THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS

Considered the last part of the Dublin Trilogy, The Plough and the Stars also has war as its backdrop. The Easter Rising was still green in the memory of the Irish and when the play was produced by the Abbey Theatre on February 8, 1926, was only about ten years past. The Easter Rising is now reckoned by historians as a spectacular beginning of the Irish Struggle for independence. "... a play dealing with Easter Rising and using the flag of the Irish Citizen Army in its title could be expected to have the qualities of a national drama..." observed a noted German critic.(1)

Perhaps The Plough and the Stars is the only play in theoretical history that created a problem for the cast even before it was premiered. There was considerable conflict within the cast itself with the disagreements with O'Casey fueling it.(2)

In Irish theatrical history, it was the second coup de theatre. "The first performance stirred up one of the greatest theatrical riots... comparable only to those which followed the production of The Playboy of the Western World..."(3)

For Sean O'Casey, it was an extension of his exercises
in successful and meaningful playwrighting. The war background for his plays having proved successful, it was but natural for him to apply the same principles with a difference, though. The Plough and the Stars bears the political back drop of 1915 and afterwards.

"It was this flag that fired in my mind the title of the play, and the events that whirled around the banner and that of the Irish Volunteers that gave me all the humour, pathos, and dialogue that fill the play." (4)

It is sheer audacity on the part of Sean O'Casey to use the Irish Citizen Army' Flag as the title of the play. It was bound to evoke many images and connotations in the minds of the audience. The title suggests multiple levels of meanings. Without any hesitation what ever, the audience was bound to attend the play. Such direct provocations may not mean anything now, at the distance of time. At that time it was highly evocative. As it will be shown later, O’Casey not only used the flag for the title but also brought the flag as a stage prop inside a bar in the Second Act. It was an act of no small courage keeping in view of the fact that the playwright had not established himself then and was struggling to earn a name and living. "... I set about illumining and ravaging my
mind for a new play about the Easter Rising setting down scene and dialogue, taking notes on any piece of paper that was handy when an idea or word struck me.”(5)

But there is a difference, a distinct one at that in the manner in which O’Casey has used the political events from the way he had used them in the earlier two plays. How political involvement by a member of a tenement family brings ruin to the entire family particularly when the member chooses not to divulge his political leanings to the other members of his family is the attack in Juno and the Paycock. The myth of the ‘will’ and the fall of Mary Boyle and her resurrection by Juno Boyle add only additional dimensions to the play. There is only one death in the family and that is the military execution of Johnny Boyle. And that is precisely the tragedy of the family. None, except the mother, Juno Boyle, is affected by it. Like Mrs. Tancred who suffered in silence. The play ended with a note of optimism even if the world were in a ‘state of chiasm’.

In The Plough and the Stars, the tragedy is not restricted to one person or one family. It is more widespread. It is the tragedy of a tenement, ‘a national drama from the perspective of the slums’. (6)
In a way, the rise and ruin of a family is projected, but the emphasis is not on this family as in *Juno and the Paycock*. The Clitheroe family's private lives and ambitions are destroyed, but the scale measures nowhere compared to the dissipation of values and destruction of ideals. Here, in this play, no character has a fatal flaw and the consequences become accountable. The 'fatal flaw' is national and the disaster is so. But the humanism of the tenement dwellers in a microcosm gets across as the leitmotif. The destruction, the decimation of property, the collapse of values disappear even as new values arising out of action in critical circumstances surface, and they dominate our perspectives and perceptions. The tragedy is national and the vanquished are the people. The loss does not stay at a political level but finds its avenues in the everyday life of the people.

There may exist more than one opinion about the Easter Rising. It is the fallout of the Rising that matters. It went beyond the known areas of impact. It left ugly scars in the creeks and crevices of the lives of the ordinary people and *The Plough and the Stars* is just that.

O’Casey draws on his own experiences in writing this play. The characters bear some resemblance or the other to the
people he knew rather well. But instead of showing them as mere caricatures, he endows them with rare insights which they otherwise lack. One might dismiss them in the day to day life but on the stage, they draw all our attention on themselves and gain importance. "I, of course, lived in the midst of the events described in the play." "There I was part of them, yet, subsconsciouly commenting on all that was said, much that was done to be coloured afterward ... through my imagination, seeing at the same time, the sad humour and vigorous tragedy of this historic time to Ireland."(7)

What is this play about as a piece? The Programme Note written for the Abbey Theatre production which opened on 27, April, 1964 at the London International Festival of Drama gives it thus:

"The first scene of the play shows Captain Clitheroe called to an assembly of both organizations held to inspire the members for the fight that was soon to come. He leaves his wife to join the meeting and the procession."

"The Second Act shows the meeting in progress outside a public house, the Volunteer Leader speaking to his men, and the effect of his words on the civilians present."

"The Third Act shows the rebellion in full swing, with three Irish soldiers including Captain Clitheroe falling back
on their Head Quarters—one of them wounded. It shows too, the civilans who were hostile to the fighting taking advantages of the confusion, to loot all they can lay their hands on."

"The Fourth Act Shows their city of Dublin—a lot of it in flames, in the hands of the British troops, who are closing in on the volunteers, making their last stand together in the Head Quarters of the Irish Army, and the happenings in the tenement home during the fighting."(8)

The play can be examined from different points of view. (a) As it was received by the audience and the critics then. These reactions would help estimate the play at another point of time with equanimity as the reactions are instantaneous, spontaneous and surcharged with emotional overtones. (b) To see the play in a critical perspective with the lapse of years. One can get a non-Irish view. That is to say, examining the play in its own ambience as a theatrical experience with universal elements in it. The political overtones remaining eschewed.

If only the title of the play had been different it would not have attracted the attention it did. In the words of Gabriel Fallon "William Butler Yeats ... saw the possibility of objectors feeling that the dramatist was deliberately
mocking one of the revered leaders of the Easter Rising."(9) The play had (has) such highly emotionally charged combustible material.

Gabriel Fallon called the play "pacifist".(10) There is yet another opinion which is at the other end of the scale. "Try to find out from the body of his work whether he is for or against the church, for or against the working man, for or against poets, for or against social Revolution—you cannot."(11)

Lady Gregory wrote: "I thought the play very fine indeed ... An overpowering play. I felt at the end of it as if I should never care to look at another, all others would seem so shoddy to the mind after this."(12)

When there was a display of violence in the auditorium by the Irish audience as the play went on, an entirely different kind of audience participation, Yeats, an impromptu persona got on to the stage and declared you have "rocked the cradle of genius. From such a scene as this went forth the fame of Synge. Equally the fame of O'Casey is born here tonight. This is his apotheosis."(13)

What matters when a performance is over is the 'rasaswada', that is the total resultant impact that gives you
a feeling of satisfaction and a craving, to see it again. St. John Irvine calling O’Casey an Irish Chekhov sums up the impact of The Plough and the Stars this way. "If anything is manifest in (the play) it is the immense pity and love which Mr. O’Casey feels for the people in the tenements. They are offered to us without any middle-class palliation or contempt."(14)

".... the effect of each scene as a whole is disturbing and grave."(15)
Quite critically and with reservations James Agate writes thus, "O’Casey’s people talk too much but not dramatically enough ... Despite the confusion there is a fine dramatic meal in this play."(16)

With the passage of time and with a critical perception that can be best described as clinical and aseptic, the play has been analyzed without the context of its performance. Writing in Le Figaro Litteraire, Paris, Jacques Lemarchand observes that it is a whole world-secret, absurd -- noble .... It sounds like a serialized story which one cannot put down."(17)

Obviously a literary view, but none the less meaningful, a critic wrote about the play that "this is a
tragedy which makes you laugh a lot, a comedy which ends with four dead bodies."(18) Comedy and tragedy being two outposts of playwrighting all the variations of the extremes have to fall between them. O'Casey's singular quality is to play the opposites setting on these mutually antagonistic posts.

Seumus Kelly seems to discover the greatness of O'Casey in the following way. He has summed up his critical assessment thus: "The play still stands for me as the greatest of the Irish Theatre in my time, and as the finest of that inspired recorder's reports on the Dublin people he lived with and the Dublin that he lived in through some of its most dramatic years."(19)

The play The Plough and the Stars "makes its anti-war point by sacrificing the humanity of everyday life to the arbitrary bloodshed of war."(20) Some critics have gone to the extent of saying that "the case for O'Casey is readily put .... Few playwrights, other than Shakespeare, have had such an easy mastery of the special texture of tragi-comedy. O'Casey can make you laugh with a sob in your throat. Also, his characters -- in his best of plays at least -- seem to have walked into theatre appropriately bewildered and bedazzled from some Dublin street."(21)
Much of the success of *The Plough and the Stars* lies in its unique construction. For O'Casey, it was a new exercise in writing. O'Casey in one of his retrospective moods has confessed: "I never make a scenario, depending on the natural growth of a play rather than on any method of journey."(22) He was a little diffident in writing and completing the play. Therefore, he wrote on the mantelshelf. "GET ON WITH THE PLAY".(23) It is also said that the design had been suggested by the poet George Russel."(24)

O'Casey has expressed his reluctance on being sermonized. "I am irritated by being told of things I must not do in plays."(25) Though the Dublin Trilogy is based on the background of war only in *The Plough and the Stars* the total impact of war is seen sparing no one in the tenement.

In *The Shadow of a Gunman* the death restricted itself to Minnie Powell. The death did not show as much the courage of Minnie Powell to lay down her life but exposed two big cowards, Donal Davoren and Seumas Shields. The rest of the tenement dwellers were only terrorized. O'Casey gave a graphic picture of the dwellers and their behaviour in tight situations.

In *Juno and the Paycock*, the war background was only in
the peripheral level. It affected only one member of the Boyle family. The irregulars do not keep any touch with the rest of the Boyle family and they could not care less what happened to them. The terror is restricted to just one person. That too, more as an act of revenge, they barge in, and warn Johnny and finally take him away. The audience gets the picture clear. How Robbie Tancred’s body was found in Finglass and Johnny Boyles’ involvement in it. When Johnny is taken away by them, the audience is informed of his execution (as an act of military justice) through Juno Boyle. There is still life. Mary and Juno Boyle take out a new lease for life. Jack Boyle and Joxer Daly continue to live even calling, cursing the world being in “a state of chassis”.

O’Casey has made a total departure from these earlier exercises. He did not believe in “photographic realism”.(26) He believed in “having real art in theatre”.(27) He has clearly declared his faith: “There can never be any actuality on a stage, except an actuality that is absolutely unnecessary and utterly out of place.”(28)

“The closer we approach to actual life the further we move away from the drama. There is a deeper life than the life we see and hear with the open ear and the open eye and this is
the life important and the life everlasting. And this can be
captured from the individual ... no dominant character in a play
can give a full portrait of a man or a woman." (29)

In keeping with his earlier plays, O’Casey keeps
violence off stage and the intensity of the violence is only
narrated, reported or referred to. O’Casey does not show the
Rising at all. He does not deal with the pathology of the
Rising. He studies, on the contrary, the consequences without
making any value judgments on the Rising perse. The audience
is left free to make its own judgments.

As a departure from the earlier plays, O’Casey has made
out The Plough and the Stars in four acts. Juno and the
Paycock was in three acts; and the Shadow of a Gunman in two
acts. The extension by an act is an integral necessity of the
action. The time of the play (action) is November 1915 for
Acts I and II and for Acts III and IV the Easter Week 1916 --
a lapse of six months, and between Acts III and IV a few days.

O’Casey has structured this play in a new mould. The
theme, and his convictions almost dictated the structure.
There is a severe constraint imposed on O’Casey while
structuring the play. Obviously he has resorted to his earlier
technique of realizing the play in terms of a group of
tenement dwellers. This is the only point of commonness
between the earlier plays and this play.

The First Act opens in a casual mood almost giving the impression that the play is going to be a sunny comedy. O’Casey relies on the technique of giving information to the audience mainly in terms of two people talking directly or obliquely referring to what is going to follow. As in Juno and the Paycock, here Mrs. Gogan and Fluther talk. In Juno and Paycock it is Mary who opens the play, reading out the news from the newspaper about death and discovery of bodies, etc., Later Juno Boyle enters the scene. Where nearly all the critics have failed is to appreciate the stage picture, a tableau that O’Casey gives even before a consonant or a vowel is uttered by the characters.

The significant picture emerges with the stage being dim, except where it is illuminated from the glow of the fire. "Through the window of the room at the back can be seen the flaring of the flame of a gasoline lamp giving light to workmen repairing the street." The play carries multiple dimensions of meaning if it is seen along, and in conjunction with the light and the sound elements (Visual and Aural elements). By inference the time of action of the First Act, is a little late in the evening. The fire hearth is burning
giving the room not only a little warmth but also flashes of red-light counterpointed by the dimness inside and by the gasoline lamp outside as seen through a window. The action takes place in the home of the Clitheroes. Fluther Good is in his working clothes contrasted by Peter Flynn who is "airing a white shirt". "He is clad in a singlet, white whipcord knee-breeches, and is in his stocking feet." A contrast between two types of people is already established. Peter is concerned about his dress, while Fluther is repairing the lock of a door. "The floor is covered with a dark green linoleum."

Another piece of description runs like this: "On the top of the table a huge cavalry sword is lying. A hanging calendar displaying a picture of 'The Sleeping Venus' and also a portrait of 'Robert Emmet'." The books kept on the stage as hand-props cannot be seen by the audience unless some action is made, (i.e., a 'business' is executed in theatrical parlance).

The home is full of articles. This must be clearly understood as it is contrasted in the last Act where all characters are housed in Bessie Burgess' room. In Act One, the home of Clitheroes is fairly large and expansive. The visual contrast becomes complete to the audience in the last act. No
need for words, and suffocation physical, spiritual and political is complete. The home "is furnished in a way that suggests an attempt towards a finer expression of domestic life."

Fluther is engaged in an action -- that of fixing a lock and having completed the job, he opens and shuts the door. This is a symbolic act as the play itself is an open and shut case, and game. On a different level, the door gives a false closing to the Clitheroes and opens up a large volley of sufferings. That is, the very purpose of fixing a lock to have privacy, to have domestic, romantic life is lost as the later events reveal.

Only Fluther works while Peter is engaged only with himself. This is again a visual contrast of two types of people in a tenement, those who work and those who only talk living off others' labour.

The stage is silent except for the punctuated rhythmic noise of the clanging of crowbars striking the sets. This is the most vital and important visual in the First Act, as it is against this background only the entire action takes place. This is in contrast to the last Act where the noise equally
dominates but the space is contracted to a room. There is no furniture whatever worth mentioning. "There is an unmistakable air of poverty bordering on distillation. The paper on the walls is torn and soiled... There is an arm chair near the fire." There is a window as usual in O’Casey’s background of the plays. Below the window "is an oak coffin standing on two kitchen chairs. Near the coffin on a home-manufactured stool stand two lighted candles. 'A tin kettle very black', and an old saucepan inside the fender. There is no light in the room but that given from the two candles and the fire. The dusk has well fallen, and the glare of the burning buildings in the town can be seen through the window, in the distant sky."

