Class During the Irish Revolution: British Soldiers, 1916, and the Abject Body

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They sent me to the gallery or round the music-'alls,
But when it comes to fightin', Lord! They'll shove me in the stalls!
-Rudyard Kipling, 'Tommy'.[1]

Introduction

At the age of 88, James Connolly's daughter, Nora, wrote about her father's death. She recalled that, after the execution, there came a knock at the family's door, and on the doorstep a young British soldier presented himself. He appeared perhaps sixteen or seventeen years old, and Connolly's widow thought he might be trying to desert. However, when she asked what he wanted, the young man replied: 'I want you to forgive me'. He continued:

> I was one of the squad that killed James Connolly. It was only afterwards that I heard how he had worked for the working people. I am a miner. My father is a miner, and my grandfather was a miner – they were both very busy in the trade union. How can I go back home? They would know about James Connolly even if I didn't. I haven't been home on leave. I can't go home. I'd let something slip and they'd know I killed James Connolly. Oh, why was I chosen to kill a man like that?

In response, Connolly's widow gave the reassurance that her dead husband had offered his forgiveness at the time of the execution, because he 'realised you were being forced, he realised you were only a working-class boy'.[2]

Of course, it is difficult to verify the story at this distance or to identify the soldier: there are no lists of the men who made up the 1916 firing squads, with the individuals simply having been plucked from their morning's parade and then ordered to perform the executions.[3] Yet certain details of Nora Connolly's story do ring true. Those who shot her father belonged to a group of English soldiers who were young and inexperienced, and recruited from the mining districts of the East Midlands. They were members of the 2/6th and 2/7th Sherwood Foresters, the second-line units from Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire that had been set up in 1914 in order to supply the

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[1] Kipling, 'Tommy', in *The Columbia Anthology of British Poetry*, ed. by Carl Woodring and James Shapiro (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p.721.
[2] Nora Connolly O'Brien, *We Shall Rise Again* (London: Mosquito Press, 1981), pp.37-38.
[3] We do know that the twenty-year-old Sergeant from Chesterfield, William Hand, of the 2/6th Sherwood Foresters, was a member of the firing squad that killed Joseph Mary Plunkett, because Hand gave Plunkett some rosary beads. Hand subsequently passed the beads to his cousin Dora, before going to France where he died in 1918 (see National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks, HE:EW.5368 and http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/785125/HAND,%20WILLIAM). We also know that Arthur Dickson of the 2/7th Sherwood Foresters commanded a firing squad, and the arrangements were made by Arthur Neal Lee, who found the task 'beastly', see Imperial War Museum, Lt. Col. A.N. Lee 66/121/1; and Captain A.A. Dickson 01/49/1; and also Cliff Housley, *The Sherwood Foresters in the Easter Rising Dublin 1916* (Sawley: Miliquest Publications, 2014), p.97.

first-line when it began haemorraging men at the Western Front.[4] One of their commanders later reflected that 'Most of our "men" were merely boys, Derby Recruits, who had been in uniform about 6 or 8 weeks. They had not fired their musketry course and many had never fired a rifle'.[5]

As Enda Duffy has noted, James Connolly's executed corpse has since taken its place in Irish history alongside the other degraded bodies that bear 'either the marks of colonial oppression or the scars of having fought against it, or both'.[6] Such bodies range from the *Illustrated London News*'s famine illustrations of 1846-50, to the bodies of the Maze hunger strikers of 1981. Certainly, in 1916, the British establishment demonstrated a distinct enthusiasm for envisioning Connolly as a corpse rather than a living person. Twelve days before he was actually executed, a communiqué from the British army declared 'James Connolly, the chief rebel leader, is reported killed', and the *Manchester Guardian* reported this (mis)information under the headline 'Better News from Ireland'.[7]

Yet during 1916, Connolly's was not the only body to preoccupy the British authorities. The general staff remained convinced that, within the army's own ranks, a public ritual of bodily punishment was necessary in order to maintain military discipline. In some cases (for 'crimes' including desertion), a court martial might condemn an offender to execution by firing squad, and from 1914-18 the British army executed 322 individuals in France and Belgium in this way.[8] In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault frequently draws on military terms, and describes civil society as an occupied zone, in order to emphasize the possibility that, as Judith Butler glosses it, 'contemporary power-relations are, at least implicitly, war relations'.[9] Hence, we might be unsurprised to find that, during the spring of 1916, the Crown authorities so readily drew upon the methodologies of the attritional Western Front when facing a militarily small-scale insurgency in Dublin, and sought to treat Connolly and his colleagues like British-army deserters at the Somme.

