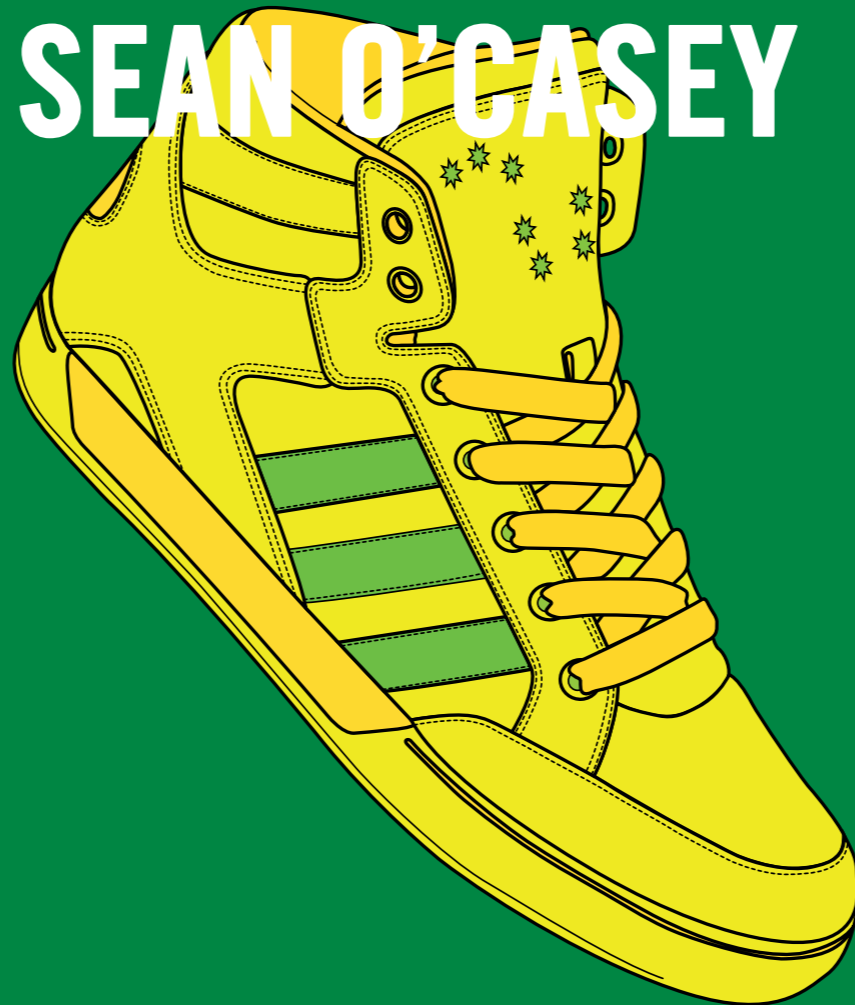


ABBEY THEATRE
**THE PLOUGH
AND THE STARS**

SEAN O'CASEY



CONTENTS

1 Introduction	3
2 How to Use This Pack	4
3 The Interviews	5
4 A Plough For Now – Four Contemporary Views	26
5 Comparing Plough	31
6 Tallaght Community School	33

INTRODUCTION

In the second act of *The Plough and the Stars* the inhabitants of a Dublin pub are stirred, annoyed, enraged and inspired by the speech of ‘The Figure in the Window’ who is never a part of the main action.

His political rhetoric has a huge impact on their lives and yet he exists at a distance. Just a few weeks ago, in Ireland, we too heard many figures at the window exhorting us to vote for them in the latest national elections.

The Plough and the Stars is not a museum piece that romanticises the feisty spirit of the tenements and celebrates The Rising. It is a passionately critical work which, while sympathetic to those who lived in the shadows of history, is scathing about the myth-making that led people to die for a cause that O’Casey believed wasn’t in their best interests. In a way *The Plough and the Stars* isn’t really about 1916 at all but about the world it gave rise to in 1925, the year it was written. It is about how that world isn’t the one it could have been. This play is a classic because that sense of frustration, and possibility, is still alive today.

So how do you reproduce the fierce but humane stance of a work that is loved and revered but whose political complexities are glossed over? In rehearsals director Sean Holmes asked the cast to list what annoyed them about Ireland today and pointed out how similar those issues were with the themes of the play.

We feel Sean, the cast and the whole creative team have honoured O’Casey’s spirit by creating a Plough for now which reminds us that poverty, oppression, false idealism and self-delusion are still undermining the better society we could be. This 2016 production challenges us to take back our agency in making our own country. To not be stirred so easily by our own figures at the window.

Phil Kingston,
Community and Education Manager, Abbey Theatre
— March, 2016.

HOW TO USE THIS PACK

This pack was inspired by a letter sent to the Abbey Theatre by Danielle Oliver from Tallaght Community School in February 2015. Danielle asked if we knew of any DVDs of *'The Plough and The Stars'* that could help her class with their Leaving Cert. We decided that seeing a live production would be better so on April 11th 2016 we took our current production out to the school itself. Before then we liaised with Danielle's teacher Caroline Gilleran and her colleagues to create a pack suited to their students.

To emphasise that theatre is a practical art we've focussed on the Abbey Theatre's 2016 production of the play as directed by Sean Holmes. From the pop art inspired poster to Mollser's football jersey this production was keen to emphasise the play's significance for today.

Then we asked the students of Tallaght Community School to interview those who actually make the play they were studying for their Leaving Cert. They asked the questions they felt were most important and from this original material we've drawn out the points they'll need for their exams. You can also see some information about Tallaght, the school and the students who did the interviewing.

To emphasise the plays contemporary relevance we've commissioned four writers deeply engaged with contemporary Ireland to comment on how its themes are still alive today. We've chosen journalists, politicians, community activists and theatre makers. All of whom had no trouble finding modern equivalents.

Each interview is annotated to highlight the following;



INTERVIEWS

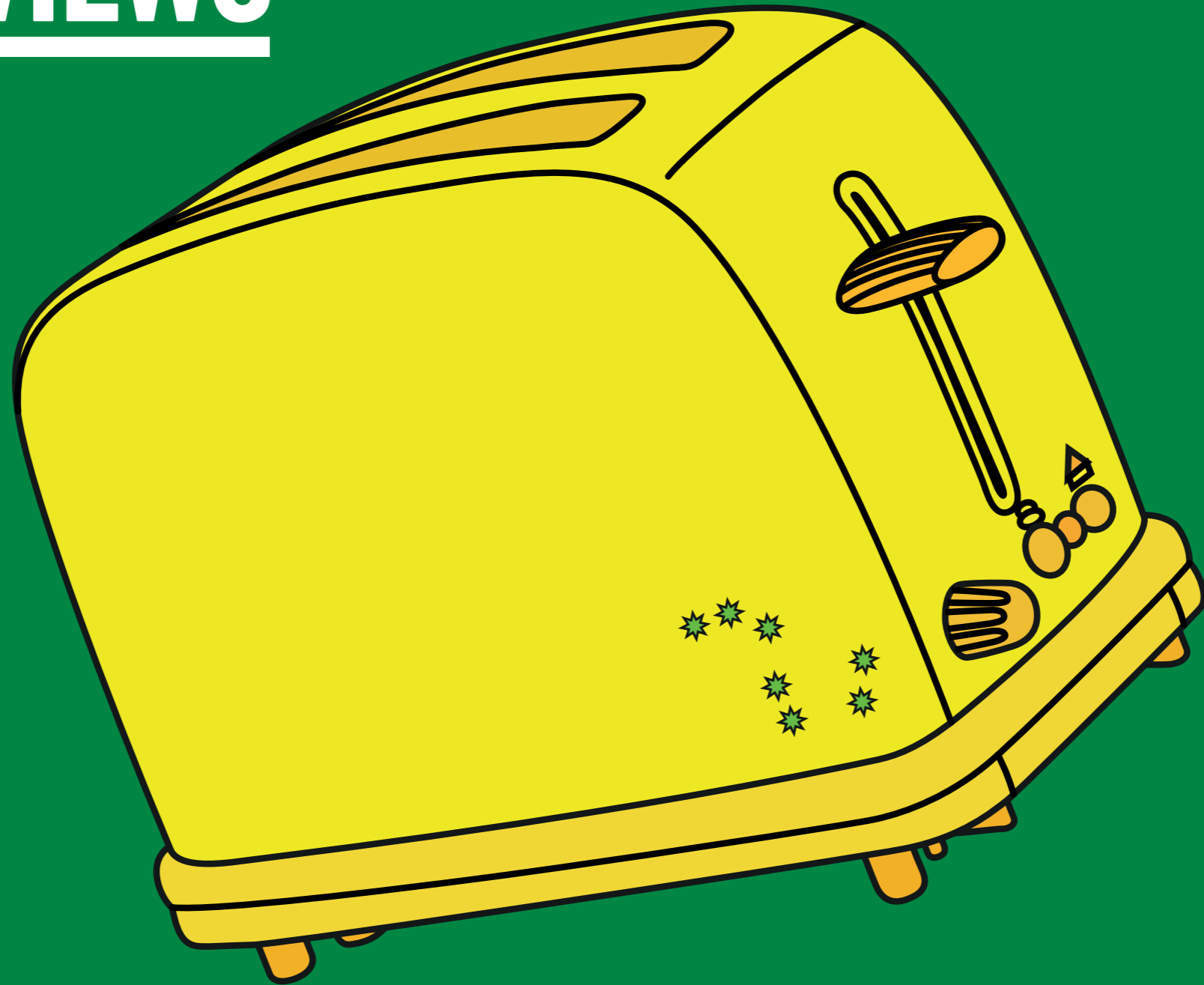




IMAGE: Eileen Walsh in rehearsal as Bessie Burgess.