O’Casey displays almost a camera eye in the description of the set and the set material. The atmosphere against which the entire Fourth Act takes place is graphically given. The sound and the light play important roles. There is no sound of gun fire. This visual as in the First Act is a non-changing visual. The audience who have seen a different visual in the First Act can see the contrast for themselves in a matter of a couple of hours. The time of action may indicate a lapse of several months. But it is O’Casey piece of genius that he shows the ravages of time and war in the description of the
set and set properties. Even before the contrasts are verbally realized, the irony of the situation is already established in terms of the set. There is a parallel that runs between the events, the political events that take place outside and the fortune of the characters on the stage.

More than in the previous plays, he demonstrates in this play a better grasp over the aural and visual elements. It is a conscious effort.

We mentioned earlier the visual element before the beginning of the play in the First Act. Fluther and Peter pay no attention to each other, lost as they are in their own worlds. But one realizes later why Peter is engaged in dressing himself up. Peter’s movements displaying his restlessness must be creating some mild moments of laughter. The first dialogue one hears is the disembodied voice of Mrs.Gogan whom the audience has not seen. One can only conjecture her face. The entire piece, short though, is a monologue. One does not hear the voice of the caller at all. It is Mrs.Gogan who receives the parcel meant for Mrs.Clitheroe. Two important names of the characters are made known to the audience--Mrs.Clitheroe and Mrs.Gogan. Mrs.Gogan is playing a dual role--the mute caller and herself. Mrs.Gogan
receives a parcel meant for Nora Clitheroe and, true to her promise, she enters the apartment to hand it over to someone. Now, a piece of stage action, that is often lost while the play is studied at the desk, is the intolerance of Peter. "Peter, more resentful of this intrusion than Fluther's presence, gets up from the chair, and without looking around, his head carried at an angry cock, marches into the room at back." O'Casey has taken all the pains to create comedy without resorting to words. Aware that the audience is going to see deaths, desecration and tragedy, he wants to put the audience in a rather humorous mood, and that is perhaps the reason why he has made Peter go through motions of intolerance. Also, he wants to communicate that even among the tenement dwellers there are people who are so much concerned about themselves that they are intolerant of others. Another piece of business is worth noticing. Mrs. Gogan unties the twine of the parcel meant for Nora. "She takes out a hat, black, with decorations in red and gold."

She pours venom on Nora with expressions like "she's goin' to the devil lately for style. That had, now, cost more than penny such motions of upperosity she's gettin."

Her entire criticism, damaging Nora as it is, rebounds
on her. This is a point often missed. Mrs. Gogan puts the hat on her head and after a moment replaces it. In one stroke of genius, O’Casey visually demonstrates that one loves to become what one seemingly hates. Mrs. Gogan impersonates Nora Clitheroe. This is the most important act of Mrs. Gogan enabling us to understand her drives and character. All the tenement dwellers are full of contradictions.

Only much later does O’Casey reveal that it is Nora’s birthday and that the hat is a gift from her husband Jack Clitheroe. “I didn’t forget this was your birthday, did I?... And you liked your new hat, didn’t you, didn’t you?” And this line is in contradiction to the lines spoken later by Nora.” I’m, longin’ to show you me new hat, to see what you think of it. Would you like to see it?” And after she wears the hat he remarks “It suits you, Nora, it does right enough.”

It is really ironical that this domestic harmony does not last long enough, as very soon personal ambition gets the better of love for wife and Jack Clitheroe warns his wife, orders her, confirms that she ‘deserve to be hurt’ and quits in military costume.

Mrs. Gogan seems to nurture animosity of some vague
variety towards Nora. The altercation between Mrs. Gogan and Fluther is significant. Two things get across very succinctly: Nora is a newcomer to the tenement; she is not liked by the tenement dwellers as she attempts to live better, or create conditions to live better. In this she is comparable to Mary Boyle in Juno and the Paycock. Mrs. Gogan destroys Nora. The initial impression that is created about Nora is she is unlikeable. It must be noted that Mrs. Gogan not only impersonates by wearing her "hat" before Nora could wear it in her husband’s presence, but also impersonates her by mimicking her. This "mimicry" no matter what impression it may create about Mrs. Gogan, is bound to create laughter. This is what O’Casey cashes in on. But what most of the critics have failed to notice is the aspect that Fluther is no stranger to the tenement. Nora has engaged him for some definite work, that of fixing the door knob, and he should be knowing Nora better. And he does not need the lecture of Mrs. Gogan on her assessment of Nora Clitheroe. O’Casey reveals by letting the audience deduce by inference that the tenement people do not hesitate to interfere in others’ private lives. Mrs. Gogan lays out not only Nora’s supposed cunningness but also of Peter and Covey who are dotards. In fact she goes "beyond the beyonds’
in her accusation.

This is just the beginning "In the First Act we see nothing but bickerings and quarrels; the characters do not have enough room to move about in freedom and peace."(30)

O'Casey takes all advantages of entries and exits and the interregnum between. In total silence there is comic action. "Peter re-enters wearing unlaced boots, carrying a white shirt. He is still in his singlet and trousers. He is looking for something and pulls the chest of drawers, and pulls out pieces of linen neatly folded and brindles them back again and exclaims, "Well, God almighty, give me patience!" and he returns to his room. This act immediately follows Mrs. Gogan's remarks. Peter is now quarreling with himself. And clearly informs that he has no patience left. He is concerned only with himself.

Fluther and Mrs. Gogan now start commenting on Jack Clitheroe, his deep involvement with the Citizen Army two months ago and why he now keeps off. Jack wore 'a Sam Browne belt' more for show off than as an act of faith and Nora is a 'clockin hen'.

O'Casey only very casually mentions about the "Great
Demonstrations an’ torchlight procession around places in the city sacred to the memory of Irish Patriots, to be concluded be a meeting at which will be taken an oath of fealty to th’ Irish Republic.”

How is it that a nosy woman like Mrs. Gogan is unaware of it? It lacks conviction. Only some in the tenement are aware of it and not all? In which case, the procession is not a fully realized one in terms of participation from the public. It may also be construed as a trick or a device to let know the audience what is going on. Peter is too preoccupied with getting himself properly and specially dressed to attend the procession. It is a woman, Mrs. Gogan, who informs the audience about the mutual hate relationship between Peter and Covey.

Mrs. Gogan lifts up the sword and uses it for a comic comment. It is even sarcastic. Peter makes his third appearance timed not by the logic of the situation or the plot, but purely by O’Casey to take it away from her. Again, O’Casey has created this incident mainly for the comic possibilities. Who is Mrs. Gogan to keep tampering with the things in Clitheroe’s home? O’Casey has created an ironical situation where people get into the home of the Clitheroes and
comment about them. Is this a part of the Irish psyche, unlikeable though? By sugar-coating the scenes with comic touches, O'Casey really asks for serious introspection about this aspect of the Irish.

While the two of them get along with commendable cordiality, the topic gets distracted. The conversation bearing references to the Bible is designed mostly to entertain the audience, in a way preparing them for the ensuing serious scenes.

Peter appears again, even as comments about the shirt are on, pulls the shirt from Mrs. Gogan and replaces it on the chair. O'Casey portrays Peter as having an obsession with a white shirt and a neurosis for looking better dressed, to give a better appearance of himself.

Logically speaking, Mrs. Gogan has no moral right to enter into Nora's house and keep tampering with the articles around, and what's worse keep criticizing her. This is a structural defect and appears very much a device of the playwright to bring off comedy than an essential, integral element.

O'Casey knows in his bones that the Fluther - Mrs. Gogan encounter cannot sustain long in the theatre and,
therefore, brings in a transition purely in terms of visual and aural factors. The motivation for the ensuing action on the stage is generated by aural sources:

"There is heard a cheer from the men working outside on the street, followed by the clang of tools being thrown down, then silence. The glare of the gasoline light diminishes and finally goes out." In other words, the only source of light on the stage is from the fire hearth. Mrs. Gogan rushes to the window to see for herself what is happening. "Now, the window is the only source to know what is happening in the world, outside of the tenement. Literally, the window serves as the only source of direct information. What the audience gets is derivative as reported by the characters with their own interpretations. "The tenement now begins to take on an existence of its own, a prismatic one, for the things that we know about, the history that is happening outside the window, take on a different colour and quality as they pass through the windows and doors of the room in front of us... We are viewing a historical event through the windows of a tenement." (31)

Covey makes his entry and the point of talk begins with a gesture of disgust he flings his cap on the table. It is
Covey who conveys the title of the play to the audience. "They've been mobilized to march in th' demonstration to night under th' "The Plough and the Stars". He shows his disgust in purple phrases like 'seculo seculorum' not bothering whether it would be understood at all by the other characters on the stage, the tenement dwellers-- and also the audience, who are mostly from the labour class.

O'Casey shifts the talk from the members of the family to public issues discussed and aired in the confines of the tenement house. The Covey talks as a dry intellectual about religion, socialism, the march, and so on. But they are more in the nature of airing views rather than demonstrating any positive action. What is to be noticed here is the tendency to quarrel has neither abated nor stopped. It has merely shifted like a football, from Mrs. Gogan to the Covey. Quarrel is a running motif and theme in Act One. The Covey's quarrels are against an unidentifiable enemy, the system, but instead of plunging in positive action, he takes out his anger against other lower placed individuals at home. What is most ironical, he is himself living at the expense of the Clitheroes. In many ways he is a reincarnation of Chalie Bentham of Juno and the Paycock. "Look here, Comrade, There's no such thing as an
Irishman, or an English man or a German or a Turki, we're all only human being. Scientifically speaking', its all a question of the accidental gatherin' together of molecules an' atoms."

As soon as this statement is made, Peter appears again. He comes in with a collar in his hand. He goes over to mirror, and proceeds to try to put it on. The remark of the Covey might very well apply to Peter now, perhaps by coincidence, but it will provoke laughter none the less among the audience. This is sheer manipulation by the playwright giving them false leads -- a ruse to let the audience sit and watch. From a two point talk, now the focus shifts to a three point talk.

The Covey is apparently knowledgeable but his knowledge is of no relevance either to himself or to his co-dwellers. The Covey now is almost a dry run of the 'Voice of the Man', and in many respects an ironic contrast. "There's nothin' complicated in it ... or a man with a big brain like me, or a man with a little brain like you!"

Again Fluther's comment comes as an ironic warning: "... shoutin's is no manifestin' forth of a growin' mind."

This the audience might ignore now, but will realize the
significance only much later.

Quarrel continues with Peter complaining openly now about "stiff-collars". The sequence that ensues with Mrs. Gogan also participating is another exercise in comedy. The remarks on "the Sleepin' Vennis" and the subsequent scene with the Covey and Peter is mostly in the nature of comedies of Laurel and Hardy. There is no motivation for any of the characters to behave in the manner they do. It is quite clear from O'Casey stage instructions. "Peter runs to the sword, draws it, and makes for the Covey who dodges him around the table" and again, "The Covey darts out of the room, Right, slamming the door in the face of Peter." It is a piece of slapstick comedy. The Covey's mockery through the key-hole calling Peter "Cuckoo-oo!" and Nora's entry is beautifully timed.

Her dress stands out from others. Physically she is cut out better sporting a tailor-made costume, with "a silver fox fur' around her necks'."

The quarrel continues. Nora is a witness to the quarrel between Peter and the Covey. She tries to settle it. But this pattern of events takes a dramatic turn a little later when there is no one to settle the differences between Nora and Clitheroe. She is aware that these two tear down the
"respectability" she builds up. The quarrel between the two, Peter and the Covey is temporarily suspended as a respect to Nora as both of them are spongers on the Clitheroes.

Like silence between two musical notes, Nora's kindness to Fluther and examining the door on its hinges, is between two quarrels of varying intensity. No quarrel is settled. It is only simmering to shoot up and terminate unpleasantly later.

The entry of Bessie Burgess looks very contrived and even uncalled for. By no theatrical consideration can the entry be justified. No reference is made either directly or obliquely to Bessie. No action has taken place which would call for Bessie's presence. O'Casey's stage direction reads: "She looks scornfully and viciously at Nora for a few moments before she speaks. Even a small facility that Nora adds to her apartment for better comfort brings in acidic criticism. It is a case of sheer intolerance of the tenement dwellers. A march is to take place but the tenement dwellers are utterly unconcerned about it. For those with religious leanings, they are even blissfully callous. They are worried only about themselves. To present Bessie in her first appearance as a cantankerous woman may be a rather self-conscious sleight of hand of O'Casey to bring her into greater, sharper emotional
focus towards the end of the play when her humanism over runs her minor kinks in her personality. To that extent it may look artificial. But Bessie would garner greater sympathy from the audience. Her wrath towards Nora seems very unjustified and perhaps gives us a clue that the tenement dwellers need no ostensible reason to slander their fellowmen. A very near physical violence happens on the stage. "Nora tries to shut the door, but Bessie violently shoves it in, and gripping Nora by the shoulder, shakes her." This is the first demonstration of violence, almost a trailer, for the violence that happened during Easter. The quarrel theme takes some physical dimensions too. Bessie Burgess screams. "Bessie Burgess'll sing whenever she damn well likes." Quite ironically she sings at the end of the play. Chanting would be a more appropriate word, though. Bessie falling on the floor feebly sings:

"I do believe, I will believe
That Jesus died for me; That on
th' cross He shed His blood from
sin to set me free...."

It is a conscious exhibition of craft to show that people change and humanism wins.

Nora runs to Peter for protection and soon "sinks
frightened on to the couch." It is at this moment when the assault is shifted, Jack Clitheroe makes his first entry.

Now Jack Clitheroe takes over the quarrels from his wife though Fluther tries to ease out the tension. Jack is over harsh to Bessie. One learns why Bessie reacts, or over-reacts. Her son is serving in the army and she is lonely and intensely religious. While she is proud of her religious roots, in the same vein she finds fault with religious defaulters. The agony of being separated from her son and living in constant fear that he might die any moment is an understandable anguish of a devout mother. Perhaps it is this neurosis that can justify her statement, "If me son was home from th' trenches he'd see me righted." In many ways she is an active, volatile, and energetic Mrs. Tancred of Juno and the Paycock. Bessie and Fluther exit.

For the first time the door is closed. Privacy is at last obtained for the Clitheroes, short-lived as it turns out. The objective of fixing the door is achieved. Clitheroe in trying to comfort his wife calls Bessie Burgess an 'old bitch'. Ironically, Bessie Burgess out of sheer pain, and afraid of dying, calls Nora 'a bitch' though there is no spite or venom. This is again a conscious craft to bring out irony
sharply, though at this moment it might appear an innocuous abuse to placate his wife. Will an audience remember this tiny but sharp abuse to recall at the end of the play and perceive the irony? But on a desk analysis, the irony is clear. Again, Nora’s fear, “Some day or another, when I’m here be myself, she’ll come in an’ do somethin’ desperate” comes true prophetically in the last act. It is Bessie who takes all the care of Nora when she becomes demented. She nurses Nora, and what is more Bessie keeps Nora in her small, tiny living room in safe custody. This is the very pinnacle of irony.

There is a lull in quarrel. But the fault-finding is taken up. Nora finds fault with the Covey for throwing the ‘dungarees’ on the floor. The Covey retorts.

