



Réamhrá

le

Dr. Éamon Ó Ciosáin

Léiríodh *Breithiúnas* den chéad uair in Amharclann na Péacóige i mBaile Átha Cliath i 1968. Polaiteoir an príomhphearsa sa dráma, fear a chuaigh chun cinn ó aimsir Chogadh na Saoirse. Ábhar tráthúil a bhí ann ar chúpla bealach. Glacadh leis gur laochra a bhí i dtrodairí Chogadh na Saoirse (1919-21); bhí cuid díobh fós gníomhach sa pholaitíocht sna 1960idí. Ach nuair a tharla ceiliúradh i 1966 ar 50 bliain Éirí Amach na Cásca (1916), thosaigh dornán daoine sa deisceart ag ceistiú an fheachtais a bhunaigh stát na hÉireann. Chomh maith leis sin bhí córas eacnamaíochta na hÉireann á oscailt do chomhlachtaí eachtrannacha. Ní raibh an bhéim chéanna níos mó ar neamhspleáchas eacnamaíoch na tíre.

Ach is dócha go raibh cúiseanna eile ar aigne ag Máiréad Ní Ghráda. Bhí taithí aici ar an bpolaitíocht aitiúil mar ba chomhairleoir contae agus náisiúntóir a hathair féin, Séamus Ó Gráda as Contae an Chláir. Bhí aithne aici ar go leor daoine a bhí páirteach sa ghluaiseacht náisiúnach, mar a bhí sí féin, sna blianta idir 1916 agus 1923. D'fhoilsigh sí cnuasach gearrscéalta faoin tréimhse sin (*An Bheirt Deartháir*, 1939). D'oibrigh sí sa pholaitíocht ar feadh tamall gearr ach d'éirigh sí as. Chomh maith leis sin bhí tuairimí láidre aici faoi shaol na hÉireann agus faoin áit a bhí ag mná sa chomhluadar. Bhí sí tar éis léirmheas láidir a dhéanamh ar stádas na mban i ndráma fada eile, *An Triail* (1964). D'úsáid sí foirm an cheistiúcháin cúirte mar ghléas amharclannaíochta agus tagraíonn na teidil *An Triail* agus *Breithiúnas* don dlí. Tá taithí againn sa lá atá inniu ann ar dhrámaí teilifíse lonnaithe sa chúirt.

Is é an stíl drámaíochta a chleacht Máiréad Ní Ghráda sna drámaí fada ná scéal na bpearsana a bhriseadh suas ina mhíreanna, mar a dhéanann an teilifís go minic. Tarlaíonn radharcanna in áiteanna éagsúla le gur féidir réimse leathan de shaol an duine agus den sochaí a chur ar an stáitse. Mar thoradh air seo taispeánann an pearsa tréithe éagsúla de réir an tsuíomh ina bhfuil sé/sí. Is féidir linn go leor tréithe a fheiceáil i bpríomhphearsa *Breithiúnas*, an polaiteoir Marcas de Grás, sna radharcanna éagsúla. Ach ní drámaíocht

réadúil atá anseo: tá Marcas marbh ó thús an dráma agus é mar bheadh spiorad ag féachaint siar ar a shaol.

D'éirigh le Marcas de Grás sa pholaitíocht trí úsáid a bhaint as go leor cleasanna agus go leor daoine. Thréig sé bean eile a bhí i ngrá agus geallta leis agus phós sé bean ó theaghlach polaitíochta. Tháinig Marcas i dtír ar dhílseacht agus ar obair a rúnaí Síle, a chúntóir Alabhaois agus a lucht leanúna. Duine sotalach, uaibhreach atá ann sa chéad ghníomh. Ach de réir mar a nochtar tuilleadh rúin ina shaol sa dara gníomh, athraíonn sé. Léirítear dó an dochar a rinne sé timpeall air ar feadh a shaoil. Nochtar an bhréag a raibh a shaol polaitiúil ar fad bunaithe air ag deireadh an dráma, eachtra ón gcogadh. Faigheann sé faoiseamh agus tá dóchas aige go maithfear dó.

Pearsa tábhachtach é Alabhaois mar ba é a chuir Marcas ar bhóthar na polaitíochta. Duine soiniúil é, mar a léirítear sa radharc ina léann sé litreacha ó dhaoine ag lorg cúnamh ó Mharcas. Is trí Alabhaois a léirítear fimíneacht na polaitíochta. Duine idéalach í Síle, a chaith a saol ar son Mharcas gan súil le buíochas. Fágtair í ina haonar, neamhphósta sa deireadh. Ach is ina theaghlach féin is mó a léirítear an dochar a rinne an saghas saoil a chaith sé. Ní furasta maireachtáil le Fear Mór. Níor phós iníon Mharcas, Nóra, mar gheall ar an chumhacht a bhí ag a hathair uirthi. Tuigeann a bhean chéile Eilís bréagadóireacht Mharcas, ach ligeann sí uirthi go deireadh nach bhfeiceann sí é. Deir sí gurb é 'buaic na clisteachta do bhean gan a ligean uirthi go bhfuil sí cliste in aon chor'. Ráiteas é seo a thugann le fios go bhfuil mná faoi smacht agus ar bheagán cumhachta. Maidir le beirt mhac Mharcas, téann Seán le dúchas a athar agus iompaíonn Gearóid ina choinne. Is ag freastal ar dhaoine mar dhea a bhí Marcas agus é ag bailiú vótaí. Ach chuaigh Gearóid chun na hAfraice le freastal ar dhaoine i ndáiríre trí obair mhisinéireachta.

Tá go leor pearsana eile sa dráma: úsáideann Máiréad Ní Ghráda mná gan ainm le tráchttaireacht a dhéanamh ar théamaí an dráma. Tá 'An Fear Eile', *alter ego* Mharcas, b'fhéidir, mar a bheadh fear faoistine nó teiripe, ag tarraingt na fírinne as Marcas tríd síos. D'fhéadfaí a rá gur teachtaireachtaí sách duairc atá ag an dráma: go maireann an dochar a dhéanann daoine ina ndiaidh agus go ndeachaigh leithéidí Mharcas chun cinn ar chostas na mban go háirithe. Ach sa deireadh fágann Máiréad Ní Ghráda faoin lucht féachana breithiúnas a thabhairt ar an bhfianaise atá curtha os a gcomhair.



Introduction

by
Dr. Éamon Ó Ciosáin

Breithiúnas was first staged in the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, in 1968. The central character is a bogus War of Independence hero who has risen through political life on the basis of his freedom-fighter past. He has prospered at the expense of his family and particularly the women around him. The play's background is one of grubby local politics, jobbery and half-truths cynically spun in political speeches, resulting in a trenchant critique of Irish society in general on the part of the author. The immediate context for Ní Ghráda's choice of theme may well have been the questioning in the 1960s of the struggle for independence and the abandonment by the Dublin government of economic nationalism. However, she probably had more specific sources of inspiration for the play, although she did not leave any statement of them on record.

