

SEAN O'CASEY IN CONTEXT

Sean O'Casey is one of Ireland's best-known writers. He is the most frequently performed playwright in the history of the Irish National Theatre, and his work is often revived onstage elsewhere. O'Casey is also widely studied in schools, colleges, and universities in the English-speaking world.

This book offers a new contextualisation of this famous writer's work, revisiting his association with Irish nationalism, historical revisionism, and celebrated contemporaries such as W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory. The volume also brings O'Casey's work into contact with topics including disability studies, gender and sexuality, post-colonialism, ecocriticism, and race. *Sean O'Casey in Context* explores a number of existing ideas about O'Casey in the light of new academic developments, and updates our understanding of this important writer by taking into account recent scholarly thinking and a range of theatrical productions from around the globe.

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Sean O'Casey's Life and Times: A Chronology

	O'Casey's life and work	Historical and literary milestones
1880	Sean O'Casey is born on 30 March (as John Casey) in the north part of inner Dublin at 85 Upper Dorset Street. His parents are Susan and Michael Casey, and he has four older siblings then living: Bella, Mick, Tom, and Isaac	Charles Stewart Parnell becomes leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster. The thirty-three-year-old Protestant had been an MP for five years, and sought to achieve Irish self-government (Ireland having been assimilated into the United Kingdom by the 1800 Act of Union)
1882	O'Casey's family moves to 9 Innisfallen Parade, a small terraced cottage just around the corner from his birthplace on Dorset Street	
1884		The Gaelic Athletic Association is founded to preserve and promote Ireland's games and athletic pastimes
1886	O'Casey's father dies, leaving the family in a precarious financial position	Gladstone presents the first Irish Home Rule Bill: it is defeated in the House of Commons
Mid 1880s–early 1890s	O'Casey suffers at school due to trachoma, is tutored by his sister Bella and taken to the theatre on occasion by his brother Isaac. O'Casey's brothers Tom and Mick enlist in the British army. The family moves to 25 Hawthorn Terrace, East Wall, an area in which O'Casey will live until 1920. Bella, who has become pregnant, marries a lance corporal in the British army	William O'Shea, another Irish MP, cites Parnell as correspondent in a divorce case: Parnell loses the support of Gladstone and is deposed as leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party

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O'Casey's life and work		Historical and literary milestones
1890		Death of playwright Dion Boucicault
1891		Death of Charles Stewart Parnell
1893		Douglas Hyde and Eóin MacNeill found the Gaelic League, an organisation that aimed to restore the Irish language. Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill is passed by the House of Commons but blocked by the House of Lords
1894	O'Casey's family moves to 4 Abercorn Road, East Wall. O'Casey leaves St Barnabas's school and takes his first paid job, in a hardware and china firm. During this decade O'Casey and his theatre-loving brother Isaac perform extracts from Boucicault and Shakespeare	
1899		Members of the Irish Literary Theatre, the forerunner of the Abbey Theatre, perform at the Antient Concert Rooms in Dublin. Second Boer War begins
c.1900	O'Casey joins the Gaelic League. His brother Tom fights for the British in South Africa, and brother Mick serves in the British army reserve in England. His other brother, Isaac, marries a Catholic woman and gains work as a clerk in Dublin	
1901	O'Casey works as a delivery clerk, then gains employment with the Great Northern Railway Ireland	
1902		First performance of <i>Cathleen Ni Houlihan</i> by Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats. Second Boer War ends with the British empire defeating the Boer resistance
1904		Abbey Theatre opens to the public on 27 December. Arthur Griffith writes <i>The Resurrection of Hungary</i> , arguing for an independent Ireland under a dual monarch, something that formed the basic philosophy of

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	O'Casey's life and work	Historical and literary milestones
		his new Sinn Féin movement the following year. First performance of J. M. Synge's <i>Riders to the Sea</i>
c.1905	O'Casey joins the secret revolutionary group, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB)	
1907	O'Casey publishes his first work, 'Sound the Loud Trumpet', an article about Irish education written under the pseudonym 'An Gall Fada' [Tall Foreigner]. His sister Bella's husband, having suffered from general paralysis of the insane, dies at forty years old, leaving Bella to raise four children in poverty	The Abbey Theatre's production of J. M. Synge's <i>The Playboy of the Western World</i> is greeted by riots Pope Pius X issues the <i>Ne Temere</i> decree, insisting that children of 'mixed marriages' should be raised as Catholics
1909		Death of J. M. Synge
1910	O'Casey helps found the St Laurence O'Toole Pipers' Band in Seville Place, East Wall, and becomes its first secretary	General election gives the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, John Redmond, the balance of power at Westminster
1911	O'Casey is sacked by the Great Northern Railway Ireland, works as casual labourer hereafter, and writes for Larkin's union newspaper the <i>Irish Worker</i>	
1912		Asquith introduces the third Home Rule Bill to the House of Commons, beginning months of delay and debate
1913	O'Casey works to bring humanitarian assistance to those involved in the Dublin lockout	The Ulster Volunteer Force is established in order to protect Ulster from Home Rule. The Irish Volunteers movement is founded to ensure that Home Rule is implemented. The Dublin lockout takes place, triggered by tram workers who refuse to sign a pledge agreeing not to join the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union: the dispute lasts for half a year. Volunteers from the Union, led by James Larkin and James Connolly, establish a paramilitary group called the Irish Citizen Army

