

Sean O'Casey's Socialism and Pacifism in *The Plough and the Stars*

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I

The Plough and the Stars, the third play of Sean O'Casey's *The Dublin Trilogy* is more popular than the second play *Juno and the Paycock*, and has been most frequently produced. Although there was considerable criticism at the time of its first production, the play gained popularity in Dublin and its worth was never challenged again. O'Casey was able to cement his reputation with *The Plough and the Stars*, and it is now universally regarded as his finest work.

The original design of "Plough" and the "Stars" had the symbol of the seven stars of the Ursa Major constellation on a gold ploughshare with a sword as its cutting edge, and the background colour was green. This was the emblem of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA), a self-defence military unit of the workers' union. The "Plough" represented labour and the "Stars" signified the hopes of the labour movement. O'Casey acknowledged that this ICA flag as well as the Irish Volunteers' flag gave him the inspiration for the play:

It was this flag [the flag of the ICA] that fired in my mind the title for the play; and the events that swirled around the banner and that of the Irish Volunteers, the tricolor of green, white and orange . . . that gave me all the humour, pathos and dialogue that fill the play.⁽¹⁾

The Plough and the Stars was first produced at the Abbey Theatre in 1926. By this time, the Irish Free State had already been established. Jim Larkin returned in 1923 from the United States where he had been imprisoned for advocating socialism to workers, which was regarded as an anarchic behaviour. After returning to Ireland, he tried to continue his unfinished trade-union movement. However, the labour movement had already lost its impetus, and Larkin had to create another new trade-union organization, based on the labour principle, in order to oppose the one he had originally created.

O'Casey, as well as Larkin, had been disappointed with the current labour movement, and he thought the reason for this decline in popularity of the movement was the Easter Rising where the union's energy had been wasted in a futile effort, having been directed towards military action. The Easter Rising was still etched on the minds of Dubliners even ten years after the event when this play was first staged. The majority of people, however, were content with the outcome of the heroic deeds of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army.

When O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* was scheduled to be staged, people believed that it would be a dramatization of the Easter Rising, and the nature of which would be to praise and glorify volunteer fighters who had devoted themselves to fighting for Irish independence against British authority. Contrary to the general public's expectations, *The Plough and the Stars* was regarded as a mockery of the revolutionaries. There were derogatory scenes which portrayed soldiers' cowardice, tenement dwellers' looting and a scene where the holy flags (the tricolour of the National Volunteers and the plough-and-stars of the Irish Citizen Army) were brought into a pub frequented by a prostitute in spite of the fact that the holy flags were considered symbols of

sacrificial deeds. Consequently, O'Casey's ill-treatment of the "martyrs" and these holy flags became the target of criticism.

The nationalists, pious Catholics, and relatives of those who had been killed in the battle were infuriated. Mrs. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, a suffragette, one of the original members of the Irish Citizen Army and the formidably powerful widow of a pacifist Francis Skeffington who was shot at the Easter Rising, led the protest. On the fourth evening of the first week, the production was met by a large number of women, mainly widows of the victims, from a nationalist group. They had decided to attend a performance where they shouted, screamed and sang songs to disturb staging of the play. Fighting then broke out between the players and patriotic members of the audience. Yeats declared this violent opposition to be a serious challenge to artistic freedom in the same way as in the case of John. M. Synge's plays; O'Casey and Synge both aimed to satirize hypocrisy and pretence in their society. People from opposition groups, however, did not properly appreciate O'Casey's intentions. One man shouted, "We fought in 1916 and did not frequent pubs nor associate with prostitutes."⁽²⁾

O'Casey's work cast serious doubt in the minds of the public upon the effectiveness of the Easter Rising. He was a pacifist, so naturally his themes represented such beliefs. He let Nora, the heroine of this play, express that she found fear, not courage, in soldiers. O'Casey was convinced that soldiers, who fought, had deceived themselves out of fear; he even believed they lacked courage to express real feelings of fear. He accused women too; he thought their patriotism was a lie, since he was certain that no woman would want to risk her husband's or sons' lives by sending them to war.

According to nationalists, the Abbey Theatre, the so-called national

theatre, should not have produced an anti-nationalist play such as this. O'Casey was dubbed a traitor and a pro-British propagandist, and the very legitimacy of the Abbey Theatre was also called into question. Their accusation was: "The Government is subsidizing the Abbey to malign Pearse and Connolly."⁽³⁾

In this play O'Casey also depicted ordinary citizens who turned into chance looters and carried away booty during the commotion. Honest Dublin citizens became indignant as they thought they had been ill-portrayed. There were clearly a great many elements in this play that would infuriate audiences at its first production, only ten years after the incident.

O'Casey might have accurately portrayed some of the different groups, but people did not accept the mirror images presented on stage. During the commotion in the theatre, Yeats came onto the stage and called for silence. He tried to address the audience to defend O'Casey and artistic freedoms as he had done for J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. After his defence of Synge's play, Yeats had become a Senator in the upper house of the Irish Free State, and he had also received the Nobel Prize for Literature. Therefore at the time of his defence of O'Casey's play, he was more well-respected than at the time of *The Playboy* riot. However, not a word he spoke could be heard by anyone due to the jeering voices of the crowd.

Yeats had anticipated what would happen and had visited the office of the *Irish Times* prior to the performance to deliver the text of his speech. The *Irish Times* "reported" what Yeats had said at the Abbey Theatre:

You have disgraced yourselves again. Is this to be an ever-recurring

celebration of the arrival of Irish genius? Synge first, and then O'Casey! The news of the happenings of the past few minutes will go from country to country. Dublin has once more rocked the cradle of genius. From such a scene in this theatre went forth the fame of Synge. Equally the fame of O'Casey is born here tonight. This is his apotheosis.⁽⁴⁾

Nothing Yeats said could not appease the anger of the audience. The mass media continued their campaigns against the play, labelling it as "sewage school drama" and O'Casey as "a guttersnipe from the slums." Some actors also criticized O'Casey for his use of abrasive language and the unsuitable content of the play. O'Casey was quite isolated due to criticism and protests; this triggered his departure from Ireland to Britain within a month after the first day of the performance of *The Plough and the Stars*; he lived in England until his death in 1964.

Despite the riotous commotion in and around the theatre during its run, *The Plough and the Stars* made a record number of performances at the Abbey Theatre.⁽⁵⁾ This was partly due to the media attention; the meaning of the play was hotly disputed by pro-O'Casey and anti-O'Casey factions in the major newspapers. This rumbled on for several weeks. Once when O'Casey defended Nora's womanhood, Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington denounced him, saying, "Nora Clitheroe is no more 'typical of Irish womanhood' than her futile snivelling husband is of Irish manhood. The women of Easter Week, as we know them are typified rather in the mother of Padraic Pearse, that valiant woman who gave both her sons for freedom."⁽⁶⁾

It is a well-known fact that this play saved the Abbey Theatre from bankruptcy. However, it is not so well known that the Abbey Theatre

caught fire during the dead of night after the performance of *The Plough and the Stars* was reproduced on July 18th, 1951. From the following day the play had to be staged at the Peacock Theatre. When the new Abbey Theatre opened in 1966 as a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising, *The Plough and the Stars* was chosen to be staged. This evidently indicates how highly valued O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* has been by the Abbey Theatre.