This chapter explores that affinity between how the early twentieth-century British state treated the bodies of its own working-class soldiers, and the way it treated Irish bodies in revolutionary Dublin: as objects that could be commandeered, displayed for instruction, and reduced to bloody debasement. In order to investigate this connection, I rely upon Georges Bataille's ideas of the social operation of 'abjection', particularly as expressed in his short essay of 1934, 'Abjection and Miserable Forms'. Here, Bataille argues that sovereignty depends on an integral exclusion by which

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[4] *The Sherwood Foresters (Nottingham and Derbyshire Regiment): A Brief History* (Derby: English Life, 1980), p.4, p.11.
[5] The World War I Diary of Lt. Col. A.N. Lee, DSO OBE TD, The Imperial War Museum. 66/121/1, f.33.
[6] Enda Duffy, 'Molly's Throat', in *Joyce: Feminism/Post/Colonialism*, ed. by Ellen Carol Jones (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp.213-44, p.231.
[7] 'Quelling the Rising', *The Times*, 1 May 1916, p.9. 'Better News from Ireland', *Manchester Guardian*, 1 May 1916, p.5.
[8] Wilson, *Landscapes of the Western Front: Materiality During the Great War* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p.65.
[9] Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, rev. edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p.226.

certain members of the population are instructively 'represented from the outside with disgust as the dregs of the people, populace and gutter'.[10]

As this chapter will emphasize, Irish writing explored this terrain in the work of Seán O'Casey, with O'Casey realizing, like Bataille, that the operation of the modern state relied on the public display of certain bodies in abject condition. Indeed, an examination of O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy – as well as his play *The Silver Tassie* and the early volumes of his autobiography – reveals an interrelation between Irish tenement dwellers and working-class British soldiers that comes close to Bataille's idea that 'Miserable exploitation is abandoned to the organizers of production […] that is to say, to a section of the population which is itself miserable; the profound internal divisions of the misérables end up thus in an infinite subjugation'.[11]

The Sherwood Foresters

The British-army units that suffered the heaviest losses at Easter 1916 were members of the Sherwood Foresters, and a surviving postcard offers a glimpse of the world from which these soldiers were recruited. This card was published by the Clay Cross Colliery in Derbyshire, in order to promote the mine, and shows a man from one of the battalions that ended up in Dublin during the Rising. On the left-hand side of the card is an image of the man at work in the mine, accompanied by the caption 'winning his bread: getting the celebrated "CXC [Clay Cross Colliery] Gold Medal" coal', and on the right-hand side is an image of the man in uniform, apparently 'serving his country. The same individual as a "Territorial"'.[12] As this postcard reveals, the Sherwood Foresters recruited in the industrial communities of the English East Midlands, a landscape that inspired art, as Katherine Mansfield disapprovingly put it, that 'looks *black* with miners'.[13]

However, if recruits to the Sherwood Foresters could be associated with the realm of industry and manufacture, the officers who commanded these men came from a quite different social background. For example, one of the most high-profile deaths amongst the Sherwood Foresters during the Rising was that of the officer Frederick Dietrichsen, a lawyer who had graduated from Cambridge University, came from a wealthy family, and lived in Nottingham's exclusive Park district at the outset of the war.[14] The way in which the Sherwood Foresters prepared for battle was designed to buttress such class difference. For example, when the 2/8th Sherwoods trained in Billericay before Easter Week, the majority of the men had suffered an assortment of ailments from their time in poor billets, whilst the Commanding Officer and Adjutant 'were most kindly and hospitably entertained at Ramsden Hall by Mr and Mrs Bacon, and lived in the lap of luxury'.[15] On arrival in Dublin, a similar divison took place: the officers dined at the Royal St George Yacht Club, whilst the rest waited in a large