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	O'Casey's life and work	Historical and literary milestones
1914	O'Casey acts as secretary of the Irish Citizen Army, but resigns later in the year. His brother Tom dies	First World War declared. At Westminster, Irish Home Rule is simultaneously enacted and postponed until after the conflict. John Redmond urges Irish men to enlist in the British army. Irish Volunteers split, with the vast majority (150,000) forming the National Volunteers who side with Redmond, and the minority (8,000) remaining as the Irish Volunteers under Eoin MacNeill. James Joyce publishes <i>Dubliners</i>
1915	O'Casey suffers from swollen, tubercular glands in his neck and is admitted to St Vincent's Hospital, where he encounters victims of the First World War	Patrick Pearse – a member of the small military council of the IRB – gives a famous oration declaring 'Ireland unfree shall never be at peace'
1916	O'Casey submits his first play to the Abbey, <i>Profit and Loss</i> . The script is returned within four days. His brother Mick fights for the British in the world war	The Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army launch the Easter Rising, which largely takes place in Dublin. The rebels declare an Irish Republic, but the uprising does not become a nationwide revolt and is defeated with relative ease by the British army within five days. The leaders of the Rising, including Patrick Pearse and James Connolly, are executed over a protracted period of days, drawing popular opinion in Ireland towards the rebels. James Joyce publishes <i>A Portrait of the Artist</i>
1917	O'Casey publishes the prose pamphlet <i>The Story of Thomas Ashe</i> , which he republishes in an expanded version as <i>The Sacrifice of Thomas Ashe</i> the following year. He also acts with the drama group at St Laurence O'Toole Club. His brother Isaac gets into trouble with the accounts	In Russia, two revolutions take place: the first overthrows the imperial government, and the second brings the Bolsheviks of Vladimir Lenin to power

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	O'Casey's life and work	Historical and literary milestones
	at his workplace and leaves Ireland for Liverpool	
1917–20	O'Casey enjoys a significant romantic relationship with the Catholic teacher Máire Keating	
1918	O'Casey publishes the poetry pamphlets <i>Songs of the Wren</i> and <i>More Wren Songs</i> , and writes a play ('The Frost in the Flower') for the St Laurence O'Toole Club, whose members refuse to produce the work. His mother and sister Bella both die	Armistice agreed between the Allies and Germany to end the fighting of the First World War. Influenza pandemic. In the general election, the Sinn Féin manifesto emphasises Irish resistance to British rule: the party wins a sweeping victory and takes 73 of 105 available Irish seats
1919	O'Casey publishes a prose history: <i>The Story of the Irish Citizen Army</i>	Sinn Féin's elected candidates establish Dáil Éireann (the Irish parliament), and declare independence, electing a leading veteran of the 1916 Rising, Éamon de Valera, as president. The Irish Volunteers, increasingly known as the IRA, swear an oath of allegiance to Dáil Éireann and to the Irish Republic
1919–21	O'Casey submits three scripts to the Abbey; each one is rejected	The IRA fights a guerrilla war of independence, the Anglo-Irish War, against British forces
1920	O'Casey shares a room with Michael Mullen in a Dublin tenement: 35 Mountjoy Square. This experience will form the basis for his play <i>The Shadow of a Gunman</i>	Yeats publishes the poem 'Easter 1916' in the <i>New Statesman</i> (making it generally available after a private printing of twenty-five copies in 1916)
1921	O'Casey moves to 422 North Circular Road, his final residential address in Ireland	Partition of Ireland implemented (stemming from the 1920 Government of Ireland Act). Anglo-Irish Treaty agreed. Allows for Ireland to have self-governing, dominion status within Britain's empire, but requiring allegiance to the British monarch. Republican critics refuse to accept the treaty as it fails to deliver a republic and involves an oath of loyalty to the British Crown