Interview with

BESSIE BURGESS Played by
Eileen Walsh

Interviewed by Rachel Flynn and Danielle Oliver

EILEEN WALSH TALKS ABOUT HER CHARACTER BESSIE BURGESS

Bessie Burgess – who is she really?

C When we first meet her she is very drunk and hiding a lot of anger and grief. She is frustrated as she is missing her son. She is incredibly poor, one of the poorest in the house and most likely drinking very cheap alcohol which makes her even more aggressive. She is not eating much because she can't afford it. There is a part of her that is desperate to reach out but is always feeling an outsider and anger makes her proud of it. She wants to be independent in the house but when push comes to shove she is the very person who cares for them and catches them when they fall.

Is she jealous of Nora?

C She is jealous of the fact that she has her man by her side. Also, Nora is now in a flat where there are four **CC** incomes and Bessie has nothing, she has little money she received from her son off at war but that's it. The overwhelming jealousy is for the financial safety, her youth, the fact Nora is starting out, and the fact that Jack and Nora are always kissing and cuddling.

TH What obstacles do the women in this play have to overcome?

CC Women have to try and make the money stretch far enough and Nora is very good at that. **O'Casey** shows us that men were seen as the head of the household but women were the spine and the strength. They need to get food, keep the place warm, look after the men, and make sure that Mollser doesn't die.

How widespread was the support for the Protestant religion in 1916 Dublin?

CC There were a lot of Protestants but an overwhelming number of Catholics. The pride and the Unionism remained very strong particularly because they were outnumbered. Interestingly Bessie says she always got herself ready for Church, particularly when she knew "God Save the King" was going to be played at the end. **CC** She constantly tells them of how proud she is of the lion and unicorn but it would have been very difficult for her as they were completely **TH** outnumbered and seen as British sympathisers.

What deeply embedded attitudes from 1916 do you see in the characters?

CC When Jack Clitheroe comes in during the opening everything shifts because he is the man of the house. **C** It is the attitude that men deserve respect and are somehow seen as the providers even when within the story the women really are the ones who are putting it on the table. **GVV** **O'Casey** wrote this in 1926 so, ten years after the Rising, and his whole opinion was to look back on the Rising and see what has it done for us, what have we become? And the Covey says such brilliant things like what is freedom without the financial emancipation of the people, if you're going to keep everyone squashed down; freedom is nothing until you let them earn a decent wage, and then their voices can be heard.

What features do you like best or least about your character?

C What I like least about her is her spitting anger.
The thing I like about her is her honesty.

In our mock English paper we were asked to choose the most dramatic episode in the play, what part would you choose and why?

P There is a wonderful moment where Captain Brennan comes back in and says "Jack's been shot, Jack's dead" and "I tried my best, I even have the bullet holes from running away meself" and then they hear a noise and they are all terrified, thinking who is coming up the stairs and they try to hide him. It feels like a brilliant TV moment, but you have to earn it, the audience have to know how scared we all are and they have to have followed the story to that point to know what's at risk. Everyone could get shot in that room, not just Brennan, everyone because they're all hiding him now too. And then, will the British sympathiser give him away?

KS

P

CC

C

If you had a choice what other character would you play and why?

C They're all great, Mrs Gogan is hilariously funny. The three (Nora, Bessie, Mrs Gogan) are all very memorable characters but I love who I play.

Do you think this play is still relevant today?

MP Yeah, I do. It's also going to be a production that is very present. When you see the housing crisis, the financial crisis, we're not that far away from it. You're not that far away when you've got people who have to pay to go to the doctor, when you have to judge if your kid is sick enough? For the fact that people are living in hotels with their kids, how do they cook food? You're building up a whole class of people who are very angry because they're very poor and they have to find a way out. For them, is it drugs? For us (in the play) it would have been drink. What use is freedom? What use is having an independent Ireland if the people aren't respected in it?

CC

P

TH



IMAGE: Janet Moran as Mrs Gogan.



IMAGE: Ciarán O'Brien in rehearsal as The Young Covey.

Interview with

THE YOUNG COVEY

Played by
Ciarán O'Brien

Interviewed by Rachel Flynn and Danielle Oliver

CIARÁN O'BRIEN TALKS ABOUT HIS CHARACTER THE YOUNG COVEY

What is your opinion of The Young Covey?

- C** He's a big socialist but he's quite juvenile as well.
- GVV** O'Casey uses him to show his views on socialism.
- C** He has great ideals and wants to be heard. He wants to express those opinions but he doesn't have empathy for other people. He flips against Rosie and shows that he is not able to deal with people.

Uncle Peter is Nora's uncle, what is their relationship like?

- C** I suppose they have a kind of loving relationship. A lot of the time Uncle Peter and Covey are basically like kids around Nora and she treats them like children.

What do you think O'Casey's vision of the people in the tenements was?

- C** The great thing O'Casey does is that he shows them as real people so a lot of the time there's unlikeable qualities to the characters. He also shows the real community of the people there. They go through a great hardship but he shows their community spirit and how they are willing to

TH sacrifice themselves for others. He shows how they come together through adversity, even with the example of the lads playing cards, you know, shows solidarity together.

What scene is the most powerful for your character and why?

- C** My most powerful scene is probably in the bar with Rosie because Covey gets to show his socialist ideas and gets to spout all he believes in but also, Rosie shows up his ineptness, how he is afraid of women and intimacy.

The Covey is often portrayed as a very annoying man, do you agree with this statement?

- MP** I wouldn't find him annoying. As an actor you can't play a character who is annoying; someone who is annoying doesn't realise they're annoying. What people find annoying about The Covey is that he just won't shut up. I think that's the case with a lot of people in this play. They want to be heard but they're not really listening either.
- TH**

If you had a choice what other character would you play and why?

- C** I'd like to play Mrs Gogan. I think she's hilarious, going on about and using the language of death. Although I'd have to play a woman and it would be a challenge, I think I could do it!

What are the most important values for your character?

- C** I suppose socialism is a huge thing for him. It's one thing he identifies himself as and wants everyone else to see him as that. He wants to be seen as an intellectual.

What features do you like best or least about your character?

- GVV** I like what O'Casey was trying to say in this play that there is an alternative Ireland, an Ireland for the workers. You know, *The Plough and the Stars* is an alternative flag which was kind of corrupted, I think, by nationalism and blood sacrifice. After 1913 and before going in to 1916 there was a big mobilisation of the workers and workers' rights were at the forefront so I really like that he's left-wing in his politics and
- C**

G saying that there's another way. He's striving for an international as opposed to a national ideal; a workers' republic that is international in its thinking. **TH** What I don't like about him? I probably don't like how he deals with Rosie; he savagely goes for her for showing him up. His capacity to have that anger and his inability to deal with women are not really nice qualities.

Do you think this play is still relevant today?

I think so. I think what the play does is that it kind of asks questions about where we came from and who we are and by asking those questions you're able to open up a conversation about who we are now.

Would you change anything about your character?

C I'd like him to have more empathy for characters and not be so hard-lined in his thinking.

What research and preparation was required to help you connect with your character?

MP I started by reading some Karl Marx and trying to get around that was very difficult. What I found most useful was reading about O'Casey's life and what he went through. I always find a lot of the preparation is actually in the script. So I like to just keep going over the text and talk about it with your fellow actors and your director and see what kind of vision you want to put across.

Do you know all your script yet?

LG I'm nearly there. O'Casey has given a non-naturalistic language to these characters which makes it a bit more difficult to learn but once you get your mouth around it it's amazing and beautiful. I think Irish people have a real affinity with it as well; the use and misuse of it.

In your opinion is your character a leader or a follower?

C He likes to think he's a socialist leader but I think he is a follower of socialism.

What character do you think reflects the cultural context of the play most sharply?

C I'd say probably Mollser. She is very much a product of her society and of tenement life. She is ignored for a lot of the time. She has consumption because of where she lives and then she dies.

Do you feel an added responsibility taking on the role of The Young Covey in the play in such an historical year?

I suppose there is a pressure on us to kind of make this relevant for the year that's in it. We are trying to ask questions about what's happening now. The great thing about this play is that it just keeps bringing up loads of different questions and different themes like the role of women, alcoholism, heroism, nationalism.

It's about trying to get what O'Casey wanted to question modern audience. Obviously there is still huge poverty today but poverty back then is a very different thing. It's hard to replicate that today.

Do you think the men or the women in the play make it stronger?

CC Before this play women were kind of shown in a romantic light, the "women of Ireland" or they were in the background whereas O'Casey puts them to the forefront. He shows their heroism and shows the ugly side of them. They are multifaceted characters as opposed to just being one-dimensional; which makes them more human and more enjoyable to watch.

Do you think the men are weak then?

TH I do. I think he is trying to show a human side to people as opposed to this "aren't we great" blood sacrifice thing. He shows what happens to the people who were left behind or decide not to go and fight in 1916.



IMAGE: Nyree Yergainharsian as Rosie Redmond and Ger Kelly as a Bar-tender. Costume design by Catherine Fay.

Interview with

COSTUME DESIGNER

Catherine Fay

Interviewed by Rachel Flynn and Danielle Oliver

CATHERINE FAY TALKS ABOUT HER WORK AS THE PLAY'S COSTUME DESIGNER

What is the role of the costume designer?