II

O'Casey's creation of *The Plough and the Stars* is inseparable from political and social movements around him in the early 1910s. He wrote for the *Irish Worker* in 1914: "Nationalism [for the workers] is a gospel without hope; it does not signify life to them."⁽⁷⁾ It is essential to understand the labour movement and the political background of the Easter Rising to appreciate the play. First, we need to understand the fact that armed forces were used not only for the Independence Movement but also for the Labour Movement in Ireland at that time.

From August 1913 to January 1914, there was a six-month struggle of workers against the capitalists' lockout. First, William M. Murphy, one of the most powerful industrialists, dismissed members of Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU). Jim Larkin called an all-out strike on Murphy's Dublin United Tramway Company. Many industrialists of Employers' Federation, requested by Murphy, also locked out all members of the ITGWU workers, and tried to break the union. This conflict between industrialists and workers escalated to the clash between 25,000 workers and 400 employers; consequently, Dublin's economy came to a standstill. When the workers held demonstrations,

they were violently attacked by Dublin Metropolitan Police. Larkin had to form workers' defence forces, the Irish Citizen Army, to protect the workers from the aggression of the police. Jack White, a trade unionist and a former British Army officer, trained workers for that purpose. However, O'Casey, the first secretary for the Irish Citizen Army, found it difficult to collaborate with him because of his aggressive and revolutionary ardor like Countess Markievicz's.

Due to the long period of the Great Dublin Lockout, many workers and their families were obliged to live on the verge of starvation. O'Casey was the secretary of the Strikers' Relief Committee, which provided workers' wives and children with food and clothing. O'Casey witnessed that some politicians talked about idealism, disregarding the reality of how poverty-stricken people were struggling to survive. He also realized that some politicians only worked for fame and personal benefit, exploiting the plight of the poor. He became so disappointed with politicians that he decided to work for economic, not political freedom.

As for the strike and lockout, the workers had to yield and return to work because of hunger in January 1914. However, the Irish Citizen Army remained intact. O'Casey wrote an article entitled "Purple Dust in their Eyes" in the book *Under a Colored Cap* (1963) which he wrote a year before his death:

As for me, I abandoned the romantic cult of Nationalism sixty years ago, and saw the real Ireland when I read the cheap edition of Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island*; hating only poverty, hunger and disease.⁽⁸⁾

In *The Plough and the Stars*, the Covey shouts, "Freedom! What's

th' use o' freedom, if it's not economic freedom?⁽⁹⁾" This is O'Casey's voice. He did not wish workers to fight against Britain to achieve independence. He wrote: "... the real struggle was not between the English Imperialist and the Irish Republican, but between international capitalism and the workers of the world."⁽¹⁰⁾ He insisted that workers should only fight against capitalists' aggression and protect themselves with force, if necessary.

According to O'Casey, the use of armed forces was acceptable within the Labour movement, but not for nationalistic causes. His principle of using arms only for self-defence was firm, and he did not allow any aggression under the name of nationalism. He was then acting as secretary of the Strikers' Relief Committee raising fund to provide the destitute workers' families with food and clothing at the time of the Great Dublin Lockout. This proves his strong support of socialism and illustrates his adamant attitude to put his principles into practice. Robert G. Lowery writes:

Nationalism, the socialist believes, is and has been a sham with which to fool the working class. It sets nation against nation for the interests of a handful of capitalists who rule. The working-class's interests should be and are with the working classes of other countries rather than with the capitalists class of his own, for the problems of the proletariat of any country are similar to those in other countries: wages, jobs, food, rent, and peace.⁽¹¹⁾

The labour dispute dragged on and provided the political background of the Easter Rising initiated by Padraic Pearse and James Connolly. O'Casey was convinced that it would be a waste to fight

against the mighty military power of Britain with such a small group of underequipped fighters. He challenged Connolly and Pearse to a debate on this matter prior to the Easter Rising, but he received no response from them. O'Casey wrote in *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army* (1919):

The high creed of Irish Nationalism became his [Connolly's] daily rosary, while the higher creed of international humanity that had so long bubbled from his eloquent lips was silent for ever, and Irish Labour lost a Leader.⁽¹²⁾

After Larkin left Ireland to raise funds for the ITGWU in the United States in October 1914, his successor Connolly provided a more militant and nationalistic nature, rather than socialistic one, to the Irish Citizen Army where O'Casey had been secretary; the ICA had been the supporting body for the labour movement which pushed for the betterment of labourers' economic conditions. In correspond with Jim White, the ICA commander, having left the ICA and joining the Irish Volunteers, Connolly was edging the organization towards nationalistic outlook, and was beginning to unite the ICA with the militant Irish Volunteers in order to fight during the Easter Rising.

Pearse made speeches in which he emphasized the necessity of blood sacrifice, and inspired people to take up arms to fight for independence. He thought revolution was the only means of liberating Ireland from its status of subject nation to Britain. An example of his speeches goes as follows:

Ireland unarmed will attain just as much freedom as it is convenient for England to give her; Ireland armed will attain ultimately just as

much freedom as she wants We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms, to the sight of arms, to the use of arms. We may make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people; but bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. There are many things more horrible than bloodshed; and slavery is one of ⁽¹³⁾ them.

One month after the establishment of the ICA, another labour union the National Volunteers was established. O'Casey criticized this organization which was affiliated with the Irish Parliamentary Party led by John Redmond. He did this because he thought it was a sham labour union which too-readily gave in to capitalists' demands. Therefore he wrote an article in the *Irish Worker* exhorting labourers to resist the lure of joining this organization.

Later, however, when he learned that Connolly and his followers decided to co-operate with the militant Irish Volunteers, he knew the organization would no longer be able to carry out labour movement activities. This is the reason he quitted the ICA in 1914, and began to devote himself to writing plays; his criticism of Connolly is found in *The Plough and the Stars*. For example, when a bricklayer, Jack Clitheroe of this play asks why his army is bringing disgrace on the flag, the Covey says, "Because it's a labour flag, an' was never meant for politics" (181) The Covey insists that the symbol of Labour Movement ought not to be associated with middle-class nationalist revolutionaries such as the Irish Volunteers.

O'Casey believed it was a criminal offence of Connolly to appropriate the labour movement initiated by Jim Larkin, and agitated workers to

riot while disregarding the ideals of socialism. Thus the structure of the play grew from his strong conviction that the labour movement had been misled by the delusions of romantic patriots. His feelings grew much stronger when the Labour Party failed to gain support in elections held after the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922. *The Plough and the Stars* is a vivid dramatization of O'Casey's disappointment at the failure of labour movement due to militant Republicanism.

At the time of the Rising, the Irish Volunteers and the Fenians were the main bodies who actually rose to fight. Pearse acted in defiance of Eoin MacNeill's higher orders to cancel the Easter Rising because the arms they had expected from Germany was intercepted by Britain. Nonetheless, Pearse and other leaders carried out the rebellion, and declared that Irish people had the right to their own land in Ireland; Pearse audaciously read the proclamation of the establishment of Provisional Government of the Irish Republic in front of the General Post Office.