Ní Ghráda had first hand knowledge of local politics in her native Clare as her father James, a nationalist, had been a county councillor. She also had experience of national politics through her involvement in the Gaelic League and Cumann na mBan in the 1919-21 troubles. She then worked as secretary to the politician Ernest Blythe, a position she left after a short period. Indeed, the topics of the Civil War and the position of women in Irish society appear elsewhere in her literary works. Her most well-known work, the tragedy *An Triail*, (1964) presents the case of a single mother and like *Breithiúnas*, refers to the legal process through its title. Questioning of characters occurs in a court-like scenario. Both plays take a sharply critical look at behaviour and conventions in Irish society; both also present universal themes.

Short, fast-moving scenes rather like television drama characterise Ní Ghráda's dramatic style. It is non-realistic in *Breithiúnas* in that the central character is dead before the play begins. He either observes the living or relives scenes from his life, in a thematic sequence rather than from beginning to end. The departure from constraints of time and space allows the author to develop more characteristics of the central character and to sketch a broad

social canvas. Once removed by death from exercising his power over those around him, he is forced to confront his half-truths and untruths and ultimately his own truth.

Marcas de Grás rose in politics thanks to his personal legend, which his sidekick, Alabhaois, a former fighting comrade grown cynical after years of politicking, promotes. He uses people and openly despises them (see the final speech of Gníomh 1). As the scenes unfold, his pride and ambition gradually yield and he begins to see the damage he has done around him throughout his career. After his various betrayals and political strokes are presented, the play ends with an expression of hope for rest from his vain striving, if not forgiveness for his deeds. Doubt remains however about the cause of his death from the gunshot which opens the play.

As Shakespeare wrote in *Julius Caesar*, 'the evil that men do lives after them'. This is expressed in Irish in the play and is particularly evident regarding the women in Marcas' life. He jilted his first love in order to marry Eilís, partly if not mainly for her political connections. She sees through his ambition but supports him, even as he cavorts with the nurse who cares for her in her final illness. Marcas' daughter Nóra and his secretary Síle both remain unmarried as a result of his power over them. Both idealise him and contribute selflessly to his career, leading to sarcasm and misunderstanding on the part of others. The two sons provide a contrast: Seán, the son Marcas shaped in his image, the hard-nosed businessman who plans ahead as soon as he reads Marcas' will and Gearóid, who refused to serve Marcas' overbearing ambition. Whereas Marcas 'served' people in order to garner votes, Gearóid emigrates to work as a lay missionary in Africa, serving people in a different and altruistic way.

While Alabhaois could be said to be Marcas' cynical shadow, another shadow character, An Fear Eile, functions like a confessor or therapist, prodding and probing Marcas as he confronts the sum of his life's deeds. Ní Ghráda uses other anonymous characters to provide commentary on the characters and the themes of the play. Flashbacks, retorts, dialogues of the deaf (as in Marcas' inability to speak to the living) and other dramatic devices are used. Irony and the revelation of contradictions between the private and public spheres are widespread in the play; they highlight the themes of hypocrisy, dishonesty in politics, the exploitation of women and the misuse of power. Marcas seeks peace at the end, or perhaps still the chancer, hopes for a final reprieve. Having presented the evidence, Máiréad Ní Ghráda leaves it to the audience to judge.

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Nótaí Staidéir ar
BREITHIÚNAS
MAIREÁD NÍ GHRÁDA

**Scríofa ag
Séamas Mac Annaidh**

Tugann na nótaí thíos treoir agus intreoir don dráma, do na téamaí agus do na carachtair atá ann. Chomh maith leis sin cuirtear ceisteanna síos tríd gur féidir leis na mic léinn a fhreagairt iad féin nó is féidir iad a úsáid chun diospóireacht agus caibidlíocht a spreagadh ina measc sa rang. Ní hionann sin is a rá go bhfuil na freagraí uile sna nótaí seo ach tá sé mar aidhm ag na nótaí seo na mic léinn a spreagadh leis an téacs a léamh go cúramach agus tuiscint níos fearr a thabhairt dóibh ar *Breithiúnas* mar dhráma.

***Breithiúnas* - An dráma:**

Ná déan dearmad gur dráma atá anseo. Scríobhadh é don amharclann agus bíodh gur féidir linn an téacs a léamh ní mór dúinn é a fheiceáil mar dhráma chun sult agus brí iomlán a bhaint as. Mar sin de ba chóir do mhic léinn radharcanna as an dráma a léiriú iad féin, nó ar a laghad iad a léamh amach os ard.

Cad é an difear idir dráma agus saghasanna eile litríochta?

An bhféadfaí cás Mharcais de Grás a iniúchadh ar an dóigh chéanna in úrscéal nó i ngearrscéal, cuir i gcás?

Cén fáth gur roghnaigh Máiread Ní Ghráda an dráma mar mheán an iarraidh seo? An scéal an-drámatúil é?

An *Triail* an t-ainm a bhí ar an dráma a scríobh sí roimh *Breithiúnas*. An dóigh leat gur féidir linn amharc ar *Breithiúnas* mar thriail de shaghas éigin? An féidir leat an scéal seo a shamhlú mar dhráma cúirte ina scairtear ar fhinnéithe éagsúla chun teacht os comhair na cúirte chun fianaise a thabhairt mar gheall ar an fhear seo a raibh aithne acu air?

Ná déan dearmad gur rud poiblí é dráma. Is minic gur mian le drámadóir ceisteanna a ardú in intinn an lucht féachana. Is rud príobháideach é leabhar.

Má tá suim fá leith agat i gcúrsaí drámaíochta b'fhiú duit roinnt léitheoireachta a dhéanamh mar gheall ar Thomás Mac Anna¹, léiritheoir cáiliúil a d'oibrigh le Máiréad Ní Ghráda ar *An Triail* agus *Breithiúnas*. Bhí baint mhór aige le hamharclann náisiúnta na hÉireann, Amharclann na Mainistreach i mBaile Átha Cliath agus bhí sé go mór faoi thionchar Berthold Brecht², an drámadóir Gearmánach.

Breithiúnas – An teideal:

Cad é is ciall don fhocal seo? An bhfuil níos mó ná ciall amháin leis i gcomhthéacs an dráma seo?

Cad é an tábhacht atá ag an teideal seo maidir leis an phríomhcharachtar? Le struchtúr an dráma? Leis an lucht éisteachta?

An bhfuil an t-údar ag iarraidh orainn, mar lucht féachana, breithiúnas a thabhairt?

Má tá, cé atá 'os comhair na cúirte'?

Nó an gcaithfidh Marcas de Grás é féin breithiúnas a thabhairt i ndeireadh na dála?

Más é Marcas de Grás atá faoi thriail anseo, cad é atá curtha ina leith?