MP

I'm part of the design team where you would have your set designer, costume designer, lighting and sound. From that, I had to research the play and go into depth with the characters and make notes on specific things they do in the play and then items they might wear or use and then start to break it down into the specifics of costume that they would wear. What the Director Seán wanted to do in this production is mix the period so I looked at the all initially in period costume and then started to look back at which ones might fit better into contemporary. Then I used a lot of visuals which I presented to Seán and the other designers. We're going to put Bessie and Mrs Gogan into contemporary costume, as well as Mollser. There are certain characters that will flip between the two and it's kind of trying to knit those together.

Is there anyone who will stay purely contemporary?

Yes, Bessie and Mrs Gogan.

How difficult is it to decide on costumes for each character?

MP

Once you have done a lot of planning and preparation it is straight forward. We've bought fabrics and certain things need to be made by the tailor, like the uniforms. Nora is in period costume so the dressmakers are making her a suit. I'll talk to the actors individually about what they think. I've spoken to David who is playing Fluther and he's keen to make it kind of Chaplin-esque; we might shorten the trousers and beat up the boots, give him a little tie, that kind of thing.

MP

C

How do you, through costume, represent the appalling poverty of the tenements on stage?

CC

What would have been obviously poor then are shawls and very dirty, broken-down clothes. In this, we're kind of going more inner-city and the flats that people will be more familiar with. Certain hairdos that maybe people would wear, certain clothes put together, even things like a nice top with tracksuit bottoms that are not considered really to be an outfit as such. For Mollser in particular I think we probably will dirty it down because it really reads well on stage, the neglect.

MP

What deeply embedded attitudes from 1916 do you see in the characters?

C

I think because David has so many opinions about how he looks, I think he'll look great. But actually, in truth, it may well be Mollser who will be in probably skinny jeans and a football jersey. Because it looks like we kind of just found it hanging around it may well be that one that is my favourite at the end.

MP

How widespread was the support for the Protestant religion in 1916 Dublin?

MP

There's no real difference actually in this one. I think when it comes to Eileen and Janet who play Bessie and Mrs Gogan they will want to try a number of things to get it right so I suppose in some respects that's maybe more difficult. In the end it'll be worth it because if you send somebody out in something that they don't feel right in then nobody will be happy. They need to not be thinking about what they're wearing, they need to just fit.

MP

How widespread was the support for the Protestant religion in 1916 Dublin?

MP

You've got to research what it is in itself and then talk to the director and see what his ideas are. So breaking it down and getting to the nitty gritty of it and then build it back up into something.



IMAGE: Kate Sandy Brennan & James Hayes in rehearsal

Interview with

UNCLE PETER

Played by
James Hayes

Interviewed by Andrew Tyndall and Hannah Skelly

What research and preparation was required to help you connect with your character?

- CC Mostly the script which you read over and over again and not so much what you say but also what people say about you is important in order to connect with the character. Because of his whole thing with the Foresters I had to do some research on them and the Citizen Army and the Volunteers so that was basically where I started.
- MP I mostly work in England doing Shakespeare plays. You [as an actor] are working on a fictional character or even a historical character (but a dramatist has worked on him). When the chips are down, you can only work off what's on the page. You can't come on and say "I am going to try give a hint of this side of the character" because they are not interested. It's hard to get it across if you have not got the language. So,
- C basically reading and the whole thing with the Foresters was fascinating. I read up on this and saw some film on YouTube. Uncle Peter was quite a ludicrous character; in the middle of a scene with all these poor people, he's got this uniform, its extraordinary; britches, high boots, a frilly shirt with a stiff collar, a green frock coat or tail coat with lots of things on it; gold epaulettes and all that.
- CC So it's like something to do with the old Irish history and you think it's going to be rather political and that but in fact they [the Foresters] were a friendly society, they weren't actually political at all. They had certain aspirations they were set up in feudal times when tenants were farmers living at the mercy of the

landlords. When they were run off the land they got together. They were called Foresters because they were made illegal and they used to meet in the forest or the woods, away from everyone. There was the ancient order of the Foresters and they are still around today up in Northern Ireland. They paid a subscription. They were a friendly society because they helped each other. There was no health service or social net for people when they were in a bad way, so they paid a little subscription so that if someone was in trouble the society would try and help them. One of the big things they did was they helped people with a burial, if there was a death in the family, of a family that was very poor, to avoid the horrors of a pauper's grave.

- C He's (Uncle Peter) the kind of symbol of the romantic Ireland that everyone in the play takes the mickey out of. To be honest he's a very one-dimensional character, he's like something out of Dickens. He has very few qualities apart from being cantankerous. He seems to spend the whole play being ridiculed and of course he is easy to ridicule because he is pompous.
- LG

Do you think your character is a leader or a follower?

- C A follower, I think. He is quite fearful. Even when he wants to go off and loot the gun goes off, eventually he says he will go but he won't go with Covey and Fluther, then he won't go with Bessie or Mrs Gogan and then the gun goes off and he is back on stage and doesn't want to know. His cowardice shows he is a
- P
- KS

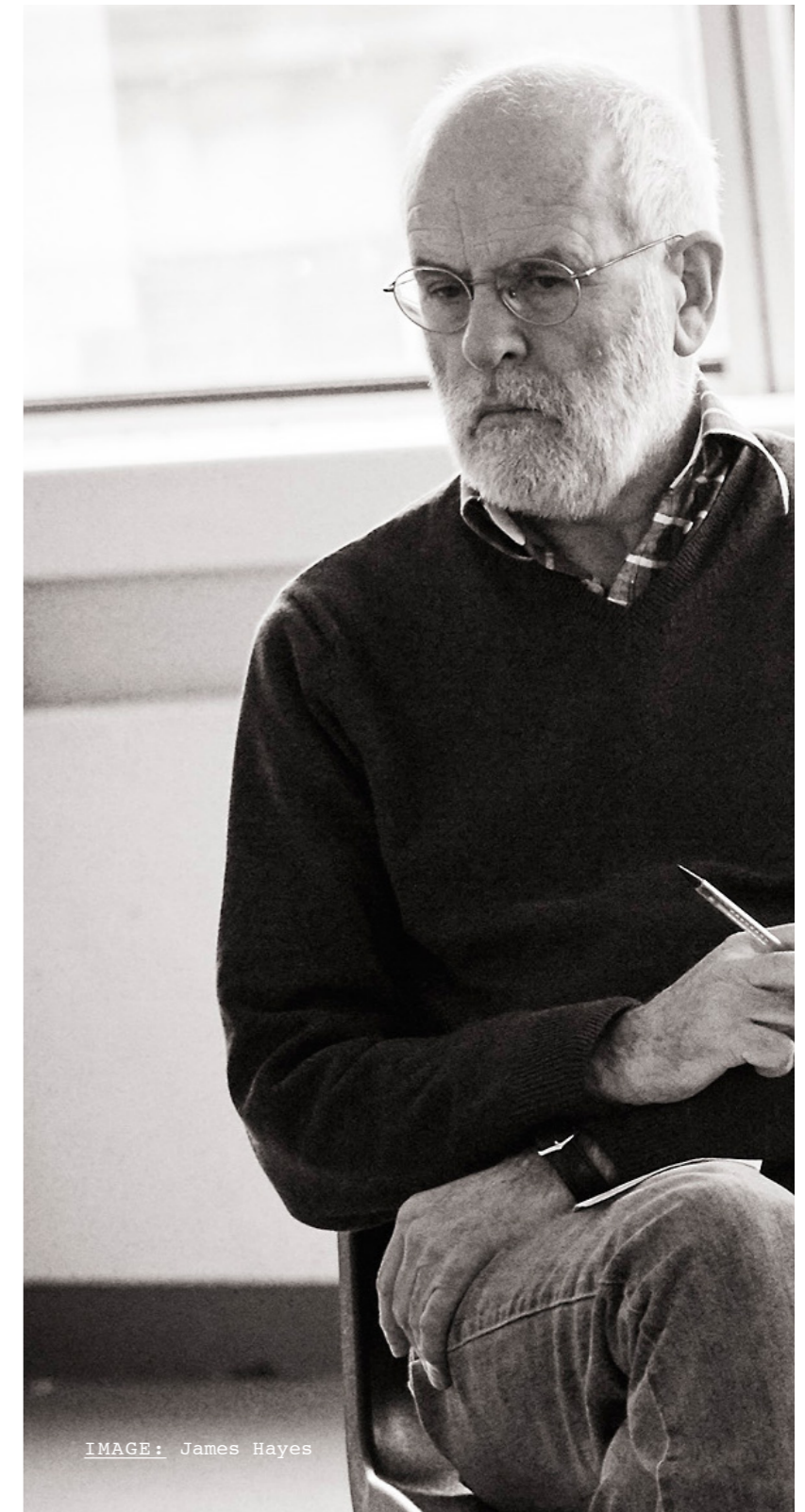


IMAGE: James Hayes

C follower. He is also such a hypocrite. When the Covey comes in with all the stuff he has looted. For instance

P The Covey comes in with a big sack of flour and a

KS ham on it, (in this production of the play there is talk we might blend the modern and ancient here and that

MP he will come on with a washing machine on his back).

C Peter immediately tells him what a terrible person he is; he reminds him that people are dying for Ireland even though two minutes earlier Peter himself might have gone down and stolen things. He is definitely a follower; he is not a leader or a strong character.

Uncle Peter was Norah’s uncle, what is your opinion on their relationship?