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	O'Casey's life and work	Historical and literary milestones
1922	Another of O'Casey's plays, <i>The Seamless Coat of Cathleen</i> , is rejected by the Abbey. But O'Casey then submits <i>The Shadow of a Gunman</i> , under the title <i>On the Run</i> . It is accepted for production	The Anglo-Irish Treaty is narrowly ratified by Dáil Éireann. De Valera opposes this, resigns as president, and is defeated after offering himself for re-election. Pro-Treaty candidates win the majority of seats at a general election. The National Army fights a Civil War against the anti-Treaty IRA ('Free Staters' against 'Irregulars'). Michael Collins is killed. The 1916 veteran, William Cosgrave, becomes premier of the new Irish Free State. Publication of James Joyce's <i>Ulysses</i> and T. S. Eliot's <i>The Waste Land</i>
1923	Abbey produces <i>The Shadow of a Gunman</i> as well as <i>Kathleen Listens In</i> , but rejects <i>The Cooing of Doves</i>	End of Irish Civil War with ceasefire of anti-Treaty forces. W. B. Yeats receives the Nobel Prize, Bernard Shaw premieres <i>Saint Joan</i>
1924	Abbey produces <i>Juno and the Paycock</i> , to great financial and popular success, also produces <i>Nannie's Night Out</i>	Lenin dies; the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Joseph Stalin, manoeuvres to power
1925		Bernard Shaw receives the Nobel Prize
1926	Abbey produces <i>The Plough and the Stars</i> ; there are riots in response. O'Casey leaves Ireland to live in England for the rest of his life, accepts Hawthornden Prize in London, takes a flat at 32 Clareville Street in South Kensington, befriends Bernard Shaw, and sends a message of support to the Miners' Federation during Britain's general strike	De Valera and others found a new republican party, Fianna Fáil, out of the embers of the anti-Treaty Sinn Féin. A nine-day-long general strike occurs in Britain
1927	O'Casey marries Eileen Carey in Chelsea	
1928	O'Casey moves to 19 Woronzow Road, St John's Wood: the only property that O'Casey would ever own in his life. His first son, Breon, is born. The Abbey rejects <i>The Silver Tassie</i>	

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	O'Casey's life and work	Historical and literary milestones
1929	<i>The Silver Tassie</i> is premiered at London's Apollo Theatre. O'Casey declares that he has 'written part of an autobiography'	In the British general election the Labour Party, under Ramsay MacDonald, becomes the largest single party in the House of Commons for the first time
1931	O'Casey sells his home in St John's Wood and moves to 2 Misbourne Cottages, Chalfont St Giles; then moves again, nearby to 'Hillcrest' on Dean Way. His brother Isaac dies	After struggling with the Great Depression for two years, Britain's Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald resigns; MacDonald breaks with the Labour Party and forms a National Government to deal with the economic crisis. Catholic bishops, who are wary of communism, warn British Catholics against voting Labour in the general election
1932	O'Casey corresponds with British prime minister Ramsay MacDonald, who invites the playwright to Chequers and expresses delight in O'Casey's opinions	Death of Lady Gregory and of Margaret Pearse. Fianna Fáil is elected to government for the first time, and de Valera as premier; the party will remain the largest in the Irish parliament until 2011
1934	<i>Within the Gates</i> is staged in London's Royalty Theatre and in the National Theatre, Broadway. The latter staging is successful, but by the start of the following year a tour of the production falls victim to religious protest. O'Casey moves from Chalfont St Giles to 49 Overstrand Mansions, Battersea. His collection of short plays/poetry/stories <i>Windfalls</i> is published but banned in Ireland. O'Casey travels to New York, befriendng the critics Brooks Atkinson and George Jean Nathan	
1935	Abbey stages <i>The Silver Tassie</i> . O'Casey's second son, Niall, is born	The Conservative Stanley Baldwin replaces Ramsay MacDonald as British prime minister, and comfortably wins a general election. O'Casey, in his later <i>Rose and Crown</i> , will remember conversations with Baldwin from the time when the two

