

M. J. Molloy's *The Terrible Beauty (A Right Rose Tree)* and Consumption in Irish Drama

SATAKE Akiko



Key words:

M. J. モロイ、結核、アイルランド演劇、ルイス・ダルトン、
マーヴィン・ウォール

M. J. Molloy, consumption, Irish drama, Louis D'Alton, Mervyn Wall

Abstract

This paper discusses the significance of an undated manuscript by M. J. Molloy, titled *The Terrible Beauty* in the context of the history and literature of consumption in Ireland and of Molloy's life. I assume the play to be an earlier draft of *A Right Rose Tree*, staged at the Abbey in 1958, whose manuscript has been lost by the company. One of the main characters in the play, on whom Molloy projected his own background and personality, contracts consumption. By first giving an overview of the Irish plays that include a consumptive character, I argue that the way Molloy uses consumption to represent not the innocent victim of society but the personal sacrifice that accompanied the historical process of nation building, is unique and valuable as a testimony of the experience of consumption by one of the very few Irish playwrights who actually suffered from the disease.

In 1958, *A Right Rose Tree*, M. J. Molloy's play of the Irish Civil War, was produced at the Queen's Theatre and lasted for six nights¹⁾. The severity of criticism it received is shocking, to say the least. "K" of *The Irish Times* wrote "Anger, sorrow and bewilderment impel me to wonder why a dramatist of the quality that M. J. Molloy showed ... should by now have been reduced to the shoddy tinsel that was offered in last night's [performance]...The Abbey company worked on the play as if they were anxious to get over it as quickly and as unembarrassingly as possible. I don't blame them."²⁾ We cannot ascertain whether such a reaction from an initially well-disposed reviewer is justified, for the Abbey company has lost the script, and the Molloy family's wish is to withhold it from public view. However, there is an undated manuscript titled *The Terrible Beauty* in the possession of the National Library of Ireland, which we can say with reasonable certainty, is a close version of *A Right Rose Tree*. The characters are identical to those listed in the Abbey archives for *A Right Rose Tree*, and the plot matches the summary given by Michael O'Neill in *The Abbey at the Queen's*. The lines quoted verbatim in a review of *A Right Rose Tree* are exactly as we find them in *The Terrible Beauty*.

The only evidence for discrepancy is found in an entry in *Contemporary Dramatists* in which Arthur E. McGuinness suggests that the landlord in *A Right Rose Tree* is killed—unless by "symbolic killing" he alludes to no more than the burning of his castle—whereas in *The Terrible Beauty*, Isidore Burke of Castlecarrá not only survives but is paired up with the heroine at the end. McGuinness writes that the play is "so fraught with social problems" that it is "more like a documentary than drama. ...The utter lawlessness which results permits the base to inherit the earth." "The final horror", he goes on to say, is "the symbolic killing of a landlord by insensitive, ignorant, and cowardly men" which "leaves nothing of value after it." (p.378) This gives a far different impression from the melodramatic "mish-mash" "K" describes, or that described by O'Neill, who refers to the burning of the landlord's home as "one of the more ironic episodes" (p.45), putting into doubt the reliability of McGuinness's account. So in this paper it will be assumed that the discussion of *The Terrible Beauty* most likely may be applied to *A Right Rose Tree* as well³⁾.

Admittedly, *The Terrible Beauty* is gauche, owing to Molloy's reliance on worn-out tricks and ruses of stagecraft. For instance, the obsessive reference to bandages—to be procured and applied—may substitute for onstage gunfights, but risks looking ludicrous if not deftly managed. And comic business of a most unsophisticated type is thrust into a highly charged historical subject, with routines like that of two boozers, male and female, vying to outdo each other in sneaking swigs from a whiskey bottle, or that of a man ordered to give over successive seats at a wedding dinner in a one-man-musical-chairs manner. Prune it of such superfluties, and it becomes a serious—and highly ambitious—play, engaging, as "K" says, with "the whole field of O'Casey's three greatest plays" (p.4),

viewed from Molloy's characteristic perspective of rural class conflicts⁴⁾. Furthermore, if we may assume *The Terrible Beauty* to be an earlier version of *A Right Rose Tree*, the change of its title from the more patriotic to the sinister quote from Yeats ("There's nothing but our own red blood/Can make a right rose tree") may suggest a deepening cynicism in Molloy's attitude to the war. However, when we consider the play's significance in the context of Molloy's life and of Irish literature in general, what makes it most interesting and worthy of attention may be its uniqueness as a testimony on stage of the Irish experience of consumption by a writer who actually suffered the disease. To put the play in perspective in this regard, I would like first to give an overview of the Irish plays that include the motif of consumption and then focus on its use in *The Terrible Beauty*.

Consumptive literature has all but become established as a category of its own, with a long list of writers who were victims of the disease, and studies made by critics like Susan Sontag, René and Jean Dubos and others. The Romantic poets, Keats and Shelley, certainly are the most familiar figures but even when we pick at random, Donne, Moliere, Smollett, Schiller, Austin, the Brontës, Hood, Poe, Stevenson, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Lawrence, Orwell, Mansfield, Kafka, Camus, etc., the sheer number of those on this dazzling roll call is astounding⁵⁾. Still, this should not surprise us when we consider that pulmonary phthisis⁶⁾ was the greatest killer for centuries, claiming as much as 20% of all deaths in England and Wales in 1660. A curious thing, however, is that Ireland, with an equally high incidence of consumption, did not produce its share of the genre, despite it being said at one time there was no one in Ireland who did not have a consumptive relative or acquaintance (O'Connor, p.20)⁷⁾. This may simply be due to the fact that only a few Irish writers of note happened to contract consumption, including Lawrence Sterne, Charles Kickham and Thomas Moore, who were all expatriates. Or, it may be that the ethereal beauty⁸⁾ of consumptives was not the image that Ireland wished to cultivate for herself. It was its antithesis, the hardy wild rose, the Irish favoured. Politically, economically and socially deprived, it is no wonder if the people had no desire to beautify weakness; Ireland stood for rustic health in opposition to England's urban sophistication and its association with consumption. Moreover, when tuberculosis came to public notice in the latter half of the 19th century in Ireland, the romanticized image of the disease was being eclipsed by a social concern for its prevalence among the poor, so that TB in Ireland began as a stigma to be concealed⁹⁾ before it had time to turn into an attractive literary motif. Besides, there were more pressing national issues for writers to deal with than consumption.