MP We haven’t actually gone into that yet. I think he’s quite a sad character really because at the end of the play

C when Nora is losing her mind and Jack is dead, the house is probably destroyed and he’s got nowhere to go. I think he’s like one of those poor relations you see in Victorian times. I think he was related to her mother or something, and either he had lost his job or had some illness or had no money and she took him in. It’s interesting that some of the characters in the

CC play, who aren’t as caught up in the events still suffer so badly. I think it’s terrible for him; it’s like the end

C of the world because despite all the rowing with The Covey and all that, I think it gives him energy and a life; he’s part of a community there but where will he go now? Everything is ruined but he still remains.

Do you feel any added responsibility for taking on this role in such a momentous year?

MP This production is going to rattle a lot of cages. Juno and the Paycock is on at the Gate and I’ve a feeling theirs is going to be a little bit more traditional. The poster depicts classic Dublin. Our poster is apparently going to be very radical and I won’t give much away but the play is going to open with Mollser, the girl

MP (actress part Asian), and she is going to come on at the beginning, there is going to be a microphone and she will be wearing a modern English football shirt (bringing it right up to date) and she is going to do the ‘can you turn off your mobile phones’ and all that but in the middle of all that she may have a hankie and will cough and there will be blood on the hankie.

C Then the safety curtain behind her will go out and you will not get the Dublin tenement, what you will get is a kind of modernish building site with scaffolding and netting around it. So it will really rattle some cages. I think the director is very keen to use this play to say something about where we are today; what the play has to say to everyone today as opposed to a nice historical one and everyone thinking wasn’t it a terrible time and aren’t we lucky we are not part of that now.

CC There is a wonderful bit in the play where one of the English soldiers says “why don’t they come out and fight properly” and it rings so true to me. You think years ago people fought battles like in the First World War (which is during this play) when they’re opposite sides, different uniforms across trenches, you think they’re fought like that, that it goes back this way through

history. But this is probably one of the first instances in drama of a kind of Guerrilla warfare where you don’t know who the enemy are. You see someone at a window; is he a sniper or is he just an ordinary man looking out? So I think it will be controversial. I think for young people as well, it will be interesting to see what connections you make now having read it, with what you will see in the theatre in this production.

MP I have done a lot of Shakespeare in England. The tradition when I first started was that you did it in the traditional Jacobean or Elizabethan costume. Nowadays directors take great liberties and try to relate the play (to a modern context). I saw an Othello at the National Theatre a year or two ago and they set it in Afghanistan (as opposed to originally being set in Venice/Cyprus). It’s similar with this; our soldiers aren’t coming in wearing British Army green uniform, they are going to be modern. It’ll play a lot of strange things with your mind watching it but I think it is all to do with saying this play has lasted because it has relevance to today, otherwise it is a museum piece.

LG

MP I talk mostly from the point of view of an actor obviously. If you talk to a director they will give you a vision (or a designer or whatever). As an actor who has been doing this for almost fifty years, my world when I work in a play is here; it’s the stage I’m on, the people I’m working with, the relationships between us and anything that can help me develop that character and enrich it. So often actors are not the best to be interviewed about a piece because you are going to ask me about (for example) Nora and the husband but

MP at the moment I hardly see them. I have one scene with him where we are having a bite to eat but I never see him again. **C** Their relationship is fascinating because **P** he is so much into his ambition about the Sam Brown belt, Ireland and fighting and she's hidden a letter. Her **KS** cracking up is fascinating because (with a modern feminist take on characters now you wouldn't have got so much in those days) is that seen as something weak in her, what does that say about her?

She's desperate for him not to fight, she goes down and scratches people's eyes out because she is trying to find out where he is but in fact a lot of other mothers and wives would not have done that. But when she cracks it's terrible. I don't know enough about the play yet or about what she's doing to know if she has some hint somewhere in her character, some side to her, that makes her vulnerable to those moments. It would be very interesting to speak to her about that. When she cracks it's terrible and what she's going through is terrible. Their relationship in the play isn't all that great, there's love, there's a bit of cuddling, but when she talks about him it's often about the time **KS** in the brambles before they got married. Then she **C** says "don't go, don't go" but he thinks of his Sam **CC** Brown Belt – ambition. They are both ambitious and both want to be upwardly mobile; he wants status, she's trying also to raise herself above the life in the tenement - she's got the pictures on the wall, she's trying to keep the place looking well and she's accused of being a bit uppity by the other residents – so in a way I can see why this would draw them together.

What do you think is your character's biggest fear?

C Death or loneliness. Loneliness I would say because **CC** you look at him all the way through and he fights back (with The Covey) because they all fight a lot, they argue, it was a tough life in those times, but he's alive in that situation. That's why I ask at the end, 'where does he go?' When this stops in a week or two's time, where does he go? So I would say fear of the future is his biggest fear, the loss that he will experience. What he has got now is better than what he will have and he is aware of it. I think he is fearful of that.

Uncle Peter is often portrayed as an ineffectual character. Would you agree with this statement? What do you think is his purpose in the play?

LG His purpose in the play is that he is there as some **C** sort of symbol of Romantic Ireland, going back to all the failures and rebellions. It seems to be that **CC** the history of Ireland is all to do with losing; Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmett etc. and here we are now (in **C** the play) and it is just as bad. I have to say I don't think he is very important in the play because he has no great seminal moment anywhere, as I said he is kind of Dickensian. He ends the play much as he started it. He is just stuck on this cycle all the time and I think it is only when he suddenly realises very late on in act four that his future is ruined.

What scene is the most powerful for your character and why?

KS For me, maybe because I've got three quite big speeches towards the end of the play attacking the other people who attack me and I kind of define myself through that. So I have three speeches where I say "you are a pair of registered bowsies, always trying to destroy me but I am hanging on to make me **C** unconscious of the life I am trying to lead..." I think he is a bit of a hypocrite but I think he is religious, sees himself as a good man. I think, throughout the play, he wants respect and no one gives it to him. We have just been doing the scene this morning when I am in the uniform and come out for the tea (all I've been seen in is a pair of britches, socks, no shoes and an old vest) and they are taking the mickey. Then I come out the door with the lot, I won't have the sword on but the hat and the feather and all that, and I think I look bloody great but they're all over the laughing and saying what an idiot. So he's a sad old soul really.

C **Do you hold Jack solely responsible for Norah's disintegration?**

KS I don't think so, I don't think you can. He's an ass isn't he, isn't he, a real ass? He walks away because he seems to be jealous of a man who seems to have been made the captain. As I say, I can't really answer that but I imagine there must be some little something in her head, I think she is fragile emotionally. As I said in other circumstances, I think they'd have made a good union, they may not have been the happiest couple in the world but they would have been ok; she'd have had children but the catalyst is this terrible event that happened over one week which destroys lives so very quickly.

CC **Do you think this play is still relevant today?**

TH I do. Look at what's going on in Syria and all that at the moment. We've had Iraq, we've had Afghanistan and it's only beginning to touch us now and maybe you less here in Ireland than me in England. Look at the awful lack of charity expressed through the British government at the moment about the refugees. We've all been part of what's gone on [in Syria et.]; provided guns and bombs, and then when someone says we should take refugees in, England is being terrible saying we will take something like 5,000. I think the problems it's creating are enormous.

TH There's always conflict and that's what this play is about – how people cope with it and how it destroys lives. I think it brings it home more if it's an Irish play being watched by Irish people as opposed to something on the television because we are being assaulted all the time (on the TV). When I was young (I grew up in Limerick) I left Ireland and we didn't have television, we had radio station so we didn't know anything. We didn't have the box in the corner of the room where you've got all these terrible things happening or wonderful products that people owned that poor families envy. In a funny way the innocence and 'cutoffness' from other societies was somehow easier to cope with. But now we want everything, it doesn't make us happier. We've got all these gadgets today and I can't believe it. As I said we had a radio but my father wouldn't let me listen to English radio programmes, mostly if they were comedy and he thought they were a bit smutty. So I think it does say a lot about the world today and I think we are all interconnected, we are destroying the planet anyway.



IMAGE: David Ganley in rehearsal as Fluther.

Interview with

FLUTHER played by
David Ganley

Interviewed by Andrew Tyndall and Hannah Skelly

What research and preparation was required to help you connect with your character?

- MP Basically reading the play 20 or 30 times, all the clues are there. With Sean Holmes we are less concerned about the fact the play is set in 1916 than we are in
- C with what is happening to these people in their everyday lives. We had to go find out what the social conditions were like in 1916; how many people were living in these tenements, and general research of the period. As you'll see, hopefully, when you come and see this show, the historical context is the least important thing about this show. There have been productions of this show that have been staged like photo realistic representations of the tenement block. This isn't going to be one of them.
- MP So the research for me was more character based than historical. Therefore, I wanted to look into the problems of social drinking/alcoholism at the time. I researched the age and life expectancy of tenement dwellers in the early 20th century. This enabled me to understand both the struggle and the vision of characters like Fluther. Our job as actors is to give a director a few different options when we arrive on set and see which one he likes.

What features did you like best and least about your character?

- MP This is a hard question as an actor. I cannot judge characters. To me Fluther is just a man and like all of us we think all we do is right until we find out it's not. If you were asking me as Fluther I'd say the knowledge that he has a drink problem is huge. Within the first page

- CC he is talking about being off the booze to Mrs Gogan for three days. The relationship that these characters had with alcohol was extraordinary at the time. It was cheaper than food. People would go buy gin in the pub, in their own chamber pot that you would use as a toilet in during the night because A) it would sterilise it, B) it was cheaper than washing it so you would buy enough gin to sterilise it and drink out of it for the night. What I love as an actor and what we love as an audience is his ability to use words to get out of tricky situations or to keep a situation going; to antagonise someone. That's the beauty for me with O'Casey - this wordsmith. Some people question if he's a coward. In the end he does go out to fight, I also think he goes out to find drink. It is interesting that himself and the Covey square up to each other in the pub. However, they don't fight and one of the reasons they use words instead of fists was if they used fists and broke their fists they lost work and if they lost work they would die. . They would do anything to avoid a fight, so you learn to fight with words.