Sean O'Casey's Life and Times: A Chronology xxi

O'Casey's life and work		Historical and literary milestones
		mixed in London's elite social circles during this period
1936–9		Spanish Civil War
1937	O'Casey alienates British theatre critics by publishing a hostile attack on them in <i>The Flying Wasp</i> ; he describes his support for republicans in Spain	The Conservative Neville Chamberlain replaces Stanley Baldwin as British prime minister
1938	O'Casey moves to Devon, where he will live for the rest of his life. Rents 'Tingrith', Ashburton Road, in Totnes	
1939	O'Casey publishes first volume of prose autobiography, <i>I Knock at the Door</i> . The book is banned in Ireland until 1947. His daughter Shivaun is born. He corresponds with James Joyce	Death of W. B. Yeats. Publication of James Joyce's <i>Finnegans Wake</i> . Second World War begins, Ireland declares neutrality
1940	<i>The Star Turns Red</i> premieres at an amateur venue, the Unity Theatre in London	Ill health forces the resignation of British prime minister Neville Chamberlain; he is succeeded by Winston Churchill, who O'Casey remembers (in his correspondence) encountering in the elite social circles of London during the 1930s
1941		Death of James Joyce
1942	O'Casey publishes the second volume of prose autobiography, <i>Pictures in the Hallway</i> . The book is banned in Ireland until 1947	
1943	<i>Red Roses for Me</i> premieres at Olympia Theatre, Dublin, and <i>Purple Dust</i> at the People's Theatre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne	
1945	O'Casey publishes the third volume of prose autobiography, <i>Drums under the Window</i> : this and the subsequent volumes (1949, 1952, 1954) are not subject to official censorship in Ireland	Suicide of Adolf Hitler, surrender of German High Command, end of Second World War. Atomic bombing of Japan. The first British general election in ten years is won by Clement Attlee's Labour Party
1946		Hanna Sheehy Skeffington dies
1947	The only other member of the original Casey family, O'Casey's brother Mick, dies in Dublin. The poet Valentine Iremonger and academic	James Larkin dies

xxii	<i>Sean O'Casey's Life and Times: A Chronology</i>	
	O'Casey's life and work	Historical and literary milestones
	Roger McHugh use the opening night of a production of <i>The Plough and the Stars</i> to protest against the 'utter incompetence of the present directorate' of the Abbey	
1949		The Republic of Ireland Act passes into law, declaring the state a republic with no constitutional ties to the United Kingdom
1950		Bernard Shaw dies
1951	The Abbey Theatre is destroyed by a fire during a production of <i>The Plough and the Stars</i> . The company plays at the Queen's Theatre instead (the current Abbey Theatre building opens in 1966)	Winston Churchill's Conservative Party wins the British general election
1953		Premiere of Samuel Beckett's <i>En Attendant Godot</i> in Paris (the first English-language production appears in London two years later). Death of Stalin
1954	O'Casey moves to his final residential address, 3 'Villa Rosa' Flats, 40 Trumlands Road, Torquay	Premiere of Brendan Behan's play <i>The Quare Fellow</i>
1955	<i>The Bishop's Bonfire</i> is first performed, to protests, at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin	Churchill retires as British prime minister and is succeeded by Anthony Eden, who then wins the general election
1956	O'Casey's son Niall dies on 30 December	Nikita Khrushchev denounces Stalin during the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Part. The Suez crisis forces Anthony Eden to resign from the role of British prime minister on the grounds of ill health. The Hungarian revolution is crushed by the USSR. IRA begins 'border campaign' for a united Ireland. John Osborne's <i>Look Back in Anger</i> is premiered at London's Royal Court theatre, and is seen as a break with Britain's more orderly drawing-room plays

Sean O'Casey's Life and Times: A Chronology xxiii

O'Casey's life and work		Historical and literary milestones
1957		USSR launches 'Sputnik', the first artificial earth satellite. Harold Macmillan – whose family firm publishes O'Casey's work – succeeds Anthony Eden as Conservative prime minister of the United Kingdom. In Ireland, the theatre director Alan Simpson is arrested for producing Tennessee Williams's <i>The Rose Tattoo</i> at the Pike Theatre, during which one actor mimed dropping a condom
1958	O'Casey submits <i>The Drums of Father Ned</i> to the Dublin Theatre Festival, but the organisers – under clerical pressure – ask O'Casey to alter the play. He refuses and withdraws the piece, and the festival collapses when Samuel Beckett withdraws work in support. O'Casey's play premieres the following year at Lafayette Little Theatre, Indiana, and he bans professional productions of his work in Ireland	In Dublin, Brendan Behan's play <i>An Giall</i> is first produced, then translated and modified for an English-language premiere in London as <i>The Hostage</i> . O'Casey notes the positive London reviews and writes that Behan's work is badly needed to encourage younger Irish playwrights
1959	<i>Cock-a-Doodle Dandy</i> is produced at the Royal Court in London: when visiting the theatre O'Casey meets John Osborne and praises the younger man's cleverness, sincerity, and courage	Éamon de Valera retires from Irish government and assumes the largely ceremonial role of Irish president. Another veteran of Easter 1916, Seán Lemass of the Fianna Fáil Party, becomes Taoiseach (Irish leader) until 1966. Lemass's premiership sees a remarkable period of economic and industrial growth and social modernisation, as well as the redesign and destruction of much of old Georgian Dublin. A new pope, John XXIII, announces the Second Vatican Council, to consider the relationship between the Catholic Church and the modern world
1960		John F. Kennedy, a forty-three-year-old of Irish descent, becomes Democratic Party