There is now a family atmosphere. Nora lays the table, “Peter is in full dress of the foresters.” An odd man in. The quarrel, and teasing game between the Covey and Fluther continues.

Jack Clitheroe opens the topic of the march and the meeting and Nora plainly refuses to participate. For a second time in the First Act reference is made to the procession but not too much notice is taken. It is understressed.

Only now does O’Casey bring in the main story. The love
life of Jack Clitheroe and Nora is not sound and cracks and crevices are seen. It is Jack who has sent her a hat fully aware that it is Nora’s birthday. He stands up to defend her honour. What is uppermost on his mind is not love, but a rivalry he has been nurturing, a jealousy with Brennan and the fact that Brennan has been made a Captain in the Irish Citizen Army. The sense of deprivation that Jack displays is pretty obvious. His jealousy takes a curious and odd turn and he lets it out by taunting Nora.” He was sweet on you, once, Nora?” Nora’s pat, peremptory reply, "...I never liked him. I always thought he was a bit of a think,” silences him.

Suddenly the family atmosphere changes and a political atmosphere sets in by the remark of the Covey. “They’re bringin’ nice disgrace on that banner now.” The very first opinion, a sharply dissenting one at that, is made after letting in the audience for a lot of comedy of known variety.

Quarrel now becomes an argument. The Covey’s contention of the flag is that it “should only be used when we’re building th’ barricades to fight for a Workers Republic!” It switches back to the taunting quarrel between the Covey and Peter. While Dublin is preparing for a march, the tenement dwellers are concerned only with their petty bickerings. While
Peter often implores to God for peace, Nora belts him up and packs him off to have peace at home 'at least for one hour'.

Now, only Nora and Jack are on the stage. The couple recall their 'courting' days and how Jack would say, "Oh, to hell with meetin'" and within a month of the marriage when Jacks 'couldn't keep away from them'. It is not exactly a quarrel but a slow revelation of their attitude to the Irish Citizen Army. Nora taunts Jack saying that he gave up the Army not because of the love for Nora but because of Jack's disgust that 'they didn't make a Captain of him'. Nora questions Jack's love for her, and almost conducts an inquisition.

O'Casey creates a tender but extremely brief love scene. Nora accuses lovingly that Jack's love for her is neither unconditional nor total. She sounds very much like Nora in Ibsen's A Doll's House. The cracks appear in their relationship but she wants to patch up. She demands her evening allowance -- a cigarette. The stage is fairly dark and one hears two people talk with two red cigarette ends burning. Both are burning out fast. Only by Nora's dialogue do we infer that it is already night. "...don't let me hear another cross word out of you for th' rest o' the night."

It is quite a piece of theatrical cunning on the part
of O’Casey to create a scene where the lover sings again to his beloved a love song of her choice, recalling amorous days. O’Casey makes his theatre ‘total’ by this song. For once there is no quarrel, but only a knock on the door disturbs them. The song stops, and there is silence, and the knock only is heard. As in Juno and the Paycock knock plays a dramatic role in the The Plough and the Stars also. The knocks become ‘more imperative’ and are followed by a voice. The voice addresses Jack as ‘Commandant Clitheroe’, not once but twice. This is to inform the audience the military hue, of Jack’s personality which the other characters on the stage are unaware of, and even Jack is unaware. This is one instance where a central character on the stage and the audience together and at the same instance react with surprise and perhaps, a mild shock. The military ‘honorifics’ are uttered twice. The voice gains a certain authority as it reveals there is a message from General Jim Connally and Clitheroe is quick to recognize it. The response which is an embarrassment to Jack is conveyed to the audience as well. “Damn it, it’, Captain Brennan.” A severe conflict churns up between Jack and Nora to let in Brennan or not. Nora knows opening the door is opening a Pandora’s Box, and she resists it. Almost similar to Nora’s
begging Helmer in *A Doll’s House* not to go to the letter box. There is a deep-seated fear about a revelation which will ruin a family life.

The audience till now has been seeing only ordinary people on the stage. Now, a military personnel appears -- a physical symbol of the army standing between a loving couple recently married. “Clitheroe opens the door, and admits a young man in the full uniform of the Irish Citizen Army.” Army enters into the private life of a couple, and becomes an interceptor of their joy.

“A dispatch from General Connolly’ is read by Jack Clitheroe asking him to take command of the eighth battalion of the I.C.A. “which will assemble to proceed to the meeting at nine o’clock.” “...At two o’clock a.m. the army will leave Liberty Hall for a reconnaissance attack on Dublin Castle.”

A very important stage direction of O’Casey reads. “While he (Clitheroe) is doing so, Brennan’s eyes are fixed on Nora, who droops as she sits on the lounge.” This throws a lot of clue to the love life of Brennan. Obviously he loved Nora but she did not quite respond to him as she preferred Jack. This must have triggered off a lot of jealousy in Brennan. *The Plough and the Stars* becomes in a way, a love
story, where the lovers have only Cadmian gains. Knowing Jack as he does, Brennan might have manoeuvered a situation where Jack jumps into the Rising which would destroy Nora's love life, almost as a vindictive act. Brennan is a symbol of destruction. The Jack Clitheroe family is destroyed possibly by the machinations of Brennan taking advantage of the Rising and, also, because of the pseudo-patriotic military, over-sized ambitions of Jack Clitheroe. The letter making Jack a commandant is only a time bomb that blasts his domestic life and happiness. The promotion is the apple and Brennan is the serpent. It is almost a retelling of our first parents' story in a minor key with small reversals of facts. It is Nora who is against the promotion, aware that that is the greatest temptation.
Brennan plays the villain in revealing that Nora did not inform Jack Clitheroe about the fact of promotion. The domestic quarrel starts, and slowly develops into a fight. Nora talks of realities while vanity and ambition blind Jack Clitheroe. For the first time two people recently married, quarrel after a false transitory amorous scene, fight and physically hurt each other throw verbal repartees. The fight takes physical dimensions.

The political, and military ambitions in Jack Clitheroe grow by leaps and bounds even as his family life loses its shape, identity, focus and importance. It starts slowly fading out. Nora's entreaties are rejected. Perhaps, this is precisely what Brennan wanted. He derives a sadistic pleasure from the rupture of the family. Nora will no longer be the same to Jack hereafter. O'Casey sums it up beautifully in his stage direction. "He goes to the chest of drawers and takes out a Sam Browne belt, which he puts on, and then puts a revolver in the holster. He puts on his hat, and looks towards Nora. While this dialogue is proceeding, and while Clitheroe prepares himself, Brennan softly whistles "The Soldiers Song"." Brennan is triumphant as Clitheroe has discarded his role as a husband. Brennan has turned the Rising to his
personal advantage.

Nora screams at Jack Clitheroe. "I don't care if you never come back." Although this statement made in a fit of anger and disgust and is not supposed to mean what is flung out, none the less, it comes true; and, prophetically so. The Captain and the Commandant quit. Jack goes out as a Commandant of the Irish Citizen Army deserting his wife. Is it an act of patriotism or a first step in the blind alley of blooming vanity and vaulting ambition? The two warriors quit. "We agree ...about Clitheroe and his wife. That love scene in the first act is most objectionable, and, ...does not ring true. What is wrong is that O'Casey is there writing about people whom he does not know, whom he has only read about" (Yeats).(32)

The hat which is a symbol of Jack's love for Nora, and a birthday gift, assumes new dimensions. After their exit, and after a pause "Nora pulls her new hat from her head and with a bitter movement flings it to the other end of the room. "There is a gentle knock at the door. The audience would almost think Jack has come back to bid good-bye but Mollser appears, a child so shriveled up by the ravages of consumption, that though she is fifteen she looks only ten, with her coughing as her breathing. There is a diminution in personality as
symbolically represented by Mollser. She is the moral, spiritual and political strength of Dublin.

Mollser’s point of view is poignantly ironical at this moment, "...I often envy you Mrs.Clitheroe seein’ th’ health you have here, an wondherin’ if I’ll ever be strong enough to be keepin’ a home together for a man.” On the stage is a mentally and emotionally shattered woman pitted with a consumptive, diminutive child. The audience must feel moved to their roots at the sight of a shattered young wife and an innocent child who is scared to stay alone and needs Nora’s company.

It is a piece of theatrical discretion that O’Casey does not continue their conversation. O’Casey brings in his mastery of the aural world to show a change in the atmosphere on the stage and also to suggest also what is going on outside. The window-view is over and the outside world makes inroads into the tenement and envelops it by its sound and power. This is how O’Casey brings in the change paralyzing those on the stage and in the auditorium.

"Just before Mollser ceases to speak, there is heard in the distance the music of a brass band playing a regiment to the boat on the way to the front. The tune that is being played is ‘It’s a long way to tipperary’, as the band comes to
the chorus, the regiment is swinging into the street by Nora’s house, and the voices of the soldiers can be heard lustily singing the chorus of the song."

For once, there is a character-audience participation in what is happening outside. The issues of the house are gone to the street.

As the music passes off, Bessie makes her entry. She becomes a self-proclaimed oracle and with no rancour for Nora or Bessie, declaims pessimistic statements, couched in semi-biblical phrases. She foresees the failure of the Rising and the wrath of God. Surprisingly she does not accuse Nora, but goes away. O’Casey makes the audience understand a different facet of Bessie. She quits. Nora closes the door out of fear for safety. "She throws herself on the lounge. Mollser sits beside her."

Mollser asks a question: "Is there anybody goin’, Mrs.Clitheroe, with a tither o’sense?" Mollser becomes a chorus and the question is directed to the audience through Nora.

The curtain falls on two women of different age groups but equally disillusioned about everything. The home has ceased to exist. Only the meetings outside the tenement get
the focus. For Nora, her dreams of a happy domestic life are shattered, and for the little one Mollser, the Rising does not ring any significance.

Jack has made his choice between Nora and Cathleen ni Houlihan "...though the conflict between Nora and the daughter of Houlihan is not as fully realized as it could be, the opposition is no mere subterranean movement in the play."(33)

At the end of the First Act we find a situation where "the women are left not yet to keen, but to keep a kind of deathwatch. The curtain for Act One comes down on this grim chorus of woman."(34)

What is the First Act like? Does it give any clue to what the Second and subsequent Acts are going to be like? "At the end of the first act we have both a comedy based upon the traditional device of social affectation and a melodrama that threatens to be a tragedy. The Comedy itself is one that creates instantaneous laughter, but the after image of the laugh is a formless and dark uneasiness. The comedy darkens as one abandons the necessary comic distance and approaches the characters for a closer look."(35)

"O’Casey’s mastery of complex techniques in this play remain undisputed."(36) "Critics have sometimes been unable to
follow him in the peculiar intricacy of his structure. They have, for instance, presented Fluther, Nora, Bessie and the Covey by turns as the central character or even as the author's mouthpiece.(37)

"The Plough and the Stars contains nine central characters of equal importance ... all of whom demand equal attention and none of whom, on his own presents the author's opinions."(38)

"In Act One, preparations for the rebellion are hinted at."(39) "The preparations for the insurrection are intimated in the worker's departure for the patriotic demonstration observed by Mrs. Gogan, but with the exception of the Covey, who significantly comes off work before time, none of the characters is concerned with this. The first part of Act I thus portrays the deceptive leisure time atmosphere in a workers' home, beset with lower middle-class ambitions and disturbed occasionally by petty quarrels."(40)

With the entrance of Brennan in uniform, the domestic atmosphere is wiped out, the quarrel between Jack and Nora reaches its zenith, military ambition thwarts domestic joy and peace.

"In Act One 'O'Casey not only reflects the situation in
Ireland but gives a typical impression of human attitudes, weaknesses and merits immediately before an event that will later on be presented by the opposing factions as unmistakably "good" or unmistakably "evil"."(41)

What type of characters does O'Casey present in the First Act? "Though all the tenement dwellers share a common Georgian home, they cannot agree upon a common dream. In fact, even beyond disagreement, all the characters fail in their relationships with one another. In the first act we see nothing but bickerings and quarrels, the characters do not have enough room to move about in freedom and peace."(42)

The end of the First Act is not as it began, a boisterously humorous note. "However comic the First Act may be, the image of Irish life that O'Casey presents, with all its futile dreams, broken wills, and alienation of the sexes, is not a pleasant one. Though not giving the audience cause to riot, he places them in the proper mood."(43)

The Act opened with the voice of a woman and ends with the dialogue of two women who are going to matter in the following Acts. "The curtain in Act One falls upon three sorrowful women."(44)

A critic summed up his thoughts on The Plough and the
Stars thus: "It is a whole world, secret, absurd, noble. ...It sounds like a serialized story which one cannot ‘put down’". (45)

There is no doubt a sense of despair, a note of ominous threats at the end of Act One. Mollser is physically consumptive, Nora mentally afflicted and Bessie Burgess almost turns a visionary.

The First Act is rather long and very much in the style of O’Casey. He gives all details, of all events, all information of all characters through talk, cross talk, comments and quarrels. The only person who really goes to the Rising is Jack Clitheroe. The rest are all watchers. Except Mollser who is immobilized, the rest of them go to the procession and meeting, more out of curiosity than out of patriotism. Nora knows subsconsciously that her life is killed by a multiple villain. Her own duplicity in not giving the letter to Jack is nagging her. Brennan is a wounded tiger, besides a jilted lover, and he appears personally to take away Jack. He has killed two birds in one stone, deprived Nora of Jack, as she deprived him of love. What is more and perhaps more relevant is Jack’s own vaulting ambition of a military career.
Act Two

O’Casey has shifted the locale for Act Two “to a commodious public house at the corner of the street in which the meeting is being addressed from Platform No.1.”

O’Casey gives detailed instructions about the plan of action on the stage. His technique of juxtaposing action for different dramatic purposes comes to the fore in this Act. In cinema, there is a technique called parallel cutting, which, in common parlance, means one is able to see bits of action from two streams of incidents presented side by side with calculated objectives. It is a subtle and sure way of making the audience think in the same wave length as the director.

O’Casey uses the ‘Voice of Man’ in a silhouette and the impact of the perorations on the public. Instead of bringing a new set of characters and showing to the audience their instant reactions to the meeting, O’Casey has taken the boldest step in bringing the characters he introduced in Act One—the tenement dwellers—and has added two more, the Barman and Rosie, a prostitute, and shows their reactions to the procession and the meeting. The reactions may tend to become derivative and exaggerated, prone to distortion, and even vaguely romantic. Since the audience have already seen the
tenement dwellers reacting in a domestic situation to
domestic, non-domestic, personal, non-personal and political
events in a myriad ways, in the new context of the pub the
reactions should be more meaningful and relevant.

Act One began with two men silently engaged in some
work. Act Two begins with a man, the Barman, and a woman,
Rosie, silently engaged in some action to establish their
characters.

In Act One a lot of information is given to the public
by Mrs.Gogan and Fluther indulging in a conversation on many
things, but chiefly about Nora and her husband Jack Clitheroe,
mostly debunking them. The uncle of Nora takes no part in the
conversation although he is living off the Clitheroes.