What do you think your character brings to the play that the other characters don't?

- C Humour is central to Fluther's character. In Act1 Scene 1 Fluther is seen giving a whole speech about being on the water wagon. A lot of the humour is in the characters hands. You are not funny because you are saying something funny. You are funny because it's true.



IMAGE: Mahnoor Saad (Mollser) and David Ganly (Fluther Good) in rehearsal.

C We just finished rehearsing the scene where Bessie barges in and attacks Nora in Act 1. Just before she comes in, Nora pays me for fixing the door and asks 'how much will that get ye?' I say 'mere droppings Ms Clitheroe for Fluther's on the water wagon then'. I do a whole speech about being sober saying 'you could do this, do that...you won't be able to change my mind...I'm not drinking, I'm not drinking'. Then a drunken woman comes in. O' Casey is brilliant. He will have a character who we know is a drunkard who says 'I don't drink, I don't drink, I don't drink'. And then a drunken woman comes in. I think that my job is to be able to say these things and the audience already know that this guy is going to be 'legless' in the next scene. I have to believe it at the time. It's only funny because of how it turns out when he gets into the pub. Part of my job is to look after what could be funny speeches but to make them true and to make them real. They are only funny because of how they turn out in the end. It's a function of him. He is the clown in a lot of ways. He is also the stock Irish character. At the time of O'Casey writing this, prior to this the presentation of Irish people on stage wasn't great. The way Irish people were portrayed was either savages, poor people or clowns and I think O'Casey combined all of these and put them in to this one guy as the Stage Irishman and you'll think that's all he is until you get to Act 4 and realise that he is brave, sensitive, caring and part of community. He is the glue that keeps some of them together.

CC These plays were presented in the National Theatre when at the time the only people going to the theatre were middle class. The middle class had to watch this

GVV portrayal of the working class. I think O'Casey was very clever, a man who spanned both working and middle class, of going you think these people are going to be a certain way but these people are you. The same as every family, every house. They just have less money.

Do you have a favourite scene?

KS The pub is great fun. When you come and see it, you will be shocked at how we are doing the play.

KS It's a great scene because the whole community spills in. Fluther and Peter are discussing speeches and we are all on a high and then all of a sudden we are all fighting again. There is something really great about that scene. The politics are starting to become infectious and take over people and pit one person against the other but they will always revert back to who they are. It's like a drug, by the end of the scene it has worn off a bit, except for the three boyos, Jack and the two boys. That's really funny because it begins with the older characters that come in and get hyped/passionate and then relax and then the younger generation come in and get hyped/passionate about the speeches but they go do something about it.

KS I think the first scene is an incredible piece of writing, to set up this house, to set up Nora as an outsider and allow the audience to know where we are, what the rules are, even the idea of putting up a door when a lot of these people took down the doors and burnt them, keeping people out, trying to keep Jack in. It's a beautiful scene. You get to know

KS these characters so quickly that's O'Casey's genius. You get to know these characters within a page.

What do you think is the most dramatic scene?

KS Act 4. Stylistically all the acts are very different. It requires you as an actor to fill in the gaps, what happened in those 3 days or 5 months? I think the growth by Act 4 that relationship has changed so dramatically. From Fluther's point of view, in the pub scene Fluther says "we've seen the dreams of the shadow past leppin' to life in the bodies of living men" and then I say in Act 4 "The sky is getting redder and redder, it could almost be a fire, half the city must be burning". To see your own city burn, no matter how cynical you are about the cause, to see on a personal level, the architecture of your city, the architecture of your own house destroyed (because by now they are all living in the attic because they have riddled the place) and then to see your friends and family in the case of Peter and The Covey and Nora, to see her riddled and destroyed. In our production we are playing cards over a coffin of two dead children (Mollser and Nora's baby). It's emotionally very tough.

KS It's a really hard scene and again in the middle of it they laugh and they fight over the cards and they have a go at the soldiers. For Fluther I think that is the dramatic high point of the play because everything he dismissed has come to pass but he doesn't say "See, I told you this was a waste of time". More importantly the people that he tried to help and save are dead or mad. So yeah I think that's the most dramatic.

Fluther is often portrayed in a humorous light. Do you think he like many of the ordinary men are the real heroes?

- TH It's hard to say ordinary people were heroes. Even today Ireland is a neutral country and we enjoy all of the benefits of the freedom the West has without really sacrificing any of our sons. I think similarly at the time, the really important thing to remember about the ICA at the time is that everyone that wasn't in it, thought it was nonsense and thought it was like a cult, this thing of men marching up and down the street without guns, with hurls in their hands, practicing and dressing up. Nobody took them seriously; no one took the little splinter groups seriously. So part of me thinks anyone who bought into that was idealistic and had a struggle that they though was worth fighting for. The rest of us in this play, apart from Jack and Brennan really, our fight is daily survival, this isn't our fight. This was not the battle of the working class at the time. All it would result in is even more poverty and worse social conditions for the working class. A guy like The Covey spouting about socialism in a way was right;
- C the only war worth fighting is an economic war. People got caught up in it. People got wound up by a few speeches. I think the hero's thing is wrong I don't think there were any heroes I think people were just trying to live their lives and survive and taking advantage of looting etc. Interestingly the premises that were looted were shops owned by business men who treated the work force very poorly and fired people. It would be like now taking revenge on the banks by robbing a cash
- CC

TH point. I don't think these people are heroes and if you put that tag on them you elevate them to something noble. I don't think it was that, it was just surviving; "stay away from that window or you'll be shot."

Alcohol played a large part in Fluther's life. Do you feel Alcoholism was a major problem in 1916?

CC It was a huge problem. There was a pub in Dublin for every 13 people. The amount of time people spent in pubs was frightening. In a lot of pubs in Dublin only men were allowed in. There were an odd few pubs where there was a snug and women were allowed in. In the men only pubs, there was a bar and a urinal and the urinal was at the bar. You didn't have to leave. This is how serious it was. Holy hour was only put in to get people home to eat something, close the pub and then they could come back; it wasn't about religion. There was alcoholism amongst adults and children, kids were fed whisky and given stout because it was cheaper than food and it would help them sleep. One of the most frightening facts I learned was that there were so many deaths as a result of drunken parents rolling over in the middle of the night onto their small children. There were huge instances of "cot death" or "unknown cause of death" because of this and because everyone was sleeping together in the one room. Infant mortality was 50% at the time. It wasn't just about what it did to you and your liver; it was about violence, sex, rape, incest. That's the real grubby side of the play

C that O'Casey touches on but doesn't present fully. He is trying to present a community in the tenements. I think it's interesting he has two alcoholics in the play, Fluther and Bessie. They are really the two people who come good in the end. He's called Fluther Good and that's not a mistake. Interestingly, more people died from alcoholism in 1916 than died in the Rising.



IMAGE: Ciarán O'Brien (The Young Covey), Sean Holmes (Director)
and Ian-Lloyd Anderson (Jack Clitheroe)

Interview with Director

SEAN HOLMES

Interviewed by Ciara Walsh & Matthew Connaughton of Tallaght Community School

CIARA: What approach did you take to directing this play?

Obviously it's about a historical event and it is 1916, but it's also got to be relevant to now.

GVV

So, if you think about the play, he actually wrote it in '26 and, of course, it's as much about 1926 as it is about '16 because he's saying; "These things happened, and we're now like this". And, obviously for O'Casey there was a betrayal of an idea with the Free State that wasn't what he thought it would be and *The Plough and the Stars* is an alternate flag that would have been a different Ireland.

CC

I suppose on a personal level, (you may have noticed I'm English, although I am called Sean – spelled the right way) I understood the importance of the play and the mischievous part of me also

GVV

liked the fact of... maybe doing it and slightly annoying everyone, because I think that the play really annoyed everyone originally. If you look at the play very simply, he takes an event which had already been slightly mythologised and he says "This event is actually really complicated and complex" and individuals behaved contradictorily

TH

from moment to moment – selfish and selfless, brave and cowardly and he puts that mess and contradiction on stage. And I think that that's

C

what I'm trying to do. My approach is to try to be true to the spirit of O'Casey's play whilst not worrying so much about the letter of the play.

MP



IMAGE: Elaine Walsh as Bessie Burgess and Tony Clay.

C: Did you do a lot of research on the Rising itself?

LG I did. I think the period is the least interesting thing about a play but obviously with this because it is an historical event. I did a production of A Streetcar Named Desire at the theatre I run in London and it was like a white box and I had a black Stella, an Estonian Stanley and everyone spoke in their own voices. For me, by not worrying about the period, it released the play and by not doing the accent (because everyone spoke in their own voices), you really released the spirit of the play and the radicalism of Williams' writing.

MP

Obviously, it's harder to do with this play because there is an historical event that happened in it. So, I came over in June and met historians, I did walking tours, I obviously read lots of stuff about it and I think it's good to then have it, to then decide what to pay attention to and what to think 'I don't really care about that'. So, though normally I wouldn't have done as much, I feel like I have actually done quite a lot.

MATHEW: For our Leaving Cert., we are doing General Vision and Viewpoint, where we focus on the viewpoint of O'Casey. So for you, especially as an Englishman, how do you feel and what is your view on the Rising itself?