Cén sórt fianaise a thugtar? An bhfuil sé cothrom agus cóir nó an amhlaidh go bhfuil gnéithe áirithe atá chomh tromchúiseach sin nach féidir le héinne cur ina gcoinne?

Má lorgann an dráma seo breithiúnas, cén sórt trialach é? Scrúdú coinsiasa duine?

Diancheistiú (smaoinigh ar an dá chathaoir agus an tábla ar ardán atá folamh)? Triail ag na meáin chumarsáide? Ag an phobal, ag madraí an bhaile?

Nó an amhlaidh go bhfuil an dráma seo é féin ag tabhairt breithiúnais ar shoचाí na hÉireann mar a bhí sna 1960idí?

An t-údar:

Tugann Éamon Ó Ciosáin sonraí úsáideacha beathaisnéise dúinn san introir a scríobh sé do na nótaí seo. Is iomaí bua a bhí ag Máiréad Ní Ghráda, gan a lua gurbh ise an chéad bhandrámadóir suntasach sa Ghaeilge. An bhfuil tábhacht fá leith le peirspeictíocht na mban sa dráma seo? Tá roinnt bancharachtar suntasach sa dráma seo. Cé hiad is tábhachtaí, dar leat? An fíor a rá go dtagann ceisteanna agus ábhair chun tosaigh sa dráma a mbeadh suim fá leith ag mná iontu? Más fíor, cad iad? An ndéantar na hábhair sin a phlé go fóill sa lá atá inniu ann?

Is fiú cuimhneamh gur mhair Máiréad Ní Ghráda tríd an tréimhse seo ar fad ina bhfuil an dráma seo suite agus bhí aithne aici ar dhaoine a raibh tábhacht leo ó thaobh na polaitíochta, na staire agus an chultúir de. Ó tharla go raibh baint aici le cúrsaí oideachais, cúrsaí amharclainne, agus gur oibrigh sí sna meáin chumarsáide agus in earnáil na polaitíochta sa tréimhse seo, bhí tuiscint mhaith aici ar a raibh ar siúl. Ar thug sí aon chuid den taithí seo chun cuimhne agus an dráma seo a scríobh aici, dar leat?

Comhthéacs stairiúil agus comhaimseartha an dráma:

Léiríodh an dráma seo don chéad uair i mí Feabhra 1968 agus is cosúil gur scríobhadh é tamall gearid roimhe sin. Ba é an dráma fada deireanach é a scríobh sí. Léiríodh *An Triail* an dráma is mó iomrá dá cuid i 1964. Ní amháin go raibh sí ar bharr a maitheasa mar

¹ <http://www.irishplayography.com/search/person.asp?PersonID=4814>

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertolt_Brecht

dhrámadóir sna 1960idí ach bhí deiseanna a léirithe ar fáil aici an t-am sin chomh maith. Is beag an deis a bhíodh ag drámadóir roimhe sin dráma fada i nGaeilge a léiriú go gairmiúil. Sa bhliain 1966 rinneadh céiliúradh mór ar Éirí Amach na Cásca 1916 ar fud na tíre. Ach bhí níos mó i gceist ná ceiliúradh. Thapaigh daoine an deis chun amharc siar ar an mhéid a baineadh amach ó bhunú an stáit, na tionscnaimh ar éirigh leo agus na geallúintí nár comhlíonadh. Bhí deireadh ré ann chomh maith nó bhí deireadh ag teacht leis an ghlúin pholaiteoirí agus cheannairí stáit a raibh baint dhíreach acu leis an Éirí Amach agus/nó le Cogadh na Saoirse. Agus cé a bhí ag teacht ina n-áit?

Chomh maith leis sin bhí athruithe móra ag tarlú, ní amháin in Éirinn agus i dtíortha eile chomh maith. Bhí athruithe móra ann ó thaobh na polaitíochta, na heacnamaíochta agus i gcúrsaí sóisialta. Ré na teilifíse agus an phopcheoil a bhí ann. Tugtar na *swinging sixties* ar an tréimhse seo. An bhfuil tionchar na hÉireann nua seo le feiceáil áit ar bith sa dráma seo?

An tréimhse ina bhfuil an dráma seo suite:

Tagraíonn an dráma seo don tréimhse ar fad ó bhunú an stáit síos go dtí an t-am sin féin. An ardaíonn an dráma seo ceisteanna deacra mar gheall ar laochra na tíre? An amhlaidh nach raibh bunús ar bith le cuid acu? An amhlaidh gur ghlac daoine bréige áit na laochra? Cad é an ról a d'imir na haicmí a bhíonn i gceannais? Cérbh iad seo in Éirinn sna 1960idí. An bhfuil na dreamanna céanna i réim inniu?

Struchtúr:

Dráma fada le dhá mhír atá anseo.

An bhfuil fáth ar bith, dar leat, gur chinn an t-údar ar an ábhar a chur os ár gcomhair ina dhá leath? Cén fáth nach mbíodh trí ghníomh aici, abair?

An bhfuil comhchruthaíocht nó cóimheá idir an dá leath? Nó íomhá scátháin?

Tosaíonn an dráma le bás amháin agus críochnaíonn sé le bás eile. Déanann an bás miotas a chruthú sa dá chás ach nuair a fheiceann muid bás An Cheannaire ag deireadh an dráma, an eachtra a chur tús le miotas Mharcais de Ghrás, déanann sé an miotas sin a scriosadh an iarraidh seo.

Tá tús thar a bheith drámatúil ag an dráma seo. Tosaíonn sé le urchar gunna agus leis an cheist 'an bhfuil sé marbh?' Díritear ár n-aird ar an eachtra láithreach bun. Ní gá don drámadóir a thuilleadh a dhéanamh le muidne a mhealladh isteach nó leis an íomhá a chruthú. Cheana féin tá an lucht féachana agus na haisteoirí araon ag cur ceisteanna.

Tugtar freagraí síos tríd an dráma, ach fágtar na cinn is tábhachtaí go dtí an deireadh.

Ach an bhfágtar roinnt ceisteanna in intinn an lucht féachana ina dhiaidh sin ar fad?

An fíor a rá gur eolas diúltach is mó a thugtar dúinn mar gheall ar Mharcas de Grás sa chéad mhír ach go ndéantar an íomhá a chothromú sa dara mír?

An bhfuil cóimheá nó coimhlint idir shaol poiblí agus saol príobháideach Mharcais de Grás?

Sa dráma seo ní dhéantar na radharcanna a scaradh óna chéile, ritheann siad ar aghaidh go díreach ó radharc go radharc. Tá go leor radharcanna gairide ann agus is féidir linn amharc orthu seo mar chuimhní, más mian linn, abair. Tugann an stíl seo scríbhneoireachta deis don scríbhneoir cuid mhór a chlúdach in achar gairid.

Stáitsiú: déantar an dráma seo a léiriú ar ardán atá lom don chuid is mó. Cén fáth? Ní luaitear ach tábla agus dhá chathaoir mar threalamh stáitse. An buntáiste nó dúshlán é seo ag na haisteoirí?