Here in Act Two, the prostitute has her grouse against
the march as the procession has told on her business. This is
the first reaction from a state of society which is related
emotionally to the public. "They're all, in a holy mood. The
solemnlookin' dials on th' whole o' them an' they marchin' to
th' meetin' you'd think they were th'glorious company of th'
saints and the noble army of martyrs thrampin' through th'
streets of paradise." But she can also be observant and non-
critical. "It's a tremendous meetin', four platforms they
"...the curtain for Act Two rises upon an entirely different kind of woman. Rosie Redmond, the prostitute...

The scene has shifted from the tenement hearth where the women live, to the pub where the men live (46) "the mass meeting of Act Two openly propagates an insurrection..."(47)

Act Two is considered the most brilliant part of the play in terms of sheer construction. "It is in this act, the parallelism between individual actions and background events...can be seen to take on symbolic traits."(48)

If in Act One O’Casey was anxious to project the attitudes immediately before the Rising, one should add that he not "only reflects the situation in Ireland but gives a typical impression of human attitudes, weaknesses and merits immediately before an event that will later on be presented by the opposing factions as unmistakably ‘good’ or unmistakably ‘evil’."(49)

It is a piece of irony that O’Casey’s short play entitled The Cooing of the Doves, which was rejected by the Abbey Theatre should get praised as a brilliant piece of theatrical craft once O’Casey integrated the play as the Second Act of The Plough and the Stars. This is not to deny
the minor alterations he made.

O’Casey mixes fact with fiction in such lovely blend that one is not aware which gave rise to what. The speeches of Padraic Pearse are all facts; only, he has extracted such passages that will be useful to him for showing and demonstrating their impact. One may question O’Casey for taking only such people whose reaction will help forge and project his attitude to the Rising. That might not be being fair to Padraic Pearse, but that will certainly be far better than his writing his own pieces which may not have the religious and emotional overtones that the present selections carry. In short, O’Casey has used the speeches intact instead of tampering with them. Did he quote Padraic Pearse out of context? In what light does he show Padraic Pearse, a true patriot however misled or deluded he may have been?

"O’Casey takes the daring step of incorporating passages from the speeches of Padraic Pearse into his context and confronting them with the attitudes of everyday people.” Yeats called the Second Act of The Plough and the Stars "the finest O’Casey has written". (50)

It must be noticed that Pearse in neither described nor
the speeches directly commented on, criticized or attacked. His features are not seen; nor is his name mentioned. "The speaker represents one extreme of current attitudes to the Rising; the other is embodied in the inhabitants of the tenements, each of whom is in this Act directly concerned by political events, but in a different way than the speaker supposes."(51)

There is yet another view that looks at the strategy of using the speeches by a different perspective. "Here is a dramatic device of the utmost brilliance. It enables O’Casey to bring the romantic rhetoric right into the heart of the action without letting the action be dominated by it as would happen if he showed us the meeting itself. At the same time the setting of the voice of the man outside the room expresses perfectly the distance of the dreamer from the common people."(52)

Very practically and very pragmatically Rosie apart from describing the plans and progress of the meeting almost immediately talks about her problems. The problems of the nation have no relevance while the strains on her profession are real and staring. She is unable to make both ends meet, and equally unable to carry on her profession. "It’s no joke
thryin’ to make up fifty-five shillins’ a week for you keep an laundhry, an’ then taxin’ ‘you a quid for your own rooms if you bring home a friend for the night. If I could only put by a couple of quid for a swankier outfit, everythin’ in th’ garden ud look lovely.”

It must be noted that Rosie only voices her grievances but it is not answered. It is overrun by the appearance of the silhouetted figure.

The first part of the speech makes a plea for arms and the glory of arms, and the glory of shedding blood. The speech, brief as it is, is very catholic in character and sounds almost an assertion of transubstantiation.

In the First Act information about the Clitheroes was given with Mrs.Gogan and Fluther indulging in a near gossip. The same technique is used here. A barman and prostitute talk about the impact and content of the speech of the silhouetted figure. While the action for the characters on the stage may look like a ‘happening’ the audience are already aware of the talk which is nearly ten years old.

O’Casey’s dialogues spoken through his characters are fresh. A now reaction to a past speech is revived for purely dramatic purposes. The two react positively to the appeal of
the "Voice of the Man'. The reactions are impulsive as their attention is immediately distracted by the entry of Peter and Fluther. Their solemn affirmation and resolutions do not last even a few minutes.

Must the act begin with a prostitute is a question that can relevantly be raised. What would have happened if Rosie is totally removed from this act? Would the act communicate the message? This is well countered by Lady Gregory in the Journal. About the prostitute in Act Two, "she is as certainly necessary to the general action and idea as are 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... the scene as a whole is admirable... one of the finest O'Casey has written. To eliminate any parts of it on grounds that have nothing to do with dramatic literature would be to deny all out traditions." (53)

What did Padraic Pearse want and what did he achieve? Is O'Casey a little cunning in using only such parts of the speeches that will help project his stand on the Rising, even indirectly through his characters? "The most maddening feature of this riot inciting Second Act is that the whores' speech is
followed by the words of Pearse whose speech to the crowd outside can be heard within the pub. The juxtaposition of the prostitute and patriot is unkind and O’Casey does not weaken the force of his irony for he chooses to use the most absurd, the most banally sabre-rattling, the most ignorantly heroic speech in all of Pearse four volumes.” (54) ”...bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing says the catholic priest, but what the rioter did not realize was that O’Casey’s three dots did a service to Pearse.” (55)

There is a distinct change in the point of view of events in Act Two. The locale is changed from the inside of a tenement to a bar. But here too, the actual events are seen from inside a pub. Thus, in both cases, the views are as seen from inside a pub or a tenement. It is not a directly involved view. ”...the juxtaposition of prostitution and patriotism is provoking, but simple juxtaposition is not O’Casey’s only technique.” (56)

”...Whatever ideological purity and sincerity are present in Pearse’s thought cannot pass through the dark window of the pub.” (57)

O’Casey gives one set of reactions for the speech. Now he contrasts this with the views of two people who the
audience have already seen and are fairly conversant with their behavior. Peter and Fluther enter. Peter is in his special dress and Fluther is not any different from what one saw him earlier in Act One. O'Casey gives an account of the impact of the speech on these two clowns. "Peter and Fluther enter tumultuously. They are hot, and full and hasty with the things they have seen and heard." The two comedians reduce the impact of Pearse's speech to the degree of the inducement it makes them to drink, as though the speech were a liquor catalyst. They are more interested in their drink than in the speech. Otherwise, why should they leave the meeting just as it started? What the two talk is plain-imaginative talk, overblowing their military ambitions, martial sizes and egos. Such cryptic talk is bound to pull down the serenity of the speech and instantly create laughter among the audience.

It may be noticed that the pattern of relationship between Fluther and Peter takes a new perspective that was not seen in Act One. There arises a discernible new dimension. They do not rush out to listen to the rest of the speech. This is really the irony. But they stay put to drink more. As they exchange their emotional reactions both the barman and Rosie freeze, listening to them as the audience do. The audience can
pit their own reactions against the characters.

The second speech of the Silhouetted man evokes images of blood, almost on the lines of transubstantiation. "And we must be ready to pour out of the same red wine in the same glorious sacrifice for without shedding of blood there is no redemption!"

Fluther is already playing a role substituting the Covey who is to appear soon." Will you stop your blatherin for a minute, man, an' let us hear what he's sayin!"

The whole essence of the appeal with religious phraseology is soon destroyed by sheer antics of Peter and the Covey. As Peter exits with Fluther, "he runs into the Covey. He immediately erects his body like a young cock, and with his chin thrust forward, and a look of venomous dignity on his face, he marches out."

One must take especial note of O'Casey's use of the word 'march'. While a march just went past outside the pub and collected at the square and Peter dressed himself up in the first act for this march, the audience had no opportunity of seeing the 'march'. But now he uses it to expose the ridiculousness of Peter's exercise. And to walk before the Covey with the old animosity between them already established in Act One the scene is fun. For the first speech, the
reaction was verbal, but for the second, it is comic.

O’Casey’s strategy in not showing the physical presence of the speaker may be an in-built defensive act. The impact of the speeches on the audience may be direct and perhaps to dimensions O’Casey might not have thought of, or visualized. By showing the shadow, the substance of the person is reduced to a shadow. It is a deliberate act of killing the speeches. This is yet another way of playing up his characters and their reactions, that is favoring the pub mates. The voice is diembodied and naturally peters out.

Another attempt at slapstick is the Covey ordering malt and Rosie gulping it, though this act of Rosie may throw insights into how prostitutes behave, and thrive in pubs in Ireland.

The entire episode of the Covey and Rosie is a parody of values. The play is now on three levels. The Covey rushes in for “a glass of malt to stimulate meself from the shock o’ seein’ th’ signal that’s after goin’ out.” What is it that shocked him? Is the sentence merely an excuse to make his entry into the pub and still show him as a puritan? He discusses the concept of freedom with a prostitute Rosie who
tries all the while to trap him, as she needs a customer that night to feed her family. The march deprives her of her business. Values do not substitute for hunger. Patriotism for Rosie is no panacea for hunger. Rosie nearly controls the stage now, even though temporarily let down by the Barman. The Covey talking economics to Rosie is the most ridiculous thing one can think of and what’s worse, he delivers his lecture, and wastes his ideas in a pub on a prostitute who needs nothing but money, and not books on social economy. Rosie is down-to-earth in her approach. The more the Covey is frightened, the more Rosie advances. She needs a client. Her physical advances make him nervous and she undresses him mentally. It is a pitiable piece of dark comedy that the Covey has no one to share his ideas with. The audience will be induced to laugh at the Rosie-Covey encounter, being a surface comedy. The speech will be forgotten as the audience will concentrate only on what’s happening on the stage. Perhaps that is the level of impact that the speeches had on the public. Is it a case of wrong rhetoric at useless places? The Covey runs away.

Peter and Fluther enter followed by Mrs.Gogan carrying a baby in her arms. But even as he leaves, the Covey irritates
Peter considerably. This is again a comic technique to carry on the vague, unspecified, and unspelled animosity between them, very nearly like Laurel and Hardy.

Peter and Fluther talk of irrelevant things, and matters unrelated to the Rising. The irony is, in the pub, which is within the very vicinity of the meeting, the common people are unconcerned about it, except superficially.

The stage is now with five people. Initially two are silent, Rosie and the Barman. And only Mrs. Gogan, Peter and Fluther talk. Peter is in the 'forester’s' dress after all. He looks an odd man in and this itself will give rise to laughter. Mrs. Gogan is with a baby in her arms.

The quarrel theme continues between Peter and Fluther, but the locale is changed--it is a pub now. And they quarrel on the silliest issues and on utterly flimsy provocations. No one is really concerned about the current Rising and its implications.

True to herself Mrs. Gogan is critical of Peter’s dress as she did in Act One about Nora’s dress,

What could turn out to be a quarrel is quelled by the Barman appealing for order simultaneously happening with the entry of Bessie Burgess and the Covey. A group quarrel is
imminent and O’Casey gives the right stage direction: "They go over to the opposite end of the counter, and direct their gaze on the other group."

The quarrel continues now ostensibly with Bessie and Mrs.Gogan on religious grounds. In Act One there is no clue to show that these two people can be antagonistic. Bessie’s outburst about young people dying is reminiscent of Mrs.Tancred’s’ prayer in Juno and the Paycock and also of O’Casey’s own observation on the death of his son. Bessie’s outbursts are counterpointed to the Voice of the Man.

The entire scene is a verbal power tennis double between the Bessie and Mrs.Gogan. Why should these woman fight at all tooth and nail? If it had been an one-acter, it may seem justifiable. But in Act One, these two women do not clash; nor has O’Casey planted any valid grounds for their emotional upsurge almost leading up to a quarrel.

When a fight is about to erupt, O’Casey stops it by bringing in the Voice of the Speaker. When these things happen Rosie and Barman do nothing on the stage with no purpose and are almost human props.

The Voice of the Speaker welcoming war to Ireland is in near canonical terms. But they do not activate the common man
enough to drop all his personal cares and anxieties, drives and ambitions, animosities and loves and plunge in the Rising with a single-minded devotion. Right or wrong, the Covey sums up this appeal curtly, sharply, succinctly and abruptly. "Dope, dope. There’s only one war worth havin’ th’ war fro th’ economic emancipation of th’ proletariat." The criticism may sound angry, and even cynical, but it is none the less true.

Why should Bessie and Mrs. Gogan tear at each other and wash each other’s linen in a pub? And for whose sake? And with zero motivation? Perhaps as severe, and stinging poverty that they share impels them to give vent to their frustration in terms of quarrels, sometimes going to the extent of questioning their morality. Each one claims she is the only true follower of Christianty. The entire quarrel sounds an extended inquisition and it is highly doubtful if their mutual recriminations soaked in religious idiom will be understood at all by the common man, the audience who has come to watch the play. The language sounds rather laboured and a little pompous to be spoken by a fruit vendor and a charwoman.

Peter and Fluther in opposing camps behave like pugilist’s coaches. Bessie’s push to Peter sends him reeling in his Forester’s attire. On the stage, a man falling on the
floor by the push of a woman, is a comic act, particularly when the audience have seen him only a short while ago in the First Act, trying to handle a sword. Bessie throughout keeps harping on a phrase 'hiding the truth'. It can be deduced that this is attributed to those who raised a call for a procession and also the Rising.

As the quarrel develops to a climax, Mrs. Gogan thrusts her baby into the hands of Peter who is least prepared for it, and who has just now recovered from a fall.

The Covey who is silent till now starts taunting Peter. The focus of the quarrel shifts. The Barman plays a self-appointed umpire. He is worried his business will suffer, as Rosie's has already suffered. Both the women are pushed out but the baby is on the floor of the pub. It is one of the most beautiful, heart-rending, bitter, shattering and disturbing visuals on the stage.

Peter, Fluther and the Covey now quarrel as to who will run out with the baby to hand it over to Mrs. Gogan. Quarrel as a theme continues. Finally, Peter takes it out, in his full Forester's costume. A comic image indeed, and an occasion for the audience to burst out laughing. All this happens while Rosie is a passive observer on the stage.
As soon as the females leave, Fluther’s comment about women is designed more to provoke laughter than out of any logical necessity for such a comment, “Women is terrible when they start to fight. There’s no holdin’ them back”. “Fluther adds one more gag line: “you know there’s no controllin’ a woman when she loses her head.”

There appears to be a mild technical error. O’Casey has not given any indication earlier about Rosie’s exit but, now, he makes her enter. The stage instruction actually reads: “Rosie enters and goes over to the counter on the side nearest to Fluther.”

After such a vitriolic comment by Fluther, Rosie taking a place nearest to him is a strong visual irony.

There is a rare insight shown in the pattern of relationship between the Barman and Rosie. It is close socially and emotionally but distant and tight financially. Again this is an emotionally charged verbal repartee bordering almost on quarrel. Thus, the theme of quarrel continues.