My job is to deliver what I think his view is.

MP What I think he definitely thinks is that it was a complicated event in which people looted shops, in which civilians were killed, in which British soldiers killed innocent civilians, in which the rhetoric didn't match the reality. It was also a time where women weren't treated well and I think that O'Casey was a socialist but the other thing is that when he wrote the play, the Russian revolution had happened.

GVV

TH

CC Ireland had also had a revolution around the same time but had replaced it with a very different political philosophy which then progressively into the '20s and '30s became 'DeValera' and that sort of hegemony of the Catholic Church. I'm aware that it's not my country, but I've got family here, and I used to come over as a kid, and everyone used to go to mass. I think the really interesting question is the legacy of the Rising. It didn't really achieve any aims and resulted in lots of innocent people dying, but the British response and the killing of the leaders led to a new political consciousness which then lead to independence in a very short time.

MP This play is full of questions so my job is to make the moments on stage happen so you're going, "What does that mean?", "Why are they doing that?", "Who's that?", "What is that?" – rather than me saying "I think this about the Rising".

Obviously, as a nation it's a really important event that led to independence from Imperialism – brilliant. The problem is there are also people in the island of Ireland, dissident Republicans, who would say that they are in a direct line with the event and that the state is really uncomfortable with. You've also got a political party that have grown out of that movement so you want to celebrate this thing, but also the consequences of celebrating it are really difficult. That's why it also is exciting to do the play, because of its complexity and its contradictions.

TH

GVV



IMAGE: James Hayes as Uncle Peter and David Ganly as Fluther Good.

KS **C: How would you approach the key scenes, like Pearse's speech outside the pub or Nora's breakdown?**

MP If you say a scene is a key scene you're also saying another scene is less important. So every single thing in the play has equal importance. But obviously, they're challenges, those scenes.

If you said to somebody "What's the style of *The Plough and the Stars*?' You'd probably say it's naturalism. But actually, the more you look at it, it's not really. And the man at the window is a prime example because it's not real. However,

LG when you stage it you have to come up with an abstraction or an expressionistic version of that. I watched past productions and I never felt it was very successful to have this guy sort of wander on, so we're doing it with a telly in the pub. They turn the volume up and it comes on, and then they turn it down. It resonates with now.

MP In Act Four, we have this heightened space and there are no windows in the set so we'll do something that's more abstracted. Sometimes you can worry about practical things, like "Where's the window?" but I think if you sometimes break out of the accepted idea, like if you make it happen on television or get rid of the walls then that can help the imagination of the audience to grow.

LG break out of the accepted idea, like if you make it happen on television or get rid of the walls then that can help the imagination of the audience to grow.

MP break out of the accepted idea, like if you make it happen on television or get rid of the walls then that can help the imagination of the audience to grow.

M: Is there a risk of the more modern adaptation compromising the authenticity of the original plot and purpose of the play?

P I don't think it does anything to the plot; the story is intrinsically the same. We talked last night with our creative team, so that's the designers – lighting designer, sound designer, costume designer and me. We talked about how to refine this idea, because if we had a play which is set now you wouldn't question the phone, computer, television, your clothes or whatever. But if it's a scene in an office a hundred years ago, and it's like this (points to the room we are sitting in, an office with modern furniture and equipment) then, as an audience, you're wondering "What does that mean?" What's important is that we don't just create a different naturalism, which is 2016 naturalism. I don't think that would make sense. So it's about presentation and performance.

LG The number of characters that speak about themselves in the third person, the characters in the play do it every thirty seconds. There's a weird, sort of self-obsession with image which is partly a response to poverty and partly a response to being occupied which makes people powerless. What people want to do is give themselves agency and status which is about performance. So you have a play which is about performance, and which is being performed. And the characters are wearing modern clothes so we can understand

MP who they are but when Jack finds out that he is in the Citizen Army, he puts on that 1916 uniform. When I bring the British soldiers on at the end, they are going to be in modern battledress – like you see from Afghanistan or Iraq on the news. And they are English because the play is partly about Britain as well, and you know, I live in a country that is still involved in imperialist wars.

M: Were there many changes to the original script?

MP No. I think the changes are in presentation rather than being textual.

C: What guidance would you give to the actor playing Jack Clitheroe?

C I think one really simple thing with Jack and with Nora is to avoid falling into the trap that you're the tragic centre of the play because you can see pressure. It's like playing Romeo and Juliet. So the contemporary thing helps. So it's important to release them from the burden of representing anything apart from what their job is. The job of any play, any actor and any director is to present behaviour. That's all plays are – they're about what people do, they're not really about words.

M: Young people often go to see a film over a play, what do you see as a challenge in bringing people back to the theatre and making theatre more relevant to people like us?

LG The thing is with theatre, it has always been a minority pursuit. It's never been mass entertainment really. You could beat yourself up because not everyone's coming, but not everyone's going to the library, there are lots of things that we don't do. Theatre can be mind-numbingly boring. A bad film is fine because you can switch off or eat popcorn or go to sleep but a bad play is excruciating, time never goes more slowly. But a good play can do something that nothing else can do, because it can destabilise you and shift who you are. I think you want to do things that are really visceral and exciting and then people understand why you want to be in the theatre.

KS C: What elements of stagecraft do you make use of to challenge the audience to engage with the themes, or to enhance the subject matter or message of the play?

LG In our production of this play, loads of it we are just saying to the audience. And the first
MP gesture of the play is acknowledging the
C audience are there. The first line of the play is Mrs Gogan; "Should I look in the box?"

MP The other element of stagecraft, as I said, would be trying not to get tied into naturalism and trying to find a way to break barriers. We have these self-imposed barriers that we build, like there are

MP walls here that don't exist. So for Jack's song, for example, he goes and gets a microphone and starts to sing it to Nora on a microphone, act it and do it for her. We spend loads of time thinking about how to do something but the important question is why to do something.

M: Finally, what would you say to your actors before a performance?

LG The objective of the play is: This is what we believe about this material, at this moment in
MP time and we're presenting it to you, what do you think? Then that's the thing to go on with, that confidence. Do we believe in what we're doing? We do. Then let's go on, look everyone in the whites of their eyes and let's win".



IMAGE: Kate Stanley Brennan as Nora Clitheroe and Elaine Walsh as Bessie Burgess.

A PLOUGH FOR NOW – FOUR CONTEMPORARY VIEWS



Maeve Stone

The Plough And The Stars:

DIRECT PROVISION

IRELAND HAS A HISTORY OF ignoring certain buildings. Institutionalised living spaces – such as the magdalene laundries – are the best example of this, but one could argue that the slums in Dublin a century ago had a similar profile. Sean O’Casey very deliberately places the tenement house at the centre of his work and in *The Plough and the Stars* all but the second act take place in or outside the building. He wanted to redress the social inequalities endemic in Irish society at the time. All of the invisible lives happening inside needed to be made visible, and audiences who might have had more in common with the lady from Rathmines might be confronted with their own privilege in light of such poverty.

Sean O’Casey draws characters that help to translate the Irish political landscape into a personal story. They are abused by a social and political system that doesn’t value them. His work gives voice to the most vulnerable in society and challenges us to consider our complicity in structural inequality. *The Plough and the Stars* is a blueprint that exists, even now, as a means to ask ourselves.

One could argue that our generation needs a new O’Casey because history is repeating itself through direct provision – the system entered by all asylum seekers arriving in Ireland. Old hotels, convents and hostels are now crowded with people but somehow remain completely invisible. There are three in Dublin city centre but you would struggle to find them. Inside – much

‘Who are suffering most in our society, who is profiting from their struggle and why are we willing to ignore it?’

like the Clitheroes – whole families live in single rooms, denied the means to support themselves while waiting and hoping for change. There is a private profit that underlines this inequality too. O’Casey’s tenements were owned by a wealthy few who collected profits from the most vulnerable. The Young Covey’s socialist rhetoric within the play highlights this injustice. Direct provision centres are also profit-making enterprises with more than €850 million paid to private firms since the system was established.

Maeve Stone is a theatre director, former resident assistant director at The Abbey and associate director with Pan Pan Theatre Company.

Her work is often auteurish with a filmic sensibility, pushing form and process (*Wake* 2014, *Meeting House* 2015). In 2015 she formed Change of Address Collective as a year-long project with fellow director Oonagh Murphy and comedian Moira Brady Averill, working to build creative connections between Irish artists, refugees and asylum seekers.



IMAGE: (Top) Tenement housing, Francis Street
(Bottom) Direct provision accommodation

INEQUALITY TODAY

by Niall Crowley

ONE HUNDRED YEARS ON and inequality is still rampant. Poverty, poor health, and tenement housing used to co-exist with wealthy professionals, comfortable living, and leafy suburbs in 1916. Today, homelessness and deprivation live side by side with high incomes and great wealth. Then, as now, this was a matter of political choices.

Economic inequality might not be as visible as in 1916, but poverty remains as damaging. In February 2016, the Department of Environment reported that 3,372 adults and 1,496 children were in emergency accommodation for the homeless. In 2014, 1.3 million people were experiencing deprivation, where they could not afford two items from list of essentials, according to the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

Many people continue to do well and inequality is growing according to the CSO. In 2014 the top 20% of earners captured five times the total income of the bottom 20% of earners. In 2013, the poorest 20% of households by income held 11.3% of all net wealth, real and financial assets minus debt, while the top fifth held 39.3%.

Inequality takes other forms. Affective equality and basic human dignity is at issue for many. People with disability are still incarcerated in institutional settings subject to well-recorded human rights abuses. Last year the HSE unsuccessfully sought 250m Euro to move 2,855 people into community settings.