[10] Bataille, 'Abjection and Miserable Forms', in *More & Less*, ed. by Sylvere Lotringer, trans. by Yvonne Shafir (Pasadena: MIT Press, 1999), pp.8-13, p.9.
[11] Bataille, 'Abjection and Miserable Forms', p.9.
[12] Paul North, *Regiments of Nottingham* (Keyworth: Reflections of a Bygone Age, 1991), p.59.
[13] Mansfield, *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield: Volume II: 1918-1919*, ed. by Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), p.287.
[14] See James Moran, '1916: A British Soldier's Family Reunion and Death in Dublin', *Irish Times*, 6 April 2015, p.11.
[15] W.C. Oates, DSO, *The Sherwood Foresters in the Great War 1914-1918: The 2/8th Battalion* (Nottingham: J&H Bell, 1920), p.20.

empty hotel and town hall.[16] Even in death, a strict hierarchy was observed, with the wounded and killed officers usually being reported separately from, and in precedence to, the other soldiers (and, of course, the civilian casualties). Hence, when Prime Minister Asquith described the Easter Rising to the House of Commons, he told of the Sherwood Foresters by saying, 'six officers were killed and 15 wounded, and of other ranks 24 were killed and 142 wounded'.[17] Such an attitude perhaps explains the conduct of the Rising itself, where at Mount Street Bridge the commanders in charge of the British army showed a strikingly cavalier attitude towards the lives of their own underlings: when Brigadier General Lowe was told at 4.40pm on 26 April that the 2/7th Sherwood Foresters had suffered terrible losses, and so could not now be expected to storm the schoolhouse, he responded by telling the British soldiers to 'go on with the job', and informed Colonel Oates of the 2/8th Foresters that, 'Your Battalion will storm the Mount Street Schools at all costs, **at all costs** mind, penetrate further if you can'.[18] Here, in microcosm, was the philosophy of the Western Front.

Abjection

The fate of the Sherwood Foresters makes manifest Georges Bataille's idea of the abject. His theorizing on this idea is primarily socio-political, and is informed by his witnessing the marginalizing of particular groups during Hitler's rise to power during the 1930s. During this era, Bataille identified a cycle of exploitation, by which the working classes were kept in subjugation by those groups whose status depended upon demonstrating their own removal from such a position. He wrote:

> The masters, who act as if they were the expression of society itself, are preoccupied – more seriously than with any other concern – with showing that they do not in any way share the abjection of the men they employ. *The end of the workers' activity is to produce in order to live, but the bosses' activity is to produce in order to condemn the working producers to a hideous degradation* – for there is no disjunction possible between, on the one hand, the characterization the bosses seek through their modes of expenditure, which tend to elevate them high above human baseness, and on the other hand this baseness itself, of which this characterization is a function.[19]

Bataille's socially inflected ideas about the abject are not particularly well known in Anglophone scholarship, as they form a minor part of Bataille's overall thinking and have been thoroughly overshadowed by Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic development of abjection in her well-known volume *Powers of Horror* (published in 1980 and widely available in English translation since 1982: by contrast, Bataille's far shorter 'Abjection and Miserable Forms' only appeared in English translation in 1999 and is now out of print). Nonetheless, in twenty-first-century analysis of Irish theatre, ideas

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[16] Officers of the Battalions, *'The Robin Hoods': 1/7th, 2/7th & 3/7th Battns. Sherwood Foresters: 1914-1918* (Nottingham: J&H Bell, 1921), p.281.
[17] 'House of Commons and the Rebellion', *Manchester Guardian*, 12 May 1916, p.5.
[18] Oates, p.39.
[19] Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, ed. by Allan Stoekl, trans by Allan Stoekl with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie, Jr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp.116-29, pp.125-26.

of abjection have become increasingly prominent.[20] In particular, scholars have sought to understand the dramaturgy of Marina Carr by using Kristeva's terminology, as shown in sensitive scholarship by Clare Wallace, Anne F. O'Reilly, and Rhona Trench.[21] Kristeva herself connected her thinking about the abject with the playhouse when she wrote about how disrupting the border between the bodily and the non-bodily can result in a state of abjection, and how the sight of a wound or corpse can affect the onlooker's own sense of self:

> [As] in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being.[22]

For Kristeva, then, this notion of the abject as a borderline condition is closely connected to the scopic operation of the playhouse, as well as with a fundamental breakdown in the sense of division, established in childhood, between an individual's own bodily integrity and the body of the mother. More recently, Sara Ahmed has drawn on Foucault and J.L. Austin to highlight how the disgust we might associate with abjection is something that, of necessity, requires an audience:

> [S]hared witnessing is required for speech acts to be generative, that is, for the attribution of disgust to an object or other to stick to others. In addition, the demand for a witness shows us that the speech act, 'That's disgusting' generates more than simply a subject and an object; it also generates a community of those who are bound together through the shared condemnation of a disgusting object or event.[23]

Furthermore, abjection may also be connected with the performance of class. When talking about abjection, scholars of Irish theatre have taken their cue from Kristeva, but Kristeva herself repeatedly points back to the way that her notions of abjection owe much to Bataille's thought, which has a primarily socio-political rather than psychoanalytic basis. Indeed, Kristeva describes Bataille as 'the only one, to my knowledge, who has linked the production of the abject to *the weakness of that prohibition*, which, in other respects, necessarily constitutes each social order'.[24] Hence Kristeva draws attention to the way that Bataille had, half a century earlier, used the idea of abjection in order to explain the situation of disenfranchised groups. As Kristeva points out, Bataille saw that such groups are excremental, and are repelled by others, but remain unable to do any such rejection themselves. As Bataille himself observes, 'Filth, snot and vermin are enough to render an infant vile;

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[20] See, for example, Martin Middeke, 'Martin McDonagh', in *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary Irish Playwrights*, ed. by Martin Middeke and Peter Paul Schnierer (London: Methuen, 2010), pp.213-33, p.222. Kim, *Women and Ireland as Beckett's Lost Others* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2010).

[21] See Wallace, 'Tragic Destiny and Abjection in Marina Carr's 'The Mai, Portia Coughlan' and 'By the Bog of Cats…', *Irish University Review*, 31 (2001), 431-49; O'Reilly, *Sacred Play: Soul-Journeys in Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Dublin: Carysfort, 2004): Trench, *Bloody Living: The Loss of Selfhood in the Plays of Marina Carr* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

[22] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, p.3.

[23] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p.94.

[24] Kristeva, p.207.

his personal nature is not responsible for it, only the negligence or helplessness of those raising it. General abjection is of the same nature as the child; wreaked by impotence under given social conditions'.[25]

Bataille thus argues that the oppressed class must exist on the edges of society, as excremental and abject, without the possibility of taking any affirmative action: yet this representation of the abject group as outsiders becomes, paradoxically, central to the operation of the social order itself. Such an idea finds its echo in Judith Butler's later thinking about abjection, when she describes such a process as 'the model by which other forms of identity-differentiation are accomplished. In effect, this is the mode by which Others become shit'.[26]

The Plough and the Stars

Seán O'Casey's best-known writings provide an extended discussion of the abject condition of such socially marginalized groups. In his three Dublin plays it is the tenement-dwelling class – with all of its drinking and dying, bleeding and breeding, tuberculosis and cursing – that takes centre-stage. Indeed, directors such as Garry Hynes have emphasised that, at the heart of O'Casey's theatrical vision, are characters who are suffering terribly from the illness and ill-fortune of poverty. Fintan O'Toole, for instance, has praised John Kavanagh's 1986 version of Joxer Daly for revealing 'the rat-like hunger of a half-starved man'.[27] Such abjection makes the tenement dwellers a species apart from figures such as the middle-class 'Woman from Rathmines' and even, provocatively, from a figure like Captain Brennan (of James Connolly's socialist militia the Irish Citizen Army) who condemns his fellow Dubliners as 'slum lice'.[28]

