

Boyle: He shook me be the han'...

Joxer: I met with Napper Tandy, an' he shook me be the han'!

Boyle: You're seldom ashtray, Joxer, but you're wrong shipped this time. What you're sayin' of Father Farrell is very near to blasphemy. I don't like anyone to talk disrespectful of Father Farrell.

Joxer: You're takin' me up wrong, Captain; I wouldn't let a word be said agen Father Farrell—the heart o' the rowl, that's what he is; I always said he was a darlin' man, a darlin' man.

Boyle: Comin' up the stairs who did I meet but that bummer, Nugent. "I seen you talkin' to Father Farrell," says he, with a grin on him. "He'll be folleyin' you," says he, "like a guardian angel from this out"—all the time the ol' grin on him, Joxer.

Joxer: I never seen him yet but he had that ol' grin on him!

Boyle: “Mr. Nugent,” says I, “Father Farrell is a man o’ the people, an’, as far as I know this History o’ me country, the priests was always in the van of the fight for Ireelan’s freedom.

Joxer: (singing)

Who was it led the van, Soggart Aroon?

Since the fight first began, Soggart Aroon?

Boyle: “Who are you tellin’?” says he. “Didn’t they let down the Fenians, an’ didn’t they do in Parnell? An’ now...” “You ought to be ashamed o’ yourself,” says I, interruptin’ him, “not to know the history o’ your country.” An’ I left him gawkin’ where he was.

Joxer: Where ignorance ‘s bliss ‘tis folly to be wise; I wonder did he ever read the story of Ireelan’.

Boyle: Be JL Sullivan? Don’t you know he didn’t.

Joxer: Ah, it’s a darlin’ book, a darlin’ book.

Boyle: You’d better be goin’ now, Joxer; his Majesty, Bentham, ‘ll be here any minute, now.

Joxer: Be the way things is lookin’, it’ll be a match between him an’ Mary. She’s thrun over Jerry altogether. Well, I hope it will, for he’s a darlin’ man.

Boyle: I’m glad you think so—I don’t. (O’Casey, *Juno...*)

Paul: Hey Sky! Fun fact! O’Casey decided to give his blessing over to a musical adaptation of *Juno and the Paycock* by an American composer named Marc Blitzstein. Unfortunately, the musical was a huge flop. It closed after only sixteen

performances and O'Casey never actually saw the show. It was considered to be too dark for a musical, which were almost exclusively light-hearted comedies. But gee, wasn't that scene just so much fun?

Skylar: It was! So much so, that we should do another!

Paul: Good call! Maybe one from the middle of his career?

Skylar: I like it! How about *The End of the Beginning*?

Paul: Good call! Tell them what its about Sky!

Skylar: *The End of the Beginning* was written in 1937. It is considered a one-act comedic play. As was typical of O'Casey, this play pushed the envelope in terms of a family in a rural Irish town.

Paul: In a brilliant slew of mid-suffrage feminism, the play contains a couple debating whether men or women have to work harder throughout the day. They ultimately decide to switch places for the day, in order to find out that answer.

Skylar: What silly circumstances? Now this play is intended to be a wild farce. A good production of this play can be very enjoyable, and a number of people felt that it was.

Paul: However, there are also people who feel that it can be ruined entirely by the wrong actors. Wilborn Hampton of the *New York Times* wrote in his review of a 1992 production that the actors, "set about it with such exaggerated mugging that the catastrophe becomes flat and dull."

Skylar: The farcical elements of the show are not to be taken for granted. We will now read a bit of this play in order to demonstrate the elements discussed.

Paul: Hopefully we don't fall flat and dull! Now in this scene... I'll read Barry. You read Darry.

Barry: Shall we try it once more?

Darry: Shush, shut up, can't you? I forgot. I'll have to get going.

Barry: Get going at what?

Darry: House-work. I dared her, an' she left me to do the work of the house while she was mowing the meadow. If it isn't done when she comes back, then sweet goodbye to the status I had in the home.

Barry: Take it quietly, take it quietly, Darry.

