

A Political Dystopia In Expressionistic Format: Denis Johnston's The Old Lady Says "No!"

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research is to look at Denis Johnston's expressionistic technique in The Old Lady Says: "No!" (1929) in order to get a better understanding of his political views on post-independence Ireland as a political, moral, and social dystopia that clashes violently with the idealized image of pre-independence Ireland. The play's expressionist form corresponded to the Gate members' collective spirit. They all agreed that the old playwriting, acting, and directing methods had fulfilled their function in the past and could no longer be considered relevant in the modern era. The play has a historical foundation and revolves around the figure of Robert Emmet, a 19th-century patriot who was persecuted for leading a revolt against British rule in 1801 and became a national hero for the Irish people. In reading Emmet, who was sentimentally presented in Irish romantic literature, Johnston takes a very different approach. Johnston portrays the Irish death wish, which pushes young men to their fate irrationally under the banner of patriotism. Like most German expressionist theatre and Johnston's own plays, the piece takes a politically extreme stance. Johnston creates a stark contrast between the idealized past with its tremendous rage of emotions and the Free State Ireland with its violence, riots, revolt, and assassinations by setting Emmet in twentieth-century Dublin. He intends to criticize both ideals, implying that the present's misery results from the idealized past's blindness.

Keywords: *Irish Drama, Irish History, Political Theatre, Denis Johnston, Expressionism.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Old Lady Says: "No!", which was premiered in the Gate Theatre in 1929, is Johnston's first play. Most critics unanimously agreed that it is his masterpiece toward which the late developments of the Irish Dramatic Movement have been ripening throughout nearly a decade from the foundation of the Dublin Drama League in 1918. Gene Barnett points out that "it was exactly the kind of play -Irish or otherwise- that they (the founders of the Gate Theatre) wanted" (1978, 11). With its expressionist form, the play came in consonance with the spirit spread among the members of the Gate. They shared the belief that the traditional way of playwriting, acting, and directing had served its purpose in the past and could no longer fit in with the spirit of modern age. The Old Lady was, in great measure, a revolution in the Irish drama that was written, as its author states, "very much in the spirit of "Let us see what would happen if we did this or that." (Johnston, 1977: 16) The Gate Theatre was already familiar with expressionism from its opening in 1928. In its first season, it presented O'Neill's The Hairy Ape and Anna Christie; the second season included Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine, then came The

Old Lady after being rejected by the Abbey directorate, and as Barnett remarks: "no play could have had a warmer welcome from producers." (1978:18).

The realist-oriented Abbey management rejected the Old Lady. However, Johnston ought to be grateful for that rejection as the play had the golden chance to be produced by the two enthusiastic theatre figures of the Gate Theatre; Hilton Edwards and Michael Mac Liamoir. Ferrar remarks that "It is ironic that "the Abbey's rejection of The Old Lady was Johnston's luckiest misfortune" (1981: 21). The play partakes of expressionist drama in almost all its elements, including theme, structure, characterization, language, and setting.

Expressionism And The Irish Theatre

Expressionism is primarily a German movement that began as a drama of protest. One of its most characteristic features is that it is a highly subjective art. It glorifies the individual and places the fundamental truth in his soul. "Expressionist art at its extremes," Gaskell observes, "rejects the outside world as unworthy of representation. In its place, it offers a projection of the life of the mind" (1972:48). The expressionist drama had a messianic tone, and it came as a call to free the world from materialism, hatred, hypocrisy, and social injustice. Freedom of realistic artistic restrictions is a remarkable element of that art that destroyed real-time, place, characterization, and structure.

The plot and structure of an expressionist play have no outward unity, and the action, as Styan remarks, always tends to be "disjointed and broken into episodes, incidents and episodes, each making a point of its own." (1981, Vol III: 6). As for characters, they are always stereotypes and caricatures, identified by nameless designations; the central character in many expressionistic plays tends to be Christ-like. All this stems from the fact that the emphasis in expressionist art lies mainly instead on the theme and the message that the author wants to convey to his audience than on the artistic devices of realistic drama. All these features mark Johnston's *The Old Lady Says: "No!"* that came to assert a nascent inclination in the Irish dramatic scene toward a break with the traditional forms that pervaded the Irish theatre for long. Sean O'Casey, *The Silver Tassie*, which was rejected by Abbey's management in 1928, was the first daring attempt at expressionism in the Irish theatre.