A 2014 European Union survey by found that

26% of Irish women had experienced physical or sexual violence. Refugees and asylum seekers are confined for years in Direct Provision settings that block participation in work and social life and damage mental health. In 2014, 1,684 people were in Direct Provision for over five years.

Cultural equality and recognition for diversity is at issue when the Government refuses to acknowledge the ethnic identity of Travellers and fails to provide safe, adequate and culturally appropriate accommodation for them. Political inequality in access to decision – making is evident where women made up 15.7% of the members of the last Dail and only 13.3% of Government Ministers. There were no Black and minority ethnic people or people with disabilities in the Dail.

Niall Crowley is an independent equality and diversity expert.

He is a founder member of the Values-Lab. Prior to this he worked for ten years as Chief Executive Officer of the Equality Authority, the statutory body established to promote equality and combat discrimination under Irish equality legislation. He is author of 'Empty Promise: Bringing the Equality Authority to heel' (A&A Farmar) and 'An Ambition for Equality' (Irish Academic Press).



THE PRACTICAL HEROISM OF THE WOMEN IN THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS

by Cathleen O' Neill

SEAN O'CASEY WAS A SOCIALIST and trade union activist who witnessed first-hand the daily struggles of women in the tenements as they strove to keep their families fed and sheltered. He knew the misery behind the doors as men were locked out of their jobs for daring to join a trade union and seek better pay. He despaired as the Catholic Church allied itself alongside the bosses and refused food, succour and aid to the families of the striking workers.

It takes bravery, stubbornness and practical skills keep a family together in these circumstances. O'Casey saw this in the tenement women and he endowed his female characters with these qualities. Nora Clitheroe was a newlywed setting up home, Bessie Burgess was a street trader and protestant, Mrs Grogan was a charwoman whose daughter Mollser was dying from consumption and not forgetting Rosie who was a prostitute.

These women knew their place in the pecking order of Dublin's tenement society but in the play they have to deal with a new stratification as they learn from Jack Clitheroe and his friends Brennan and Langdon that

'Ireland is greater than Wife or Mother'

These men took their lead from the oratory of Pearse and Connolly and they march off in comradesly fashion professing to be ready to die for Ireland. The women meanwhile are trying to live in an Ireland that is hostile to their gender, culture and religion.

One of the ways they do this is by forging prac-

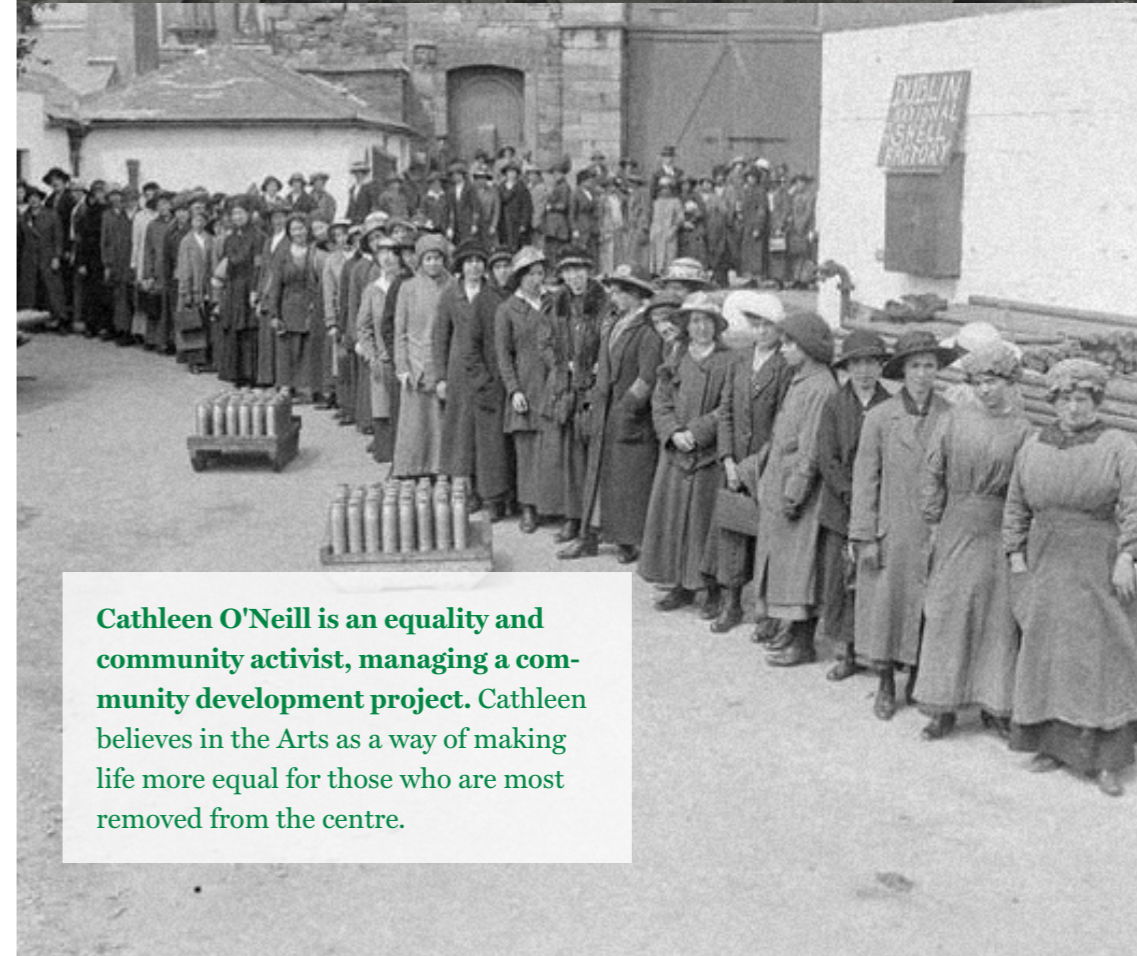
tical alliances in order to bear the double burden of gender and social class. They support each other in bereavement and suffering, leaving aside religious and political differences. Nora's stillbirth and Mollser's death from consumption were reminders of how short life was in the tenements. By the end of the play Bessie Burgess's rough and ready love represents a solidarity against the Church, capitalism, ruthless bosses, the daily grind of poverty and an indifferent establishment.

O'Casey thought the Easter Rising was the wrong conflict and that it divided the working class at a time when they should have been united in fighting the class war. One hundred years later women are still fighting it. The most casual glance at recent austerity shows that women bore the brunt of the cutbacks and loss of services. We are truly living in a care-less state.

As we recall the strong working class women in this play, and those of 1913 and 1916, let us also remember that the issues they stood for and against are the same issues that working class women experience today. The tenements are returning, and the state is claiming that we are the rioters as we fight for equality, dignity and social justice. Our children are hungry and we experience high levels of ill health. The dreams of 100 years ago are the same dreams of today. Our women are not on strike, they have no jobs, instead they sit in queues proving their poverty again and again. We need to take our lead from the strong women of the past and arise, arise, arise.



IMAGE: xxx



Cathleen O'Neill is an equality and community activist, managing a community development project. Cathleen believes in the Arts as a way of making life more equal for those who are most removed from the centre.

IN PRAISE OF THE YOUNG IDEALIST

by Gary Gannon

‘When I think of all th’ problems in front o’ th’ workers, it makes me sick to be lookin’ at oul’ codgers goin’ about dhressedup like green accoutred figures gone ashtray out of a toy shop!’

I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED THE temerity of The Young Covey but it has only really occurred to me why O’Casey chose to prefix the name of my favourite character in his ‘Dublin Trilogy’ with an expiry date. Ardent idealism, you see, is not expected to last.

As a candidate in the recent general election, I myself was described by a prominent political commentator as an “affable young Councillor with a somewhat idealistic outlook.” I wore that description as a badge of honour but I’m not entirely sure that it was intended as a compliment.

To be idealistic is a trait we so often associate with being young and naïve. Idealism is something to be grown out of once the harsh realities of this world become too big an obstacle to overcome.

I reject that. Posterity has perhaps been unkind to The Young Covey in viewing his character as something of a pompous political zealot. Yet it his view of O’Casey’s world which has best stood the test of time.

While the violent conflict that existed outside the windows of The Plough & the Star’s concluded some seven years later, it was the greater social

wars the Covey identified which have persisted ever since.

Idealism is a nuisance because it undermines the manufactured ‘threats’ that distract us from the real struggles. In the Covey’s day it was the supposed danger that our Nationalism was being oppressed which stopped people fighting the more important class war. Today it is the fear of betraying ‘economic stability’ that stops people suggesting alternative solutions to Ireland’s problems. The Covey was considered arrogant because he dared question the contemporary opioms of Nationalism and Catholicism.

In today’s Ireland, the label of idealistic seems to apply to all of us who reject the false messages of economic stability and seek to demonstrate a fairer means by which a Republic should operate. Our demands are quite modest in fact. We prioritise the creation of a decent society that would be witnessed in a better standard of healthcare, education and public service.

The audacity of such youthful idealism.