Darry: Take it quietly? An' the time galloping by? I can't stand up on a chair 'n say to the sun, stand thou still there, over the meadow the missus is mowing, can I?

Barry: I know damn well you can't, but you're not going to expedite matters by rushing around in a hurry.

Darry: Expedite matters! It doesn't seem to strike you that when you do things quickly, things are quickly done. Expedite matters! I suppose loitering to look at you lying on the broad of your back, jiggling your legs about, was one way of expediting matters; an' listening to you plucking curious sounds out of a mandolin, an' singing a questionable song, was another way of expediting matters?

Barry: You pioneered me into doing two of them yourself.

Darry: I pioneered you into doing them! Barry Derrill, there's such a thing in the world as a libel. You came strutting in with a mandolin under your arm, didn't you?

Barry: I did, but—

Darry: An' you sang your song.

Barry: Yes, but—

Darry: When you waltzed in, I was doing calisthenics, wasn't I?

Barry: I know you were, but all the same—

Darry: An' you flung yourself down on the floor, and got yourself into a tangle trying to do them too, didn't you?

Barry: Hold on a second—

Darry: Now, I can't carry the conversation into a debate, for I have to get going. So if you can't give a hand, go, 'n let me do the things that have to be done, in an orderly 'n quiet way.

Barry: 'Course I'll give a hand—only waiting to be asked.

Darry: Is the clock stopped:

Barry: There's no ticking, 'n it's hours slow.

Darry: Lizzie again! Forgot to wind it. Give the key a few turns, Barry, an' put the hands on to half-past nine. (He breaks it) You've broken the damn thing, have you?

Barry: I didn't touch it.

Darry: Didn't touch it? Amn't I after looking at you twisting an' tearing at it for nearly an hour? Show me that. Didn't touch it. Oh, for God's sake be more careful when you're handling things in this house! You must have the hands of a gorilla, man. Here, come over 'n wipe while I wash. (Barry fucks up) Look out, look out, there—you're not leaving that jug on the table at all; you're depositing it in the air, man!

Barry: Am I? Don't be afraid, I won't let anything drop. (He sends the jug flying)

Darry: You snaky arm'd candle-powered elephant, look at what you're doing!

Barry: It's only a tiny jug, anyhow, 'n you can hardly see the pieces on the floor!

Darry: An' if I let you do much more, they would soon be big enough to bury us! Sit down, sit down in the corner there; do nothing, say nothing, an' if I could, I'd put a safety curtain round you. For God's sake, touch nothing while I run out an' give the spuds to the pig.

(Darry exits. A few moments pass, and he reenters with a bloody nose.)

Darry: Get me something cold to put down the back of my neck, quick!

Barry: What the hell did you do to yourself?

Darry: I didn't bend low enough when I was going in, 'n I gave myself such a—oh, such a bang on my nose on the concrete. Get something cold, man, to shove down the back of my neck 'n stop the bleeding!

Barry: Keep the nose sticking up in the air as high as you can. I don't know where to get something cold to shove down the back of your neck. I knew this ruchsing round wouldn't expedite matters.

Darry: Oh, pull yourself together, man, 'n remember we're in the middle of an emergency.

Barry: A little block of ice, now, would come in handy.

Darry: A little—oh, a little block of ice! An' will you tell us where you're going to get a little block of ice? An', even f we had one, how could you fasten it down the back of my neck? Eh? Can't you answer—where are you going to get a block of ice?

Barry: How the hell do I know where I'm going to get it?

Darry: D'ye expect me to keep lying here till the winter comes? (*O'Casey, The End...*)

Paul: Wasn't that just a hoot and a half?

Skylar: You're darn-tootin, it was!

Paul: I don't like it when you talk like that.

Skylar: Like what?

Paul: Like...ya know...

Skylar: No. Like what? Go on and say it.

Paul: Really? We're gonna do this here in front of everyone?

Skylar: I just think that we-

Paul: Let's move on!

Skylar: Right! Where we going?

Paul: To what is considered to be O'Casey's most important and well crafted play ever.