Yeats wrote a memorable poem titled "Easter, 1916" in which he consecrated the leaders: "All changed, changed utterly:/ A terrible beauty is born."⁽¹⁴⁾ The Easter Rising, however, became the root of the subsequent wars, especially acts of terror during the Irish Civil War when the two opposing groups of Irish nationalists (one was the pro Anglo-Irish-Treaty group, and the other was the group of staunch Republicans) fiercely fought from June 1922 to May 1923. This pro-Treaty side was led by Michael Collins, and today's central-right party Fine Gael is its descendant. Éamon de Valara, founder of a today's centrist party Fianna Fáil, was against the Treaty.

Although rebel leaders had been shunned or bitterly criticized immediately after the Rising, they were canonized as martyrs after

execution without fair trial. The shedding of Pearse's blood and that of the other leaders' by the British inflamed nationalistic emotions of the general public.

The blood-sacrifice of Padraig Pearse, James Connolly and the other leaders had become the symbol of Ireland's age-long struggle for freedom. It was both a crucifixion and a resurrection.⁽¹⁵⁾

William Armstrong comments further on how this Easter Rising ignited to start the Irish Free States five years later:

It [Easter Week] transfigured Irish drama as well as Irish life. The insurrection against English rule at Easter, 1916, is an outstanding instance of that Celtic paradox, the physical defeat from whose ashes spiritual victory rises like a phoenix. The insurgents were defeated but the subsequent execution of Pearse, Connolly, and their other leaders horrified Ireland and made the Sinn Fein movement strong enough to resist English troops during the troubles of 1920-21 and to exact the treaty which set up the Irish Free State in 1921.⁽¹⁶⁾

III

The Plough and the Stars is set in and around an ordinary Dublin tenement house and in a pub, not the General Post Office where the main battle was fought, nor the headquarters of the revolutionary forces. The audience are informed of events in Dublin through the conversations of tenement dwellers or speeches heard through windows of the pub.

They also see loot brought back from shops and witness fleeing soldiers.

The tenement house where all the major characters are living is a microcosm of Irish society; Uncle Peter's useless sword symbolizes the inappropriate weapons of the revolutionaries, and the quarrel and the fighting between the tenement dwellers is the reflection of the fighting between the revolutionaries and the British forces. The individual actions that take place in the tenement house are in parallel with the background events. Desmond MacCarthy points out this parallelism:

... his [O'Casey's] effects are chiefly based upon the contrast between the shining qualities which the characters attribute to themselves and their actual behaviour, between the romantic world within them and the grimy world without. The exhilaration and the sardonic fun springs from the indomitable, heroic, obstinacy with which they insist that the inner dream is true, in spite of their pretensions and idealism collapsing every moment at the prick of fact. While realising enormously such humiliations in the case of other, the one and all ignore them in their own.⁽¹⁷⁾

In the opening scene three different actions proceed simultaneously while each character pays no attention to others. They are self-absorbed, and completely unconcerned about the things happening around them. Mrs. Gogan receives a box sent to Nora Clitheroe during her absence. She peeps into the box out of curiosity. Uncle Peter, Nora's uncle, is restlessly pacing back and forth. The Covey, Nora's cousin, comes in and starts to mock Uncle Peter over trivial matters while the carpenter Fluther fixes the door of Nora's room.

The Plough and the Stars is often compared to Anton Chekhov's

plays. Instead of a single hero or heroine, each tenement dweller is important in their own way in this play. All of them, however, are on the margin of the political event; only Jack Clitheroe aspires to enter the centre of the political movement, the consequence of which would be a disaster.

When Mrs. Gogan finds a gorgeous-looking hat inside the parcel, she criticizes Nora for trying to make a “babby-house” (165) with her newly-married husband Jack. Naming this character Nora reminds us of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, and the expression of a “babby-house” also gives us strong impressions that O’Casey tried to present an Irish counterpart to Ibsen’s Nora as Synge had previously done in his play *In the Shadow of the Glen*.

O’Casey’s Nora, however, is not a strong-willed New Woman; she is like Ibsen’s Nora who had been a devoted wife to her husband Torvald before she gained revelation. O’Casey is rightly acknowledged as an Ibsenite dramatist by John O’Riordan: “He is, indeed, the Ibsen of early twentieth-century Dublin, and, assuredly, the Ibsen of the tenements.”⁽¹⁸⁾ O’Casey followed the Master of the Modern Drama not only by namesake but also by characterization of Nora and her simple-minded husband Jack. The day of the opening scene is Nora’s birthday as festive as Christmas time in *A Doll’s House*.

Clitheroe: I didn’t forget this was your birthday, did I? And you liked your new hat; didn’t you, didn’t you? (184)

In answer to her husband’s “Little, little red-lipped Nora!” (184) Nora says: “. . . your little, little red-lipped Nora has to clean your boots every mornin’ all the same.” (184) Nora’s coquettish attitude and her servile

devotion to Jack is also the same as Ibsen's Nora's dedication to Torvald.

Mrs. Gogan is critical of Nora, saying, "Valts that are hidin' th' dead, instead of homes that are shelterin' th' livin'." (164-65) O'Casey uses the death imagery from the beginning to insinuate that the place Nora is making is not her home but in fact her own grave. O'Casey foretells Nora's tragic end with the death-related words and phrases "hearse", (168) "Earth to earth, an' ashes to ashes, an' dust to dust" (168), "funeral" (168), "shroud" (169).

Mrs. Gorgan says Nora's effort to draw her husband's attention will, sooner or later, become futile; "She dresses herself to keep him with her, but it's no use — after a month or two, th' wondher of a woman wears off." (164) Fluther endorses Mrs. Gogan's speech by emphasizing men's capriciousness in preference of women; "when a man finds th' wondher of a woman beggin' to die, it's usually beginnin' to live in another." (164)

As for an ultra-nationalist Jack, his "another woman", if there were, is Cathleen of Yeats's and Lady Gregory's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* staged in 1902. Jack convinces himself that Cathleen, symbol of Irish independence, is more important than Nora in the same way that the bridegroom Michael decided to call off his marriage and decided to fight for Irish independence in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*.

Uncle Peter is a member of the Foresters (the Irish National Foresters' Benefit Society), which supports Irish nationalism and its constitution; it called for establishing "government for Ireland by Irish people in accordance with Irish ideas and Irish aspirations."⁽¹⁹⁾ He is wearing a Foresters' green and gold uniform to prepare for the memorial torch procession and the meeting held the same evening at Parnell Square. The organization is a benevolent society, and he has no intention

of fighting against Britain. His huge cavalry sword is too long for a short man like him, and he looks comical in his colorful uniform.

The Covey believes in Darwin's theory of evolution (as did John. M. Synge) and is a socialist, partly influenced by communist ideas. He is mostly O'Casey's chief mouthpiece-spokesman in terms of political principles and social issues in this play. When Jack proudly says that the flag of *the Plough and the Stars* will be shown in the procession, the Covey denounces this as disgrace.