Still, we can find some examples of consumptive characters in Irish literature, and they plainly conform to the traditional persona. Michael Furey¹⁰⁾ in *The Dead* is a consumptive romantic par excellence, young, sensitive, and heart-rending, but he figures

more as a frozen one-shot image than a character in his own right. On stage, a character that immediately comes to mind may be Mollser in *The Plough and the Stars*, who functions as a pool of still water amid the bustle and noise that goes on around her. The residents of the tenement house stop gabbling and wrangling for a moment to show concern for her. A fifteen-year-old who looks ten years old (p.125), she is full of admiration for Nora's housekeeping, a sign of healthy normal living. Six months later, on the eve of the Easter Rising, her mother brings her outdoors to get some sunshine, but by the scene's end, she is compelled to withdraw, "feeling curious" (p.143)¹¹. After that we see her no more, just hear that the doctor is urgently called for. She is lying dead when English soldiers break into the house (p.166).

Though an unassuming minor character, Mollser's presence on stage is crucial in throwing into relief what is being overlooked in society as people busy themselves with political, private and material conflicts. Mollser herself is not granted sufficient intellectual and emotional scope to articulate the problem, but she points us toward what O'Casey most wants us to see. Different people go off in different directions to fight. Clitheroe and Nora are at loggerheads over his participation in the Irish Citizen Army; young soldiers march off to slaughter singing "It's a Long Way to Tipperary"; leaving Mollser to wonder, "Is there anybody goin'... with a tither o'sense?" (p.126). When her condition becomes critical, Fluther is drunk; Nora is crazed, wrapped up in her personal grief; her own mother is afraid; with only Bessie left to brave rifle shots and machine-guns for her. Mollser is the catalyst to unveil society's blind spot, as well as the truth that lay beneath Bessie's gruff exterior—common humanity that cuts across religious and class divides—bringing hope for unity in the future. The Covey for once comes to grips with reality when he retorts to the soldier who belittled the cause of Mollser's death: "Is that all? Isn't it enough? D' ye know, comrade, that more die o' consumption than are killed in the wars? An' it's all because of th' system we're livin' undher?" (p.166) Consumption has come to represent the social ills that people need to preoccupy themselves with, rather than wars.

Whereas Mollser functions primarily as a passive victim, Catherine in Louis D'Alton's *The Man in the Cloak* (1937)¹² and Verna in Mervyn Wall's in *The Lady in the Twilight* (1941)¹³, are closer to the idealized female consumptive Susan Sontag and others have postulated¹⁴. Perceptive, refined and sympathetic, Catherine and Verna could have brought about a change for the better in other characters, and thereby the world they lived in, but they were destined to fade away before they could fulfill their potential.

Catherine Hayes was James Clarence Mangan's private student who encouraged and inspired the harried *poète maudit*. Two hours of lessons provided Mangan with his only happy moments each week, but even her spiritual guidance was not enough to stop his self-destructive ways, and she dies neglected¹⁵. In other words, the only thing that was

beautiful in his life besides poetry was consumptive, and doomed. Consumption, however, is but secondary in a play overrun by cholera, whose relentless advance is gauged by the mounting number of victims in the streets surrounding the dosshouse. It is 1849, at the end of the Great Famine; Mangan's brother, John, barely survives with next to no food. A man dies falling through banisters that have been torn off to make fire. Pitted against this background of fear and panic is Mangan's equally lurid courting of death, as wracked by the thought of his mediocrity¹⁶⁾, he drowns himself in drink and opium and, it is to be inferred, dies of cholera. In contrast to cholera, which, being sudden and violent¹⁷⁾, hurtles the play to its catastrophe, consumption comes off as slow, denoting quiet submission to fate rather than resistance. Catherine had known its coming, for it ran in her family, and she disappears into the countryside three months before she dies—as she correctly predicts—shielded from any manifestation of ugly decay¹⁸⁾.

Unlike Catherine, who is shockingly direct in revealing her disease to Mangan's mother, Verna's consumption in *The Lady in the Twilight* is only suggested by her coughs and tiredness, which go totally unnoticed by her parents until a newcomer, Vane, suspects it for what it is (p.24)¹⁹⁾. Verna is the daughter of an unsuccessful writer, Malachy, who lives in a cottage in Wicklow. Billiard, an orphan Malachy cared for but who now supports his family with his meager poacher/gillie's earnings, is provoked by socialist Allen's agitation to shoot dead the benevolent land agent Vane²⁰⁾. With no help to be got from others, Billiard flees at the end to his certain death in the snowy mountains. The political plot of land agitation, in this way, is woven into the cultural and romantic milieu of the literati in the wild mountains, giving rise to a lyrical, ironical and argumentative portrait of 1930s Irish society.

Consumption in this play serves as an indicator of sensitivity to nature, culture and fellow humans. Verna's mother, who died at the age of eighteen giving birth to her, was susceptible to nature, if adversely. She "used to sit and watch the mists clinging in the mountain clefts, as if she didn't understand them" (p.23)²¹⁾, and damaged her lungs with the damp of Wicklow. Billiard and Verna, who used to climb the mountains together²²⁾, are bound by a *Wuthering-Heights* type of deep sympathy, though Verna becomes romantically attracted to Allen's son, who abandons her in the end. We can almost divide the characters into those who notice Verna's illness, Vane, Billiard, and Egan, and others who don't²³⁾, wrapped up in their respective self-delusions²⁴⁾. And, except for the pragmatic detective sergeant Egan, those sensitive to consumption all die or will die. It is interesting that in both D'Alton's and Wall's play, the transitory beauty associated with consumption is crystalized in a ditty-like poem. Mangan writes to Catherine:

I saw her once one little while and then no more
'Twas Eden's light on earth a while and then no more,

Amid the throng she passed along the meadow floor;
Spring seemed to smile on earth a while and then no more; (p.62)

Vane is shot just after he finishes singing the song "Passing By", which goes in a very similar vein:

There is a lady sweet and kind,
Was never face so pleased my mind;
I did but see her passing by,
And yet I love her till I die. (p.35)

The sensitive seem unable to survive well in a Byzantine society, best exemplified in the mutual recriminations that follow Billiard's murder²⁵.