An féidir linn a rá go cinnte cá háit a dtarlaíonn an dráma seo ar fad?

Baineann an t-údar úsáid as:

Fuaimneanna: Bíonn an-éifeacht acu seo ag tús agus deireadh an dráma ach go háirithe.

Guthanna éagsúla: Cuireann a leithéid scaifí inár láthair. Cuireann sé an gnáthphobal in iúl chomh maith.

An t-iardhearcadh: Is féidir leis an údar an scéal a insint san ord is fearr a oireann don dráma.

D'oibrigh Máiréad Ní Ghráda sa chóras náisiúnta craolacháin in Éirinn. Ar imir drámaíocht teilifíse agus raidió aon tionchar, dar leat, ar struchtúr agus ar stáitsiú an dráma seo?

Cad é mar a bhraitheann an dráma seo?

Foréigean is cúis le trí bhás sa dráma seo (Marcas, a dheirfiúr óg agus An Ceannaire) ach an féidir linn traigéide a thabhairt ar an dráma seo?

An bhfuil greann ar bith sa dráma seo, aon rud a dhéanann blas an dráma a athrú, nó an bhfuil an chuma chéanna air síos tríd?

An mbíonn tionchar ar bith ag na ráitis bheaga a thagann ón scaifte ar chuma an dráma?

Ord eachtraíochta:

Déantar na príomhradharcanna a liostú thíos. Ach ós rud é go dtarlaíonn sé go dtéann radharc amháin go díreach isteach go radharc eile seans go mba mhaith leat iad a bhriseadh suas ar dhóigh eile agus a thuilleadh radharcanna a chur leis na liostaí seo. Déan do liostaí féin go bhfeice tú.

Mír a haon

Bás Mharcais.

Bás a dheirfiúr.

Cuireann sé a mháthair i dteach na mbocht.

Nóra agus Brian Ó Doinnlé.

An bheirt mhac, Seán agus Gearóid.

Marcas, Eilís agus an pholaitíocht.

Síle, Marcas agus Alabhaois – polaitíocht arís.

Mír a dó

An Tuairisceoir agus Alabhaois.

Cur síos ar Shíle.

Cur síos ar an tsochraid.

Marcas agus an Bhanaltra.

Eilís agus Síle.

Marcas agus mná.

An tiomna – Seán agus Nóra.

Sochraid, mná ag caint.

Marcas agus An Fear Eile.

Bás an Cheannaire.

Marcas Óg agus Peigí.

Radharc deiridh.

Na carachtair

Marcas de Grás:

An príomhcharachtar. Tá coimhlintí agus contrárthachtaí sa charachtar seo. Is polaiteoir mór le rá é, is breá le daoine é. Ach ní duine ceannasach é mar sin féin. Tá sé ag brath ar na daoine atá thart timpeall air. Tá clú an laoch air, ach níl aon bhunús leis seo. Meatachán atá ann, rud a léirigh sé le linn Chogadh na Saoirse.

Ar chóir dúinn fear óg soineanta a lochtú mar go raibh eagla air nuair a scaoileadh faoi is gur goineadh é? An é ba chúis le bás An Cheannaire? Cad iad na bréaga a d’inis sé? An raibh an locht air go ndearnadh laoch de agus gur chuir mná suim mhór ann?

Eilís, a bhean:

Is duine láidir í ar féidir léi tionchar a imirt ar dhaoine. Tuigeann sí cad é atá uaithe agus an dóigh le sin a fháil. Cinneann sí ar Mharcas a mhealladh ó Pheigí de Búrca agus éiríonn léi. Is den aicme cheannais í, níorbh ionann agus Marcas. Bhí carr aici nuair nach raibh a leithéid aige. Ach déanann sí é a roghnú agus déanann sí a shaol polaitiúil a eagrú. Tuigeann sí a bhfuil de bhuanna agus laigeachtaí ag Marcas. Oibríonn siad as lámha a chéile. Ise an duine atá i gceannas sa teaghlach. Ach tagann galar marfach uirthi. An bhfuil aifeála ar bith uirthi? Cad é an tuiscint a fhaigheann muid uirthi nuair a labhraíonn sí le Síle, rúnaí Mharcais?

An bheirt mhac, Seán agus Gearóid:

Tá siad seo éagsúil go maith óna chéile. Tá Seán sásta toil a athar a dhéanamh rud nach ndéanfaidh Gearóid a thuilleadh. Ó bhí siad ina ngasúir bhí ról acu i saol poiblí a n-athar. Ach cad é mar a réitíonn siad le Marcas? Cad é an chiall agus an tábhacht atá leis an fhocal ‘meatachán’? Cad é a tharla do Ghearóid ag an sorcas?

Nóra, a iníon:

40 bliain d’aois atá sí. Féach an cur síos a dhéanann Alabhaois uirthi agus é ag caint leis an Tuairisceoir ar lch 61-2³. Tá sí umhal agus dílis do Mharcas. Déan í a chur i gcomparáid lena máthair. Bhí Eilís saor a rogha fir a phósadh ach ní mór do Nóra cead Mharcais a lorg, rud nach dtugann sé di. Cad é a fhoghlaimíonn muid fá Mharcas sa chás seo? Agus fán tsochaí ina maireann siad? An ionann seo is a rá go bhfuil an aicme cheannais coimeádach, agus go raibh cás na mban níos measa sna 1960idí ná mar a bhí glúin roimhe sin?

Síle Ní Shúilleabháin, rúnaí Mharcais:

D’fhóirfeadh an cur síos a dhéanann Alabhaois ar Nóra go maith do Shíle chomh maith. Tá sise ag dul anonn sna blianta fosta. Tá sí umhal agus dílis do Mharcas chomh maith. Tá a saol caite aici ag obair ar a shon. An fíor a rá go bhfuil íomhá idéalach ina hintinn aici, is go bhfuil sí doirte ar Mharcas? An raibh riamh gaol de shaghas ar bith eile eatarthu, nó an raibh riamh aon seans go mbeadh?

An Bhanaltra:

³ Tagraítear do na leathanaigh de réir mar atá siad in eagrán 1996 (An Gúm)

Ní thugtar a hainm. Cén fáth? An duine óg neamhspleách í, nó an amhlaidh go raibh sí ann chun freastail ar riachtanais Mharcais? Ar chóir dúinn amharc uirthi mar dhuine de chuid na *swinging sixties*? Agus más amhlaidh, an bhfuil a cás a dhath ar bith níos fearr ná cás na mban eile?