Grattan Is An Opposite Historical Figures To Emmet

Henry Grattan and Robert Emmet were two Irish leaders who opposed the British rule of Ireland in two opposite ways. Henry Grattan was an Irish statesman who dedicated his life to the cause that "Ireland should be granted its rightful status, that of an independent nation" (Moody & Martin, 1984:233) through nonviolent means. He managed to win a voice for the Irish parliament "and had lived to watch it all destroyed by the rising of 1798 which led to an enforced legislative union with Great Britain," Ferrar points out. (1973:33). Robert Emmet, on the other hand, adopted violence as the only means for national liberation. He was a revolutionary rebel leader who formed an abortive rebellion in 1801, ending with his persecution for "high treason" in 1803.

The Structure Of The Old Lady Says: "No!"

The Old Lady does not depend in its structure on a particular narrative line or a usual plot; the action takes the form of relatively separate tableaux and disjointed episodes. Following the play-within-the-play technique of Pirandello, it opens with a playlet that serves as a prelude to the two parts that comprise the main body of the play. The opening playlet presents a romantic scene between Robert Emmet and his beloved Sarah Curran

in the latter's garden at Rathfarnham. The runaway Emmet comes to bid farewell to his lady. During the meeting of the two lovers, a British force headed by Major Sirr comes to seize him. The actor playing Emmet is accidentally stunned as he resists arrest. From this moment on, the actual play takes place in the numbed mind of the unconscious actor, in the form of a dream, or rather a nightmare in which he imagines himself as the real Emmet searching for Sarah Curran in the twentieth-century Dublin.

The rest of the play presents Emmet's frustration at the realities of modern Ireland after gaining the freedom for which he sacrificed his life. His search for Sarah Curran ends in failure and frustration. Instead of his beloved, he finds a vulgar, foul-mouthed old flower woman. The lover's quest is given broader connotations. It is used as a symbol for Emmet's own search for the past romantic Ireland that turns out to be the modern Irish Free State which lays bare before his eyes all its unheroic realities. By making this leap of time and casting Emmet in the twentieth-century Dublin, Johnston makes a sharp juxtaposition between the idealized past with its passionate rage of sentiment and present free Ireland with its violence, rioting, revolt, and assassinations.

Thus, the play's structure depends on two main parts: a series of kaleidoscopic disconnected scenes. The main action takes the form of a scripted dream in the mind of the unconscious actor, a quality that it shares with many expressionist plays. Through this device, Johnston sets himself free from the usual restrictions of time, place, and the chain of cause and effect. The action is revealed as stations in the Speaker's journey to Rathfarnham, searching for Sarah Curran.

PART I

In Part One, the Speaker finds himself thrust into a noisy and crowded city that turns out to be modern Dublin, a remarkable contrast with the quiet romantic mood of the prelude. In this city, he makes a series of encounters, the first of which is with the statue of Grattan. A debate follows between the two political leaders on the two opposite ways of liberating Ireland. Johnston makes a confrontation between the two opposite figures; one is the symbol of irrational chauvinism and uncalculated courage, and the other stands for reason and mature wisdom. Grattan's words present the central motif of the play: "Oh, it is an easy thing to draw a sword and raise a barricade. It saves working... waiting... everything but blood ! And blood is the cheapest thing that God has made" (2.1977: 32- 33). He mocks the national death wish characteristic of most of his "countrymen," which is a recurrent leitmotif throughout the play. However, Grattan could not open the Speaker's eyes to the tragedy that he and those who are like him, "the omniscient young Messiahs," have caused Ireland to suffer. He says, addressing the audience: "He is an old man. He does not understand the way we do. He can only doubt while we believe" (33). Then, unwilling to give up his ideals, he seeks a way out of this argument: "I must go back to Rathfarnham. They will understand there" (33).