As a consumptive character in a more recent play, we have the eponymous heroine in Dermot Bolger's *April Bright*. Bolger dedicated it to his "lost uncle, Francis Bolger", who, born in 1911, died at the age of seventeen. April is a sprightly high school student in the 1940s, full of mischief and dreams, not exactly the pale damsel of Millais or Modigliani—at least earlier on—but her beauty and white skin, in contrast to that of her sister, is emphasized throughout. Everyone's favorite at home and at school, and yet April is powerless against the relentless progress of the disease²⁶, ending in her confinement in a makeshift garden shed²⁷. It is this ostracism by society and the inadequacy of medical care for the poor that Bolger indicts in this play.

In addition to the aforementioned plays in which a consumptive character plays a more or less important role in presenting the playwright's ideas, there are what may be called 'slum plays', which almost invariably include a sick character as if in token of their wretched living conditions. The character may suffer from other diseases, but consumption seems to be always lurking at the back of people's minds. Among the writers were doctors and health officials directly involved in the fight against TB. *Marrowbone Lane* (1939) was written by Dr. Robert Collis (1900–75), who campaigned on behalf of the Citizens' Housing Council citing TB as a consequence of overcrowding²⁸. In his play, a baby dies of pneumonia, after being refused treatment at one hospital after another, in the desperate rounds his mother makes at night. The young mother's piercing denunciation at the play's end, however, refers not to pneumonia but to consumption²⁹. In *Blight* (1917), Oliver St. Gogarty, who was a surgeon, ridicules the utter ineptitude of health officials while addressing the issue of derelict housing in his outrageously irreverent manner³⁰. The "hidden plague" (p.534) there refers to syphilis, with typhus also mentioned (p.522), but a concern with the contaminated milk³¹ (p.535) indicates the prevalence of TB in the background. To add two more examples, the disease that finally whisks the unseen son Tomseen off to hospital in Walter Macken's *Mungo's Mansion* (1946) is diphtheria (p.77), but the symptoms described till then are evocative of consumption.

Maybe Macken, like Collis, needed an acute disease that would precipitate the denouement, which consumption would not have suited. Joseph Tomelty's *The Endhouse* (1944) does not name Sar Alice's affliction, but her chronic coughing is a telltale sign that the powder at the mill she worked at for 40 years has affected her lungs.

So, as we have seen, we can find instances of consumption on the Irish stage, and it is commonly used to highlight the victimization of the innocent and the sensitive by an indifferent society. Mollser, Verna, Catherine, and April, are all attractive young girls in line with the romantic tradition of the tragic damsel. But only two of the playwrights were themselves consumptives. And it is interesting to note the slightly different approach taken by these two writers compared to the rest. One is Michael Mulvihill (1918–93), who wrote *A Sunset Touch* (1963)³²⁾ based on his experience at a sanatorium in 1954–55, and the other, of course, is Molloy.

Mulvihill was a friend of Noël Browne in the Department of Health. His play depicts some days at Saint Malachy's Chest Hospital ward, where five male patients cheerfully follow the regimen, pull a prank on the inspectors, sneak in drinks, etc. until death strikes the most intelligent, tolerant, and liberal member of the lot. Mulvihill's consumptives are robust down-to-earth men, not ethereal girls. A play purporting to paint a picture of the TB experience, presumably, would not be complete without at least one death. So, "the best patient," as the nurse calls Maurice, is sacrificed, but the rest of them are all expecting to be discharged soon at the end. Mulvihill's portrayal of consumptives as not passive victims but as fighters in their own way—for life—is also true of Molloy, albeit in a rather involuted manner. And what is more interesting, while Mulvihill's treatment is basically descriptive in nature, Molloy's allusion to consumption in *The Terrible Beauty* is very brief and seemingly incidental, leading us to wonder all the more why he included it.

Paddy Beirne in *The Terrible Beauty* is the only consumptive character Molloy created in his plays—though in his interviews he unfailingly speaks of his past illness. The play revolves around two romantic couples from two households of the landlord's employees, each headed by a widow, the Beirnes and the Hyneses. Paddy is engaged to Bina Hynes. Ted Dooley, Paddy's comrade in the fight against the Black and Tans in Act I, marries Paddy's sister Peg in Act II. The action is set in Bina's home throughout, with Bina serving as the voice of conscience, though with her farmhouse burned at the end of Act I, she and her mother are staying at the landlord's gatehouse in the two latter acts. By the second act Paddy and Ted are divided in opposite camps, pro- and anti-Treaty. The political conflict surrounding the fight for independence in this play is overlaid with that related to land agitation, with the four romantic characters, both IRA and Free State, aligned behind landlord Isidore. This comes about because Paddy and Bina's families are being threatened by the land agitators, while Ted is under the orders of the IRA

headquarters to stop the locals boycotting until compensation is decided by their "Land Courts" (p.10)³³). Ted is also personally indebted to Isidore for providing shelter when he was wounded.

It is February 1921, three months after the Croke Park massacre. Galway's IRA unit has just begun operations, with five months of fighting lying ahead of them before the truce is to be called in July. The play opens on the morning after a Black and Tans' raid—indicated on the stage by Bina's torn shawl and bruised arms—when she discovers a letter from "Rory of the Hill"³⁴). The land agitators' threat, however, is swept aside by a big ambush of the Tans planned by the IRA just outside Bina's house. The embroilment of Jobber, the presumed "Rory of the Hill", who had come to woo Bina, in the ambush results in the land agitators' coming under the IRA's command willy-nilly.

Act II highlights the split caused by the civil war by bringing together Paddy, by now a Free State officer, and IRA captain Ted for the latter's wedding—only to have the news of the attack on the Four Courts (June 1922) catapult the sunny day's celebration into hasty exits by the newly bound brothers-in-law to muster their respective men. The land agitators are apparently lying low, since Isidore's estate has already been distributed—making Jobber a big farmer now—but their smouldering grudge is gauged by Seamus, an eviction survivor, animated to hear Isidore is coming, and Isidore being shot at, though he manages to escape unhurt. Act III brings the nationalist and agrarian conflicts into a head-on collision with Jobber and Seamus's betrayal of the IRA. The two men not only misappropriate the bombs intended for a raid on the barracks, but persuade Bina to leak the plan to Paddy. As a result, in the confusion following the simultaneous staging of the attacks on Isidore's Castle and the rescue operation for Peg held at the barracks, the IRA men are ambushed, with Ted shot dead by soldiers under Paddy's command.

