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# *Mike Sarne sees the Ford film that Cardiff finished . . .*

**Directed by, Jack Cardiff, and John Ford. Produced by, Robert D Graff and Robert Emmett Ginna. Screenplay by John Whiting based on *Mirror in My House*, the autobiography of Sean O'Casey. Directory of photography, Ted Scaife. Editor, Anne V Coates. Music, Sean O'Riada. Art director, Michael Stringer. A Sextant production, distributed by MGM. British. Technicolor Cert A. 110 mins.**

***John Cassidy***, ROD TAYLOR; ***Mrs Cassidy***, FLORA ROBSON; ***Archie***, JACK MacGOWRAN; ***Ella***, SIAN PHILLIPS; ***Tom***, T P McKENNA; ***Sara***, JULIE ROSS; ***Michael***, ROBIN SUMNER; ***Mick Mullen***, PHILIP O'FLYNN; ***Nora***, MAGGIE SMITH; ***Daisy Battles***, JULIE CHRISTIE; ***Bessie Ballynoy***, PAULINE DELANY; ***Lady Gregory***, EDITH EVANS; ***W B Yeats***, MICHAEL REDGRAVE; ***Foreman***, ARTHUR O'SULLIVAN; ***First Hurler***, JOE LYNCH; ***Second Hurler***, VINCENT DOWLING; ***Constable***, TOM IRWIN; ***Barman at Cat & Cage***, JOHN COWLEY; ***Publisher's Clerk***, WILLIAM FOLEY; ***Bank Teller***, JOHN FRANKLYN; ***Murphy***, HARRY BROGAN; ***Neighbour***, ANNE DALTON; ***First Hearseman***, DONAL DONNELLY; ***Second Hearseman***, MARTIN CROSBIE; ***Cab Driver***, FRED JOHNSON; ***Captain White***, EDWARD GOLDEN; ***Man in Phoenix Park***, CHRISTOPHER CURRAN; ***Charlie Ballynoy***, JAMES FITZGERALD; ***Lady Gregory's Maid***, SHIVAUN O'CASEY; ***Abbey Theatre Manager***, HAROLD GOLDBLATT; ***Theatre Attendant***, RONALD IBBS; ***Woman in Foyer***, MAY CRAIG; ***Woman in Foyer***, MAY CLUSKEY.

The story of *Young Cassidy*, as most people know by now, is taken from Sean O'Casey's autobiography. An even more remarkable intelligence is that O'Casey himself is alleged to have approved the script. On second thoughts, perhaps that isn't so remarkable, when one considers what happened to *Lolita* with Nabokov's collaboration. However, the blunt truth of the project is more like a romanticised half-truth with *Shadow of a Gunman* and *The Plough and the Stars* thrown in at the end to prove that even if Rod Taylor looks like an Irish navvy on the day after St. Patrick, he can still write plays just like Sean O'Casey. Where there was a wizened Voltairean countenance full of guile and humour is now a bluff, red and homely face blinking in the deceptive sheen of reflected glory, and where there was a sly physical coward now stands a rough and tumble superman.

Nevertheless, for what it is, it is a piece well done. In the first twenty minutes which incorporate John Ford's direction there is great style and dash, cut and thrust, hit and miss, or what have you. We discover Rod Taylor digging a hole in the ground when the film opens, and spitting in a very virile manner when the upper classes ride by in their coach. During these precious moments we are told not only that it is his first day on the digging site, but also that he must 'learn to control his passionate feelings', in the Stoic words of our hero's foreman. So, you see, there is more to young Cassidy than would strike the superficial observer who might see him purely as a navvy digging away at his hole. Thereafter, having been convinced that perhaps his digging is not the most skilful in the street, he is sent off to make friends with Mick, the wick lighter. Within seconds Mick and Johnny are soul-mates, and the screen glows with intended brotherhood. On his return home he comes upon his mother played by Flora Robson who is between inspecting the baby and its potty, and preparing dinner. His sister Ella who owns the children is played with tact by the haunting beauty, Sian Phillips.