The Covey calling the meeting “a lot o’ blasted nonsense, comrade” seems to be an intellectual’s attitude to the Rising. Fluther’s demonstration, “(catching his cheek
with his hand, and pulling down the flesh from the eye) d’ye see that mark there, under me eye? A sabre slice from a dragon in O’Connell Street! (Thrusting his head forward towards Rosie) Feel that dint in th’ middle o’ me nut!” is reminiscent of Jack Boyle’s romantic call of his exploits as a Captain in Juno and the Paycock. The rest of the sequence with Rosie is a counterpointed romance to Nora’s and Jack Clitheroe’s in Act One. Only the venue and quality differ. The Covey becomes an initiated Joxer Daly. And the fight, although in a low key, is a piece of the ‘absurd’.

The distance between the intellectual and the labour classes, and also those who have given calls for the Rising are graphically and comically portrayed by O’Casey in this sequence. Fluther answering the Covey. "What th’ hell do I care what he says? I’m an Irishman enough not to lose me head be fully in’ foreigners!” will at once pamper the pride of the audience and the absurdity of the statement tickle their sense of humor. This is a laugh line.

Rosie is very practical, and very wisely she argues for Fluther, because he may be the only client she can look for her living that night. It is a hunger and survival battle for
her. Any honest, good intention is reduced to absurdity by the
tenement dwellers. The Covey is right in whatever he says, but
being a lone voice, he looks a fool even in the eyes of a
prostitute. O’Casey subtly establishes the loss of values --
an indirect fall out of the Rising. Rosie dismisses the Covey
as a ‘kid’.

The quarrel is extended, and now, it is between the
Covey and Rosie. Only at the beginning of this act did O’Casey
show a minor face to face of Rosie and the Covey. At that time
the Covey did not properly respond to her. Perhaps that is the
reason why she now calls him names.

It will also be interesting to note that people change
cloaks for quick and immediate benefits. This intransigence in
relationship O’Casey brings out in Fluther quarreling with the
Covey, who lives in the same tenement as Fluther does, all for
the sake of a woman, a prostitute at that!

The quarrel takes comic proportions on the physical
side. This is a repetition of the same technique done only a
little while ago. No physical fight really takes place. It is
only the “sound and the fury”. What makes this shadow fighting
more comic is clearly instructed by O’Casey. “Fluther suddenly
springs into the middle of the shop, flings his hat into the
corner, whips off his coat, and begins to paw the air."

O'Casey makes even the Barman take sides with Fluther, maybe because of Fluther's show of physical power, as he is keen on saving his bar. It is a piece of comic irony with shades of sadness that the Covey, who is the only right thinking person, is pushed out of the bar. O'Casey hints there is no place for people with similar views.

Rosie stands to gain by this fight as she gets her client. The Rising has not turned out a ruin for her survival battle.

As Fluther exits with Rosie, Jack Clitheroe, Captain Brennan and Lieutenant Langon enter. It is surprising, even mildly puzzling, as to why O'Casey omits to refer Clitheroe by his new rank -- Commandant. These are the three people who really belong to the Irish volunteers. There is silence on the stage. "Captain Brennan carries the banner of The Plough and the Stars and Lieut Langon, a green, white and orange Tricolour. They are in a state of emotional excitement." The meeting is not yet over. The three are militarily involved in the Rising each for a different inner motivation. Jack, because of vaulting ambition, Brennan because of jealousy
mixed with cunningness, he has weaned away Jack from Nora; and Lieut Langon's, it is vague. O'Casey introduces him only now.

It is Clitheroe who offers the drinks. Lieut Langon's declamation is pregnant with meaning. "Th' time is rotten ripe for revolution." Each one shows a concern for the other.

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.

But Capt. Brennan has no such thing to declare. Perhaps he has no domestic interest or concern.

Even as Lieut Langon declares, "Th' time for Ireland's battle is now - th' place for Ireland's battle is here", "the tall dark figure is silhouetted against the window."

For the first time, the audience can feel that the speech is directed to the right persons. The crux of the scene is the line. "...while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland, unfree, shall never be at peace!" which is reiterated by
Capt. Brennan (Catching up The Plough and the Stars)

Imprisonment for the Independence of Ireland!

Lieut Langon: (Catching up the Tricolour) Wounds for th’ Independence of Ireland.

Clitheroe: Death for th’ Independence of Ireland.

Lieut. Langon calls the time ‘rotten ripe’, an oxymoron, and he is right, as events prove later, it is more rotten than ripe.

The three people, a Commandant, a Captain and a Lieutenant swear three things for the Independence of Ireland. "Imprisonment, wounds and Death;" and the three ‘amen’ their voicings by saying in chorus. "So help us God!" All these are taking place in a pub. For the first time, we find the right, and perhaps relevant response to the speeches. The Barman is silent. He must be shocked to see the swearings in the very bar where there was only petty, silly, meaningless, irrelevant and ridiculous quarrels. And what is most important, Rosie, is absent. This is the cleverest stroke of O’Casey. What follows
their declamation is stunning. "A bugle blows the Assembly. They hurry out."

The audience must be moved by the sound of the bugle blowing the Assembly. The music is not only for the characters on the stage but common and meaningful for the audience as well. There is a conscious participation in the stage events the impact of which goes beyond the stage. This is a rather clever dramatic stroke.

Yet it is extremely unthinkable that the three warriors will care to desert their meeting while it is working up, spiraling to a crescendo almost acquiring religious frenzy and tone, to enter into a pub, just to disclaim these slogans; "Imprisonment, Independence and Death." The exercise appears a little crude, nonetheless effective on the stage. Their exit is logical.

The entry of a little drunk Fluther with Rosie looks rather unnecessary. It is reminiscent of the last scene in Juno and the Paycock. But as a piece of reaction from a tenement dweller to the bugle, it is significant. Rosie bears a moral responsibility to take Fluther home. Those who come to the pub must also go back home as well. Pub stay is purely transitory.
Now, O’Casey gives his masterly touch. As Rosie, the prostitute, helps the unstable and tipsy Fluther be on his feet to go back home, in the background is heard, the “officer’s voice” (giving command outside) Irish Volunteers, by th’ right, quick march!” The march is parodied on the stage and the audience must be feeling rather uncomfortable and even like rioting.

To the aural background of the march, Rosie sings putting her arm round Fluther. “I once had a lover, a tailor...” The keyline is love begets a “bawlin’ for butcher an’ bread”. There is a march, and there is a recall of hunger. Which one is relevant, march past of the Irish Volunteers, or the hunger march past? That is O’Casey’s question. There is a certain sadness in Rosie’s life also, a failure of love life, and family. A tragedy in a microcosm. They exit. The stage is empty and the order of Clitheroe is heard overlapped by the soldier’s orchestrated, and disciplined footfalls. “Dublin Battalion of the Irish Citizen Army, by th’ right, quick march!” It will sound as though they are marching over the audience. That is precisely O’Casey’s mastery of aural techniques.

Act Two is shorter than Act One, but looks almost
independent in structure.

"...Rosie agrees that slavery is worse than bloodshed, but Pearse would have been embarrassed to receive her endorsement. Again, the juxtaposition of prostitution and patriotism is provoking but simple juxtaposition is not O’Casey’s only technique. Peter and Fluther rushing into the pub, flushed with excitement that Pearse’s speech has inspired them, and as the speech is repeated and handled by these comic characters, the sacred becomes profane, and the speech contiguously becomes infected with the comedy of the absurd buffoons who have been lifted to such heights of enthusiasm.” (58)

"The behavior of the stage characters thus offers a graphic commentary on the words of the speaker, showing how everyday people react to his idealistic visions. The speaker manifestly misjudges or ignores human nature. The tenement people prefer to drink their beer, to help Rosie to some income or to carry on their daily quarrels, instead of fighting for the abstract idea of national liberation.” (59)

"The speaker’s ideas are neither criticized nor ridiculed by this contrast but the chances of their realization become even more doubtful... The insurgents behavior illustrates the confusion of their intentions, the ensuing stage direction
says, "They drink'. The pub setting ironically qualities their idealism which, according to the speaker, should be free of all material and personal interest." (60)

"The stage action of Act Two has already intimated what the reality of the allegedly holy and purifying war will be like: dirty, painful and cruel with an admixture of the comic." (61)

"It is true indeed that most of the characters remain aloof from the uprising as did the mass of the Dubliners... The exit of Fluther and Rosie with her lewd song from the tavern just before the marching order is issued, explains with perfect dramatic concision why that order is futile and will lead to defeat. At the same time it provides a note of devious hope by juxtaposing the damn--all joy in life, dancing a jig in the 'bed' with the military order barren of all hope and directing the marchers to death." (62)

"The normal grossness of life inside the pub is brought into painful contrast with the high idealism of the speaker and his impassioned call for duty and heroism." (63)

The more sacrifice the speaker demands, the less the pubs' inmates are willing to give. The inverse ratio is carefully proportioned. (64)
About the selection of speeches a critic finds, "a special significance to a prominently catholic audience, because of its allusions to the doctrine of Transubstantiation and the redemption through blood sacrifice."(65)

On the impact of the speeches, Saros Cowasjee sees two sets of responses: "The first is from Captain Brennan, Lieut Langon, and Clitheroe who have just come into the bar and are in a state of high emotional excitement. They affirm their readiness to laydown their lives for Ireland."

"The other is from Fluther who totally disregards the exhortation of the speaker and walks out with the prostitute Rosie... Fluther's failure to support the freedom fighters is symbolic of the failure of the Dublin citizen to respond to the call of duty."(66) Fluther who showed so much enthusiasm when he entered the bar cools off at the end, prefers a woman to ideals.

The Second Act also ends with a song. What's the impact of the Second Act? "Given these lively ingredients it has to be said that O'Casey does not make very much of them. Apart from crude contrasts and juxtapositions... the general impression is of busy farce rather than the clash of interests
and ideas."(67) The same critic opines elsewhere, "... even though opportunities are missed the ingredients are still enthralling."(68)

The Second Act is so complete in itself, that it does not lead on to the Third Act. This is so as it was written earlier as a one act play and later on included in the present form as Act Two.

There are certain inconsistencies. In Act One Mollser is introduced, at the very end of the act, as Mrs.Gogan’s child. There is no clue whatever to show that Mrs.Gogan has another child a baby at that. And Mrs.Gogan carrying that child, to the meeting and the pub seems very forced and without proper motivation. The presence of a baby may give all the opportunities to Bessie Burgess to slander Mrs.Gogan. No doubt, it provides excellent situation, for a farce. Peter in "Forester’s dress holding a child on his hands in a pub will generate comedy in itself, irrespective of the seriousness and gravity of the situation outside the pub. Whether this is done merely as a ploy to placate the audience to sit through the grim, and gory scenes in the following acts is a moot question. It looks as if an average Dubliner, a commoner, would rather spend a night with a prostitute than involve
himself with the Irish volunteers. There is one voice which is sane, that of the Covey, but it is so devoid of humanism that it fails to make any impact at home or in the pub. The Covey can at best tease or irritate Peter.

Act Three

Considerable time has elapsed between the end of Act Two and the beginning of Act Three. To be exact, the time has elapsed between November 1915 and Easter Week 1916. But on the stage the duration of the lapse cannot be shown concretely. The act begins and only by inference can the audience judge the passage of time.

The locale also has shifted. It is "the street outside the Clitheroe tenement." It is the exterior. The first Two Acts had action taking place in the interior and in this act, it is all open as the Rising was. O'Casey gives such precise description that the audience will not take much time to understand the ravages suffered by the house. "The house is a long, gaunt, five story tenement; its brick front is chipped and scarred with age and neglect. The wide and heavy hall door, flanked by two pillars, has a look of having been charred by a fire in the distant past... The windows, except the two looking into the front parlor.. are grimy, and are
The atmosphere is deceptively calm. The scene opens on a note of motherly care and tenderness. "Mrs. Gogan is seen helping Mollser to a chair... she then wraps a shawl around Mollser’s shoulders." There is no mention of time but by inference of the opening line, it is presumed it is day.

There is an air of hope and assurance that emerges from the talk of the mother and daughter. The horror of the night punctuated by the sounds of gun shot is described by Mrs. Gogan and she gives the audience information that Nora has gone out to bring back her husband while Fluther has gone to fetch Nora! What may happen to any person, a commoner, who may venture to go out is recounted by Mrs. Gogan. "...he might come staggerin’ in covered with bandages, splashed all over with th’ red of his own blood, an’ givin’ us barely time to bring th’ priest to hear th’ last whisper of his final confession, as his soul was passin’ through th’ dark doorway o’ death into th’ way o’ th’ wondherin dead..." Even this concern has its overtones of sarcasm.

She announces the arrival of Peter and the Covey. They come together. This is the first time they come together and this will create a flutter among the audience, as they have...
always been seen at loggerheads. They will gear themselves up for some comedy, although of a slapstick variety.
"The Covey and Peter come in, breathless and excited!" Mrs. Gogan gives them a running commentary of the happenings. We are also informed that both Nora and Fluther are missing. Mrs. Gogan's sudden deep concern for Nora's safety is a totally unexpected turn about in her character. O'Casey endows her with a sense of premonition. Perhaps a bit of anxiety neurosis.

The battle is described by turn both by the Covey and Peter. O'Casey who, takes so much care about the costumes of his characters, is strangely silent about it now. The proclamation of Ireland as a Republic is narrated by the two pithless characters. The Covey appears he has dropped all his theoretical talk on socialism, economic freedom, etc.

Bessie appearing from her window on the top draws all the attention. It is an intelligent use of space. She is a single person chorus and sums up very well the gun battle. "May be yous are satisfied now, may be yous are satisfied now, Go on an' get guns if yous are men."

Mrs. Gogan castigates Bessie for chanting "Rule, Britannia' all, 'th' morning calling her an 'oul' Orange bitch!" She again suffers from her visions, which are invariably negative, destructive and unhappy. They come true,
nonetheless. But she renders her vision with a quality of comedy that it gets the better of the vision.

The stage is already crowded and so far no action has taken place. The arrival of Nora and Fluther is announced by Peter. For once, a physical condition of a patient is left to be gauged by the audience themselves.

"Fluther and Nora enter. Fluther has his arm around her and his half-leading, half-carrying her in. Her eyes are dim and hollow, her face pale and strained-looking; her hair is tossed, and her clothes are dusty." Everyone is concerned about Nora. Mrs. Gogan who criticised her so much in Act One, now rushes to her. O'Casey shows her capable of being human.

Bessie Burgess appearing from the window at the top and making comments is a repetition of the technique of the 'silhouetted man and voice' in Act Two. What is more meaningful is that the dissents made are given by a woman in flesh and blood. The technique is reversed. The characters down react in a particular way for which Bessie Burgess takes counterpointed views and airs them boldly. This point has been missed by nearly all the commentators on O'Casey and the trilogy.

Mrs. Gogan plays the catalyst in eliciting information about Jack. Nora behaves in a shockingly hysterical way. The
audience see Nora only now after the end of Act One. In fact, if Act Three is continued after Act One, nothing would have been lost. Act Two looks disjointed, as Nora does not have any role to play in Act Two at all. Nora's outbursts are to be seen as a young housewife's unbounded love for her husband, and she does not want any patriotic pep talks to destroy her family life. She echoes the views of a younger generation of tenement housewives who would not want to do anything with the Rising.