As described above, the action is more or less equally divided among half a dozen characters. But while Bina occupies the centre stage as a moral touchstone, Paddy commands our particular attention because he is the only character who shows signs of inner conflict and development. Moreover, Molloy allots to him a profile that could very well have done for Molloy himself: "of slender build and wears a well-worn but neatly patched work-a-day suit. He is intelligent and sensitive and like many such, who have been reared in poverty and dependence, he is normally shy and quiet-spoken and gentle." He is pitted against Ted, who is described in parallel but exactly opposite terms: "about the same age as Paddy, but is a bigger, stronger, better-fed, better-dressed type and is also more assertive, fiery and willful, being a big farmer's son and heir, who has never known poverty or dependence" (p.10). The insistence on "poverty and dependence" here as the key to personality, even if there is little in the play actually to indicate Paddy as being specially dependent or poor, is worthy of note. Molloy's mother, like Paddy's, was a

widow, and if Molloy projected his own image into the character of Paddy, this may reflect a deep-seated complex in the playwright himself.

Molloy was born on the 3rd of March in 1914 in Milltown, Co. Galway as the sixth child of Maria and William Molloy³⁵). William Molloy from Glenamaddy was a commercial traveler in charge of North Galway and East Mayo, selling tea, wine, spirits and tobacco for John Daly and Co. Cork wholesale merchants. He would travel by train to Swinford and other surrounding areas, but by pony and trap to nearby Dunmore, Tuam, and Claremorris. This was a respectable job, and the family were fairly well off, taking annual holidays in Salthill, until William's death from pneumonia at the age of forty-eight plunged them into poverty when Molloy was six. Maria Tucker from Claremorris was a national school teacher at Milltown Girls' School, and a church organist, but she had to rely on the support of her brothers and sisters to bring up her eight children. The eldest two boys, Liam and Tom, were fostered in Claremorris and the younger ones depended on their relatives' gifts for basic supplies of clothes and food. Christy, Molloy's younger brother, remembers the 'yobos' jeering at them. "How are the cattle going today?" they would say, because the brothers wore raincoats on a fine summer day, like cattle jobbers, to hide the rags beneath. But for all the material shortages the Molloy children received a good education. All went to university except Molloy, who went to St Columban's Chinese Mission instead. Six out of seven of his siblings chose the career either of priest/nun or teacher. Liam, Gerald and Christy, taught respectively in Castlegar, Ballina and Milltown. Tom became a priest and Evelyn and Mon were nuns. Della worked for a bank in Sligo before she got married. Connaught is said to be a province where education is most prized, and with the mother a schoolteacher, this may be nothing to wonder at, but there is no denying it is an impressive achievement, a testament to the Molloy family's determination to overcome adversity.

So, though it seems to have been a very happy childhood, surrounded by a large family, warm and helpful relations, and plentiful nature to play around in, it is possible that Molloy, a proud boy by nature³⁶), was dogged by an awareness of being 'dependent', which may well have been intensified by his contraction of TB cutting short his studies at the seminary.

St Columban's College was located in Dalgan Park, Shrulce, Co. Galway, not far from Molloy's hometown. The main house was a former Big House about 200 yards in width, but the students' quarters were barracks or huts bought from the British army after WWI. About 150 to 200 students were there, with 30 students stationed in each hut. Father Fred Hanson, who joined the seminary one year after Molloy³⁷), remembers that the dormitory was cold with only a charcoal stove for heating though the black woolen soutane was warm. By the time he came to know of Joe, as he called Molloy, he was

already suffering from TB like several others. TB was not uncommon in the seminary. It seems almost certain, therefore, that Molloy caught the disease in the fairly Spartan conditions of the college with its "spirit" of male camaraderie³⁸.

According to Christy Molloy, his brother developed TB of the knee in 1933/34, which developed into that of the lungs in 1935/6. He is supposed to have undergone surgery³⁹ in the Mater Hospital in Dublin and it must have been during one of his many trips to Dublin hospitals when he stayed with his cousin, Senator J.T.O'Farrell, in Rathfarnham, that he saw Shaw's plays at the Abbey in 1935, which proved to be the moment of a dramatic awakening for Molloy (Molloy, p.ix). Molloy was admitted to the Newcastle Sanatorium⁴⁰ on 21st April, 1937 at the age of 23 on the recommendation of the Galway Board of Governors, his occupation listed as "student", and was discharged exactly eight months later on 21st December, 1937, his condition marked as "v.m.i." (very much improved)⁴¹.

After his return from the sanatorium, his bed was placed in a front room on the ground floor because it was difficult for him to get upstairs. With his mother and sisters catering to his every need, "Joe" was "bright and cheerful as he hobbled about on his crutches", his brother writes, but for a young man who had enjoyed active pursuits like swimming in the rivers and aimed to go as a missionary to the Far East, the imposed physical limitations must have been particularly frustrating⁴².

It is conceivable that Molloy counterbalanced his sense of humiliation with a kind of mental elitism the sanatorium culture is said to have nurtured⁴³. "The long hours spent together encouraged self-revelation and exchange of beliefs and ideas", Greta Jones writes, adding that "The enclosed life of the sanatorium gave rise to a sense of isolation and a feeling of difference from 'normal' people" (pp.170-171). The secluded community where people from all walks of life, most of them young and not incapacitated⁴⁴, lead a life exclusively devoted to improving their health—and for those so inclined, cultivating the mind—may be said to have a lot in common with a seminary. It was especially so in Ireland, where sanatoriums were characterized by a daily religious routine, which must have made the place congenial to Molloy⁴⁵. Patients had time to spare, while the constant presence of death sharpened their consciousness. In his biography Noël Browne describes how enlightening the time spent at the sanatorium had been for him, reading and talking with other inmates⁴⁶.