Alabhaois:

Tá seisean i láthair ag tús agus ag deireadh an dráma. Tá sé i láthair nuair a fhaigheann Marcas agus An Ceannaire bás. Agus, níorbh ionann agus gach duine eile sa dráma, ní thagann aon athrú air. Is pearsa shíoraí é. Cuireann sé a leagan féin den scéal chun tosaigh agus glactar leis. *Spindocter* an t-ainm a bheadh againn ar a leithéid sa lá atá inniu ann nó comhairleoir meán. Ach tá níos mó ná sin i gceist le hAlabhaois. Gníomhaire atá ann chomh maith, is duine de na daoine sin a bhíonn ag oibriú na polaitíochta. Eisean a dhéanann an tsochraid a reáchtáil. Cé dó a bhfuil seisean ag obair i ndáiríre? An Páirtí? An gnáthphobal? An tír?

Tabhair fá deara nach dtuigeann muid i gceart an ról seo atá aige go deireadh an dráma nuair a fheiceann muid an dóigh ina ndéanann sé ról Mharcais i mbás An Cheannaire a láimhseáil. Cén fáth go ndéanann sé a leithéid, dar leat? An ag cosaint na cúise nó ag cur dallamullóg ar an phobal atá sé?

An ionann an ról atá aige sa dráma agus an ról atá aige sa pholaitíocht? Cad atá ar siúl aige? Is cosúil gur tábhachtaí leis an miotas ná an fhírinne. Is gur tábhachtaí an córas/an páirtí ná aon duine, ná an fhírinne féin.

Ní dhéanann seisean aon iarracht tabhairt ar Mharcas an fhírinne a aithint, níorbh ionann agus An Fear Eile.

Deir Eilís (lch 71) go ndéanann Alabhaois (agus daoine eile) Marcas a chosaint ar an saol. ‘Ní mór dó aige iad chun misneach a thabhairt dó agus chun féinmhuinín a chothú ann.’

An Fear Eile:

Carachtar an-spéisiúil. Cé hé i ndáiríre? Coinsias Mharcais? An gcuireann sé Spiorad na Nollag i scéal *A Christmas Carol* (scéal Scrooge) le Charles Dickens i gcumhne duit? Nó an aingeal ag geataí na bhFlaitheas é? An ndéantar é a chóimheá le Marcas? Nó le hAlabhaois? Cad é an éifeacht dhrámatúil atá aige mar charachtar?

An Ceannaire:

Eisean an ceannaire, an ceannaire a cailleadh. Is fíorlaoch cogaidh é ach cuirtear Marcas de Grás ina áit. Tagann polaiteoir i gcomharbacht ar an saighdiúir. An gcuireann sé ceannaire cailte i ré Chogadh na gCarad i gcumhne duit?

Peigí de Búrca:

Cailín tuaithe a thiteann i ngrá le Marcas óg, laoch, agus é ar a choimeád i dteach a muintire. Grá románsúil atá anseo. Ar chóir dúinn í a chur i gcomparáid leis An Bhanaltra, nó le hEilís, abair?

Tabhair fá deara go dtugann Marcas Óg ‘mo bhanaltra’ uirthi (lch 84-85).

Tabhair fá deara nach bhfuil sí umhal do Mharcas. Nuair a thréigeann sé í cuireann sí an dlí air agus éiríonn lena cás. Agus níorbh ionann agus Nóra, iníon Mharcais, briseann sí saor uaidh, pósann sí agus bíonn clann aici.

Brian Ó Doinnlé:

Fear óg atá ag siúl amach le Nóra. Is mian leis dul chun cinn a dhéanamh sa saol ach ní ghéillfidh sé do Mharcas. Duine óg neamhspleách atá ann.

Téamaí eile

An Pholaitíocht:

Is polaiteoir é Marcas de Grás. Níl an chuma air gur ábhar maith polaiteora a bhí ann. Ach tagann sé chun cinn mar gheall ar eachtra a tharla le linn Chogadh na Saoirse agus déanann a bhean chéile Eilís a bheatha a stiúradh. Éiríonn go maith leis i saol na polaitíochta. Ach ní ceannaire ó dhúchas é. Cad é an léiriú a thugann a chás dúinn ar an pholaitíocht? Cé atá ag rialú na tíre i ndáiríre? Agus é ag labhairt ag a shochraid deir Alabhaois go raibh de phribhléid aige aithne a bheith aige ar fhear ‘chomh hionraic, chomh huasal, chomh Gaelach’ le Marcas de Grás (lch 77). An mbaineann aon cheann de na haidiachtaí seo le Marcas i ndáiríre? Cén fáth go ndéanann Alabhaois é a mholadh ar an dóigh seo, mar sin? An bhfuil an fhírinne á nochtadh aige Alabhaois nuair a deir sé ‘tá a spiorad beo bríomhar inár measc i gcónaí’? An breithiúnas an ráiteas seo ar pholaitíocht na hÉireann?

Tugann Marcas cuid mhór geallúintí uaidh sna hóráidí toghchánaíochta aige (lch 41-2).

An iad seo na geallúintí céanna a thugann polaiteoirí uathu i gcónaí tráth toghcháin?

Tabhair fá deara go gcuirtear coinníoll leis na geallúintí seo – ‘gan cur isteach ar na feirmeoirí ná ar na siopadóirí,’ agus ‘mo vóta i gcónaí don pháirtí.’

Cén aicme lena mbaineann na feirmeoirí agus na siopadóirí?

Cad é an tábhacht a bhaineann leis an nath ‘agus mo vóta i gcónaí don pháirtí’?

Cad é a léiríonn sé seo fá chóras na polaitíochta? An mbíonn aon tionchar ag an teachta dála aonair ar pholasaithe an rialtais i ndáiríre?

Caitheann an dráma solas ar an dóigh ina ndéantar comharba polaiteora a roghnú chomh maith. Diúltaíonn Alabhaois láithreach don mholadh go nglacfaidh seisean suíochán Mharcais. Cén fáth, dar leat? Deir sé nach mbeadh ann ach ‘sop in ionad na scuaibe’ (lch 20). Ansin déantar mac Mharcais a mholadh agus féach an chéad cháilíocht a luaitear leis – ‘an t-íománaí is fearr sa chontae.’

(Bhí Seán Ó Loinsigh, a bhí ina thaoiseach tráth an dráma seo ina íománaí clúiteach ina óige.)

An bhfuil dearcadh soiniúil i leith na polaitíochta á léiriú ag Máiréad Ní Ghráda sa dráma seo?

Ról na mBan:

Tá páirteanna tábhachtacha ag mná sa dráma seo. Tá éagsúlacht mhaith iontu, sna rólanna atá acu agus sna tuairimí a nochtann siad.

Rinne Síle agus Nóra beirt an chuid is fearr dá saol a chaitheamh ag obair do Mharcas agus fán am go bhfaigheann sé bás is cosúil go bhfuil siad ró-aosta le go mbeadh clann acu. Bhí siad beirt dílis do Mharcas – níorbh ionann an ról a d’imir siad ach bhí an toradh mórán mar an gcéanna.

Bhí Eilís sásta bheith mar bhean chéile aige, bhain sí sult as. Cuireann sí síos uirthi féin mar fhimíneach, ach le fírinne bhí sí dlí di féin. Ní raibh sí dall ar an fhírinne. Cad é mar a bhí an pósadh s'aici i ndáiríre?