The Covey: They're bringin' nice disgrace on that banner now. . . .
Because it's a Labour flag, an' was never meant for politics . . .
What does th' design of th' field plough, bearin' on it th' stars of th' heavenly plough, mean, if it's not Communism? It's a flag that should only be used when we're buildin' th' barricades to fight for a Workers' Republic! (181)

Jack (similar to conceited Jack Boyle in *Juno and the Paycock*) desires glory through a revolutionary act as an officer of the Irish Citizen Army, and considers the Easter Rising as a chance for it. Jack is described as a man with "a face in which is the desire for authority, without the power to attain it." (178) Nora points out Jack's weakness, and foretells the consequence of it: "Your vanity'll be th' ruin of you" (189)

Since Nora does not want him to be involved in a violent revolution, she has been hiding the message which officially pronounces his appointment as a commander. She wants to keep her idyllic life and has determined not to inform him for fear that she would be left alone with an unborn child if he should be killed in the battle. Mrs. Gogan criticizes

people like Jack who join the forces for superficial reasons: vanity, fame, self-importance or greed.

At the beginning of the play, the inside of the tenement house is rather peaceful, though there are small arguments between Uncle Peter and the Covey until Brennan appears and passes the message of Jack's promotion directly to him. Jack gladly accepts the appointment, and accuses Nora of having hidden the message from him. His accusation and the actual acceptance of his promotion in the Irish Citizen Army greatly distress Nora, and consequently her delicate mental balance begins to fall apart. She desperately cries out something she does not mean: "I don't care if you never come back!" (190) The social, political and military unrest, the culmination of which is the Easter Rising, is imminent and the volatile mood in society clearly affects the relations between Nora and her husband.

After Nora is left alone, a sickly girl Mollser comes to Nora's flat unable to bear her loneliness. She is suffering from consumption and terribly weak. She needs her mother's nursing attention, but is left alone as her mother Mrs. Gogan has to go out for looking for work. Mollser envies Nora's good health and her attractive status as a homemaker:

I do be terrible afraid I'll die sometime when I'm be meself . . . I often envy you, Mrs. Clitheroe, seein' th' health you have, an' th' lovely place you have here, an' wondherin' if I'll ever be sstrong enough to be keepin' a home together for a man. (190)

However, in spite of Mollser's idolization of Nora, Nora's ideal household will not last much longer.

The special features of the first act are the contrasts of situations

and inter-relational problems between tenement dwellers: for example, the differences in political stance between nationalism-oriented Uncle Peter and a socialist the Covey, and potential conflicts between Nora and Jack,

The second act, the essential part of this play, was originally a short piece named "The Cooing of the Doves" which was previously rejected by the Abbey Theatre. O'Casey kept this part with few minor changes, and added three other acts to make a full-length play. Thus the plot outline of Nora and her husband in the first act seems to be lost in the second act, and the entire play feels lacking in consistency and the conventional linear plot outline. Each character, however, stands out in their own way, and their coordination makes this play an impressive work of art.

The setting of this act is a pub. The nationalists' meeting is held outside the pub, and the Voice of the Man/ the Voice of Speaker (the silhouette of an orator intended to be Padraic Pearse or someone who shares his opinions) appears on the other side of the pub window. His addresses are audible to the people inside the pub. These speeches are selections from Pearse's addresses delivered in public. Here O'Casey contrasts Pearse's utopianism spoken about outside with the depressing reality inside the pub where Rosie Redmond, a prostitute, complains that people are lost in noble ideals and her business is slack. As for her, lofty aspiration may completely ruin her business, because the nature of her work is heavily influenced by men's suppression of natural feelings due to high moral tone of the nationalistic movement.

Rosie: You'd think they were the glorious company of th' saints, an' th' army of martyrs thrampin' through th' streets of paradise.

They're all thinkin' of higher things than a girl's garthers
(193)

Rosie's role is important in terms of showing a contrast between ideals and reality. W. B. Yeats writes:

She is certainly as necessary to the general action and idea as the drunkards and wastrels. O'Casey is contrasting the ideal dream with the normal grossness of life and of that she is an essential part. It is no use putting her in if she does not express herself vividly and in character, if her 'professional' side is not emphasized.⁽²⁰⁾

It is interesting to note that O'Casey's criticism of patriotic violence is shown in his ironic comparison of patriotism with prostitution; this vulgarity was also one of the main causes of the riot at the Abbey Theatre in the first week of the first production.

The pub's owner also complains that the sale of the liquor has become slow. On the other hand, the Man outside the pub, indifferent to reality, voices his idea of the necessity of blood sacrifice for independence:

The Voice of the Man: Bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation that regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood There are many things more horrible than bloodshed, and slavery is one of them! (193-94)

Even Rosie first agrees with the Man's idealistic and rhetorical speech: "It's th' sacred thruth, mind you, what that man's afther sayin'."

(194) The barman is also impressed by the speech and says he would join the movement if he were younger. The emotional reaction of the people in the pub acts in the same way as the metaphor of the mob who easily reacted to Anthony's speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. O'Casey must have taken this from Shakespeare how the juxtaposition of two contradictory ideas or actions is effective in dramatizing a whole set of situations.

The gap between the ideal and the real is so wide that ordinary citizens like Uncle Peter and Fluther cannot connect the ideal situation propagated by the speaker with their reality. Consequently, they lose interest in the speaker's lofty speech, and pay little attention to it. When the Covey enthusiastically talks to Rosie about the importance of fair share of wealth and about the necessity for the workers to control their own production line, he seems to lack human sympathy and consideration. Rosie loses an interest in listening to his extremely unrealistic theory.

Bernard Benstock uses the example of the Covey to point out the lack of humanity in the dogmatist: "Loving humanity in the abstract . . . the Coveys fail as human beings by being unable to respond humanely to the individual people around them."⁽²¹⁾

The holy warfare this public speaker advocates could merely indicate the eventual destruction of the city and the commotion in the daily life of the general public. It inevitably incurs pain and suffering on the part of ordinary citizens. The Voice of the Man continues:

Comrade soldiers of the Irish Volunteers and of the Citizen Army,
we rejoice in this terrible war. The old heart of the earth needed to

be armed with the red wine of the battlefields Such august homage was never offered to God as this: the homage of millions of lives given gladly for love of country. And we must be ready to pour out the same red wine in the same glorious sacrifice, for without shedding of blood there is no redemption! (195-96)

This speech is part of Pearse's famous address in 1913. The idea of a blood sacrifice appealed to the Catholics who believe Christ's blood purified the earth. He continued to say the Irish should welcome war as it would have a cleansing effect on their past sin. As World War I was welcomed as the "Angel of God" for Ireland, he declared that the revolution was a glorious thing and would bring heroism back to the Irish at last:

The last sixteen months have been the most glorious in the history of Europe. Heroism has come back to the earth. War is a terrible thing, but war is not an evil thing. People in Ireland dread war because they do not know it. Ireland has not known the exhilaration of war for over a hundred years. When war comes to Ireland she must welcome it as she would welcome the Angel of God! (202-203)