Bessie's talks are total counterpoints to whatever was said by the "Voice of the Speaker". She also soaks her pronouncements in Biblical language. "It's a bad for any one that thries to jilt th' Ten Commandments, for judgements are prepared for scorners an' stripes for th' back o' fools!"

The audience are bound to get confused over her singing, "Rule, Britannia. Britannia rules the waves, Britons never, never, never shall be slaves." Even as Nora is frenzied over her husband, Bessie is over her son. A beautiful study of two women who are concerned about the lives of human beings.

Mrs. Gogan is most sympathetic to Nora and is almost maternal when she comforts her, "... there's a power o' women
that's handed over sons an' husbands to take a runnin' risk in th' fight they're wagin'!"

Nora recounts her experience of searching for Jack. Peter counselling patience to Nora is ironical enough but, in this context, is without the sting. But he makes a universal truth. "We all have to put up with twarthers an' tormentors in this world." This is immediately counterpointed by the Covey. "If they were fighting for anything worthwhile, I wouldn't mind". Right from the beginning, he is dead against the Rising. Everyone is comforting Nora even as she suffers from romantic delusions.

In the person of Nora O'Casey raises a basic question. Are the volunteers brave? "No, but because he's a coward, a coward, a coward!" Jack is representative of the volunteers. Nora repeats her charges. "...they're afraid to say they're afraid!"

O'Casey gives a graphic account of the ugly fall out of the Rising through Nora. She wants to continue as a housewife, fond of home and wishing to raise children. In a way she is representative of young married women and their attitude to the Rising vis-a-vis the political ambitions of a few. According to Nora even laugh and shout are based on fear.
In this sequence there is no dramatic build, but there is a dramatic narration of the war. How far will that sustain the audience's interest is debatable. Nora is slowly losing her composure, and she is conscious of it. Nora is apocalyptic. She has premonitions of losing Jack, and she gives expressions to it.

It must be borne in mind that Mollser in the wheelchair is a passive spectator to the goings on—war as seen by a consumptive child. Disease destroys her inwardly and war outwardly. She is in the middle of attrition from both sides.

Nora is led inside by Mrs. Gogan and Bessie discards the role of a chorus. A silent action by Bessie Burgess belies all the opinions and calumnies heaped on her. O'Casey's master stroke lies in the silent moments he creates between the exits and the entries. "She (Bessie) passes by them with her head in the air. When they have gone in, she gives a mug of milk to Mollser silently." No one thought about it but the supposedly demented Bessie does it. In the midst of decimation there is care, there is love. One cannot even ferret out a piece of bread, which is what the Rising has brought. Bessie goes out.

Fluther and the Covey enter into a bet about Fluther
staying away from liquor while a battle is going on. This is typical O’Casey. His aural command and the way he mixes sounds is breathtaking. Here is how he achieves it. “The Covey places the coins on the strip of wood, and flips them up into the air. As they jingle on the ground the distant boom of a big gun is heard. They stand for a moment listening.” The audience must be feeling numb and shattered by this audio-mix. No doubt he has employed this technique in The Shadow of a Gunman but not as powerfully as now.

Peter, Fluther and the Covey realize that ‘artillery’ is used by the British which the volunteers did not anticipate. In spite of the calamity they are in and the catastrophe that is at their doorstep, they continue the game of tossing up the coins. The winning or the losing of the war is not as simple an act as the toss of a coin. While a lot of Irish volunteers are dying as heroes or as cowards, here is a set of tenement dwellers who have time to indulge in irrelevant talk and childish games.

O’Casey as if by the wafture of a magic wand changes the entire atmosphere by the appearance of Bessie. “She runs in excitedly. She has a new hat on her head, a fox fur round her neck over her shawl, three umbrellas under her right arm,
and a box of biscuits under her left. She speaks rapidly and breathlessly." The very presence of Bessie Burgess now, is a slapstick picture. Verily an object that provokes laughter but somewhere inside the roots of this laughter lie the germs of loot and plunder of the shops in Dublin. The chaos that Dublin is facing is portrayed in the person of Bessie dressed in odd costumes, narrating the looting and making it almost a clarion call for others to join. The tenement dwellers' poverty is reduced to such pitiable depths that the loot becomes an act of redemption.

O’Casey’s description of the variety of loot is almost like a film montage. "I seen two men an’ a lassie pushin’ a piano down th’ street, an’ the sweat rollin’ off them thryin’ to get it up on th’ pavement; an’ an oul’ wan that must ha’ been seventy lookin’ as if she’d drop every minute with th’ dint o’ heart beaten, thryin’ to pull a big double bed out of a broken shop window! I was goin’ to wait till I dressed meself from th’ skin out." But why did Bessie go out at all? What is the motivation? O’Casey gives no convincing clue.

Loot has not changed Bessie when Mollser wants her to take him(her) in. She does so without hesitation. That is one way of making the stage free for others.
Humour runs even amidst loot. Fluther enquires about any loot in the pub for his convenience and needs. Fluther and Peter decide to join the looters and not the Irish volunteers.

O’Casey is unpredictable. While a near celebration is taking place with a large scale looting being committed, O’Casey brings in a heart rending scene by a character whom the audience has not seen before.

“A fashionably dressed; middle-aged stout woman comes hurriedly in, and makes for the group. She is almost fainting with fear.” She wants to go to wrathmines and likes to be escorted or shown safe passage. But both Peter and Covey are such cowards they do not help her. The scene echoes the scene in Juno and the Paycock where Johny sights a ghost, like Macbeth sighting Banquo, and no one except Charlie Bentham shows real courage to enter his room. Both of them desert the stranger to engage themselves in looting, risky though it is.

To counter point this, O’Casey now brings in Mrs. Gogan. She “comes out of the house pushing a pram before her. As she enters the street Bessie rushes out, follows Mrs. Gogan, and catches hold of the pram, stopping Mrs. Gogan’s progress.” In loot, they become partners. While there is national calamity people come together for wrong reasons! Bessie Burgess and
Mrs. Gogan argue over the placement or the displacement of the pram. This is in comic contrast to the fight in Act Two in the pub.

Peter wants to join them now to see for himself and experience the loot. In Act Two people gathered together to see the procession and listen to the speeches. Now, they do it for an entirely different set of reasons. Peter can compromise with the women and would even go with them for a loot excursion.

This comedy of sorts is suddenly interrupted by the booms of gunfire. O’Casey has it his way. "By this time they have disappeared from view. Peter is following, when the boom of a big gun in the distance brings him to a quick halt." But Peter is honest enough to wish and pray for their safety. The real Peter is seen now. The reverberations of the big gun booms form the aural background. He is alone on the stage, a frightened man. "He looks down the street for a moment, then runs to the hall door of the house, which is open, and shuts it with a vicious pull; he then goes to the chair in which Mollser had sat, sits down, takes out his pipe, lights it, and begins to smoke with his head carried at a haughty angle. The covey comes staggering in with a ten-stone sack of flour on
his back. On the top of the sack is a ham. He goes over to the door, pushes it with his head and finds he can’t open it; he turns slightly in the direction of Peter.” The Covey who till now gave the impression to the audience he is straight stands self-betrayed. This silent action is the crowning piece in comedy in this Act. The Covey also is a bit of a looter. He is unmasked. The Covey-Peter eternal animosity and mockery gets another lease of life even when the loot and the firing is going on. Nothing seems to prevent them from such silly indulgences. As they move inside, Mrs.Gogan and Bessie enter. A direct result of the Rising, O’Casey shows very pictorially. “Bessie and Mrs.Gogan enter, the pride of a great joy illuminating their faces. Bessie is pushing up the pram, which is filled with clothes and boots; on the top of the boots and clothes is a fancy table, which Mrs.Gogan is holding on with her left hand, while with her right hand she holds a chair on the top of her head. They are heard talking to each other before they enter.” O’Casey has visually summed up the equation the Rising holds to the tenement dwellers.

Peter reminds Mrs.Gogan of her children’s critical illness. Gun shots seem to be the rhythm of this act. With every new bang of gun shot or rifle fire, there is a turn in
the relationship among the characters. When Peter “tries to shut (the door) before they have got inside” invites derisive comments from Mrs. Gogan. She calls him openly, “Cowardly oul’ fool.”

They all go inside. There is an end to lampooning. The stage is empty. “Captain Brennan comes in supporting Lieut. Langon, whose arm is around Brennan’s neck. Langon’s face which is ghastly white is convulsed with spasms of agony. He is in a state of collapse, and Brennan is almost carrying him. After a few moments Clitheroe, pale, and in a state of calm nervousness, follows, looking back in the direction from which he came, a rifle-held at the ready, in his hands.”

For the first time we have a first hand account about the Rising and who are all involved in it. Captain Brennan forgetting or overreaching his rank castigates Clitheroe. O’Casey knowingly uses the word ‘savagely’. “Why did you fire over their heads? Why didn’t you fire to kill?”

The humanism of O’Casey and Clitheroe oozes out. “...bad as they are they’re Irish men an’ women.” Brennan has no respect for his own countrymen. He dismisses them as ‘slum lice’ and threatens to shoot them. Here is a contrast in attitude between two people who are soldiers by necessity.
Brennan does not show enough care to try for an ambulance till Lieut. Langon himself moans for it. Brennan consoles him, but does not move out. Why should these three army men assemble here, of all places? The presence is very unmotivated. While Langon moans for an ambulance O’Casey springs in a shock for the audience.

"Nora rushes wildly out of the house and flings her arms round the neck of Clitheroe with a fierce and joyous insistence."

The couple is reunited. Nora thinks Jack has returned from the army for good. A happy but a sorry misunderstanding. The reunion is aimed at bringing some joy to the audience as well. The ‘exterior’ romance is in contrast to the ‘romance that took place in the ‘interior’ in Act One. It may be recalled that Nora is the only character who did not enter the pub in Act Two. There is a small change in this reunion. In Act One Brennan only was present, but now Lieut. Langon also is present, injured and fighting for his life. Nora does not care for any one else. Clitheroe is embarrassed and requests Nora not to ‘create a scene’, his vanity as a ‘commandant’ being the dominant motivation. This scene is true and contrasting to the one in Act One, as both of them have gone
through an emotional trauma. Nothing romantic but thoroughly goingly honest and tender.

Bessie appears again at the window more as a single person chorus and makes factual statements which are most embarrassingly critical of the military trio. Her comment in its entirety is an assessment of the result of the Rising.

"Th' Ministhrel boys aren't feelin' very comfortable now. Th' big guns has knocked all th' harps out of their hands. General Clitheroe'd rather be unlacing his wife's bodice than standin' at a barricade... An' th' professor of chicken butcherin' there, finds he's up against somethin' a little tougher even than his own chickens, an' that's sayin' a lot!"

She becomes a vox populi and chooses to call Brennan, a 'chicken-butcher, euphemistically "professor of chicken-butcherin". She dismisses him as being unfit to face anything stronger than a chicken. She strips his pride and vanity bare to the extent that Brennan calls her "an' 'oul' hag!" and orders her to 'shut up'. Bessie's only reply of three words is intoned beautifully. "Choke th' chicken, Choke th' chicken, Choke th' chicken!" All this while Brennan does not take any
action to bring in an ambulance for Langon. Poor Langon he has
to appeal for medical attention. "Am I to die before anything
is done to save me?" The audience can make their judgement as
to how far Capt. Brennan is truly involved in the Rising, or in
caring for his wounded colleague. Bessie intones again the
"choking" leitmotif.

O'Casey offers an impressive visual to the audience. On
the top from the window is Bessie Burgess. In front of the
house, on one side are Jack and Nora hugging each other,
discovering a new joy in finding each other, and on the other
side are Brennan and Langon the former wounded in vanity and
the latter physically, and almost dying. Jack is clinging to
Nora and struggling half-heartedly to realise himself. On the
one side of the stage promises of 'gladness' and on the other
appeals from Langon to save his life.

Brennan is needlessly angry with Jack. Perhaps it is an
expression of unrequited love for Nora. He is so small that he
wants to take it out on Nora. If only he is so concerned about
giving medical attention to Lieut. Langon, why does he hand on
Jack for help? He can very well go on his own, if he cares,
and has any respect for life.

Jack literally struggles with Nora and releases
himself. Jack’s vanity comes to the forefront when he asks "What are you more than any other woman? Nora totally underplays herself. Again, "Are you goin' to turn all th' risks I'm takin' into a laugh?" shows Jack's face-saving mechanism and a display of his vanity as a military personnel --a commandant.

As Brennan plays his last card calling Jack almost a ‘renegade’, Bessie hits him back by voicing the truth. "Runnin' from th' Tommies--choke th' chicken." She repeats it to let the audience know the truth.

Nora has a hindsight which Jack lacks. She sizes up Brennan very well and reads his intentions as from an open book. "...He himself's afraid, afraid, afraid!...He wants you to go th' way he'll have th' 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!" In other words, a transflected feeling.

Nora cries ‘Jack, Jack, Jack! counterpointed by Lieut. Langon, "a priest, I'm dyin', I think, I'm dyin'.” The ambulance is forgotten.

There is violence on the stage. The love-hug turns into a physical wriggle. "He (Jack) roughly loosens her grip, and
pushes her away from him. Nora sinks to the ground and lies there."

O’Casey brings in the strongest visual contrast, although melodramatically. Nora is appealing to Jack not to desert her, home and their life while Langon is appealing for a priest. Both have lost hopes—Nora getting back her Jack, and Lieut. Langon of any medical attention. The only victor is Brennan, as he has been able to wean away Jack from Nora by playing the patriotic cards on Jack.

They go out. "Bessie looks at Nora lying on the street ... leaving the window, she comes out, runs over to Nora lifts her up in her arms, and carries her swiftly into the house."

The stage is empty for a while, "...down the street is heard a wild drunken yell; it comes nearer and Fluther enters..."

He is in a "state of chassis". He sings "Fluther's a jolly good fella!" He keeps banging on the door. Almost like "Porter's knocks" in Macbeth.

On this banging sound is overlaid the scream of Nora from inside, followed by a moan. The audience will be in great suspense as to what may have happened to Nora. Fluther now sings to the accompaniment of Nora's moaning. This is a
dramatic moment. A drunkard spills liquor on the street attributing goodness to himself while the lady of the house is almost demented. O’Casey springs another surprise on the audience. In Act Two Bessie almost came to blows with Mrs.Gogan. Now she repeats it, only instead of Mrs.Gogan it is Fluther. In O’Casey’s words, ”the door suddenly opens, and Bessie, coming out, grips him by the collar.”

Fluther is worried only about the jar. She pulls him in. The stage is empty. The act can as well end here. But O’Casey presents an entirely as yet unseen face of the two women’s personality that shows that O’Casey’s humanism stands above everything else.

“A short pause, then again, is heard a scream of pain from Nora. The door opens and Mrs.Gogan and Bessie are seen standing at it.”

Bessie wants to call a doctor to help Nora. Mrs.Gogan has the right reasons not to go. Besides, it will be unsafe to go. No doctor will care to come with the city underfire and in flames. Yet Bessie Burgess says, “I’ll risk it... Give her a little of Fluther’s whisky... It’s th’ fright that’s brought it on her so soon... Go on back to her, you...”