Indeed, one of the things that made the portrayal of Patrick Pearse in *The Plough and the Stars* so incendiary was his literal separation from the tenement dwellers onstage. In fact, a sign of O'Casey's nervousness about this treatment of Pearse is demonstrated by the playwright writing a last-minute revision to the Pearse character (which never survived into performance) in which that onstage figure, who otherwise exclusively speaks words penned by the real-life Pearse, would deliver some additional dialogue invented by O'Casey, including the line 'in every age will be found Irishmen willing and eager to fight for the sovereign freedom of their counthry'.[29] That word 'counthry' is deeply revealing about the way that O'Casey, at the eleventh hour, attempted to bring Pearse into closer affinity with the tenement residents of the play: the Pearsean figure speaks only in standard English in the rest of the script, and 'counthry' is usually associated with the phrasing of O'Casey's working-class Dublin characters (Joxer Boyle, for example, observing that 'the whole counthry's in a state o' chassis').[30] By putting 'counthry' into the mouth of the Pearse figure, O'Casey anxiously attempted to bridge the chasm he had suggested between

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[25] Bataille, 'Abjection and Miserable Forms', pp.11-12.
[26] Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd edn (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p.182.
[27] Fintan O'Toole, 'Course of True Theatre Never Should Run Smooth', *Irish Times*, 8 October 2011, <www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/weekend/2011/1008/1224305440357.html>.
[28] O'Casey, *Three Dublin Plays* (London: Faber, 1998), p.220.
[29] NLI, *The Plough and the Stars* Typescript with MS Annotations, MS 29,407, fol.II-2, 3
[30] O'Casey, *Three Dublin Plays*, p.104.

middle-class revolutionary and the suffering tenement dwellers.

However, it is the fourth act of *The Plough and the Stars* that proves most concerned with the blood, corpses, and wounds which in Kristeva's terms threaten so traumatically to remind us of our own materiality, but that, according to Bataille, reveal that 'the majority of workers do not have the capability to react strongly against the filth and decay which is overtaking them'.[31] The act begins with the corpse of the consumptive Mollser onstage, and then provides a description of Jack Clitheroe's death (with 'a tiny sthream o' blood thricklin' out of his mouth').[32] Then Bessie Burgess is shot and yells, 'I'm bleedin' to death, an' no one's here to stop th' flowin' blood'.[33] Mrs Gogan spreads a sheet over the corpse and describing 'th' poor woman, she's stiffenin' out as hard as she can! Her face has written on it th' shock o' sudden agony, an' her hands is whitenin' into th' smooth shininess of wax'. However, although Bessie's corpse is left on the stage, her presence scarcely affects the British soldiers. They sit next to the destroyed body, and Stoddard starts hungrily drinking tea: 'Pour it aht, pour it aht, Stoddart – *I could scoff anything just now*' (my italics).[34] The soldiers, horribly, show how social abjection may work within the British imperial state, making the Irish tenement dweller into a dehumanized form of waste that, to use Bataille's analysis, have been 'disinherited [from] the possibility of being human'.[35]

Moreover, in killing this woman, the soldiers have committed a symbolic matricide. Bessie may appear to them as simply being 'one of the women of the 'ouse', but she is actually a Protestant unionist who has proudly declared that her only son is currently serving in the British army.[36] The Mockney accent that O'Casey gives these soldiers is designed to denote a working-class English identity, and by the end of the play these soldiers are revealed to have murdered a Dublin street-fruit vendor who is delighted to be the mother of their comrade-in-arms. Thus, O'Casey's play describes an exploitative system in which working-class men are positioned to kill the family members of fellow working-class men.

The Silver Tassie

In his 1928 play *The Silver Tassie*, O'Casey spent more time thinking about how the British soldiers of this era were themselves subject to abjection according to social rank. In that play's famous second act, O'Casey presents Barney Bagnal, who is, much like Bessie Burgess's son, a former denizen of Dublin's tenements now suffering amidst the shell holes, barbed wire, and ruined buildings of the Western Front. But the text specifies that although Barney is a member of the British army he is not fighting: he is being punished by his superiors, and so is tied to a gunwheel throughout the act.[37] The reason for this punishment is that Barney was caught stealing a chicken from one of the small cafés and bars near the Front. Like the characters of the Dublin Trilogy, he was presumably experiencing desperate hunger.