Paddy, who shares aspects of Molloy's past, is not an innocent victim of circumstances. As a controversial Free State officer, he has taken a conscious stand so that progress can be made and lives saved. Paddy makes a cogent argument: "We are proud, too, but we'd sooner suffer this compromise Treaty than make the people suffer another Tan War" (p.49). Then, in Act III, when everything turns grimmer and harsher, we hear of the symptoms of Paddy's illness. The time is March 1923, two months before the

Republicans surrender their weapons. The IRA men are camping in their dugouts, wet, cold, and hungry, their nerves frayed, “with hardly a dry thread on their bodies” (p.56)⁴⁷. But with Bina and her mother Bidy helping them—drying their clothes and procuring provisions—it is Paddy, now called “the wickedest of the Staters” (p.54), who looks isolated and harassed in this Republican stronghold⁴⁸. He has started to drink heavily⁴⁹, his language toward the enemy grown more strident⁵⁰, and is described “as thin as a hawk” (p.58). And he is, tellingly, coughing. Though Molloy himself was a model case of surviving the disease, consumption in the play is assumed to be fatal. “If ‘tis consumption, no doctor can cure it, and if it isn’t consumption ‘tis no harm” (p.58), Paddy says. In other words, his illness is presented almost as a price he has had to pay for the nation’s struggle.

The change Paddy underwent is marked above all in his attitude to killing. The peaceable young man of Act I, who never even fought with a bill-hook (p.20), and was “pale and shocked” after seeing his comrades “spurred out their blood and died” (p.23), is forced to shoot a Black and Tan sergeant in the back as he is running away⁵¹. He misses the first time, fires the fatal shot the second time, “starts and turns away in horror...comes in with his hands covering his eyes...and sits at the fire with his back to Ted.” (p.25) The whole sequence is laboriously annotated in stage directions with graphic physical details⁵². By the second act, however, Paddy seems inured to bloodshed, expertly dodging bullets through the woods, and in the third act he figures as the cold torchlight that persistently pursues Ted and a shout to “Fire!” (p.80) heard offstage. When Paddy finally appears on stage, bitter arguments ensue between him and Bina. She accuses him of not having given Ted a chance to surrender, to which Paddy replies that Ted had taken advantage of such a chance earlier and shot down his best friend. When Bina questions further, “How could Ted hear that surrender call with all the shooting?” Paddy replies,

“He heard all right; but he had sworn to die rather than obey the elected Government of his country. Such men you can’t save and you can’t spare.” (p.81)

There is callousness but also rationalizing humanity in Paddy, which nevertheless fails to placate Bina. She insists on calling him a murderer and throws her engagement ring at him. In his retort Paddy refers to his illness and that of others like him,

“So I’m a murderer! We risked our lives and lost our health to save the people from the mad fanatics, and now we’re murderers and they’re heroes.” (p.81)

Thus, despite being nominally the winner in the war, Molloy shows Paddy as doomed. He exits “coughing hard”, with Bidy commenting that “He has the real graveyard cough and colour, and when he spits into the fire his spit goes on fire.” (p.81)

The play includes a rather puzzling coda, however, in which Bina, now considered a traitor and in danger of reprisal, offers to accompany Isidore on his exile. Molloy needed

to show in some way the future that was achieved by all the sacrifices people like Paddy, Bina, Ted and Peg made.

Isidore: Yes, it would be safer, for a while, until all this war madness and hatred pass away.

Bina: And will they pass away, sir?

Isidore: (smiling) Of course they will, like an evil dream and then Ireland will be herself.

Consumption was a topic rarely treated by Irish writers, unlike in other European countries where we can find a steady strand of consumptive literature. And the limited number of Irish plays that did include consumption as a motif tended to use it to express the victimization of the innocent by society, their tragedy enhanced by the beauty, sensitivity and sometimes artistic potential of the victim. Molloy, having been a patient himself, chose to represent consumption not as a weakness, but as an emblem of the sacrifice made by an active agent of history on the way to building an Irish nation. Biographical relevance or social significance does not necessarily translate into literary excellence, but Molloy's *The Terrible Beauty* serves as a valuable literary document of this neglected page of Ireland's history.

Notes

- 1) It opened on 27th October, directed by Ria Mooney with the set designed by Tomas MacAnna.
- 2) *The Irish Times* Oct 28, 1958, p.4.
- 3) We also know that Molloy hated to make changes. For example, Molloy would give his friend Michael Leyden a manuscript to ask for his opinions, and yet when he made any suggestions, Molloy would find every excuse to defend the original (the interview conducted by the author in 1999).
- 4) Molloy's perspective is supported by today's historians who argue that the war of independence in the west was largely agrarian in nature and characterized by inter-class conflict between the landless or small farmers and the more well-do farmers (Campbell, 2005, p.242, p.292, pp.301-302; Fitzpatrick, 1998, p.146). Fitzpatrick points out that it is "difficult to disentangle the economic, political and military strands" because the same men belonged to different organizations (Fitzpatrick, 1998, p.65).
- 5) Clark Lawlor traces in detail how tuberculosis became a "glamorous Romantic disease" (Lawlor, 2006, p.1) by the late 18th century, considered "both the cause and consequence" (Lawlor, 2006, p.177) of "passion, spirituality and genius" (Lawlor, 2006, p.2). For instance, Dubos quotes Alexandre Dumas, who based his *La Traviata* (1853)/*La Dame aux Camélias* (1848) on his mistress, writing "in 1823 and 1824,...it was the fashion to suffer from the lungs; everybody was consumptive, poets especially" (Dubos, 1992, pp.58-59).