xxiv	<i>Sean O'Casey's Life and Times: A Chronology</i>	
	O'Casey's life and work	Historical and literary milestones
1961		president of the United States of America Royal Shakespeare Company founded by Peter Hall in Stratford-upon-Avon. Tom Murphy's play <i>A Whistle in the Dark</i> is premiered in London
1962	One final flurry of new O'Casey works in production sees <i>Figuro in the Night</i> at Hofstra University Playhouse, New York; <i>The Moon Shines on Kilenamoe</i> in Amherst College, Massachusetts; and <i>Behind the Green Curtains</i> at the University of Rochester, New York State	Cuban missile crisis
1963	O'Casey studies news reports of President J. F. Kennedy's trip to Ireland, the first such visit of a sitting US president. One month later, Kennedy is assassinated and O'Casey pronounces himself stunned and horrified. The playwright's sympathy is appreciated in the circle of Robert F. Kennedy, and <i>The New York Times</i> notes that O'Casey 'shared the anguish of Americans'	Harold Macmillan resigns as prime minister following the Profumo affair (a sex and Soviet-espionage scandal). Britain's National Theatre is founded by Laurence Olivier
1964	<i>Young Cassidy</i> , a Hollywood movie based on O'Casey's autobiographies, is filmed in Dublin O'Casey dies, aged eighty-four	Harold Wilson's Labour Party wins the British general election. Premiere of Brian Friel's play <i>Philadelphia, Here I Come!</i> in Dublin. Death of Brendan Behan, aged forty-one, six months before that of O'Casey

Abbreviations

Letters of Sean O'Casey

- 1 L* *The Letters of Sean O'Casey, Volume 1: 1910–41*, ed. David Krause (London: Macmillan, 1975).
2 L *The Letters of Sean O'Casey, Volume 2: 1942–54*, ed. David Krause (London: Macmillan, 1980).
3 L *The Letters of Sean O'Casey, Volume 3: 1955–58*, ed. David Krause (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989).
4 L *The Letters of Sean O'Casey, Volume 4: 1959–64*, ed. David Krause (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992).

Works of Sean O'Casey

- B* *Bedtime Story, The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), IV, 225–59.
BaB *Blast and Benedictions: Articles and Stories*, ed. Ronald Ayling (London: Macmillan, 1967).
BB *The Bishop's Bonfire*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), V, 1–128.
BGC *Behind the Green Curtains*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), V, 245–328.
C *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), IV, 117–224.
D *The Drums of Father Ned*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), V, 129–245.
DuW *Drums under the Windows*, in *Autobiographies ii* (London: Faber, 2011), 1–264.
E *The End of the Beginning*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), I, 263–92.

- F* *Figuro in the Night*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), v, 329–66.
- FGC* *Feathers from the Green Crow: Sean O'Casey, 1905–1925*, ed. Robert Hogan (London: Macmillan, 1963).
- FW* *The Flying Wasp: A Laughing Look-Over of What Has Been Said about the Things of the Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1937).
- G* *The Green Crow* (London: W. H. Allen, 1957).
- H* *Hall of Healing*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), III, 233–74.
- HF* *The Harvest Festival*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), v, 409–72.
- IFTW* *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well*, in *Autobiographies* II (London: Faber, 2011), 265–511.
- IK* *I Knock at the Door*, in *Autobiographies* I (London: Faber, 2011), 1–175.
- J* *Juno and the Paycock*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), I, 1–90.
- K* *Kathleen Listens In*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), v, 473–500.
- M* *The Moon Shines on Kilenamoe*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), v, 367–408.
- N* *Nannie's Night Out*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), v, 501–35.
- NAL* *Niall: A Lament* (London: Calder/Riverrun, 1991).
- O* *Oak Leaves and Lavender*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), IV, 1–116.
- P* *The Plough and the Stars*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), I, 159–262.
- PD* *Purple Dust*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), III, 1–122.
- PH* *Pictures in the Hallway*, in *Autobiographies* I (London: Faber, 2011), 177–402.
- PoD* *A Pound on Demand*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), I, 293–314.
- R* *Red Roses for Me*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), III, 123–232.
- RC* *Rose and Crown*, in *Autobiographies* III (London: Faber, 2011), 1–208.
- S* *The Shadow of a Gunman*, in *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1984), I, 91–158.