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[31] Bataille, 'Abjection and Miserable Forms', p.11.
[32] O'Casey, *Three Dublin Plays*, p.230.
[33] O'Casey, *Three Dublin Plays*, p.244.
[34] O'Casey, *Three Dublin Plays*, p.246.
[35] Bataille, 'Abjection and Miserable Forms', p.11.
[36] O'Casey, *Three Dublin Plays*, p.245.
[37] O'Casey, *The Silver Tassie* (London: Faber, 2014), p.32.

But, unfortunately for Barney, he was caught red-handed by one of the top-ranking military officials who was, at the time, fucking one of the women of the area. When this incident is recounted, Barney is admonished by a plummy-voiced visitor to the trench, who declares, in public-school tones: 'The uniform, the cause, boy, the corps. Infra dignitatem, boy, infra dignitatem [Beneath (one's) dignity]'.[38] This visitor, of course, does none of the fighting, and makes no comment about the sexual incontinence of the 'brass hat' who caught Barney: Barney simply finds himself fighting for such people and being subject to their disciplinary regime. As Bataille puts it: 'The rich man consumes the poor man's losses, creating for him a category of degradation and abjection that leads to slavery […] the modern world has received slavery, and has reserved it for the proletariat'.[39]

For Bataille, as Imogen Tyler succinctly puts it, 'the waste populations created by sovereign power at the same time intrude at the centre of public life as objects of disgust'.[40] O'Casey also saw this perfectly well: and thus in the second act of the *Tassie* Barney Bagnal on his gunwheel is degraded, yet is also central to the scene's staging, with the display of his abjection giving a theatrical lesson to the other soldiers about the structure of power within the army. Furthermore, although W.B. Yeats declared that O'Casey knew nothing of the Great War's battlefields, this scene also reveals that O'Casey actually did know about the disciplinary regime of the British army during that conflict (as well as knowing about the sexual shenanigans of the wartime estaminets). As Ross Wilson explains, in real life:

> For more serious offences, such as theft or looting from military stores or the surrounding farms, soldiers were sentenced to 'Field Punishment Number One'. This form of retribution consisted of tying the offending soldier to a gun-wheel by the wrists and the ankles for an hour at a time, once in the morning and again in the evening. These punishments were to be carried out whilst the soldier's unit was out of line, so all the soldiers in the battalion could see the results of disobeying the rules laid out by the military authorities.[41]

O'Casey had learned about such structures of power from his two older brothers, who enlisted in the British army in the 1890s. His brother Tom fought in the Boer war with the Dublin Fusiliers, while another brother Mick served with the Royal Engineers (and later re-enlisted in 1916).[42] In the first two volumes of his autobiography (1939 and 1942), O'Casey wrote about his brothers' military service. His brother Tom is contrasted with 'Captain Bacon', a figure with a 'bristling' moustache, who attempts to co-opt Tom into being a 'spying bully' for the higher ranks and thus precipitates Tom's exit from the army.[43] Meanwhile, O'Casey's other brother Mick is described as 'doing twelve calendar months, cells, for up-ending a

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[38] O'Casey, *Tassie*, p.38.
[39] Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, ed. by Allan Stoekl, trans by Allan Stoekl with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie, Jr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp.116-29, p.125.
[40] Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*: *Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (London: Zed Books, 2013), p.19.
[41] Wilson, pp.64-65
[42] Christopher Murray, *Seán O'Casey: Writer at Work* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2004), p.34, p.52.
[43] O'Casey, *Autobiographies*, 3 vols (London: Faber, 2011), I, 217, 309-10.

company sergeant-major who had called him a good-for-nothing Irish bastard'.[44] Thus, as O'Casey depicts it, his brothers' experience revealed the noxious hierarchies of the army, and showed how working-class men – particularly working-class Irish men – might develop a more productive sense of affinity elsewhere. Ultimately, in what Christopher Murray is surely correct to describe as a scene of 'pure fantasy', O'Casey's autobiographies depict the two brothers, whilst wearing their army uniforms, fighting alongside the Irish nationalist members of a hurling team against members of the Royal Irish Constabulary.[45]