Both: *Cock-A-Doodle Dandy*.

Skylar: Yes, you did hear that correctly. The play is called *Cock-A-Doodle Dandy*. It was published in 1949. In this play, a magic cock forces people to choose between liberation and oppression.

Paul: Well, he's not wrong, but there's more! Like, more than just a magic cock. Or, rather a cockerel. Nope, still not better. God. A cockerel is a young domesticated male chicken! In this piece, one comes into a town and forces people to make bold decisions about their lives!

Skylar: Once again, O'Casey's propensity for envelope-pushing came into the play.

The work received backlash from the general public because it was seen as anti-

Catholic. The play also made people feel uncomfortable because of its elements of dark fantasy. Catholics don't like other Catholics thinkin' of things, specifically the somewhat sacrilegious notion that a chicken could control an entire Irish town and impose his teachings on the people. Irish playgoers already had the Jesus for that, and weren't about to let a fictional chicken shit all over him.

Paul: So yeah, the play struck a bit of a nerve with the locals. It forced them to look at the balance between liberty and oppression. The Irish aren't the only people to have opposed *Cock-A-Doodle Dandy*. The Lord Chamberlain banned it from public performance, and many US theatres have suppressed it over the years (Malone 130).

Skylar: But we thought it was a pretty dope-ass play, so we're gonna read a scene from it.

Paul: In this scene Michael and Mahan are discussing the effects of choosing their life paths, as a result of the magic cock. A messenger enters to give them an important message and is ultimately disregarded. I'll be playing Michael.

Skylar: I'll be playing Mahan.

Paul: And Oliver here (gestures to raptor) will be playing the messenger.

Mahan: Well, the anchor's weighed.

Michael: It was an edifying spectacle, Sailor Mahan, thrustin' us outta this world for the time being. Julia's asked for a sign, Sailor Mahan, and believe me, she'll get it.

Mahan: She will, she will, though I wouldn't like to bet on it.

Michael: She'll get what she's after—a complete cure. Me own generous gift of fifty pounds for the old bog'll be rewarded; and the spate of praying going on, from the

Mayor to the Bellman, is bound to get the higher saints going, persuadin' them to furnish a suitable answer to all we're askin'.

Mahan: Arra, man alive, do you think the skipper aloft and his glitterin' crew is goin' to bother their heads about a call from a tiny town and district tryin' hard to thrive on turf.

Michael: Looka, if you were only versed in the endurin' promulgacity of th' gospels, you'd know the man above's concerned as much about Nyadnanave as he is about a place where a swarm of cardinals saunther secure, decoratin' the air with all their purple an' gold!

Mahan: Are you goin' to tell me that th' skipper aloft an' his hierarchiological crew are concerned about the Mayor, the Messenger, Marion, me and you as much as they are about them who've been promoted to the quarter-deck o' the world's fame? Are you goin' to pit our paltry penances an' haltin' hummin' o' hymns against the piercin' pipin' of the rosary be Bing Bang Crosby an' other great film stars, who side stepped from published greatness for a holy minute or two to send a blessed blast over th' wireless, callin' all Catholics to perpetuatin' prayer!

Michael: Sailor Mahan, I ask you to try to get your thoughts skip-shaped in your mind.

(Enter Messenger)

Mahan: Do you remember who you're talkin' to, man? Ship-shape in me mind! Isn't a man bound to have his mind fitted together in a ship-shape way, who, forced out of his true course be a nautical catastrophe, to wit, videlicet, an act o' God, ploughd a

way through the Sargasso Sea, reachin' open waters, long after hope had troubled him no longer?

Michael: Aw, Sailor Mahan, what's them things got to do with the things tantamount to heaven?

Messenger: Mick's right—them things can't be tantamount to anything but themselves.

Mahan: What do you want? What're you doin' here? Your coalition of ignorant knowledge can't comprehend the things we talk about!

Messenger: Listen, boys—I've a question to ask yous.

Michael: Ask it some time more convenient. An' don't refer to us as 'boys'—we're gentlemen to you!