The second figure that the Speaker meets is the Old Flower Woman who is selling flowers at the base of Grattan's statue and who occasionally interrupts Emmet's conversation with Grattan by calling out to her flowers, by asking for money "a copper for a cuppa tea. Spare a copper for yerowin old lady" (33) or by laughing hysterically. She is satirically presented as the symbol of twentieth-century Ireland, a complete reversal of the traditional figure of Cathleen ni Houlihan who stands for everything good in Ireland. Canfield regards her as "a caustic vision of modern Ireland, a degenerated Cathleen Ni Houlihan" (1981: 40). She says: "Me four bewtyfulgre- in fields...", a glaring mockery of a famous line in Yeats's play where the Old Woman asks the Irish youth to liberate her "four beautiful green fields," whereby she is to return a beautiful

young lady. Johnston's parody satirizes a semi holy Irish figure. He wants to shock the Irish audience and to startle them into a recognition of the dreadful realities of twentieth-century Ireland, or as Grattan calls it, "this little hell of babbling torment"(2. 1977: 32), indicating that the romanticized heroic past is the cause behind the atrocities of the present. Before the climax of Part One, there is a brief scene where the Speaker meets other members of modern free Ireland who are not interested in politics but whose chatter reveals the hollowness of their thought and the triviality of their interests. They are the Flapper: "Do you like my nails this shade? ... Has your car got a strap round the bonnet?" and her friend, the Trinity Medical student: "Tayson's ties tie tightly" (35). The other couple is "A Well-Dressed Woman and a Businessman," who are- as Barnett states, "simply the counterparts of (the previous couple) fifteen or twenty years later." (1978: 33). The last couple is "Two Young Things," Bernadett and Carnel, who chat about their affairs with boyfriends in a lower-class accent. This is modern Dublin unfolding a section of her generation. Barnett regards them as "the luckier half of Dublin youth"(1978: 33) presented before the eyes of Emmet, the self-appointed savior of Ireland.

After this brief scene which serves as an easy relief between two serious ones, the climax is reached through an act of violence in which the Speaker finds himself involved with two girls that caused a crowd to gather. In this scene, the Speaker presents himself to the Dublin crowd who welcome him as a hero, and therefore, he is permitted to give a speech in which he flatters the mob's emotions with romantic patriotism and in which the love of death ideal is the main issue "Life springs from death and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations." (44) The Old Flower Woman, or Ireland, reappears demanding her right "It's not food or drink that I want..." (42), an allusion to the lines spoken by Cathleen ni Houlihan in Yeats's play. When she refers to Grattan's words about blood-shedding, she indicates that this is only what she wants: "What is it he called it?... the cheapest thing the good God has made...eh? He - he -he. That's all for your own old lady" (43). Having been ignored by the Speaker, she betrays him to the crowd telling them that he is not Robert Emmet, and consequently, they reject him as "a self-appointed instructor of the Irish people" and a "dirty trickster." Here, Johnston satirizes the headless mob and their quickly changing attitude. Barnett remarks that this rejection recalls the rejection of Parnell by the Home Rule Party in 1890. (1978: 4).

The scene assumes a melodramatic tone when the Speaker, defending himself against the crowd, seizes a gun and shoots a young man, Joe, in a manner that parodies the melodramatic death scenes in other plays such as O'Casey's *The Sun and The Sunset*. When the Speaker attempts to defend his deed, he uses a big word for what happened; he calls it "war": "what could I do?... It was war. I didn't mean to hurt him" (47). At the end of Part One, the Flower Woman reappears in the shadows, now revived and chanting in the voice of Sarah Curran, after getting what she wanted, i.e., blood-shedding; Barnett states: "She is a national symbol and flesh-devouring matriarch, but to the Speaker she is still his beloved Sarah – and he still pursues her." (1978: 34).

PART II

Part Two opens with an aristocratic party in "a fantastically respectable drawing room" at the house of the Minister of Arts and Crafts. This scene is regarded as insignificant in the development of action, yet it serves as a comic interlude, in which Johnston ridicules contemporary figures in letters, art, and politics. Among the targets of Johnston's satire is the Irish cultural movement; "Minister: What I say to Ann Taoischach (prime minister) is this, until we have Talent and Art in the country we have no National dignity." He also satirizes the Censorship Act, which "helps us to keep an eye on the sort of stuff that's

turned out and supports (the artist) only if he deserves it" (50), and the "Troubles": "Well, what if you shoot somebody? Everybody's shot somebody nowadays. That'll soon be over." (56).