“Mrs.Gogan goes in, and Bessie softly closes the door.
She is moving forward, when the sound of some rifle shots, and the tok, tok, tok, of a distant machine-gun brings her to a sudden halt. She hesitates for a moment, then she tightens her shawl round her, as if it were a shield, then she firmly and swiftly goes out."

"Bessie (as she goes out) oh, God, be Thou my help in time o' throuble. An' shelter me safely in th' shadow of thy wings!"

This is the moment when the audience will hold its breath. A woman much maligned for her independent views and open criticism is the one who risks her life to save another. The curtain falls on her as in Act One. Bessie shows the power of prayer as stronger than anything else and the prayer is so brief and to the point, it stands out in painful contrast to the Voice of the Speaker in Act Two.

"In Act Three the thematic use of dramatic space is less exciting than in Act Two, for in order to place an insurrection on stage O'Casey had little choice but to use the traditional horizontal flow across the stage... The time of crisis has come, and, of course, in drama, crisis is the moment which reveals character entirely... The time of crisis does not inspire any heroism for Ireland, but it does inspire
the heroic of one human being for another human being."(69)

Questions have been raised as to the veracity of the loots. "To the naturalistic imagery of prostitutes and brawling hags, O'Casey now adds the looters and those who do not steal but stay at home do so out of cowardice, not morality. O'Casey is remorselessly true to fact, but he is not a bleak naturalist, for having a nadir and sounded a bottom to humanity, he begins to re-ascend. O'Casey's ascent, is on his own terms."

"Her (Nora's) personal cry of suffering cannot echo with anguished cry of mankind, and she cannot lift her predicament into the dimensions of tragedy, it falls into pathos. It is difficult to make a tragic heroine out of a pretty girl. The Ophelias, the Cordelias and Desdemonas are always the means of bringing suffering to others, but the tragedy takes place in Hamlet, King Lear and Othello. It is only when woman exults in destruction, when the womb of life becomes the organ of death, that we have the inversion of natural order that creates the terror necessary for tragedy. Medea, Clytemnestra, Lady Macbeth, these are tragic heroines but poor Nora is only an object of pity."(71)
"Unfortunately, failing to achieve the terror necessary for tragedy or the grotesque ironies necessary for tragi-comedy, O’Casey relies upon Boucicault melodrama ... the scene is only too complete when we learn at the curtain of Act Three that Nora was with child when her husband cast her to the floor."(72)

Attacking a pregnant woman, here Nora, is a reworking of Jack Boyle attacking his daughter Mary Boyle.

Heinz Kosak describes Act Three thus: "...In Act Three the characters find themselves driven back to the street in the slums which they can only leave in danger of their lives...."(73)

Discussing the relationship between stage actions and background events, he finds a scene in Act Three a classic, example where military events overflow onto the stage itself. "This is the scene where the military personnel appear with the wounded Langon; and Nora and Clitheroe play a domestic scene. Clitheroe uses violence to get away from Nora." This scene, the critic feels, is most significant in four aspects:

1. It elucidates the actual battle situation operating much more effectively than the reports previously given by other characters... death for
one's country loses much of its romantic aura when it is preceded by a wound..."

2. "The scene serves a contrast to the preceding and ensuing episodes. ... O’Casey’s sequence illustrates the various aspects of war without condemning any of them...

3. "...The dramatic prophecy of Act Two is thus confirmed, and after Langon’s prophetic oath has been fulfilled, the audience will expect imprisonment for Brennan and death for Jack. The line of development ends in Act Four, where Brennan brings the news of Jack’s death and is himself led into captivity."

4. "The scene under discussion contributes considerably to the characterization of the figures involved in it, at the same time clarifying O’Casey’s own attitude."

"This scene shows more clearly than any other that the Rising is not a farce, that the insurgents are suffering... It becomes explicit that O’Casey does not see his work as a one-sided criticism of the Easter Rising."(74)

Ronald G. Rollin’s criticism that the insurgents were
"sunshine soldier" who lack the stamina and courage to carry the colors to the front" is answered by O'Casey's in this scene. (75)

The Third Act helps us understand the characters better and their behaviour makes it possible to judge their human qualities and renders explicit the scale of human values.

Act Four

The locale is reduced to the living room of Bessie Burgess. There is a heavy compression of space. "It is one of two small attic rooms." It is "compressed confinement". "There is an unmistakable air of poverty bordering on destitution."

The set is very functional but in a realistic style. "A small arm chair near by. One small window at Back." What is more relevant is the following description. "Under the window to the Right is an oak coffin standing on two kitchen chairs. Near the coffin is a home-manufactured stool, on which are two lighted candles." The looted property also finds its place in the room.

"There is no light in the room but that given from the two candles and the fire." The time is given clearly. "The dusk has well fallen; and the glare of the burning buildings in the town can be seen through the window, in the distant
sky."

"The Covey and Fluther have been playing cards sitting on the floor by the light of the candle on the stool near the coffin."

There are three people on the stage. The Covey, Fluther and Peter. "Fluther is continuously kneeling beside the window, continuously looking out." There is a passage of time --a few days -- between Act Three and Act Four.

There is no sound whatever. The coffin stands as an excellent and meaningful symbol of Dublin and the Rising. It is a picture of mourning. The Act begins with the three males. It is in the realistic tradition and this act is a natural corollary to Act Three. The flow of action is natural, and consequential.

An eminent critic puts the background of Act Four very precisely. "Act Four takes place at a time when the insurgents have been crowded together in a few buildings and their capitulation is imminent. In analogy to this, the stage characters have left their flats, seeking refuge in Bessie's shabby room."(76)

Fluther is the window commentator. The most important information given to the audience is "th' sky's gettin' redder
an' redder...you'd think it was afire...Half o' th' city must be burnin'.” And the tenement dwellers have been near hostages into smaller dwellings where they might be safe, at least for a while. Life is no longer a certainty and as a symbolic act, O’Casey makes these three stooges play cards—a game of chance. One can only identify the players by voice. It is “visible darkness” in the attic. The only aural background to this setting is “the feeble moans” of Nora. It can be a moaning for Mollser lying as a symbol of death in the coffin on the stage. Nora may be moaning for her stillborn child. Or, in her mind, in her world, Jack is already dead.

The aural structure of Act Four is one of the most beautifully made by any playwright. The gun shots are partially replaced by the “lilting” of “voices” that chant: “Cr...oss...Red Cr...oss! Ambu...lance, Ambu...lance!” The words are cracked and chanted to communicate more than the surface meaning. Cross may mean death around abounding. The word “Red” may mean a flow of blood which the speaker in Act Two wanted the volunteers to shed. Ambulance also is cut into two, the stress falling on the lance. The situation is heart-rending, with death and decay all around.

It may be pointed out there that this “Voices”,
chanting' "Red Cross" and "Ambulance" is the aural leitmotif. It is a substitute of the Voice of the Speaker in Act Two. Perhaps a direct resultant echo of the call made by the Speaker. A dark, bloody prophecy coming true without realizing the objective of driving away the British.

The heart-piercing tragic tale is told just in a sentence evocative of the most powerful picture that will shatter anybody's poise. Talking about Mollser's demise and Mrs. Gogan's helplessness, O'Casey remarks, "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!" This dialogue is followed by an 'aural' insulation--"Red Cross" and "Ambulance" fracturedly uttered. That is the tragic life of Mrs. Gogan.

There is a double image, in fact. Mollser is already dead. Nora's stillborn child is thrust in Mollser's hands. Death holding death when there is only death about; a cubistic death image, indeed.

The audience will experience an emotional shock to see three people play cards in a house where there are two dead bodies. These are the very men who went to the "Procession" and the meeting and nearly quarrelled among themselves. There
is a certain advantage in the events happening on the stage - the time is compressed, and conquered. Surprisingly, the internecine, petty-fogging is absent among the three.

Given Nora's state of mind, how is it Bessie Burgess who takes continuous care of her is not informed about Nora's health directly. The Covey informs Bessie, and through her to the audience. This may be to sympathise with Nora more when she actually appears.

The three, true to themselves, mildly quarrel over the cards. It is an authentic 'absurd' piece.

Bessie takes charge of the scene. She dominates and admonishes the three from making a noise. Her care for Nora is revealed. She is even threatening, "If I hear a whisper out of one o'zous again, I'll...gut yous!"

Liquor as a part of the Irish life has been quite effectively handled by O'Casey in earlier plays. The trio drank in the pub, and it is so much a part of them, they resort to it even at this sad hour. "Fluther takes a bottle of whisky from his pocket, and takes a drink." He is almost a Zen Buddhist and believes only in the present moment and, therefore, he justifies his drink.

The picture changes. "Bessie is seated in an arm chair
at the fire." The sequence describes more of Nora's condition. Bessie herself is tired and takes a wink or two.

The Covey asks for silence as he senses somebody moving. There is 'a pause'. It must be pretty agonising for the audience and the four characters on the stage. O'Casey gives Brennan's entry thus:

"Then the door opens and Captain Brennan comes into the room. He has changed his uniform for a suit of civvies. His eyes droop with the heaviness of exhaustion; his face is pallid and drawn. His clothes are dusty and stained here and there with mud. He leans heavily on the back of a chair as he stands."

This is O'Casey's master stroke. On earlier two occasions Brennan was seen in military attire as Captain Brennan. But now he is seen in 'civvies' stained with mud. His battle is over. He has reversed his role to a civilian, a vaulTe face for him.

Captain Brennan wants to meet Mrs. Clitheroe. O'Casey makes Bessie answer him. "What d'ye want with Mrs. Clitheroe?" This gives a clue that Captain Brennan right from the start nursed a grudge against Nora because she preferred Jack to Brennan. There can be a sense of negative satisfaction in
Capt. Brennan in the death of Jack. Bessie being a realist smells sad news and asks instantly "killed! He's not killed, is he!"

Brennan admits: "...I had to leave him to save myself."

Brennan didn't defend his country or his friend, sadly though.

It is ironical, purely authorial irony—that Captain Brennan who brings the news of Jack's promotion brings the news of Jack's death as well. He plays the 'messenger' as in Greek plays. He quotes the General paying a tribute to dead Jack. "Commandant Clitheroe's end was a gleam of glory. Mrs.Clitheroe's grief will be a joy when she realizes that she had hero for a husband." But the General is not aware that Brennan in civvies is a deserter. He would not have approved of Brennan's self-appointed role of a 'messenger' to inform Jack's death.

Only after the death of Jack is informed to the other characters on the stage does O'Casey bring in Nora on the stage, upon whose mental and physical condition nearly all the characters have commented. The 'three stooges' are frozen playing cards, Bessie and Brennan are on the other side of the stage and Nora enters as a somnambulist living in delusion much like Lady Macbeth. There is no dialogue. This silence is most meaningful and powerful.
“Nora appears at door. She is clad only in her night dress; her hair uncared for some days is hanging in disorder over her shoulders...Her eyes are glimmering with the light of incipient insanity, her hands are nervously fiddling with her night gown.”

The brief soliloquy confirms her ‘insanity’. This is mainly as a supportive sequence to show how Nora has already been described, and also to invoke empathy in the audience to judge for themselves what war brings to a housewife. It may be added here, she is the only housewife, young at that, in the entire play, who is against all wars. Bessie silences the others on the stage. She prefers to deal with Nora herself. There is a sudden eruption of minor violence, an echo of the violence outside, when Nora, who was so kind to Fluther in Act One, grips him by the shoulder and asks him about her baby. “Where is it? Where’s my baby...My baby, my baby...I want my baby!” A real melodramatic piece. O’Casey makes Bessie pity her instantly. “Blessin O’ God on us, isn’t this pitiful!” O’Casey makes Nora scream and fight with Bessie to release herself from her. She physically struggles. Bessie and Mrs.Gogan fought in Act Two in the pub. There is physical violence again, but entirely of another chrome. O’Casey makes
Nora his mouthpiece now and gives out his opinion about the Rising itself. "Murderers, that’s what yous are; murderers, murderers!"

The scene where Nora imagines Jack is present and keeps on talking to him is a piece of clever craftsmanship. The impact of romance, though now unreal and lost, is brought to surface by a one-sided re-enactment of a romantic episode which the audience had not seen before, but which they see now with Jack in absentia. The intensity of a young woman’s love for her child and husband cannot be portrayed more forcefully. Even in her lapses into insanity, her main concern is only her child and husband.

O’Casey employs authorial irony, again, in Nora asking Bessie to hold her hand, and put her arm around her. In Act One, it is Nora who informs Jack of her fear of Bessie and an attack from her. The charm of this brief episode with Bessie and Nora, lies in the fact that O’Casey makes Bessie treat Nora as a child having already established Nora’s intense desire to have a child. She is treating her now as a child and she plays her mother, and sings a song for her which is atonce a lullaby and a prayer; a prayer uttered for the
suffering tenement dwellers and misguided insurgents as well.

Looked at from another point of view, this "song" which is actually a prayer stands in contrast to the "romantic" song that Jack sang for Nora in the First Act.

Brennan's mask of a "committed" insurgent, and his patriotism is exposed when the Covey asks him to "slip back". He is an opportunist of the deplorable order. He gave the inmates to understand that he braved to bring the news of Jack's death. But the fact reveals he has come to take shelter as a hostage. "There's no chance o'slippin' back now, for th' military are everywhere; a fly couldn't get through. I'd never have got here, only I managed to change me uniform for what I'm wearin'...I'll have to take me change, an' thry to lie low here for a while." He has derobed himself to escape capture and death.

The "trio" are apprehensive of Capt. Brennan's presence. In Bessie's prayer, the last stanza is thrown on the "trio" and Brennan. They take a scare of his presence as the "Tommies" are bound to barge in searching for him. They look upon him as a harbinger of trouble. One would expect the "trio" to push Brennan out, but they continue to play cards, even amidst living in death. Surprisingly it is Brennan who
declared in Act Two “Death for th’ Independence of Ireland!”

O’Casey cannot afford to prolong the card playing scene any more to sustain the audience interest. Therefore, he brings in Corporal Stoddart of the Wiltshires. It is a contrast to the entry of Capt. Brennan made only a few moments ago. While Brennan is no longer a Captain but now only a fugitive, a ‘runagate’, Stoddart is a Corporal, in uniform. This is a visual irony in terms of costumes.

“The door opens and Corporal Stoddart of the Wiltshires enters in full war kit, steel helmet, rifle and bayonet, and trench tool. He looks around the room. A pause and a palpable silence.”