The Covey dismisses this as mere "dope". According to him, the only war worth waging is "th' war for th' economic emancipation of th' proletariat." (203) O'Casey's socialist viewpoint is revealed in this speech by the Covey. The Covey says, "What's th' use o' freedom, if it's not economic freedom?" (197) and "There's only one freedom for th' workin' man: control o' th' means o' production, rates of exchange, an' th' means of disthribution." (197)

He continues talking about the right of the workers, and accuses Fluther of his uncooperative attitude to the labour movement. Here O'Casey tried to suggest that Pearse's lofty aims were poisonous to lower-class citizens who would not get any substantial benefits from revolution. The Covey continues his charge against Fluther. He asks whether or not Fluther has done something for the Labour Movement or knows Marxist theory: "... the mechanism of exchange ... th' Relation of Value to th' cost o' Production." (209) Fluther's answer is: "What th' hell do I care what he says? I'm Irishman enough not to lose me head be follyin' foreigners!" (209) In a way, the Covey is a troublemaker and almost fanatic in his propagation of socialism and Marxism. The Covey is useful as a counterblast to Pearse's romantic nationalism, though his viewpoint is a little too extreme, sometimes almost comical.

When the fighting begins in the pub, first between Mrs. Gogan and Bessie and then between the Covey and Fluther, we see these battles as something of a parody of the great "fight" for freedom being promoted by the Voice of the Man. Thus, the juxtaposition of high ideals (nationalism and communism) and lowly reality of daily life is shown in clear contrast. O'Casey also tries to exposes inadequacy of the Man's figurative speech and over-idealistic doctrine through these farcical fighting scenes in the pub.

At the end of the second act, Clitheroe and Captain Brennan of the Irish Citizen Army and Lieut. Langon of the Irish Volunteers enter hurriedly; Captain Brennan with the banner of *the Plough and the Stars*, and Lieut. Langon with a green, white and orange Tricolour. They have been mesmerized by the fervency of the speeches, and make a vow to fight for the nationalistic cause.

Lieut. Langon: Th' time is rotten ripe for revolution.

Clitheroe: You have a mother, Langon.

Lieut. Langon: Ireland is greater than a mother.

Capt. Brennan: You have a wife, Clitheroe.

Clitheroe: Ireland is greater than a wife.

Lieut. Langon: Th' time for Ireland's battle is now — th' place for
Ireland's battle is here. (213)

These speeches are clearly reminiscent of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. However, O'Casey insinuates defeat and death using the words "Imprisonment" by Brennan, "Wounds" by Langon and "Death" by Jack Clitheroe when they vow to fight for achieving independence.

Capt. Brennan: Imprisonment for th' Independence of Ireland!

Lieut. Langon: Wounds for th' Independence of Ireland!

Clitheroe: Death for th' Independence of Ireland!

The Three: So help us God! (213-14)

Ironically, their vows will become reality to each one of them towards the end of the play; Brennan's imprisonment in a Protestant church, Langon's wound and Jack's death under the rubble.

In this play, three of the four Acts end with a song. The first Act concludes with a famous wartime love song, "It's a Long Way to Tipperary." The second Act ends with Rosie's song expressing joy of life and fun of making love, which is in contrast with sacrifice of life for war; "An' there, to our joy, a bright bouncin' boy/ Was dancin' a jig in th' bed!" (214)

The actual Easter Rising occurs in the third act. First, O'Casey

shows Mollser now dying of consumption as a victim of pitiable social conditions. The battle is fought outside for the idealistic aim, whereas inside the tenement house a poor child is fighting merely to survive without any chance of having medical treatments. Mollser embodies all the struggles of the lower-classes, which is against poverty, malnutrition, ill-health, and maladies arising from the lack of economic means. Ronald Ayling comments:

Alienation performs another important function in addition to broadening the social criticism and realising something in the nature of group drama . . . In *The Plough* . . . the effects of poverty and warfare are depicted in both a personal, subjective manner and an external, objective one, too.⁽²²⁾

Nora is gone somewhere. Mrs. Gogan knows why she is out. These tenement dwellers, though often arguing and picking at each other, are actually very close and compassionate among themselves.

Mrs. Gogan: An' thinkin' o' that madman, Fluther, runnin' about through th' night lookin' for Nora Clitheroe to bring her back when he heard she'd gone to folly her husband (216)

This shows that Nora's neighbors are truly concerned about her. Mrs. Gogan predicts Nora's tragic end again as she did at the beginning of the first act.

Mrs. Gogan: I'm always seein' her sthretched on her back in some hospital, moanin' with th' pain of a bullet in her vitals, an' nuns

thryin' to get her to take a last look at th' crucifix! (217)

Nora returns home escorted by Fluther after having been to the barricade to seek Jack. She is now totally exhausted and dejected, a state which later triggers her miscarriage.

Nora: I could find him nowhere They said th' women must learn to be brave an' cease to be cowardly . . . Me who risked more for love than they would risk for hate . . . My Jack will be killed, my Jack will be killed! (219-220)

Just then Bessie, a Protestant unionist appears from the upper window, expresses her opinion against the Easter Rising, and starts to sing "Rule, Britannia" at the top of her voice: "Rule, Britannia, Britannia rules th' waves, Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!" (220) Bessie is the only Protestant in Catholic community and her son is fighting for Britain in Flanders. Her behaviour is ostentatiously belligerent and boisterous, but she is very kind and compassionate to each one of the Catholics, especially weaker ones. For example, she wordlessly gives Mollser a mug of milk after everyone is gone.

It is ironic to have Bessie sing the British National Anthem here. O'Casey makes an appeal about three things by her singing of the national anthem of Britain; Firstly, Britain is the stronger country, so Ireland will never be able to attain freedom through military action. Secondly, it shows that since Britain had never been a slave to any country, why would Ireland want to be a slave to Britain? Thirdly, he is stating that no one in any nation ought to be reduced to slavery.

O'Casey's message here is to free all manual labourers from slavery

whichever country they belong to. What they need is the solidarity of workers whether they are British, Irish or of any nationality; there would be no meaning to wage a war against each other, sacrificing workers' lives for the benefit of capitalists.

However, the women who rioted in the Abbey Theatre regarded Nora, as an enemy, the spokesperson of O'Casey's anti-republicanism. Nora expresses that she feels each sound of a gunshot fired in the air is aimed at Jack, which virtually means aiming at herself:

Nora: I can't help thinkin' every shot fired'll be fired at Jack, an' every shot fired at Jack'll be at me. . . . An' there's no woman gives a son or a husband to be killed — if they say it, they're lyin' lyin' against god, Nature, an' against themselves! (220)

Nora: An' he [Jack] stands wherever he is because he's brave?
(Vehemently) No, but because he's a coward, a coward, a coward! (221)

She abhors war as it means destruction of everything, including her precious home. She says soldiers are fighting not courageously at all; they are fighting in fear and for fear that they might be regarded as cowardly, and they do not have courage to refuse to fight.