Mahan: Looka, Mick, if you only listened to Bing Crosby, the mighty film star, sroonin' his Irish lullaby, "Tootal ooral ooral, tooral ooral ay," you'd havethe visuality to see the amazin' response he'd have from millions of admirers, if he crooned a hymn!

Messenger: I was never struck be Bing Crosby's croonin'.

Michael: You were never struck! And who the hell are you to be consulted? Please don't stand there interferin' with the earnest colloquy of better men. Looka, Sailor Mahan, any priest'll tell you that in the eyes of heaven all men are equal and must be held in respect an' reverence.

Mahan: Ay, they'll say that to me an' you, but will they say it to Bing Crosby, or any other famous film star?

Messenger: Will they hell! Honour be the cregy's regulated by how much a man can give!

Michael: Get to hell outta here! With that kinda talk, we won't be able soon to sit steady on our chairs. Oh!

(His chair collapses, and he falls)

Mahan: Holy saints, what's happened!

Michael: Take no notice of it, fool. Go on talkin'!

Mahan: I'll say you're right, Mick; the way things are goin' we won't be able much longer to sit serene on our chairs. Oh!

(His chair collapses, and he falls)

Michael: Don't notice it; go on's if nothin' happened!

Messenger: Well, yous have settled down now, anyhow! Will I get yous chairs sturdy enough to uphold th' wisdom of your talkin'?

Michael: There's nothin' wrong with th' charis we have! You get outs here! Nothin's wrong with th' chairs at all. Get outa here—I don't trust you either!

Messenger: I've somethin' important to ask yous.

Michael: Well, ask it at some more convenient time. It's a blessin' that so many lively-livin' oul' hoysl spots are still in th' land to help us an' keep us wary.

Messenger: And where are the lively hily spots still to be found? Sure, man, they're all gone west long ago, and the whole face of the land is pock-marked with their ruins?

Michael: Where are the lost and ruined holy place? We've always cared for, an' honoured, our holy spots! Mention one of them, either lost or ruined!

Messenger: There are thousands of them, man; places founded be Finian, Finbarr, an' the rest; places that are now only an ol' ruined wall, blighted be nettle an' dock, their only glory the crimson berries of the bright arbutus! Where's the Seven Churches of Glendalough? Where's Durrow of Offally, founded be Columkille? Known now only be the name of the Book of Durrow!

Michael: Book o' Durrow! It's books that have us half the woeful way we are, fillin' broody minds with loose scholastically, infringin' the holy beliefs and thried impositions that our fathers' fathers' fathers gave our fathers' fathers, who gave our fathers what our fathers gave to us!

Messenger: Faith your fathers' faith is fear, an' now fear is your only fun.

Mahan: Let him go, Mick, an' let's have that drink you mentioned a year ago.

(O'Casey, Cock-A-Doodle Dandy)

Skylar: How bout those plays Paul?

Paul: Pretty good stuff, if I do say so myself.

Skylar: I'd have to agree with you. So let's bring this thing home, huh?

Paul: Right! Sean O'Casey was a wonderful Irish playwright. His plays are incredibly important to the Irish people and specifically the lower class Irish man.

Skylar: He brought an edge with his writing that was just unprecedented. He challenged religion and social norms in many of his plays, often in ways that either others were scared to do, or made people highly uncomfortable. To quote William Armstrong, "Living intensely in an age of cataclysmic destruction, O'Casey sought a

principle of hope and joy, and his quest succeeded most when it was directed by intuitions of Ireland's needs and Ireland's better self."

Paul: His plays incited outrage and evoked emotion from people that otherwise may have gone unmoved. He spoke out for the working class Irish in a way that hadn't been done before paving the way for future playwrights to feel comfortable to do the same. He opened the door for playwrights to provoke change in their communities and the world as a whole.

Skylar: Well said Paul. We hope you have enjoyed this presentation on Sean O'Casey.

Paul: We hope you had fun...but not too much fun. Have a good day guys!

Both: Thank you!

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