The audience must be holding their breath because the pause is meaningful and threatening as well. It is Fluther who breaks the silence. Corporal Stoddart’s first remark is about the coffin. There is a mild ‘black humour’ when the Corporal wants information as to who “goes with the ‘stiff?’” The Covey is unaware of it. His reply indicates none of the three has any intention to go with it. Bessie entering the scene asks the corporal: “Oh, are yous goin’ to take away poor little Mollser?” This is authorial irony of a high order. She doesn’t want the army to take away Mollser, dead though.
The Covey given a shadow of a provocation will begin to lecture even to an army man about the "evils of the system" forgetting that his own life is under peril. Only Bessie proves she is a realist. She asks the right question. "How is things in th' town, Tommy?" The Rising is summed up by the Corporal: "Ow, it was only a little bit of a dawg-foight". As if to reiterate his statement, "the sharp ping of the sniper's rifle is heard, followed by a squeal of pain", followed by the chorus of Red Cross and Ambulance. Even as the Corporal swears vengeance, "We'll jab the belly aht of 'im, we will!" the audience and the characters on the stage tick seconds with fear. Mrs.Gogan enters, unaware of what is going on inside. "Mrs.Gogan comes in tearfully, and a little proud of the importance of being directly connected with death." Only through Mrs.Gogan do the audience get to know the great risk taken and sacrifice made by Fluther. It is he who has arranged for the undertaker. The tenderest moment arises out of the following sentence. "...Mother...won't forget to whisper, now an' again, th' name o' Fluther." Mrs.Gogan thanks everyone around.

"The Covey, Fluther, Brennan and Peter carry out the coffin, followed by Mrs.Gogan." The stage has only two people
a sleepy Bessie and the Corporal and the latter asks who is asleep. This is yet another device to provoke humour. The Corporal and Bessie talk at cross purposes. But Bessie makes her convictions and loyalties clear. She has her share of agony as a mother. Her only son went to th' front in th' first contingent of Dublin Fusiliers, an' that's on his way home carryin' a shattered arm that he got fightin' for his king an' country!" Is she a reworking of Mrs. Tancred? O'Casey quickly changes the stage picture. Bessie sinks into sleep. "Her head sinks slowly forward again. Peter comes into the room; his body is stiffened and his face is wearing a comically indignant look. He walks to and fro, at the back of the room, evidently repressing a violent desire to speak angrily. He is followed in by Fluther, the Covey, and Brennan who slinks into an obscure corner of the room, nervous of notice." There is an "embarrassing pause".

The agony of carrying a coffin and leading a hearse is expressed in anger and indignation. That the trio have 'fun' even while carrying a coffin is yet another example of 'black humour'. Bessie in "a sleepy murmur asking the trio to be quiet to let Nora sleep, and Peter's indignation over Fluther and the Covey are all incomprehensible to the Corporal."
The scene, very brief though of the trio with the Corporal is shocking for two reasons. That the trio will be rounded up, and they will be housed in the Church, and they can play the card there too. With the Rising, sacred places like the Church lose their value, and that is the limit.

For the first time O’Casey shows a member of the opposing force burst into a song. There is so much poverty among the ‘Tommies’, that Corporal Stoddart asks the ‘trio’ to bring snacks. His singing, which must be painful to the characters on the stage and also to the audience, is stopped short by the “snap of the sniper’s rifle ring(ing)” out again, followed simultaneously by a scream of pain. Corporal Stoddart goes pale, and brings his rifle to the ready listening. The “Voices Chanting Red..Cro..ss.. Red Cro..ss! Ambul..lance, Ambul..lance!” rent the stage and the auditorium. It is a stunning piece of sound orchestration by O’Casey, where off-stage sounds dominate, and obliterate on-stage sounds.

A song sung by a solo voice accompanied by the ringing of rifles and followed by screams is a piece of coup de theatre.

Sergeant Tinlay enters when the sounds abate. Death is reported. No matter who dies, it is death and death is not
welcome to O’Casey. He is honest in reporting the death leaving the reactions to the characters. In other words, he does not take sides.

Corporal Stoddart could not care less to Fluther’s call for ‘fairness’ or where one belonged - Dublin or not. Patriotism is voiced on wrong occasions to save one’s skin, as evidenced by Fluther, “who are you callin’ a bloighter to, eh? I’m a Dublinman, both born an’ bred in th’ city, see?”

Despite the verbal bravado by Fluther, the inmates are flushed out. It must be noticed, that all the while, Brennan has been hiding himself in some corner. Also, none of the other characters made any reference about him either to Corporal Stoddart or to Sergeant Tinley. If Brennan is not a croward, who is he? It is Brennan who asked Jack in Act Three, “...If you want to act th’ renegade, say so, an’ we’ll be off!” O’Casey leaves it to the audience to make their own conclusions about Brennan’s episode and character. Brennan achieved what he planned as a jilted lover—to destroy the love life of the Clitheroes.

O’Casey now offers a different stage picture. “Peter, Brennan, the Covey and Fluther, followed by the soldiers, go out. Bessie is sleeping heavily on the chair by the fire.
After a pause, Nora appears at the door, left, in her night dress. Remaining at door for a few moments she looks vaguely around the room. She then comes in quietly, goes over to the fire, pokes it, and puts the kettle on. She thinks for a few moments, pressing her hand to her forehead. She looks questioningly at the fire, and then at the press at back. She goes to the press, opens it, takes out a soiled cloth and spreads it on the table. She then places things for tea on the table."

All this takes place in near darkness and in total silence. Nora lives in her past. She has lost all sense of time. She is deluded and recreates the scenes already lived in the Company of Jack. This scene is done mainly to tap tears from the audience and is melodramatic in its approach. The only sounds that are counterpointed with her chanting are the "voices chanting in distance street, Ambulance, Ambulance! Red Cross, Red Cross!" Over this chanting is a mild solo by Nora, the last stanza of a love song sung earlier in Act One by Jack. "This sort of lyric flashback at the heart of a painful storm works well here, as it does in Hamlet and Othello not as gratuitous pathos, but rising naturally out of what has gone before and pursuing the main themes of the
The scene is a reworking of the technique he employed in *Juno and the Paycock* when Mary Boyle asks Jerry Devine to recall the love-song. As she complete the stanza, "a burst of rifle fire is heard in a street nearby, followed by the rapid tok, tok, tok of a machine-gun."

Nora screams for the baby and Jack. Bessie wakes up. As Nora runs to the window, Bessie runs to her to push her away from the window. The soldiers outside shout "Git away from that window, there!"

It is not difficult to imagine what O'Casey is manoeuvring for—death of Bessie. In O'Casey's words, "With a great effort Bessie pushes Nora away from the window, the force used causing, her to stagger against it herself. Two rifle shots ring out in quick succession. Bessie jerks her body convulsively, stands stiffly for a moment, a look of agonized astonishment on her face, then she staggers forward, leaning, heavily on the table with hands."

The action in silence serves as a bridge to the dialogue outburst. Bessie screams: "Merciful God, I'm shot, I'm shot!...The life's pourin' out o' me!" She wants to live and shouts for a doctor. Nora is not conscious at all.
is happening. She has lost all her cognitive faculties. O’Casey works out a stunning stage picture that none of his verbal rhetoric can really match. "She (Bessie) staggers frightened towards the door, to seek for aid, but weakening half-way across the room, she sinks to her knees, and bending forward, supports herself with her hands resting on the floor. Nora is standing rigidly with her back to the wall opposite, her trembling hands held out a little from the sides of her body, her lips quivering, her breast heaving, staring wildly at the figure of Bessie". She stands alienated from Bessie and continues to live in delusion so much that Bessie’s pleadings to call for a doctor go unrecognized.

"Bessie’s body lists over and she sinks into a prostrate position on the floor." The war has created such havoc that intercommunication between two people is dead. There is death of communication, and death of relationship. Bessie forgets Nora and utters her last prayer. Her prayer itself evokes irony:

"I do believe, I will believe
That Jesus died for me;
That on th’ cross He shed His
blood,"
From sin to set me free."

She repeats the prayer. An unasked question by O’Casey; for whose sake, and for what cause, is the blood shed now by the insurgents, and whom will it set free?

A pause. On the stage there is a demented woman and a dead body. Mollser is substituted by Bessie. Mrs. Gogan enters and learns about Bessie’s death. She is motherly to Nora. Everyone is kind to Nora now.

"Sergeant Tinley and Corporal Stoddart enter agitatedly, their rifles at the ready". O’Casey shows Nora recognising Bessie’s body. Mrs. Gogan describes her hands thus "...her hands is whitenin’ into th’ smooth shininess of wax..." echoing Shakespeare on Desdemona, "smooth as monumental alabaster."

Nora and Mrs. Gogan go slowly out. On the stage are only the two Tommies.

They take tea. "Corporal Stoddart pours out two cups of tea, and the two soldiers begin to drink. In the distance is heard a bitter brust of rifle and machine-gun fire, interspersed with the boom-boom of the artillery. The glare in sky seen through the window flares into a fuller and a deeper
red." The stage is in near darkness. The redness through the window is dominant.

There is no tenement dweller left in the attic. Instead, there are two 'Tommies' drinking somebody else's tea. Sergeant Tinley informs the audience about the general attack on the Post Office. Over his announcement the choir of "Ambulance and Red Cross" is placed and as a counterpoint. "The Voices of soldiers at a barricade outside the house" singing, "They were summoned from the 'illside'" is juxtaposed, and as the stanza ends on "And although our 'eart is breaking, make it sing this cheery song," is continued from
an off-stage chorus to an on-stage duet." Keep the "owme fires burning,

While your "earts are yearning;
Though your lads are far away
They dream of "owme;
There's a silver loining
Through the dark of cloud shoining,
Turn the dark cloud inside out,
Till the boys come "owme!"

They sip the tea, and on a physical level there is fire on the stage, from the fire-hearth. The stage is otherwise dark. The flickering of fire from the fire-hearth (on the stage) is heavily counterpointed and stressed by the red sky off stage, seen from the window. The last picture is shattering, although similar to the end in Juno and the Paycock. Nonetheless, it is a telling and ironic picture.

Whose home is it now and for whom is the fire burning? There is no trace of the insurgents, and the "Tommies' have already occupied the tenement. Whither Rising? A painful irony, exclusively authorial. The Fourth Act also ends in a song different from the ones that preceded. There is thus a rhythm in the ending of action on the stage.
The Fourth Act taking place as it does in Bessie’s attic becomes a microcosm of Dublin in particular and Ireland in general. "The last act of the *The Plough and the Stars* in which the survivors shelter in an attic room is another O’Casey’s triumph. The unifying activity is the progress of a game of cards interrupted by action and reflection."(78)

AN ASSESSMENT

Heinz Kosok considers *The Plough and the Stars* as the best play of O’Casey and enumerates several reasons for his assessment. He declares it “as one of the most important plays of the twentieth century”.(79)

(a) It is perfection of technique.

(b) O’Casey achieves a very high degree of universality uncommon in a realistic play.

(c) *The Plough and the Stars* reveals several concentric circles ranging beyond the case of the individual. None of the previous plays incorporated to such a degree the fate of a large group of people.

(d) There is a very high level of objectivity in the play.

(e) The quality of *The Plough and the Stars* is determined by the large number of themes it touches despite its formal concentration.
"O’Casey brings on the instruments of oppression, the British soldiers, matter of factly, and, although we bear them threatening ‘cold steel’ for the snipers when they catch them, there is a sense of their ordinariness and of the horror winding down.” (80)

"Do O’Casey’s early writings find adequate expression in The Plough and the Stars? And the answer would have to be yes but in a different manner. There are, of course, the well-known themes that manifest themselves throughout the play—the uniform issue, the blood sacrifice idea, the destruction of Capitalist property; all issues which O’Casey argued pro and con prior to the Rising—but they are subtly woven into the action rather than being balantly ridiculed, as O’Casey did before the Rising.” (81)

The supreme success of The Plough and the Stars lies in the way O’Casey handles the events in their truest perspective. No single character is allowed to dominate as in the earlier two plays, particularly Juno and the Paycock. Each character is like a piece of mosaic and as they are laid in the design as O’Casey conceived them. Collectively they communicate compulsively rare viewpoints that are at once charming and disturbing. “Each of the characters is lost in a
private dream of self-importance but each lacks a definite, effective relationship with his world. Since they are lower class, they lack power; since they lack power, they have atrophied wills, since they have atrophied wills, they dream themselves into the places where they matter."(82)

"They are as they are and for which they are, creatures full of vanity and windy emotions, childlike, superstitious, sentimental, kindly, greedy, full of ferocity and fear, capable of courage, play acting, and a sour sort of romance, and with it all pitiable.... They have their strutting vanity, and their mouths are full of wrinkled words... but they have, too, a comic dignity and glory which raises them above their sordid circumstances. These people steal into our affections even, while we are informing each other that they are hopeless and can never be regenerate."(83) None can sum up better than St. John Ervine. "...although each character is an individual he is still made subservient to the author’s purpose in the creation of a total effect i.e., the author’s interpreted and shaped ‘facts’."(84) This view makes it clear that O’Casey was more concerned with projecting the play rather than with projecting his characters, as he did in his two earlier plays. The author quoted earlier goes as far as to say, that
"O'Casey's technical experimentation began some while before his definite break with naturalism in Act Two of *The Silver Tassie". (85)

Bobby L. Smith writing on *The Plough and the Stars* concludes that "*The Plough and the Stars*...is the best of the Irish plays, combining the humour, pathos, and the tragedy of the other four." (86)

Jack Lindsay in his *The Plough and the Stars, Reconsidered* (1976) pays a tribute that it deserves: "...it is a true work of art that has engaged the whole of its author's being, his grasp of the world and his sensibilities at all levels. Any analysis we make of it is not likely to exhaust all its qualities and meanings, and any simplified interpretation is not going to enter into its real nature as a work of art at all." (87)

Another critic sums up the play's achievement thus: "Only if one considers this multiplicity of themes, in addition to the fact that O'Casey in this play mastered extremely complicated formal problems, can the importance of *The Plough and the Stars* be fully appreciated." (88)
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37. According to Harry Bergholz, The Plough and the Stars is °in erster Linie...die Tragedie einer liebenden. Frau (Sean (O’Casey’s *Englische Studien*, LXV, (1930/31. p.61). Starkie sees Fluther as O’Casey’s °ironical mouth piece character’ (The Plays of Sean O’Casey, p.231). Cowasjee
considers Rosie as the only one with whom the dramatist aligns himself (Sean O'Casey, p.67). To Renee Saurel, it is the Covey qui reflete le mieux la croyance "O'Casey en l'avenir d'un socialisme libérateur..." ("un dramaturge inconfortable, Temps Modernes, XVII, 1961/62 No.193, of Maureen Malone, The Plays of Sean O'Casey, (Carbondale Ill., 1969), p.6.

38. Hogan Robert, "The Experiments of Sean O'Casey" (New York, St. Martins Press, 1960) cites eight central characters; he overlooks the importance of Brennan.


54. Padraic Pearse, Collected Works Political Writings and Speeches, p. 99.


59. Cf. O'Casey's positive remarks on Pearse, quoted by


64. Cowasjee, Saros, O’Casey, Writers and critics: Oliver and Boyd Edinburgh, London, p.34.


67. Simmons, James, Sean O’Casey MacMillan (London), (1983), p.84.


69. Thompson William Irwin, The Imagination of an


73. Kosak Heinz, O’Casey The Dramatist, Barnes and Noble Books, Totowa, New Jersey, 1985, p.78.

74. Kosak Heinz, O’Casey The Dramatist, Barnes and Noble Books, Totowa, New Jersey, 1985, p.79.