Nora: I tell you they're afraid to say they're afraid! . . . I saw fear glowin' in all their eyes An' some o' them shouted at me, but th' shout had in it th' shiver o' fear I tell you they were afraid, afraid, afraid. (221-22)

This speech was a slur on the republicans who fought and died, provocative enough for those who were unscathed or injured, and also for the wives and relatives of the victims. We can clearly see O'Casey's criticism of the soldiers of the Irish Citizen Army who were easily led by the violent revolution-oriented leader Connolly. He thinks their revolutionary act is a betrayal of workers. They are "afraid" to say "No" to their misguided leader.

When the British military bombardments grow in intensity, it becomes dangerous wherever people are. By this time, looting has started, and the deprived people's desperate appetite for attractive consumer goods of all kinds is exemplified by Mrs. Gogan and Bessie. When Bessie comes back home with full of loot, Mollser asks for help. "Help me in, Bessie; I'm feelin' curious." (224) Bessie leaves the looted goods in the house and rapidly returns to help Mollser.

After this, a stout middle-aged woman in a decent dress appears in front of the tenement house. She is almost fainting with fear and desperately asks Fluther first, and then Uncle Peter to usher her out to safety from the dangerous corners of Dublin streets. Fluther says he has to go away to "save a few things from th' burnin' buildin's." (226) Uncle Peter has no ear to this lady and dismisses her request as he does not want to be shot.

Bessie and Mrs. Gogan then come back with more loot put in the pram. Peter accuses Mrs. Gogan of having been away looting at a time when her daughter's physical condition is critical. After they bring in all sorts of booty home, Jack and Brennan appear, supporting wounded Langon. His bleeding is the result of the heroic deed exhilaratingly hailed as noble by the Voice of the Man.

Brennan, the Lieutenant of the ICA, is in the position to protect Irish

workers, but instead he threatens them: "Irish be damned! . . . Attackin' and' mobbin' th' men that are riskin' their lives for them. If these slum lice gather at our heels again, plug one o' them, or I'll soon shock them with a shot or two meself!" (232) Langon is writhing in pain, "Th' stomach is ripped out o' me." (232) At this point there is no way he can be given emergency medical treatment. O'Casey exposes the chaotic realities of the revolution through looting and injury of Langon and the dilemma Jack has to go through.

When Jack meets Nora, the first thing he says to her is: "My Nora; my little, beautiful Nora, I wish to God I'd never left you." (232) Nora responds to this with fervent words: "I'll be silent an' brave to bear th' joy of feelin' you safe in my arms again." (233) Seeing this from the upper window, Bessie mocks them: "General Clitheroe'd rather be unlacin' his wife's bodice than standin' at a barricade." (233) Meanwhile Brennan is attending to the seriously wounded Langon, telling Jack that they need to find him a doctor.

O'Casey's excellent dramatic skill in balancing tragic and comical elements is proven at the final love scene between Jack and Nora. James Simmons praises it thus: ". . . it is this sort of juxtaposition, rather than any coherent thesis, that gives the play its weight and vitality."⁽²³⁾

Jack repents his mistake too late, and he cannot leave his wounded comrade at this stage. Nora does not want to lose Jack, so she clings to him and tries to dissuade him from going off to fight again. Jack tries to resist her:

Clitheroe: Let me go, can't you, Nora? D'ye want me to be unthru
to me comrades?

Nora: No, I won't let you go . . . I want you to be thru to me, Jack

... I'm your dearest comrade; I'm your thrustest comrade ...
They only want th' comfort of havin' you in th' same danger as
themselves. ... Oh, Jack, I can't let you go! (234)

Nora: (clinging to Clitheroe, and indicating Brennan) Look, Jack,
look at th' anger in his face; look at th' fear glintin' in his eyes
... He himself's afraid, afraid, afraid! ... He wants to go th' way
he'll have the chance of death sthrikin' you an' missin' him! ...
His very soul is cold ... shiverin' with th' thought of what may
happen to him ... It is his fear that is thryin' to frighten you
from recognizin' th' same fear that is in your own heart!
(235-36)

After a struggle, Jack throws Nora off and leaves. Nora loses her consciousness when she falls. After the three soldiers are gone, Bessie finds Nora having collapsed weakly on the street, and runs over to her, lifts her up, and carries her swiftly into the house. Soon after that, while a scream from Nora is heard inside the house, Fluther returns singing merrily with a looted earthen half-gallon jar of whisky in his arms and wearing a woman's vivid blue hat with gold lacing. Bessie's kindness goes further when she hears Nora screaming in pain of childbirth and when Mrs. Gogan commenting on Mollser's critical physical condition. Bessie is determined to risk her life to call for a doctor, and goes out to the street where the sounds of rifle shots are still being heard.

In the fourth act, the Covey and Fluther have been playing cards, sitting on the floor by the light of the candles on the stool near the coffin. The armed rebels were overwhelmed by English forces. In the tenement house there is an unmistakable air of misfortune and destitution; all the futilities of the Easter Rising are reflected there, and their disintegration

seems to be accelerated. Fluther reports two deaths occurred in their tenement house: "It's damned hard lines to think of her [Nora's] dead-born kiddie lyin' there [in the little coffin] in th' arms o' poor little Mollser. Mollser snuffed it sudden too, afther all." (240-41)

The Covey: Sure she [Mollser] never got any care. How could she get it, an' th' mother out day an' night lookin' for work, an' her consumptive husband leavin' her with a baby to be born before he died! (241)

O'Casey's sympathy is always with the poverty-stricken. Nora also loses mental health, and consequently her physical health, and she can no longer be a homemaker as once so admired by Mollser, since her baby is dead and her husband is also dead. There is no home for her to make any longer.

All the possible disintegration will be completed by the end, as in a Greek tragedy. The cause of this disaster is the Easter Rising; workers should not meddle with the battle for independence. Jack was supposed to protect workers from violent forces of capitalists; the Irish Citizen Army was established for that purpose alone. The fact that she has lost Jack after losing their baby pushes her far beyond her mental limit. The Covey says, "Th' doctor thinks she'll never be th' same; thinks she'll be a little touched here. [He touches his forehead]." (241)

The person who takes care of ailing Nora is the Protestant Bessie. The Covey continues: "... up with her [Nora] for th' past three nights, hand runnin." (241) Fluther also praises Bessie: "I always knew there was never anything really derogatory wrong with poor oul' Bessie." (241) Bessie appears at the door of the flat and gives a tense whisper:

Bessie: D'ye want to waken her again on me, when sh's just gone asleep? If she wakes will yous come an' mind her? If I hear a whisper out o' one o' yous again, I'll gut yous! (242)

Bessie is seriously concerned about Nora's critical physical condition. Then Captain Brennan, having changed out of his uniform into civilian clothes, comes into the room. He brings the news of Jack's death.