James Connolly and Jack White

Like O'Casey, James Connolly also developed an intimate knowledge of the British army's hierarchical structures. Indeed, Connolly knew those structures even better than O'Casey, as Connolly had personally served seven years in the British army between 1882 and 1888-9.[46] Connolly, having been born into the severe poverty of Edinburgh's Cowgate, probably viewed becoming a British soldier as less of a career choice and more of an essential escape route. His older brother had taken the same path out of the slums by the time that Connolly, as a fourteen-year-old, came to enlist in the King's Liverpool Regiment, probably under a false name and giving an incorrect date of birth.[47] During the seven ensuing years that he spent in the army, James Connolly quite probably served in the Cork area, in Castlebar, at the Curragh, in Belfast, and in Dublin.[48] He then deserted in 1888 or 1889, perhaps realising that he was part of what Bataille labels the 'infinite subjugation' of the social order, whereby 'Miserable exploitation' of the Irish was being undertaken by those from backgrounds such as Connolly's, 'a section of the population which is itself miserable'.[49] Certainly, when world war came in 1914, Connolly perceived little of the glory that Pearse identified in the conflict, and saw here only the latest manifestation of exploitation carried out by those who squatted at the top of an unjust socio-economic system. In November 1915 he wrote the address for an anti-conscription meeting in Glasgow, speaking to 'all the Comrades who refuse to be led astray to fight the battles of the ruling capitalist class' and insisting that, whilst dying for freedom at home remained a possibility, 'we have no intention of shedding our blood abroad for our masters'.[50]

It is notable that, when the ex-British-soldier, James Connolly, founded the Irish Citizen Army in 1913, he was assisted by Seán O'Casey – who also knew the British army so well from family experience – as well as by Jack White, another former British soldier. Indeed, it was White who founded the Irish Citizen Army by first proposing the formation of a militia 'as a means by which to bring discipline into the distracted ranks of labour', and at one stage he argued about the use of 'his' army.[51] White was an Antrim-born man from a distinguished British-army background, being the son of Field Marshal Sir George Stuart White VC, the defender of Ladysmith; and

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[44] O'Casey, *Autobiographies*, I, 310.
[45] Murray, p.22.
[46] Donal Nevin, *James Connolly: 'A Full Life'* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005), p.15.
[47] Nevin, p.15.
[48] Nevin, pp.16-17.
[49] Bataille, 'Abjection and Miserable Forms', p.9.
[50] In James Connolly, *Between Comrades: James Connolly: Letters and Correspondence 1889-1916*, ed. by Donal Nevin (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2007), p.532/
[51] Nevin, pp.552-53.

Jack White himself served in the Boer War with such distinction that he received the Distinguished Service Order.[52] Yet during that time as a soldier, White also had some discomforting experience of the British army's hierarchicial operation of power. In his autobiography, *Misfit*, he describes his reaction to seeing a fellow officer threatening to kill an unarmed Boer prisoner:

> I saw an extremely frightened youth of about seventeen years of age […] Then arrived an officer, my superior in rank, and by this time there were ten or a dozen men around. 'Shoot him, shoot him', yelled the officer.
> A wave of disgust swamped my sense of discipline.
> "If you shoot him", said I, pointing my carbine at him, "I'll shoot you". And he passed on.
> He is now a General.[53]

Little surprise that, with White holding such feelings, he found himself drawn into Connolly's circle by 1913, and even though White clashed with others in the Irish Citizen Army and missed the Easter Rising, he did later reflect that 'I should have stuck with the Citizen Army, where I had the clear guidance of international revolutionary principle undercutting and outlasting the conflict of national interests that caused the Great War'.[54]

However, by the time of the rebellion in 1916, there had been a parting of ways between Connolly, O'Casey, and White. Only Connolly remained in the Citizen Army during the Rising, and O'Casey would become one of Connolly's sternest critics, publishing *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army* to argue that in the build up to Easter Week, for Connolly, 'The high creed of Irish Nationalism became his daily rosary, while the higher creed of International humanity that had so long bubbled from his eloquent lips was silent for ever'.[55] Yet, although Jack White did not fight in the Rising, he remained loyal to Connolly, and wrote what he called 'Conolly's [*sic*] defence against O'Cathasaigh', emphasizing that Connolly remained an internationalist to the end and simply 'realized that the National Movement was the reservoir of the nation's subconscious power, that amalgamating with it he could tap mines of energy which would ultimately produce the true revolutionary ore in Ireland'.[56]