Ní hionann an caidreamh a bhí ag Peigí de Búrca agus An Bhanaltra le Marcas. An féidir linn a rá gur grá rómánsúil a bhí ag Peigí agus gur caidreamh fisiciúil a bhí i gceist ag an Bhanaltra?

Ar bhain Marcas leas as na mná seo uilig? Ar bhain aon duine acu leas as Marcas?

An pósadh:

Tá radharc lárnach sa dráma seo ina ndéanann Eilís a bhfuil galar marfach uirthi Marcas a phlé le Síle, an rúnaí dlí di s'aige. Baineann sí úsáid as dhá fhocal láidre – *fimíneach* agus *óinseach*. An dtuigeann tú go díreach cad é atá i gceist aici leis an dá fhocal seo? Cad é an dearcadh atá aici i leith an phósta? An gcuireann seo iontas ort? Cad é an ról a imríonn bean atá pósta ar fhear mór le rá? Cén fáth go dtáinig bean mar Eilís faoi dhraíocht Mharcais? An dóigh leat go mbíodh na barúlacha maidir leis an phósadh a nochtar sa dráma seo conspóideach in Éirinn sna 1960idí? Cén fáth?

Na meáin chumarsáide:

Gan amhras cuireann na meáin chumarsáide suim i mbás polaiteora mór le rá. Déanann RTÉ an leagan oifigiúil den eachtra mar a insíonn Alabhaois é, a chraobhscaoileadh go luath (lch 22).

Déan seo a chur i gcomparáid leis an mhéid a dhéanann An Tuairisceoir de chuid *Nuacht na Cruinne* ag tús Mhír a Dó. (Bheadh sé níos suimiúla dár léitheoirí dá mba mhurdar é, a deir sé ar lch 57). Agus féach na grianghraif a ghlacann sé.

Déanann an t-údar aoir ar an saghas seo tuairisceora. Cén dóigh?

Cad is Leigiún Mhuire ann? (Lch 61).

Ba chóir duit ról Alabhaois a chur san áireamh anseo chomh maith nó is eisean a chuireann an t-eolas ar fáil do na meáin chumarsáide agus don ghnáthphobal. Déanann sé dearcadh an phobail a mhúnlú. Tugann sé óráid ar shochraid Mharcais agus déanann sé cur síos bréagach ar bhuanna Mharcais. Cén fáth go ndéanann sé amhlaidh? An dóigh leat go ndéantar seo de ghnáth?

Roinnt ráiteas eile ar chóir duit suntas a chur iontu:

‘É féin an namhaid ba mheasa a bhí aige ... ach caithfidh duine a bheith de réir an dúchais a bhíos ann’ (lch 25)

Seo Marcas ag caint mar gheall ar a athair – ach nach féidir linn an rud ceannann céanna a rá fá Mharcais féin?

‘Ní mór duit féachaint sna háiteanna is uaighní i do chroí’ (lch 30)

Insíonn An Fear Eile do Mharcas cad é atá le déanamh aige. Baineann na radharcanna a tharlaíonn ina dhiaidh seo leis an dóigh ar chaith sé lena theaghlach.

‘... a thábhachtaí atá an teaghlach mar aonad spioradálta ... Leithscéal chun tíoránachta!’ (lch 30)

Seo Nóra ag iarraidh a mhíniú dá buachaill cén fáth nach gcuirfeadh a hathair fáilte roimhe. Tá tábhacht leis an fhreagra a thugann Brian uirthi, i gcomhthéacs an dráma, agus i gcomhthéacs na tréimhse inár léiríodh an dráma seo don chéadair, tráth ar leag an mhoráltacht Chaitliceach an-bhéim ar thábhacht an teaghlaigh sa tsochaí.

‘Tá an-spéis ag muintir na hÉireann i sochraidí’ (lch 63)

An fíor seo, dar leat? Cad é an tábhacht a bhaineann le sochraidí móra poiblí? An cuimhin leat sochraid George Best? Cár réachtáladh í? An féidir leat smaoineamh ar aon sochraid pholaitiúil a raibh tábhacht léi i stair na hÉireann?

‘An t-olc a dhéanann duine maireann sé ina dhiaidh’ (lch 76)

Seo admháil ó Mharcas go bhfuil dochar déanta aige dá theaghlach féin. Is pointe tábhachtach sa dráma é, nó tarlaíonn sé go díreach roimh an tsochraid, tráth a ndéanann Alabhaois é a mholadh go hard. An é seo teachtaireacht an dráma seo?

‘Cén leigheas a bhíonn ag duine air féin? Caithfidh sé déanamh de réir a mheoin ... de réir a chroí’ (lch 88)

An leithscéal é seo ó Mharcas nó ráiteas fealsúnach? Ar ghníomhaigh Marcas de réir a mheoin nó de réir a chroí?

An maíonn an dráma seo gur féidir le botún beag amháin tionchar a imirt ar shaol iomlán an duine?

Léitheoireacht bhreise

Ní Bhrádaigh, Siobhán *Máiréad Ní Ghráda, Ceannródaí Drámaíochta*. INDREABHÁN: Cló Iar-Chonnachta 1996 ISBN 1 874700 34 6.

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Study notes on
BREITHIÚNAS
MAIREÁD NÍ GHRÁDA

**Scríofa ag
Séamas Mac Annaidh**

The notes below provide a guide to the play, its themes and characters. They also ask questions which students may ask themselves and which can be used to stimulate debate and discussion in class. We do not claim to provide any definite answers! Such discussions will encourage close reading of the text and a better understanding of the play.

***Breithiúnas* - the play:**

Don't forget that this work is a play. It was written to be staged and although we can read the text to fully appreciate, enjoy and understand *Breithiúnas* we must at least try to imagine it as it would be staged. Therefore it is strongly recommended that students perform key scenes, or at least read through them out loud.

How does a play differ from other literary works?

Could you imagine this story being told in a novel or short story? Why do you think Máiréad Ní Ghráda has chosen the play as her medium in this instance? Is this a very *dramatic* story?

Her previous play was called *An Triail*. Do you think that *Breithiúnas* could also be seen as a trial? Could you imagine it as a court-room drama with different witnesses being called to give their accounts of Marcas de Grás?

Consider that a play is a shared, public work, while a novel is a private one.

If you have a special interest in drama you could read up on Tomás Mac Anna⁴, the producer who worked with Máiréad Ní Ghráda on both these plays. He was an important figure in Ireland's national theatre, the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and was influenced by the work of the German playwright Berthold Brecht⁵.

⁴ <http://www.irishplayography.com/search/person.asp?PersonID=4814>

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertolt_Brecht

Breithiúnas - the title:

Breithiúnas/Judgement. What does this mean? Has it more than one meaning? What is the significance of this title, for the main character, for the structure, and for the audience. Who/what is being judged and who makes the judgement? Is the author asking us to deliver a verdict on Marcas de Grás? Or in the end does Marcas have to make his own choice?