When the Speaker arrives at the scene asking about the way to Rathfarnham, he is recognized as "the hard Emmet," "The old Scout," and is greeted by the Chorus in a comic distortion of salutation: "Oh how do you how do you how do you how do you" (53). Lady Trimer asks him, "a nice woman": "Now do tell us Mr. Emmet about your wonderful experience in the Trouble" (55). The word "Trouble" here indicates the lady's confusion about historical events: she confuses Emmet's rising 1801 with the "Troubles" that befell Ireland after the 1921 Treaty. This is a subtle indication of the modern elite's ignorance and the idea that Ireland is afflicted throughout her history with violence and bloody rebellions. Moreover, it is noteworthy that although the Old Flower Woman is present at the party, it is only the Speaker who can see her, and the refined people refuse to acknowledge her presence. This clever device suggests that the luxurious aristocracy is heedless of the actual conditions of Ireland.

The second scene in Part Two presents the Blind Man, who "represents those who live on the ashes and rotten bones of the past," as Canfield puts it. (1981: 41). He takes pride in his ancestry: "High kings in Thomond, my fathers are. Lords of the Gael". Ironically, he is the Speaker's guide in his quest, "Take my arm now and walk with me for a while, and I will put you on your way. Come". (61). Then, the Trinity medical reappears with his friend, and they are referred to as "He" and "She." Although they are now "a little older" and seemingly "more serious," they do not give up their triviality of thinking. Even the unspoken offer for marriage is quickly withdrawn before uttered, "He: I think we ought to have... maybe we still could.. (The music stops. There is a pause). The music is stopped" (63). This is perhaps a light reference to the corrupted morality of the modernist Dubliners with which the Speaker is shocked: "O'God help me!" and we feel that these are the words of Johnston himself put on the tongue of the Blind Man: "This is no City of the living: but the Dark and the Dead!". Finding himself in a "wasteland," the Speaker is baffled by the terrible realities of modern Ireland that contradicts his idealistic vision sharply, "O'God make speed to save us! I cannot tell what things are real and what is not!" (63).

He hears Sarah's voice calling upon him as the stage darkens and the scene is changed into a dingy room of a tenement house. While still in darkness, he hears Sarah's voice singing, and as the lights go up, he finds himself affectionately clasping the arm of the Old Flower Woman, whom he has expected to be Sarah Curran. When he recognizes her, he is shocked and suddenly bursts into hysterical laughter. He admits that he has been tricked: "The joke is on me! Well done!". Oddly, he is not disgusted at making love to this repugnant old woman, "kiss me, lovely Sarah Curran!". Barnett remarks: "he is inebriated with the despair of a man who finds that the virginal object of his deepest love is, in reality, a tainted whore".(1978: 37). To the killer of her son, she makes this indecent offer "Ay are you looking for a bit of sport tonight?". From this utterly degenerate portrait of the Flower Woman, Johnston indicates that "Ireland herself is unworthy to be saved by sacrifice," as Canfield points out (1981: 41).

The discourse between the Speaker and the Flower Woman is occasionally interrupted by a fervent political argument between the Older Man who is satisfied with "the status quo" and the Younger Man who is for the Republic. Nobody is attentive to the dying Joe, "the symbol of Ireland's genius," as Grattan describes him, and on whose death the third

movement ends to give way to the final shadow dance scene. The Blind Man enters to declare that "this land belongs not to them that are on it, but to them that are under it." This is the Irish "waste land" where "there is a rattle of bones and a bit of a laugh where the presidents and senators of Ireland are dancing hand in hand" (68), an image reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's recurrent images, in *The Waste Land*.