Capt. Brennan: In th' Imperial Hotel; we fought till th' place was in flames. He was shot through th' arm, an' then through th' lung Then I had to leave him to save meself An' then, I seen the Plough an' th' Stars fallin' like a shot as th' roof crashed in, an' where I'd left poor Jack was nothin' but a leppin' spout o' flame! (243-44)

Jack was caught up in an idealized romantic battle fuelled by fanatic nationalism. He was shot in the lung and lost his life under the rubble of the Imperial Hotel, whose destruction Brennan graphically describes. Brennan tries to transform Jack's miserable death into a heroic end, but Bessie challenges him, saying: ". . . you run like a hare to get out o' danger!" (244) Brennan continues: He took it [death] like a man. His last whisper was to "Tell Nora to be brave; that I'm ready to meet my God, an' that I'm proud to die for Ireland." (244) He adds: "Mrs. Clitheroe's grief will be a joy when she realizes that she has had a hero for a husband." (244)

Bessie repudiates his stale, one-sided argument; "If you only seen her, you'd know to th' differ." (244) Nora has already lost the power to recognize things. She grips Fluther by the shoulders, and screams:

“Where is it? Where’s my baby? . . . I want my baby! My head, my poor head . . . Oh, I can’t tell what is wrong with me. Give him to me, give me my husband!” (245) and then to Bessie: “I won’t go away for you; I won’t. Not till you give me back my husband. (Screaming) Murderers, that’s what you are; murderers, murderers!” (246) Fluther repeats Mrs. Gogan’s speech in the first act.

Fluther: . . . Sure, she’s in her element now, woman, mixin’ earth to earth, an’ ashes t’ ashes an’ dust to dust, an’ revelin’ in plumes an’ hearses, last days an’ judgments! (249)

After four men are taken out by the British soldiers, Nora comes into the room and goes over to the fire, and puts the kettle on. She now imagines that she is in the country with Jack. She sings the same song Jack sang in Act One: “When I first said I lov’d only you, Nora, / An’ you said you lov’d only me.” (256) The same song sung in a different tone works very well to show Nora’s change in fortunes. Nora’s madness is likened to Ophelia’s by Ronald G. Rollins:

The Nora of Dublin, the second testament in madness, is like Ophelia in that she works to create and then to defend an idyllic world of love and order; she will extend — make permanent — the honeymoon bliss. She, too, begins to lose her optimism and composure when her husband rejects her for the military; she hastens her collapse with unwise actions, finding, like Ophelia, temporary joy in the phantasmagoria of impermanence.⁽²⁴⁾

O’Casey insists that when the militant nationalists’ plans are carried

out, not only social relations but also familial bonds are severed. Nora is suddenly awakened from her delirium due to a burst of rifle fire followed by the sounds of a machine-gun. She starts screaming, "Jack, Jack, Jack! My baby, my baby, my baby!" (257), and frantically opens the window and screams.

As in the case of Nora Helmer's final closing door in *A Doll's House*, this opening of the window by Nora is symbolic as well as crucial to the play. At the beginning of Act I, the door lock of Nora's flat was being fixed by Fluther. Nora Helmer shut the door behind her, and went out into the world she wanted to belong to, whereas Nora Clitheroe fervently tried to secure her cozy living space from the dangers of the outside world; the door, nevertheless, could not protect her from the invasion of destructive forces from outside.

In this play an act of opening the window brings death to Bessie in place of Nora, when British soldiers start shooting at windows to clear them of Irish snipers. When Bessie tries to keep Nora away from the window, there is a struggle between them; and Bessie is accidentally pushed to the window. At this moment, Bessie, whose son is fighting for Britain, is ironically shot and killed by a British soldier.

O'Casey denounces war as folly, and insists that it is reckless to raise arms against Britain for independence. He also portrays the natural consequences of a violent revolt; how brutal British authority can be to the Irish as well as to ordinary British people. O'Casey intentionally withholds heroic status from Jack and shows what disaster he brings to his wife, to his baby and to himself. This is an example of O'Casey's advocacy of his pacifism, which is later developed in the setting of World War I in *The Silver Tassie*.

Bessie is an embodiment of Irish complexities: antagonism and

sympathy, offensiveness and generosity, cruelty and uncommon compassion and kindness to her Catholic neighbours. She is realistic and knows what she has to do; she gives a helping hand when someone like Mollser has trouble. She talks about justice while she joins the looting. O'Casey was criticized for his justification of looting in this play. He wrote on behalf of the poor in *Letters* (vol. 2):

[The looting] is usually condemned as 'a dastardly insult to the unselfish men who were risking all for Ireland'. I don't look at it this way. When they got a chance, they 'illegally' seized the brighter goods of life which, with all others, they, too, had the right to have. Here people were usually cased 'the rats of the slums'; but I, who lived among them for so long, knew they had their own intelligence; they had courage, humour, and, very often, a great zest for life.⁽²⁵⁾

O'Casey's justification is that these poverty-stricken chance looters are no worse than well-to-do people in terms of morality. He asserts that the rich are no better than the poor in their mentality.

Bessie's behaviour is realistic, and her good deeds to help her neighbours are compassionate and heroic. However, she never shows any sign of heroic gestures similar to those of some fanatic nationalist leaders or soldiers.

Bessie: Merciful God, I'm shot. I'm shot! . . . Th' life's pourin' out o' me! [To Nora] I've got this through . . . through you, you bitch, you! . . . O God, have mercy on me! . . . I'm bleedin' to death, an' no one's here to stop th' blood! (258)

Bessie is dying in pain, but Nora does not realize what is happening and continues to look for Jack. Bessie's death is the culmination of the dramatic irony of the play. O'Casey tries to show that there is no heroism in death.

Towards the end, it is reported that the city is all aflame. The confusion within the tenement house mirrors the confusion of the outside world. Fluther, Uncle Peter, the Covey and Brennan sit by the coffin and are playing cards when British soldiers enter the room with guns. They are all arrested at gunpoint, as O'Casey himself had experienced when he was imprisoned in a church and later detained in a granary.

In the final scene the Covey preaches to a British soldier, Corporal Stoddart, about the evils of the capitalist system.

The Covey: D'ye know, comrade, that more die o' consumption than are killed in th' wars? An' it's all because of th' system we're livin' undher?

Coporal Stoddart: Ow, I know. I'm a Sowcialist moiself, but I 'as to do my dooty.

The Covey: Dooty! Th' only dooty of a Socialist is th' emancipation of th' workers. (249)

Corporal Stoddart concedes to the Covey's point, saying that he is a socialist himself, but has to do his duty as a soldier nevertheless. The Covey argues that the only duty of socialists is the emancipation of workers, which is O'Casey's voice. However, Stoddart replies that one has to fight for his country just the same.

At the conclusion of the play, Mollser, Jack and Bessie are dead, Peter, the Covey and Fluther have been arrested, and Nora is mentally

deceased. Ironically, Mrs. Gogan is unscathed, even though she had talked about “death” at the beginning and had lost her daughter. Now the tenement space is occupied by the two British soldiers.

The play ends with the song “Keep the Home Fires Burning” sung by two tea-sipping British soldiers.