If Marcas de Grás is the defendant, what is his alleged crime? What sort of evidence is presented? Is it balanced and fair or are there certain things weigh so heavily as to make all other evidence irrelevant?

If this play asks for a judgement what sort of a trial is it? Is it an examination of one man's conscience? An interrogation? Is it trial by media, by the general public, the man of the street?

If Marcas de Grás is a product of the society in which he lived is this play actually asking us to make a judgement on Irish society as it was in the 1960s?

The author:

Éamon Ó Ciosáin provides useful biographical details in his introduction. Máiréad Ní Ghráda was a woman of many talents and achievements, not least that she was the first significant female dramatist in Irish. Do you think she brings a particularly female perspective to the play? There are several very significant female characters in the play. Who are they? Issues and attitudes which would be of particular relevance to women are prominent in the play. What are these? Are they still relevant today?

Also she lived through the entire period in which this play is set and knew many of the important political and cultural figures of the time. Her educational, media and political work meant that she was involved in much of what was going on in these areas during the period. Do you think she brought any of her own personal experience to this play?

Historical and contemporary significance:

The play was first performed in February 1968, apparently having been written shortly before then. It was her last full length play. *An Triail*, her best known work had been staged in 1964. Not only was she at the height of her powers as a dramatist in the 1960s but the conditions for staging such works were right. Previously there had been few opportunities for the professional production of full length plays in Irish.

1966 saw a great national celebration of the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising. But it was not just a celebration. It was also a time for people to look back at what had been achieved, the mistakes that had been made and to think of what might have been. The generation of local and national politicians who had a direct connection with the Rising, the War of Independence and the Civil War was passing away. Who was replacing them? In Ireland and internationally also it was a time of great social, economic and political change. Do any of the characters reflect the 'swinging sixties' or the new found wealth of an emerging modern Ireland?

Era in which the play is set:

The play covers the whole of the era from the birth of the state to the then present day.

Does the play suggest that some of Ireland's heroes were bogus? Does it suggest that the true heroes were usurped by imposters? What is the role of the ruling classes? Who were the ruling classes in 1960s Ireland? Are they the same as today?

Structure:

This is a full length, two act play. Is there any particular reason which the author has chosen to present this material in two, rather than, say one or three acts?

Is there balance or symmetry between the two halves? It starts with a death and ends with a death. In both instances the death creates a myth but when we see the death of An Ceannaire at the end of the play, the event which created the Marcas de Grás myth, for us it finally destroys that myth.

The play has a very dramatic opening. It begins with a gunshot and then the question '*An bhfuil sé marbh?*' This immediately draws our attention to the action. There is no need for scene-setting. Straightaway the audience is asking as many questions as the actors. We get answers throughout the play but the most important ones are left until the end. Are some questions left for the audience to answer?

Would it be true to say that most of what we learn about Marcas de Grás in Act One is negative while in Act Two we begin to get a more balanced picture?

Is there a balance or a conflict between the public and private lives of Marcas de Grás?

In this play the scenes all run seamlessly into each other. There are many short scenes.

These can represent memories and allow the author to include a lot of material in a short period.

Staging: This play is staged on a stage that is empty for the most part. Why? The only props mentioned are a table and two chairs which can be used as required. Do you think this is an advantage or a challenge for the actors? Where does the action of the play take place?

Could this play have been called 'Death of a Hero'?

The author uses:

Sound effects. These are particularly effective for the opening scene and for the ambush scene at the end of the play.

The chorus. This can represent the disparate voices and moods of the general public. It gives the effect of crowds.

Flashbacks. These allow the author to tell the story in the order that she thinks best for dramatic effect.

Mairéad Ní Ghráda worked for the Irish broadcasting service. Do you think the structure and staging of the play has been influenced by radio and television drama?

What are the visually most significant images in the play?

Several characters are known only by their titles: An Bhanaltra, An Ceannaire, An Tuairisceoir. Why is this, do you think? Are they stereotypes?

What is the mood of the play?

There are three violent deaths (Marcas, his little sister and An Ceannaire) but can this play be described as a tragedy?

Is there any humour in the play, any light relief, or is the mood unchanging throughout?

What effect do the quips and comments from the bystanders have?

Sequence of the action:

The main scenes are listed below. However, as each scene runs into the next you may choose to divide them up in a different way and may decide that there are more scenes than listed here. Make your own list.

Act One

Death of Marcas de Grás and reactions to it.
Death of his sister.
Putting his mother into a home.
Scene with daughter and boyfriend.
His sons – Gearóid’s plans and childhood story.
Marcas, Eilís and politics.
Síle, Marcas and Alabhaois – politics again.

Act Two

Journalist and Alabhaois.
Description of Síle.
Description of funeral.
Marcas and Nurse.
Eilís and Síle.
Marcas and women.
His will – Seán and Nóra.
Funeral – women talking.
Marcas and Fear Eile.
Death of An Ceannaire.
Marcas Óg and Peigí.
Final Scene.

The characters

Marcas de Grás:

He is a successful politician, a larger than life character, who inspires loyalty in those around him. Yet he is not a leader. He needs the support of a lot of people around him. His whole image is based on a falsehood. During the War of Independence he was a wimp, not a hero. Can we fault him for being afraid when he was wounded and under fire? Was he responsible for An Ceannaire’s death? What lies did he tell? Why? Was it his fault that he was lionised and that women found him attractive?

He is a flawed individual whose private life does not live up to his public image. He is very severe on his own children, expecting them to be something he wasn’t himself.

Eilís, his wife:

She is a strong, manipulative person, who knows what she wants and how to get it. She sets out to entice Marcas away from Peigí de Búrca and succeeds. Unlike Marcas she has connections with the ruling classes. She has a car before Marcas does. She has chosen him

and she directs his political career. She knows his weaknesses and his strengths. She is the dominant person in the household. She falls mortally ill. Has she any regrets? What does she reveal about herself when she speaks to Síle?

His sons, Seán and Gearóid:

The two boys are quite different. Even as small children they have a role to play in their father's public life. What role does their father see for them in the future? What is his relationship with them? What is the significance of the word 'meatachán'? Who is the bravest in reality?

Nóra, his daughter:

She is 40 years old. See how Alabhaois describes her uirthi in his conversation with the *Tuairisceoir* on page 61-2⁶. She is subservient and loyal to Marcus. Compare the daughter with the mother. Eilís did not have to ask her father for permission to marry yet her daughter does, and her father says no. What does this say about Marcus? What does it say about society? About progress? Are the ruling classes essentially conservative?

His secretary:

Síle Ní Shúilleabháin has given her life to Marcus de Grás. Is it true to say that she idolises him, or at least that she has an idyllic image of him? Has there ever been anything other than a working relationship between them, or was there any likelihood that there ever would be?