Four Shadows enter upon the scene "coming to dance at a wake" after being summoned by the Blind Man and the Voices of the crowd. They are dancing behind a gauze curtain and chanting the words of four famous Irish figures: Yeats, Joyce, Wilde, and Shaw. They are, in Johnston's own words, "Dublin's greatest contributors to the world's knowledge of itself" (2. 1977: 81). Then, the shadow of Emmet himself is called out to "justify" his deeds, "Justify! Justify! shadow of the Speaker, speak!" (72). However, he turns upon the crowd in haughtiness, keeping aloof from justifying his deeds, "I do not fear to approach the Omnipotent Judge to answer for the conduct of my short life, and am I to stand appalled here before this remnant of mortality?" (73). After the disappointing journey he has made in modern Ireland, he still insists on his own violent way, "My fan is in my hand and I will burn the chaff with un-quenchable fire." Instead of acknowledging the failure of his mistaken ideals, he repudiates the city that has disappointed his dreams. He pours out his god-like curses upon those who disagree with his apocalyptic ideals:

Cursed be he who values the life above the dream

Cursed be he who builds but does not destroy

Cursed be he who honours the wisdom of the wise" (73)

All this is accompanied by "Amen" from the Voices engaged in prayer-like approval of his curses. The end takes us back to the very first minutes of the performance with the Doctor coming to cover the unconscious actor's legs with a rug, thus giving the impression that all these events have lasted only for few minutes, the time of the Speaker's dream.

The structure of the old Lady does not depend on a narrative relationship between events but on the juxtaposition of diverse situations and scenes among which the logical transitions are deliberately omitted. Using this experimental device, Johnston aims to build a total pattern or idea about twentieth-century Ireland through opposed images and confusing situations, hence the ambiguity that characterizes the play.

Allusions

Another device that contributes to the sense of bewilderment and obscurity is the use of so many allusions that repeatedly reiterate throughout the play. The opening playlet is composed of many lines taken from well-known 18th and 19th-century authors. According to Canfield, Johnston draws on thirty-eight poems and songs in the opening playlet. We may take, for example, Emmet's question to Sarah: "When he who adores thee has left but a name, ah, say Wilt Thou weep?" Barnett indicates that this is taken from Thomas Moore's "When he Who Adores Thee." She gives him the answer from the other two poems by the same poet: "I shall not weep, I shall not breathe his name. For my heart in his grave will be lying" (2. 1977: 28). The irony of their speech reveals itself when Johnston tells us in Opus One that the real Sarah has married an English officer after Emmet's death. (2. 1977: 15). Johnston uses the allusion to give a doubly ironical effect, for he comments on a given situation while at the same time parodying the other work of art that he refers to using this highly allusive method.

Johnston is influenced by Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in which the latter keeps on using oblique references to literary works by other authors with which his readers are not necessarily familiar. It has been argued that only an Irish audience can appreciate this

highly allusive play, for those are all extracts from works by Irish poets and dramatists. However, Robert Hogan protests that "many of his allusions elude even Irish audiences." (1981: 60) It may be noted finally that the repetition of certain lines that are dispersed in a seemingly arbitrary manner gradually gains significance and gradually continues to add to the whole idea that Johnston wants to convey.

Characters

In the old Lady, characterization is typical of any expressionist play. The same freedom and the same distortion of the traditional way of character delineation mark Johnston's characters. They are not real individuals as can be found in realistic drama; instead, they stand for types. Except for Major Sir and Grattan, they all have categorical designations instead of human names such as the Speaker, The Old Lady, the Blind Man, and the Doctor. In addition, many characters may lose identity and dissolve into one another. In this respect, Johnston is influenced by Toller in *Man and The Masses* (1919), where the same actor plays the Man, The Banker and the Prisoner: and the Hand Cuffed one bears the same features of the Woman. The same device is found in *Transfiguration* (1919) by the same author. In *The Old Lady*, Major Sir of the opening playlet is transformed into Grattan, The Red Coat is changed into the Free State General, and the Minister of Arts and Crafts bears a solid resemblance to the stage Hand. This mingling of identity can be understood in terms of the swooning mind of the Speaker; moreover, it provides a sort of link between the characters of the opening playlet and their counterparts of the rest of the play. Curtis Canfield sees "a carefully arranged inner design" in such a "selection of extra personal identities." In the case of Major Sir and Grattan, he believes the author has done this because "Grattan stands in the same dramatic relationship to Robert Emmet as Major Sir does. Both are symbols of the opposition ... Emmet is naturally inimical to both." (1981: 42) As for other changes of identity on the part of minor characters Canfield maintains that Johnston used them "primarily for comic purposes" (42).