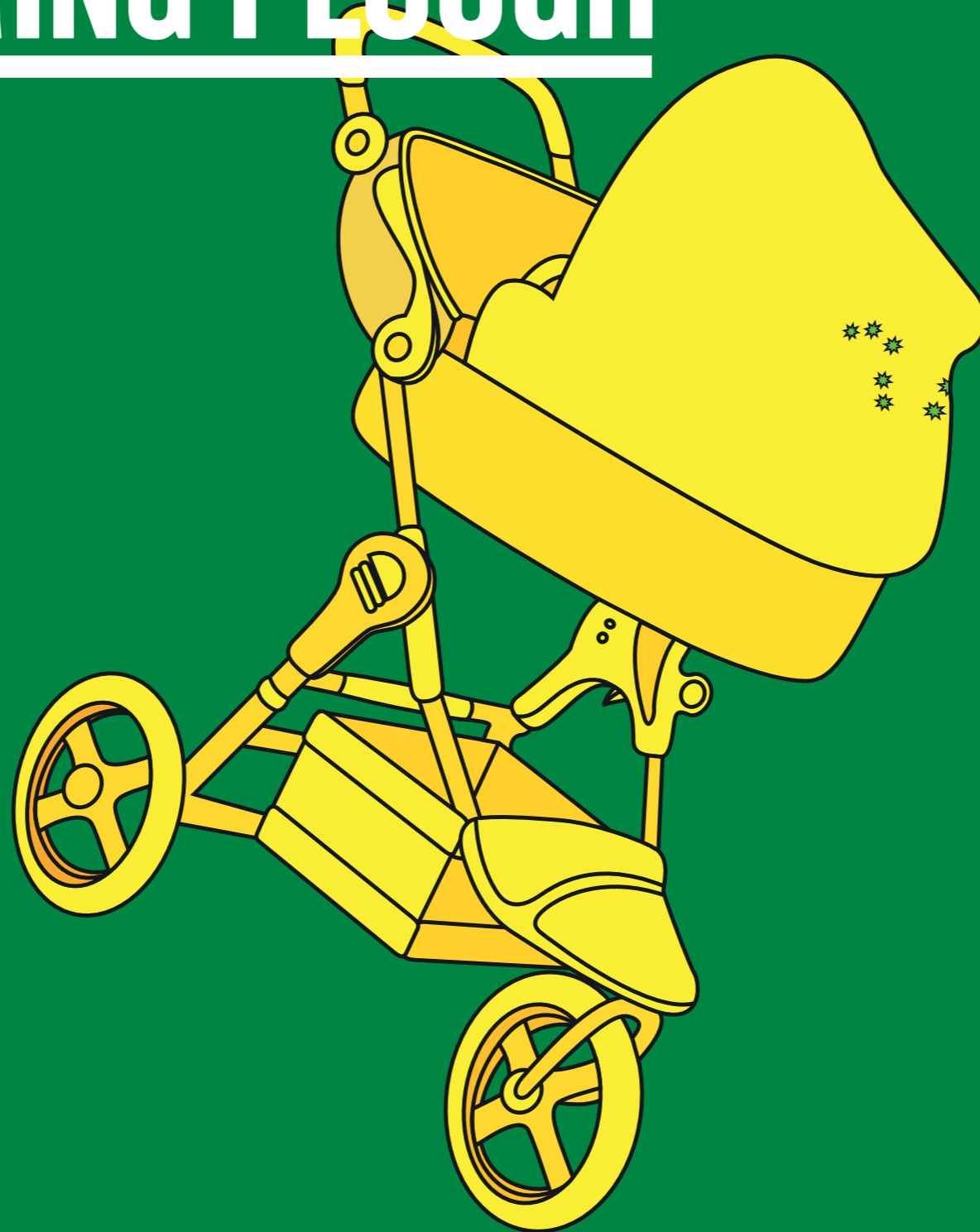


Gary Gannon has lived the majority of his life in Dublin’s North Inner City.

Gary was elected in 2014 to represent the people of Dublin’s North Inner City at City Council. He graduated from Trinity College in 2012 with an Honours degree in History & Political Science and remains a proud and committed Ambassador of the Trinity Access Programme

(TAP). As an elected representative of Dublin City Council, Gary is a member of Economic & Enterprise Development, Housing and Arts & Culture SPC’s. Prior to being elected to Dublin City Council, Gary worked as a Career Guidance Advocate for Early School Leavers in the North Inner City.

COMPARING PLOUGH





For Higher Level Leaving Cert *The Plough and the Stars* is a comparative text. Niall Lenoach who teaches at Tallaght Community School has provided this useful chart comparing the play with the film *The King's Speech* (dir. Tom Hooper) and the novel *Foster* (by Clare Keegan).

PLOUGH AND THE STARS

- O'Casey is highly critical of Republicans involved in 1916 Rising, especially the Irish Citizens Army.
- Depicts them as vain using patriotic slogans while civilians especially women suffer.
- The speech about the glory of bloodshed is contrasted with the reality of life in the tenements.
- He is critical of the men in general, those like Jack Clitheroe who fight & die & those like Covey & Peter who talk about revolution & fighting but are cowards in practice.
- He is critical of the jealousy & spite of some tenement dwellers resenting Nora for having a door on her flat, getting a new hat etc.
- His only positive view of people in the play is the women of the tenements.
- Bessie dies trying to save Nora (Shot by the British soldiers she admires).
- Mollser the teenage girl dying of TB who wonders is there anyone left with any common sense.
- Sad ending, destruction of city.
- Death of Jack & Nora's insanity.
- Death of Bessie & Mollser.



THE KING'S SPEECH

- Generally Hopper has a positive viewpoint of main characters political sense of duty above personal seen positive unlike PS.
- King George VI speech rallying his people to fight depicted as good & inspiring unlike nationalist in PS.
- People seen as united in support of King unlike PS. Rhetoric leads to arguments.
- Bertie sense of duty seen as a positive thing unlike I.C.A volunteers.
- Lionel Logue is depicted positively as a down to earth common sense adviser.
- In contrast Bertie's brother Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson is portrayed as selfish and stupid admiring Hitler & putting pleasure above duty.
- We see the contrast between Logue's simple though not poverty stricken lifestyle & The King's wealth & privilege.
- Hopper gives a critical view of The Archbishop & Church of England.
- The medical establishment's jealousy of Logue.
- The way Bertie was treated as a child.
- Happy ending. Bertie overcomes fear with Logue's help; makes his inspiring speech, is greeted by cheering crowds.



FOSTER

- Keegan viewpoint is a mixture of positive & negative.
- She is highly critical of the girl's father & her upbringing.
- Her father Dan is selfish & vain; he drinks heavily and gambles with cattle – He lies about the work he does & is full of empty pride.
- Her mother neglects the daughter but is seen as a victim with a bad husband & too many children to care for properly.
- Divorce is still illegal & big families are common.
- In contrast the girl's life with the Kinsellas is seen as very positive.
- Both John & Edna are kind & practical – they treat her well and make up for the neglect she suffered
- They work hard looking after their farm & cattle; their modern home is a contrast to the girls.
- We see the good side of a close community playing cards together helping each other with funerals & farm work.



Comparing 'The Plough and the Stars' with both

- There is also criticism of the nosey neighbour like Mildred who looks for gossip & watches how the Kinsella's dress the girl
- Mixed view at the end
- The girl has to go back to her unhappy home but has gained greatly from her time with the Kinsellas

TALLAGHT COMMUNITY SCHOOL

IMAGE: Hannah Skelly, Ciara Walsh, Matthew Connaughton, Andrew Tyndall, Dannielle Oliver, Rachel Flynn on the way to interview the cast members and director of O'Casey's *'The Plough and the Stars'*.

THE HISTORY OF TALLAGHT

Tallaght's history is documented back to the earliest centuries of Christian Ireland. There is however evidence to indicate the presence of Bronze Age or possibly earlier settlers. The area gets its name from a prehistoric plague graveyard which was known as Tamhlacht Muintuire Partholon and was later anglicised to Tallaght.

Tallaght first entered history in the third quarter of the eighth century with the foundations of the monastery by St Maelruan. Colonisers recognise the strategic importance of Tallaght and monastery of Maelruan was destroyed by the Vikings in 811 AD.

Upon Mount Seskin (the tallest of the Tallaght Hills) can be seen numerous stone structures. The one on the very top is commonly referred to as "The Hell Fire Club". It was built upon a passage tomb, an ancient monument similar to Newgrange. Thus was created the perfect location for very many myths and legends, as the destruction of these structures, for any reason, is said to bring bad luck.

By the 17th and 18th centuries there were many changes to the region with introduction of mills along the Dodder which provided huge employment.

In the years leading up to the 1916 Rising Tallaght was a rural village to the southwest of Dublin. There were a number of small industries that included quarries and sandpits in the area. By the 1970's suburbanisation had reached Tallaght. Tallaght has continued to grow and adapt after many years it has gained new facilities which include Tallaght Hospital, The Square Shopping Centre, Tallaght Institute of Technology, Tallaght Library, The Civic Theatre and a soccer stadium.

TALLAGHT COMMUNITY SCHOOL

The first Community School opened in the oldest part of Tallaght in 1972 close to Tymon Park. Since 1963 the State had been contributing towards the building costs of voluntary secondary schools and the Department felt it was entitled to a say in the running of these schools. This coupled with lessening vocations meant that church control of schools was lessening. In 1970 the Vocational Educational Act empowered VEC's and other schools to provide education and these schools would be managed by a board representing managerial and local interests

By the end of the 1960s Tallaght was expanding as one of the major satellite areas of the Greater Dublin. Student numbers were increasing and it was suggested three separate schools be built near the Dominican Priory. This idea was criticised and on 30th July 1971 the Minister of Education announced his intention to open a Community School (absorbing the existing vocational school) in Tallaght and one in Blanchardstown. The school became fully operational in September 1973 and the official opening ceremony took place on May 27th 1974.

There are now 804 students and 60 teachers in Tallaght Community School.

CREDITS



Plough and the Stars

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