Keep the 'owme fire burning,
While your 'hearts are yearning;
Though your lads are far away
They dream of 'owme;
There's a silver loining
Through the dark cloud shoining,
Turn the dark cloud inside out,
Till the boys come 'owme! (261)

O'Casey's idea of solidarity between workers is well depicted by the soldiers' song sung in Cockney accents. Britain squashed the Irish rebels, which means they are the victors. However, it does not mean anything to these lower-class Cockney soldiers; the living standard of British workers will not be raised by this war. What they want is to go home and sip tea with their wives and children in front of their own snug fireplaces. In contrast, Nora still has a fireplace but her husband will never come home. W. A. Armstrong observes:

... the vanity and excitements created by patriotism and war
disrupt and destroy fundamental human relationships, particularly
those between husband and wife, and those between mother and
⁽²⁶⁾
child.

They are now weary of fighting, and feel that it is meaningless to kill each other. The line "There's a silver loining" is O'Casey's expectation of the arrival of a new era of solidarity among workers. This final scene provides a masterly portrayal of O'Casey's main theme of workers' solidarity in capitalist countries. His belief in pacifism is felt by the audience, who have seen the characters go through all sorts of tragic experiences during the Easter Rising.

IV

Among *The Dublin Trilogy*, *The Shadow of a Gunman* was about a person's tragic fate, and *Juno and the Paycock* was about the tragic end of a family. *The Plough and the Stars* looks at several individual's tragic fates in a tenement house. O'Casey shows that the residents of the tenement house are always affected by the political and violent incidents outside. O'Casey objectively depicts the effect of the Easter Rising, and his pacifism and humanism are best expressed in this play.

In addition to this, O'Casey's expressionistic approach, which was later fully developed in *The Silver Tassie*, can be detected in this play: the singing of Jack, Nora and British soldiers on the street and inside the tenement house. In addition to these songs, we hear the sound of a marching band and the Voice of the Man through the window, and the sounds of guns and rifles. Ronald G. Rollins puts it:

It is the poet O'Casey, grouping to find new techniques to convey his imaginative vision, who accounts for this burgeoning interest in scenic stylization, weird lighting, rhythmic dialogue-poetry, the abundance of music and song, and the pervasively ironic mood that

engulfs the whole.⁽²⁷⁾

Contrary to Yeats' and Lady Gregory's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* which had evoked patriotic feelings, the pacifist O'Casey did not approve of bloodshed or sacrifice of people's lives. He asserted, "Nora voices not only the feeling of Ireland's women, but the women of the human race. The safety of her brood is the true morality of every woman."⁽²⁸⁾

O'Casey shows how much people have to suffer as a result of this kind of "fantasy." He criticizes hasty acts that spring from simplistic patriotism. He emphasizes that human beings have hope for peace, happiness, fraternal affection; what he advocates is the need to cherish these feelings. When O'Casey humorously depicts people in different predicaments, he is criticizing nationalists who tend to ignore the weak.

O'Casey thought the 1916 Easter Rising had been a mistake as far as the working class' labour movement was concerned. His political viewpoint was neither nationalist nor unionist; it was anti-unionist and anti-imperialist. His depiction of the situation at the time of the Easter Rising was a well-balanced criticism. O'Casey contextualised his ideas through the incidents of the Easter Rising. He located the development of the plot within a tenement house, and made the tenement house a mirror image of the outside military atmosphere.

This play juxtaposes two worlds, the private and the public. Herinz Kosok praises several points of this play: (a) a perfection of the technique, (b) a very high degree of universality uncommon in a realistic play, (c) its objectivity, (d) the large number of themes it [*The Plough*]⁽²⁹⁾ touches on despite its formal concentration.

Though it was the object of some criticism when it was first

produced, O'Casey's mastery in depicting the characters in a tenement house as a reflection of the outside world has been highly appreciated. *The Plough and the Stars* is now universally regarded as not only O'Casey's best play but also the best among the plays produced at the Abbey Theatre.

Notes:

- (1) Sean O'Casey, "A Retrospect" in Ronald Ayling (ed.) *O'Casey: The Dublin Trilogy* (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 139.
- (2) Garry O'Connor, *Sean O'Casey: A Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), p. 198.
- (3) *Ibid.*, p. 198.
- (4) *Ibid.*, p. 199.
- (5) According to Robert G. Lowery's record, O'Casey's three Dublin plays ranked No. 1 to No. 3 in the number of performances in the history of the Abbey Theatre by 1978. *The Plough and the Stars* (637 times), *Juno and the Paycock* (420 times) and *The Shadow of a Gunman* (403 times). Robert G. Lowery, "Sean O'Casey at the Abbey Theatre" in David Krause and Robert G. Lowery (eds.), *Sean O'Casey Centenary Essays* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colin Smythe, 1980), p. 249.
- (6) Garry O'Connor, *Sean O'Casey: A Life*, p. 201.
- (7) John O'Riordan, *A Guide to O'Casey's Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 73.
- (8) See John O'Riordan, *A Guide to O'Casey's Plays*, p. 72.
- (9) Sean O'Casey, *Selected Plays of Sean O'Casey* (New York: George Braziller, 1955), p. 197. The page numbers of the subsequent citations will be given in parentheses in the text.
- (10) Robert Hogan (ed.), *Feathers from the Green Crow* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1962), p. 43.
- (11) Robert G. Lowery, "Sean O'Casey: Art and Politics" in David Krause and Robert G. Lowery (eds.), *Sean O'Casey Centenary Essays*, pp. 123-24.
- (12) See John O'Riordan, *A Guide to O'Casey's Plays*, p. 74.
- (13) See Ronald Gene Rollins, *Sean O'Casey's Drama* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1979), p. 12.
- (14) Richard J. Finneran (ed.), *The Yeats Reader* (New York: Palgrave

- Macmillan, 2002), p. 76.
- (15) Hugh Hunt, *Sean O'Casey* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), p. 52.
 - (16) William Armstrong, *An Introduction to the Classic Irish Drama* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 12.
 - (17) Desmond MacCarthy, "The Plough and the Stars", *New Statesman*, XXVII, 1926, p. 170.
 - (18) John O'Riordan, *A Guide to O'Casey's Plays*, p. 103.
 - (19) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_National_Foresters (accessed on September 24, 2011).
 - (20) Lennox Robinson (ed.), *Lady Gregory's Journals, 1916-30* (London: Putnam and Company 1946), p. 89.
 - (21) Bernard Benstock, *Sean O'Casey* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1970), p. 38.
 - (22) Ronald Ayling, "The Plough and the Stars", in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Sean O'Casey* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 56.
 - (23) James Simmons, *Sean O'Casey* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 88.
 - (24) Ronald Gene Rollins, *Sean O'Casey's Drama*, pp. 35-36.
 - (25) See John O'Riordan, *A Guide to O'Casey's Plays*, p. 82.
 - (26) W. A. Armstrong, *Experimental Drama* (London: G. Bell, 1963), p. 240.
 - (27) Ronald Gene Rollins, *Sean O'Casey's Drama*, p. 40.
 - (28) "A Reply to the Critics," *The Irish Times*, 19 Feb. 1926.
 - (29) Heinz Kosok, *O'Casey: The Dramatist* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colin Smythe, 1985), pp. 86-87.