Emmet's character, like most central figures in the expressionist drama, is a Christ-like figure, being affronted by a multitude of social ills and dismal realities that he seeks to change. This attitude is more apparent near the end in his messianic declaration, "I will take this earth in both my hands and batter it into the semblance of my heart's desire" (2. 1977: 73). He is a typical expressionist hero who is engaged in a continuous search for a particular ideal. Moreover, it may be noted that although it is made clear from the beginning that the central character is Robert Emmet, Johnston rarely refers to him by his name; instead, he uses the name, "Speaker" which introduces him as a prototype, not as a particular individual. He is the prototype for all the jingoist patriots who follow the same irrational way. Canfield believes that by this device, Emmet is established as a puppet in the operatic tradition by being made to speak a romantic- patriotic poem fashioned from separate lines from well-known fervid 18th century authors". (1981: 40). In addition, although there is no confusion of identities between the Speaker and other characters, it is the Speaker himself who suffers from a state of confusion between his own identity as an actor and the character of the real Emmet, a significant trick that Johnston uses to comment on his hero, indicating that "he is merely posturing over ideals and their violent execution," as Maxwell puts it. (1981: 117). However.

Johnston's hero differs from other expressionist heroes in that he is himself the target of scorn and criticism. Johnston does not aim to unify the audience's sensibility with that of his central character; we are not made to sympathize with the Speaker who insists on blinding his eyes to the miserable results of his own ideals of violence in modern Dublin. The element of the "regeneration" of man – which is the main aim of expressionist drama – is not

fulfilled in Emmet, for the vision he experiences in his journey through modern Dublin does not elucidate to him the truth of his own self-conceited heroism. At the end of his journey, Canfield remarks: " he cannot see the bitter joke on himself, nor the irony of his confidant, " Ah. I was so right to go on!" (1981: 45).

The Flower Woman's character is presented as a shrewd crone who begs by selling flowers, or her "four gre- in fields." In her, Johnston incarnates his most vindictive satire of modern Ireland. Canfield points out :

Yeats's beatific vision of Cathleen ni Houlihan, the spirit of Ireland for whom Irishmen went smiling to death in the field or on the gallows, has changed here into a drunken hag who curses her son as he dies for her. It is a savage and bitter conception that strikes at the heart of sentimental idolatry. (1981: 41)

For the Speaker, she is an inimical figure, the symbol of real Ireland with her awful conditions that he refuses to see or to acknowledge. She Speaks the lower class slang, yet she immediately assumes Sarah Curran's voice chanting romantic poetry that only the Speaker hears and pursues. This is a highly remarkable device in which Johnston juxtaposes the two ultimately opposite concepts of Ireland in reality and illusion. Through this device, Johnston wants to imply that both are two faces of only one entity: romanticized Ireland, dwelling on past heroics, and the actual one with the headless acts of violence, guerrilla warfare, and assassinations.

The Chorus appears only in the salon scene, but we can say that their role is partly played by "Voices" in Part 1 and the last scene of Part 2. Johnston uses the Chorus primarily for a satirical intent. Their function in the play is to imitate the speech of other characters such as Meave, the Minister, and Lady Trimmer. Sometimes, they comment ironically on other characters' speech; for example, when the Minister is talking about the censorship act, the Chorus says: "Clean and pure art for clean and pure people." (2. 1977: 51). The language of the Chorus is formed sometimes of ironical repetitions of some snatches from other people's speech; the result is an odd distortion of language that gives no sense: Chorus : (Loudly) Oh tut tut poor man do not talk as hard as you can lighting fantastic pay no attention shellshock probably to have seen it all wonderful is he better yet poor man everybody pretends not to fight notice. (56).

Johnston's Chorus is far different from their traditional counterparts, whose role was primarily to foretell events, draw lessons, clarify other characters and behaviors, and comment on the action. Like other characters in the old Lady, the Chorus bears the unmistakable stamp of expressionism.