The nurse:

She has no name. She fulfills a role/several roles. Is she a young modern woman or a servant?

Alabhaois:

He is present at the start and the end of the play. He is there when Marcus dies and when the Ceannaire dies. He presents his version of the events to the public. Would he be called a media consultant nowadays, a spindoctor? Whom does he serve? The party? Note that we don't fully understand his role in the opening scene until we see what he does when An Ceannaire is killed.

An Fear Eile:

Who/what is he? Is he the conscience of Marcus de Grás? Or a ghostly figure like those who haunt Scrooge in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*? An angel? Is there a balance between him and Marcus? What dramatic effect does he have?

An Ceannaire:

He is the leader, the lost leader. He is a genuine war hero whose place is taken by de Grás. Can you think of a lost leader from Irish history?

⁶ References to page numbers refer to the 1996 edition (An Gúm)

Does Máiréad Ní Ghráda suggest that he might have made a better politician? Or does politics corrupt as former freedom fighters become government ministers?

Peigí de Búrca:

She is the country girl who nurses the wounded hero back to health and gets romantically involved with him. But she cannot be taken for granted, for when she is jilted by de Grás she successfully sues him for breach of promise. Is it significant that Marcas Óg refers to her as 'mo bhanaltra'? (Page 84-5). She played her part 'for the cause' but later she is rejected and paid off. What do you think Máiréad Ní Ghráda is saying here?

Brian Ó Doinnlé:

He is Nóra's boyfriend. He is a solicitor's clerk. He knows what he wants and is prepared to speak his mind. Was he right to confront Marcas? Does he represent the younger generation which is prepared to challenge the status quo?

Other themes

Politics:

Marcas de Grás is a politician. Given his background he is an unlikely one. However he comes to prominence because of the War of Independence and his wife Eilís successfully launches his political career. What does this say about Marcas de Grás? Is he a natural leader? Speaking at his funeral Alabhaois says that it was an honour and a privilege to have known a man 'chomh hionraic, chomh huasal, chomh Gaelach,' as Marcas de Grás (p77). Do any of these adjectives really describe Marcas? Why does Alabhaois describe him thus? Is there a certain irony/truth in his statement 'tá a spiorad beo bríomhar inár measc i gcónaí'? Is this a verdict on politics in Ireland?

Marcas makes many promises in his electioneering speeches on pages 41 and 42. Are these the usual sorts of promises we hear from politicians at election time? Note that all these promises are conditional – 'gan cur isteach ar na feirmeoirí ná ar na siopadóirí' and 'mo vóta i gcónaí don pháirtí.'

What stratum of society is represented by the farmers and shopkeepers?

What is the significance of 'mo vóta i gcónaí don pháirtí'?

What does this say about the political system? Does the individual member of parliament have any real say in governmental policy making?

The play also comments on how a politician's successor is found. Alabhaois is quick to reject any suggestion that he fill the vacancy, being only a 'sop in ionad na scuaibe' (p20) and then Marcas's son Seán is proposed and what special qualification does he bring? 'An t-íománaí is fearr sa chontae.'

Why does Alabhaois decline the offer?

Is it fair to say that people get the representatives they deserve?

Does Máiréad Ní Ghráda present a cynical view of politics in Ireland?

The role of women:

There are many significant female characters in this play with an interesting range of roles and attitudes.

Síle and Nóra have both given the best parts of their lives to Marcas for by the time of his death they are probably too old to marry and have families. Obviously their roles are different but the end result is much the same.

Eilís, has played the role of the good wife and she has enjoyed it. She describes herself as being *fimíneach* but in fact she has not deluded herself as to the realities of her situation. What are these realities?

Peigí de Búrca and An Bhanaltra have very different relationships with Marcas. Would it be true to say that Peigí represents romantic love while the nurse's relationship is purely physical?

Were all of these women used by Marcas?

Marriage:

There is a very significant scene where the ailing Eilís discusses Marcas with Síle, his dutiful secretary. She uses two very strong words: *fimíneach* and *óinseach*. What exactly does she mean by these? What is her view of marriage? Is this surprising? What is the woman's role in marriage, especially where her husband is a well-known public figure? Why do you think a woman like Eilís came under his spell?

Do you think that the views on marriage expressed in this play would have been controversial in Ireland in the 1960s?

The media:

Unsurprisingly the tragic death of a well-known politician attracts considerable media attention. RTÉ is quick to broadcast the official version of events as provided by Alabhaois (p 22).

Compare this with the actions of the reporter from the News of the World at the start of Act Two. Does he want truth or sensation?

'Bheadh sé níos suimiúla dár léitheoirí dá mba mhurdar é' (p 57).

Note the photographs that he takes.

The author satirises this type of journalist in this scene. How?

What is the Legion of Mary? (P 61).

The role of Alabhaois can be considered here as well since he is the person who provides the media and the general public with information. He manipulates public opinion. He speaks at the funeral and describes Marcas de Grás in a way that he knows to be untrue. Why does he do this?

Some significant quotes which should be noted

'É féin an namhaid ba mheasa a bhí aige ... ach caithfidh duine a bheith de réir an dúchais a bhíos ann' (p 25)

This is Marcas talking about his alcoholic father – but could these words be as equally applied to himself?

‘Ní mór duit féachaint sna háiteanna is uaigní i do chroí’ (p 30)

An Fear Eile tells Marcas what he must do. In the scenes which follow Marcas must recall how he treated his own children.

‘... a thábhachtaí atá an teaghlach mar aonad spioradálta ... Leithscéal chun tíoránachta!’ (p 30)

Here Nóra is trying to explain to her boyfriend why he would not be welcomed by her father. Brian’s response is significant, both in the context of the play and in the context of the era in which it is set, when Catholic morality placed great emphasis on the importance of the family in society.

‘Tá an-spéis ag muintir na hÉireann i sochraidí’ (p 63)

Do you think this is true? What is the significance of major public funerals? Do you remember George Best’s funeral? Where was it held?

‘An t-olc a dhéanann duine maireann sé ina dhiaidh’ (p 76)

This is Marcas admitting the damage he has done to his family. It is a telling moment in the play, coming as it does just before his funeral where Alabhaois eulogises him. Is this the message of the play?

‘Cén leigheas a bhíonn ag duine air féin? Caithfidh sé déanamh de réir a mheoin ... de réir a chroí’ (p 88)

Is this an excuse from Marcas or a philosophical statement? Did Marcas follow his head or his heart?

Does this play suggest that one mistake can lead to a whole lifetime of falsehoods?

For further reading

Ní Bhrádaigh, Siobhán *Máiréad Ní Ghráda, Ceannródaí Drámaíochta*. INDREABHÁN: Cló Iar-Chonnachta 1996 ISBN 1 874700 34 6.

Ó Siadhail, Pádraig, *Stair Dhrámaíochta na Gaeilge 1900-1970*. INDREABHÁN: Cló Iar-Chonnachta 1993.