- 6) It came to be called tuberculosis only after Koch's discovery of the virus in 1840.
- 7) TB was known to spread initially in congested cities, and was rare in rural areas, so it spread later in Ireland than in the rest of Europe, owing to its late industrialization (Dubos, 1992, p.192). Ireland, moreover, lagged behind in the diagnostic techniques such as X-rays and bacteriological analysis so that it can be assumed that a large number of cases went undetected (Jones, 2001, p.138). In England the TB mortality rate peaked in 1780 or the late 18th century and started to fall in the 1870s, whereas in Ireland it rose steadily throughout the 1880s and 90s reaching a peak in 1904 (Fukuda, 1995, pp.348-49; Dubos, 1992, p.1, p. 8; Daniel, 1997, p.30; Jones, 2001, p.2). The rate rose again after 1937 in Ireland, a singular phenomenon in Europe (Guest, 2004, p.66) with a jump from 1939 to 1941, until a vigorous anti-TB campaign spearheaded by Noël Browne during his term as Minister of Health (1948) finally put a stop to the epidemic, virtually eradicating it. As for the peculiar late revival, T.Dillon explains that a rise in food prices from 1940 to 1943 led to a rise in the TB death rate, while O'Connor notes that many men who returned to Ireland at the end of WWII were infected (O'Connor, 1994, p.114).
- 8) Exemplified in paintings by John Everett Millais and Aubrey Beardsley: languishing, with liquid eyes, a long neck and limbs, sensual mouths, flushed cheeks, dressed in white muslins (Dubos, 1992, pp.54-57).
- 9) O'Connor notes that the families of the patients at the Newcastle Sanatorium addressed their letters to Anchor Hotel "to prevent people in their hometown and elsewhere from knowing" (O'Connor, 1994, pp.8-9). Euphemism such as "ah, the poor girl is not strong" (Logan, 1981, p.23) or "to go away for a time [to a sanatorium]" (Jones, 2001, p.170) was used. Even doctors refrained from registering the disease "out of considerations" (Jones, 2001, p.139).
- 10) He is modeled on Michael Bodkin, Nora Barnacle's boyfriend, who died in 1903.
- 11) The descriptions of her state and the care she receives are typical of TB patients at the time. The "ravages of consumption have shriveled her up". She is "worn, walks feebly, and frequently coughs" (O'Casey, 1985, p.125). It is milk that Bessie Burgess gives her (O'Casey, 1985, p.148), believed to be very good for TB, especially goat milk (Logan, 1981, p.22; Guest, 2004, p.66). Her own mother recommends the sun: "Th'sun'll do you all th'good in th'world. A few more weeks o'this weather, an' there's no knowin' how well you'll be" (O'Casey, 1985, p.143). The climate was all-important for TB, which is why sanatoriums spread.
- 12) It was directed by Hugh Hunt, with the design by Tanya Moiseiwitsch at the Abbey.
- 13) It was produced by Frank Dermody at the Abbey.
- 14) According to Susan Sontag, TB as a metaphor "makes the body transparent"; "speeds up" life, "highlights" and "spiritualizes" it, making a person "more conscious" and psychologically "complex", who feels more and therefore suffers more, set apart from the vulgar world. The result is a scholar or a poet. Lawlor makes a further distinction between the sexes. A consumptive man is thought to be creative, whereas his female counterpart turns into an

object of creation (Lawlor, 2006, p.44).

- 15) Her model can be found in John Desmond Sheridan's biography of Mangan, which most likely provided the source for the play (O'Farrell, 2004, p.99).
- 16) He says, for example: "One thing only I needed for my salvation in life. It was denied me." (D'Alton, 1938, p.24) "My genius is intermittent." (D'Alton, 1938, p.38) "I have had moments of genius in years of mediocrity." (D'Alton, 1938, p.49)
- 17) Cholera is described as "devourin' them inside and they knowin' nothing of it. An then before you can say it, down they drop" (D'Alton, 1938, p.55) with "a dizziness...inside your head", knees "trembly", and a "queer sort of a green look" (D'Alton, 1938, p.55) and faces "black and twisted" foaming at the mouth (D'Alton, 1938, p.57).
- 18) This may have led Mangan to beautify death as an "angel" with "a shining face" (D'Alton, 1938, p.58), himself partaking of its glow with a "queer brightness...a sort of shining" on his face (D'Alton, 1938, p.62).
- 19) From the very first appearance, she "seems tired and sits down at once, not taking off her coat for a while" (Wall, 1971, p.4) and "coughs gently" (Wall, 1971, p.6).
- 20) The victim was a humane libertine, who having lost all in gambling (Wall, 1971, p.11), took up this post fully aware of the danger involved.
- 21) Malachy only remembers her as an object of artistic appreciation with no concern for how she must have felt as a person. "See how prettily she blushed? Ah, girlhood! A happy time! Her mother was just that age..." (Wall, 1971, p.17).
- 22) Malachy's insensitivity is suggested by the way he calls their hike "gallivanting" (Wall, 1971, p.10).
- 23) Billiard notes Verna's conditions in his simple way, "You do be always tired now, Miss Verna." (Wall, 1971, p.6) Egan is quick to offer help when he sees an obviously invalid girl is made to carry turf (Wall, 1971, p.10). Vane shows concern towards Verna from the first and mentions it to Egan (Wall, 1971, p.21) and Allen (Wall, 1971, p.24), adding that "the loneliest and most helpless look comes at times" in her eyes. He advises "Your daughter doesn't look very strong...Why not take her where she could see a doctor from time to time?" (Wall, 1971, p.30), while Verna's father and stepmother, if not as cruel as Cinderella's, keep on giving Verna physically exacting chores, to light the lamp (Wall, 1971, p.6), get the turf (Wall, 1971, p.9), and boil water (Wall, 1971, p.20).
- 24) This is a play that explores self-delusions, with every character chasing a shadow of some kind, be it literary genius, physical allure, political ideal or moral integrity. The realist Egan says, "you spend your lives stumbling around in some gray twilight following a shadowy figure that you haven't even seen properly and don't know what it really is." (Wall, 1971, p.41). Only Verna looks at the reality of her conditions, saying "My father expects me to be a great painter, but I know I won't be" (Wall, 1971, p.28), "Five years. I think—five months would be too late" (Wall, 1971, p.47), so it is doubly ironic that her illness turns her into an image of the beautiful shadow that others are after in its various forms.