Language

If we say that the expressionistic technique marks the language of The Old Lady, it will be a logical consequence of what has previously been mentioned. The dialogue has nothing to do with the everyday language of realistic drama. It is composed of a strange mélange of romantic poetry, bombastic rhetoric, political clichés, slang dialect, and other abstruse lingual snatches that can be interpreted only in the light of the delirious mind of the Speaker. Moreover, the language of the play is made more mystifying through the heavy use of allusions and the insertion of Gaelic songs throughout the play. Johnston's remarkable technique of verbal juxtaposition reveals itself in the blending of formal and colloquial speech. For example, in Part One, the Speaker's fustian speech, "O Ireland, it is still unripen, that clanking chain... still unripen. O Ireland, Ireland, no streak of dawning is in the sky", clashes with the colloquial short " disengaging" words of the Passer- By: "Sorry The banks close at half two." (29) Throughout the whole play, there is always this

oral contrast and clash of styles between Emmet's bombast and the speech of others, including the Flower Woman with her debased slang, the Voices with their prayers like toning, the Chorus with their clamorous febrile noises, and Grattan with his prose speech. When the latter uses poetry, it is to ridicule the Speaker's idealist image of Ireland. For example, when the Speaker rejects the Flower Woman, "Go away! there is something horrible about your voice", Grattan immediately quotes the Speaker's romanticized metaphor of Ireland only to stultify his attitude:

Young she is, and fair she is
And would be crowned a Queen. (33)

Language is also used for invoking a sense of comic parody of cultural and artistic pretensions. Part Two opens with what Johnston describes as an "amusing piece" being lisped out by Meave, the untalented daughter of the Minister of Arts and Crafts; it is a parody of A.A.Maline's "The King's Breakfast":

Ferrar remarks: "This recitation strips the posturing hero of all dignity. Unless he blinds himself to reality Emmet must acknowledge he is not hero but fool". (1973:36). The exact purpose is behind the absurd presentation of the contrapuntal chanting of different songs by different people simultaneously at the end of the salon scene. In a hilariously absurd manner, the Speaker is made to chant lines of the romantic poetry of the opening playlet, while the General is singing George Darley's "Serenade of a Loyal Martyr" and O'Cooney joins them reciting his prose speech about the 1916 Rising as the Minister is talking to him about the same subject. During all this, O'Rooney and O'Mooney "join in in low undertones." Indeed, through this device, Emmet's romantic idealization of his country is reduced to absurdity. It may be noted that this device is standard in Dadaism in which it is usual to have many people recite separate poems, "often to the accompaniment of "music" made by screeching wheels, rattling keys, banging kitchen utensils, typewriters...", as mentioned by Brockett and Findlay(1973: 296). All these lingual devices are verbal equivalents for the idea that persists throughout the whole play. In his satirical campaign against the Irish society, Johnston may share with Kaiser and Toller that mood of pessimism that characterizes their drama, but it is by no means that of despair and submission. He uses satirical language as a sharp blade that cuts deep into the social maladies of the Irish body. Moreover, Johnston's language in *The Old Lady* is not unlike that of Eliot in *The Waste Land*. He is influenced by Eliot's concept of the "objective correlative," an original device in the language in which the author's personality is disguised in his medium.

2. CONCLUSION

The Old Lady Says: "No!" revolves around the historical figure of Robert Emmet, who became a national hero for the Irish people. Emmet, who was sentimentally presented in Irish romantic literature, is presented in the play as a prototype of Idealistic chauvinistic patriots who lack a clear vision for national regeneration. By juxtaposing him with the rational figure of Grattan, Johnston satirizes the Irish death wish that leads young men irrationally to their fate under the motto of patriotism. He found in expressionism the suitable form for the political message of his play. By casting Emmet in twentieth-century Dublin, Johnston makes a sharp juxtaposition between the idealized past with its passionate rage of sentiment and the Free State Ireland with its violence, rioting, revolt, and assassinations. He aims at criticizing both ideals indicating that the distressing present is the fruit of the blindly idealized past.

Instead of stating his criticism of modern Ireland directly in an Ibsen discussion scene,

Johnston presents "verbal equivalents" for his opinions and emotions. This technique is mainly applied to most of the kaleidoscopic street scenes in Part One, the juxtaposition of opposite scenes, and the sudden shifts in tone and sound effects, all of which express Johnston's bitter emotion about modern Ireland. Undoubtedly, this technique is one factor contributing to the challenging quality of the play, which makes it baffling to the hasty reader's mind that may withdraw vanquished by its difficulty. However, this same technique enriches the play and makes it endlessly suggestive and highly allusive.

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