There is strife, we learn, and money is scarce. The Poor Relief will not be entertained for a moment in the Cassidy household; they will win through with dignity and courage. We meet Johnny's theatrical brother, given with obvious enjoyment by Jack MacGowran, and after dinner Mick the Wick reappears for private, seditious anti-British chat with our John.

Johnny composes an inflammatory pamphlet to celebrate the tram drivers' strike which occured, it seems, in 1911. On the event the crowd jeers uncontrollably at the various scabs and blacklegs who ride to work with police protection. The jeering breaks into an extremely bloodthirsty riot, and Ford's direction has a gruesome field day as it describes the atrocities of the crowd and the enthusiastic sabre-swishing of the police. These scenes are colourful and distinctly painful; whether they are true documentations of the carnage of a riot, I couldn't say, but they certainly made me wince with their facile and enthusiastic account of the cheapness of human life. A writhing blackleg is passed over the heads of the crowd in an unmistakably stagey manner and tossed into the canal. Seconds later the cart on which he had been riding is hurled after him: the yelp which came presumably from the poor unfortunate's lips as the carriage dropped onto him and then plunged to the bottom put me in mind of the epic delights of Wyler and Bronston. Children are crushed under pounding hooves, among them a niece of Johnny's and pedestrians are sliced up and disfigured. Of course, when Rod attacks the police with fisticuffs, as he heroically does on a couple of occasions, it is in true Big Country style, and [illegible] books and left [illegible] police's [illegible]

Apart from his John Wayne routine [illegible] Taylor has also something of the [illegible] Roland, for we suddenly find him hold Julie Christie's hand. Their spontaneous intimacy is further accentuated by a congenial drink in the pub while the crowd mills a couple of streets away in the blood bath. Then, deserting the responsibility his leaflets had imposed on him with their social and mutinous conscience, Rod hies away to Julie's pad and gets himself seduced in about twenty seconds flat. Daisy Battles, that is to say, Julie Christie, is rediscovered after a meaningful American edit, wrapped in her coverlet and telling Johnny how fabulous he is, and, smiling contentedly, she draws the coverlet around her shoulders which are richly tanned with an improbable Mediterranean glow.

The scene ends with a massive and unfortunately delightful close-up of Julie Christie's generous smile, instead of going out of the door with beefy Rodney. It was obviously a shot dear to Ford's heart, but it played havoc with my expectations, since I waited in vain for Julie Christie to do more right up to the end of the picture. I imagine it was hereabouts that Jack Cardiff took over the direction of the film, for a veil of European tactfulness now seemed to influence the Americanese of it all.

The next young lady to come Johnny's way is Maggie Smith. I have rarely seen so sympathetic a face as hers in the cinema, I sincerely hope to see it again. She plays Nora who works in a bookshop where she discovers Johnny pinching a few volumes for self-improvement. She makes him put them back, but later sends them round to him in a brown paper parcel. How she discovers where he lives is anybody's guess.

Cassidy now joins the Irish Citizen Army, and you'd expect them at least to have the courtesy of informing him when they decide to have a war. Not a bit of it. He discovers it quite by chance, as it were. While he is strolling through the park he hears gunfire. He stops. Listens. Sees the smoke rise and declaims something like: 'Why those mad, crazy, wonderful, magnificent fools!' It was at this point that I groped for my handout and looked up the scriptwriter's name. It was John Whiting.

We are now shown some good battle scenes of the Easter Rebellion of 1916. Some of the pictures that Jack Cardiff is able to give us are not only credible but have a stylised quality and composition which I regretted constantly during the later part of the picture.

We have to gather that the battles are over, and we find Flora Robson talking to Mick with words like, 'I'm so worried about Johnny. He's been gone for days.' And, then, talk of the devil, there he suddenly is, propping up the jamb of the

door and looking as if he has just come off the rugger pitch for his cup of tea and lemon at half-time.

He thereupon gets down to writing a book. I should like to mention that this is one of the very few times that I have seen anyone on film looking as if they are writing and thinking. Despite my many reservations about the impersonation of O'Casey, or any artist for that matter, on the screen, these moments looked real. For this, Messrs Cardiff and Taylor, my sincere thanks. He writes all night. In the morning one of his sister's children knocks on the door and murmurs, 'Me mum's dead'.