That imagery of 'mines of energy' and 'revolutionary ore' is particularly telling, because when White heard about the Rising he attempted to help his former comrades by travelling to Wales, where he intended to organise a miners' strike that would prevent the British from executing Connolly. White later reflected, 'Had I succeeded I would have crippled the coal supply for the British Fleet'.[57] Of course,

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[52] See Leo Keohane, *Captain Jack White: Imperialism, Anarchism & the Irish Citizen Army* (Dublin: Merrion, 2014), p.30.
[53] White, *Misfit: An Autobiography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930), p.45.
[54] White, *Misfit*, p.249.
[55] P. Ó Cathasaigh [Seán O'Casey], *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1919), p.52. I have pointed out elsewhere, later in the twentieth century O'Casey did eventually come to a view about the relationship between nationalism and socialism that was strikingly similar to that held by Connolly in 1916: see Moran, 'Conflicting Counter-Hegemonies?: The Dramaturgy of James Connolly and Seán O'Casey', *Kritika Kultura*, 21/22 (2013/2014), 516-32.
[56] Jack White, *Misfit*, p.249.
[57] White, p.345.

unfortunately for him, he ended up in prison instead. Nonetheless, he did have time to gain a sympathetic hearing for Connolly's cause amongst the miners of South Wales, inspiring the future founder of the Communist Party of Great Britain, the collier Arthur Horner, to travel to Dublin and join the Irish Citizen Army. Horner felt that, when viewed from the valleys of South Wales, the Irish struggle took on a class-inflected colouring: 'we, who had seen the viciousness of the coal owners, regarded what was happening in Ireland as the real struggle for the rights of small nations in a war-torn world'.[58] If Nora Connolly was correct in her recollection with which this essay began, then we can see that other members of British mining communities may also have identified with James Connolly's cause.

Of course, Britain's miners, visibly marked by their daily work in dirty and dangerous conditions, were accustomed to seeing the male body displayed in abjection. Such miners may have felt a particular affinity with Connolly: as Arthur Horner points out, in an era of strikes and violent labour disputes, the miners could compare Connolly's anticolonial and anti-capitalist struggle with their own awareness of the 'viciousness of the coal owners'.[59] Although the 1916 rebellion was a failure in military terms, Connolly and his colleagues showed at least the possibility of resistance to the hegemonic order. Later, in 1934, when Seán O'Casey read about the mining communities of the English East Midlands, he sought to reverse conventional societal ordering by valuing this life more highly than that of the middle-class existence which was more usually portrayed on the commercial stage. O'Casey read D.H. Lawrence's play *A Collier's Friday Night*, in which a miner emerges from work and is criticized for trailing black dirt with him, and when O'Casey reviewed the script he indicated – as Mary Douglas would do more explicitly later in the century – that 'dirt' is a culturally determined construct.[60] Seán O'Casey praised the drama precisely because of its bodily accretions: 'there is the sweat of life in it' wrote O'Casey, contrasting that welcome sweat with the lamentable 'sound of silken garments moving' that O'Casey saw in the dominant middle-class British theatre.[61] For O'Casey, then, the filth of the colliery signified an existence that was of more value than the life described by figures like Noël Coward. Ultimately, Connolly's struggle may have been inspiring to British miners because it offered the possibility of a similar subversion of social order: the battle of Easter week potentially showed how, as Bataille put it, 'In the collective expression, *the misérables*, the conscience of affliction already veers from its purely negative direction and begins to pose itself as a threat'.[62]

[58] Horner, *Incorrigible Rebel* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1960), p.26.
[59] Horner, *Incorrigible Rebel*, p.26.
[60] Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).
[61] O'Casey, 'A Miner's Dream of Home', *New Statesman*, 28 July 1934, p.124.
[62] Bataille, 'Abjection and Miserable Forms', p.10.