- 25) Known for his cynical view of the repressive 30s and 40s Irish society, Wall's characters are all colored in different shades of selfishness, headed by the literati Malachy, disdainful to the man he regards as his inferior while thinking nothing of living off his labour and money. His wife only pretends to be sympathetic to Billiard. Allen would have nothing to do with the man who has put his political ideas, if misguidedly, into action. His son nonchalantly abandons Verna to launch on his five-year travel. The priest, though supportive of Billiard and the poor, is criticized for his repressive morality and incendiary talk against communists. Efficient Egan is a pleasant contrast to the wooly-headed intellectuals, but could be callous.
- 26) It is traced realistically from the incipient slight cough (Bolger, 1997, p.29, p.35) to expectoration (Bolger, 1997, p.38), the thinning of arms (Bolger, 1997, p.41), the weakening, and fever.
- 27) This was a common practice. In 1944 the Irish Red Cross even provided 8ft x 6ft huts to isolate patients discharged from the sanatorium (Guest, 2004, p.69-70).
- 28) It was Collis who told Dorothy Price about BCG. Price subsequently went to Scandinavia and introduced the vaccination in Ireland in the 1930s.
- 29) This is what she says: "My God! 'All right—all right!' That's what you've always said, Jim Kane, ever since you brought me into this place. 'It's all right.' It was 'all right' when they told us we couldn't have a house unless we had eight children or were dyin' of consumption, and now they're after murderin' the only baby we can ever have, it's all right...I'm glad he's dead. ...I'm glad I can't have any more children to be born in this city to die in sickness and pain...Oh, Mother of God! Brendan, my baby!" (Collis, 1943, p.95)
- 30) For example, the "Board of the Townsend Thanatorion" (Gogarty, 2001, p.534) gleefully resolves that the donated money be used to build triple mortuaries next to the hospital in the shape of a shamrock, representing Catholics, Protestants and Non-conformists equally.
- 31) "Damp housing conditions, inadequate sanitation, limited diet often augmented by milk from tubercular-ridden cows..." helped to spread tuberculosis in Ireland (Collins, 1986, p.107). Pasteurization did not spread until after WWII (Jones, 2001, p.139).
- 32) His daughter says the production, which lasted for 17 performances from the 11th November, suffered because "the whole of Dublin went into mourning" when Kennedy was assassinated.
- 33) The IRA leaders did not want violent and forceful taking of lands. They "issued a directive condemning unregulated land agitation" and established land courts at a Sinn Fein conference held in May 1920 "to implement redistribution in a gradual and regulated manner" (Campbell, 2005, p.255). Fitzpatrick even says "the IRA intervened in the landlord's favour" (Fitzpatrick, 1998, p.64).
- 34) In August 1920, "threatening letters have become as common ...as mushrooms" and the landlord's employees were physically attacked (Campbell, 2005, p.250).

- 35) Some confusion attends Molloy's various biographical entries because he falsified his age to present himself three years younger than he actually was. Robert Driscoll, for example, who edited his *Selected Plays*, marks the year of his birth as 1917.
- 36) Christy Molloy recounts one boating adventure in which his brother rowed back through a storm in defiance of a local man's warning.
- 37) interviewed by the author on 30th March, 2010. A native of Belfast, he was ordained in 1939, and was 93 years old at the time of the interview.
- 38) Father Hanson's fondest memory was of rugby and Gaelic hurling.
- 39) "Surgical treatments came into vogue in the 1930s" (Healy, 2002, p.33). Streptomycin was not available until 1945 (Lawlor, 2006, p.187).
- 40) In the early 1890s, sanatorium treatment like the one at Nordach-im-baden was in vogue in Europe. Florence Wynne proposed to build the first purpose-built sanatorium in Ireland in 1891 and the Royal National Hospital for Consumptives at Newcastle was erected in 1894 on the land offered by Lord Fitzwilliam—though Wynne resigned later from the committee when her design to make it a Protestant venture failed. (Moorhead, 1943, p.129; Jones, 2001, p.159)
- 41) The Newcastle Sanatorium Papers in possession of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. The patients were "limited to 12 months' treatment so as to make room for" others (Collins, 1986, p.114). The cost was 28 shillings per week, equal to the weekly income of the workers but it could have been borne by the County Board of Health. Whether Molloy's treatment was paid for by Co. Galway is unknown.
- 42) O'Connor shows how life for the patients after they left the sanatorium was difficult, for many of them could not get a job. There was a post-sanatorium weekly allowance of 25 shillings for the unmarried and 39 for the married up to 18 months after discharge, but that was hardly enough. Molloy was no exception in facing financial difficulties but fortunately he had a strong family support. The problem was so acute that a sweepstakes, which incidentally Mungo's family won in *Mungo's Mansion*, was started in 1930 to help patients after their sanatorium treatment, and the Post-Sanatoria League was established in 1944 (O'Connor, 1994, pp.25-28).
- 43) Healy describes various cultural activities at Peamount Sanatorium, which had 700 books in its library (Healy, 2002, p.42). In Mann's "Magic Mountain", Hans Castorf famously finds a made-to-order teacher for his re-edification.
- 44) Jones says the sanatorium before anything else was "a community of young people" with 47% of patients at Newcastle in 1938 in their 20s and 30s (Jones, 2001, p.163) in a "romantic...balance of the sexes" (Jones, 2001, p.169). The average age of patients remained low particularly in Ireland while in the rest of Europe it went up (Healy, 2002, p.40). According to the Medical Record for 1937 in the Newcastle Sanatorium Papers, the number of patients discharged in 1937 by age groups were 2(11-15), 10(16-20), 20(21-25), 7(36-40), 7(41-45), 2(46-50). Among the occupations of 288 patients admitted in 1937, the highest were labourers 31, unemployed 31, clerks 26, housewives 25, post office officials

13, shop assistants 13, factory hands 12, civic guards 10, students 9, school children 9, domestics 9, farmers 8, civil servants 7, bank officials 4, typists 4, messengers 4, teachers 3. From this broad range of people with a substantial mixture of students and the educated, we can imagine how communication among them could have been stimulating. In addition to that, there was an atmosphere of rejuvenation at Newcastle when Molloy entered because of the addition of a new operating theatre in 1936, of which the hospital was very proud. Thoracoplasty and phrenicectomy were performed there.

- 45) For example, life at Newcastle was punctuated by a mass at 8:00, prayers at 8:30 and 6:30, and Angelus confessions at 12:00 on Thursdays, besides a mass on Sundays (Jones, 2001, p.171). The director of Cheshire Joint Sanatorium, where Browne found work highly congenial, told him of a regime of "monastic sobriety and asceticism" (Browne, p.79) as well as the "somnolent pace" of its management. Mann's Davos is also compared to a cloister (Mann, 1952, p.194).