His book on the Irish Citizens' Army is accepted by a publisher. His mother dies. There is a disastrous scene which follows, with a scruffy undertaker being ill-mannered not only to the memory of the late lamented but also to the credulity of an audience. It was apparently meant to be funny, but I should have laughed far more readily had we seen a boozy Irish wake instead. But Cassidy does what he can and goes out and gets drunk in a pub.

He next moves into a room with Mick, consorts with a tarty lady from upstairs, and lets her share his pillow while her husband is being arrested by the Black and Tans. He writes a play which is rejected by the Abbey Theatre, but he then writes *Shadow of a Gunman* which is duly performed. Rod Taylor is at this moment in his twenties in the film, Sean O'Casey was forty-six. Another inexactitude is that the directors of the Abbey Theatre, played by a stilted Sir Michael Redgrave as Yeats and a lovable Dame Edith Evans as Lady Gregory, are unequivocally impressed by the young genius.

Johnny's first play has been vehemently attacked by the critics who find his attitudes towards the working classes patronising. Nevertheless, he writes *The Plough and the Stars* and causes something like chaos in the auditorium with the forthright vulgar language of the play. Michael Redgrave goes on stage and shouts the audience down with a great speech on Mr Taylor's genius and the short-sightedness of the public in not accepting it. I realise that it is hard to show that a hero is portraying a genius without having the plaudits of his co-stars spilling madly over the screen to prove it, but it must be done. Otherwise they shouldn't bother with making the lives of the saints.

When the play recommences before the now subdued audience who are being rigidly supervised by the Dublin constabulary, two louts walk in, looking for the action. Mr Taylor attacks the fellows with vigour and [illegible] sciotis. [illegible] trasted [illegible] violent [illegible] messages to the Green Room of the Theatre, and got himself barred from taking tea with the cast.

After the play Johnny meets his old chum, Mick the wick, who tearfully complains that Rodney's play is an affront to the dignity of the plebs, and that he had better move his things out of the bedsitter before Mick gets really upset. This incredible scene is performed in the pouring rain, and just as we are about to get back in the warm, Sir Michael turns up and delivers another speech to Johnny, who by now is soaked to the skin, and colourfully declaims on the great future ahead of him. Paris, New York, London, bring a glow to Mr Taylor's eyes, and for a moment we forget that Sean O'Casey left his native land to spend the rest of his life in Torquay.

There follows a scene where Johnny and Nora 'part in bitter-sweetness' and Nora informs him that 'I'm a small, simple girl, and I need a small, simple life. Not your terrible dreams and your anger, Johnny.'

As Johnny stands with his back to the stage and gazing up at the auditorium, he and Nora have their violent parting words. He pleads with her to marry him, and she quotes the above-mentioned. The acting could not be faulted on either side. But the ludicrous tracking shot which makes Nora walk backwards all the way up the aisle and into the foyer with a camera pointing over her shoulder at little Johnny in the distance, was a definite mistake. Not only was it a phoney move which made Maggie Smith try to perambulate backwards without knocking into anything, there was no excuse to make these parting moments a stylised piece of trickery, totally out of context with the rest of the film.

The closing moments are taken from 'Stephen D' as the young writer walks along the wharf to start a new life across the Irish Sea in the land of hope and freedom. And a cast list brought a ripple of applause from the writers and journalists seated in the tiny theatre.

Of the script I think there is enough said. Of Jack Cardiff's camera, with Ted Scaife controlling the switches, I can add that, in the main, there is very good work. One or two shots stuck in my mind. There was a set-up taken on what looked like a wide-angle lens, which filmed Rod Taylor in bed and then tilted towards the ceiling to show the reflected lights from the street. As Rod Taylor rose in the bottom of the frame he walked towards the window and away from the camera. Why I remember this particular moment, or the high angle looking down on the barricades and fighting during the Easter Riots means that I thought there could have been so much more that was good among the cornball and cliché But the premise of the film, before it started, was bad. It seems to me that if a script works before you start spending your vast sums on the production, you stand a much better chance of evolving an original work.