The views around Newcastle Sanatorium were similar to Dalgan Park though much milder and comforting. O'Connor's description, "a symmetrical, three-storied, partly red-bricked buildings, ... in spacious wooded grounds with well-kept lawns and flower beds and a view of the Irish Sea from the rooms and balconies on the top floor, a veritable rural retreat" (O'Connor, 1994, p.9) remains true to this day.

- 46) Browne, better known for the Mother and Child Scheme, came from a family of TB victims; he lost his parents and three sisters, and was himself treated in 1940, after which he joined the staff at Newcastle in 1942, assuming the post of assistant medical superintendent in 1945.
- 47) "By December 1920, a number of members of the south Galway IRA had been forced to go on the run and were living in a makeshift tent" (Campbell, 2005, p.273); In East Connemara an officer wrote that they were "in a pitiable and most desperate condition in need of proper clothing and feeding" (Hopkinson, 1988, p.212).
- 48) "Almost all the IRA in Mayo, Sligo, and West Galway had gone anti-treaty" (Hopkinson, 1988, p.158). With the lack of centrally organized leadership, the local units acted on their own. The fighting was "sporadic and dispersed" (Hopkinson, 1988, pp.128-130). The influence of the local IRA commanders was the key factor" (Ó Gadhra, 1999, p.13).
- 49) He says, "Too much I'm leaning on the bottle, and still this oul'cough is choking me." (Molloy, n.d., p.58)
- 50) He calls Ted "that blackguard", "mad scoundrel of a husband", "Boshies" (Molloy, n.d., pp.57-58), though, to be sure, they were uttered in a moment of anger, believing that Ted has sent his sister to carry mines.
- 51) Bina let the sergeant escape when he was taken prisoner because he had saved her from rape the night before, but Ted orders Paddy to shoot him saying it was either the sergeant's life or Ted's.
- 52) For example, Bina "shudders" receiving "the blood-stained rope" (Molloy, n.d., p.26). We

find in Molloy's writing an almost sensuous love-hate obsession with the body, which may well have sprung from his experience of consumption, with Catholic teachings laying the ground. Life in a sanatorium is intensely focused on the body, every small change in body temperature controlling the patient's routine and sense of well-being (as Mann depicts vividly in *The Magic Mountain*). Patients become acutely aware of the preciousness of life and grow sensitive to death to an unusual degree. It also translates into a great concern for sanitation in practical terms. The sanatorium "taught self-discipline, self-management, community and home hygiene" (Collins, 1986, p.107). Molloy was very fastidious, for example, about nutrition and teeth, as his niece recounts. He was proud of the fact that all his teeth were his own until he died (an interview with Ann Molloy conducted by the author in 1999).

References

- Bolger, D. (1997). *April bright and blinded by the light*. Dublin: New Island Books.
- Browne, N. (1986). *Against the tide*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.
- Campbell, F. (2005). *Land and revolution: Nationalist politics in the west of Ireland 1891-1921*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Collins, E. (1986). Peamount hospital. In O'Sullivan, P. (Ed.), *Newcastle Lyons: A parish of the pale* (pp.107-118). Dublin: Geography Publications.
- Collis, Robert. (1943). *Marrowbone lane*. Dublin: The Runa Press.
- D'Alton, L. L. (1938). *Two Irish plays*. London: Macmillan.
- Daniel, T. M. (1997). *Captain of death: The story of tuberculosis*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.
- Dillon, T. W. T. (1943). Tuberculosis: A social problem. *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 32, 163-174.
- Donoghue, J. (2001). *The Abbey reneges on the 'Bachelor': Abandoning by default its trusted storyteller* (Unpublished master's thesis). National University of Ireland Galway.
- Dubos, R. and J. (1992). *The white plague: Tuberculosis, man, and society*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Fitzpatrick, D. (1998). *Politics and Irish life 1913-1921: Provincial experiences of war and revolution*. Cork: Cork University Press.
- Fukuda, M. (1995). *Kekkaku no bunkashi: Kindainihon niokeru yamai no image* [The cultural history of consumption: The image of the disease in modern Japan]. Nagoya: The University of Nagoya Press.
- Gogarty, O. (2001). *The poems and plays of Oliver St John Gogarty*. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe.
- Guest, S. (2004). Cure, superstition, infection and reaction: Tuberculosis in Ireland, 1932-1957. *Oral History*, 32(2), 63-72.
- Healy, T. M. (2002). *From sanatorium to hospital: A social and medical account of Peamount 1912-1997*. Dublin: A & A Farmar.
- Hopkinson, M. (1988). *Green against green: The Irish Civil War*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

- Jones, G. (2001). *'Captain of all these men of death': The history of tuberculosis in nineteenth and twentieth century Ireland*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Lawlor, C. (2006). *Consumption and literature*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Logan, P. (1981). *Irish country cures*. Belfast: Appletree Press.
- McGuinness, A. E. (1988). Michael Joseph Molloy. In Kirkpatrick, D.L. (Ed.), *Contemporary dramatists* (pp.379–380). Chicago: St James Press.
- Macken, W. (1946). *Mungo's mansion*. London: Macmillan.
- Mann, T. (1952). *The magic mountain*, New York: Random House.
- Molloy, M. J. (n.d.). *The terrible beauty*. Archives of the National Library of Ireland.
- Moorhead, T. G. (1943). Newcastle sanatorium: Fifty years' work. *The Irish Journal of Medical Science*, 209, 129–139.
- O'Casey, S. (1985). *Seven plays by Sean O'Casey*. New York: Macmillan.
- O'Connor, C. (1994). *The fight against T.B. in Ireland in the 1940s*. Dublin: Privately printed.
- O'Farrell, C. (2004). *Louis D'Alton and the Abbey Theatre*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.
- Ó Gadhra, N. (1999). *Civil war in Connacht 1922–1923*. Dublin: Mercier Press.
- O'Neill, M. (1999). *The Abbey at the Queen's: The interregnum years 1951–1966*. Ontario: Borealis Press.
- Sontag, S. (1991). *Illness as metaphor and AIDS and its metaphors*. London: Penguin.
- Tomelty, J. (1993). *All souls' night and other plays*. Belfast: Langan Press.
- Wall, M. (1971). *The lady in the twilight*. Newark, Delaware: Proscenium Press.