Jack

‘D’ye want me to be unthrue to me comrades?’ Jack’s role in the play is two fold, he represents the brand of Nationalism inculcated by the speaker and he is also cast as the husband of Nora, both roles are in stark contrast with each other. At all points he must make a choice between them. In the early part of the play we see him as Nora’s husband desperately trying to rekindle the love of their early courtship against a background of disappointment in his military career. His declaration in the second Act “Ireland is greater that a wife” is prophetic as he chooses the Republican cause over his marriage and lays down his life despite the protestations of Nora. In the end he is as much a victim of his own delusions as is Nora, as his death for the cause of Ireland strips him of everything.

Nora

Your vanity’ll be th’ ruin of you an’ me yet.’ Nora is the central character in the play - everything that happens turns directly or indirectly on her. She is the person with the most insight into what life should be like and where the dangers lie, she is all for life and is primarily the victim of forces outside her control. She realises that the nationalist adventures are divorced from the real needs of the people and that people are more important than idealist abstractions. Nora realises that happiness is a concrete thing that has to do with human harmony and fulfilment. To do this she is protective of Jack, she is determined to maintain a happy marriage and rise above the social level of the tenement building.

Fluther

‘D’ye think Fluther’s like yourself, destitute of a titther of undherstandin’?’ Fluther is to many the heart of the play and it’s often a highlight in an actor’s career when he gets to grapple with this self-aggrandising yet genuinely kind character. We first meet him mending Nora’s door, bantering with Mrs Grogan and sharing his firm opinions with whoever will listen. In one sense he’s the common man, not holding the extreme positions of Uncle Peter or The Young Covey, and yet swayed by the rhetoric of the Rebels. He is complicated too, like all of us, seemingly swaggering and self-deluding one minute but then gentle and brave the next.

Rosie

‘If I’m a prostitute aself, I have me feelin’s’ Rosie Redmond hasn’t time for ideals, she needs money. She’s a working girl who has to charm her customers and so will say whatever seems agreeable to them. The Rebels meeting is a tiresome distraction of potential punters and she’ll be for or against it according to whoever might buy her next drink. But though her life is hard and sometimes desperate she has her dignity and responds fiercely when it’s insulted.

Bessie

‘If you think, me lassie, that Bessie Burgess has an untidy conscience, she’ll soon show you to th’ differ?’ Bessie Burgess seems like the neighbour from hell, drunk, aggressive and spoiling for a fight. She’s abrasive and provocative, relishing her British sympathies in the midst of a nationalist uprising. But she’s also more attentive and practically caring to Mollser than the others and proves to be the most tirelessly compassionate to Nora when she’s at her worst.

The Young Covey

‘It makes me sick to be lookin’ at oul’ codgers goin’ about dhressed up like green-accoutred figures gone asthray out of a toyshop!’’ The Young Covey is an idealist who thinks he’s found the answer to the world’s problems in the theories of socialism. He’s keen to share these insights but is blind to how his own behaviour doesn’t always reflect the principles he preaches. His intellect is mature but his behaviour with Uncle Peter is very childish. He’s prepared to fight for what he believes in but isn’t above looting with everyone else. He believes in the universal love of all mankind but gets nervous when Rosie suggests a more local kind

Mollser: Character Study

Described in O’Casey’s notes as Mrs. Gogan’s ‘consumptive child’, Mollser is one of the few characters in the play who appears to be relatively silent. Those around her – her mother, Bessie Burgess, Fluther Good – speak at and shout over one another, desperate to be heard and understood. But it is by saying little at all that Mollser has most influence over the lives of those sharing her tenement house. Mollser is the youngest character in the play – O’Casey says that she’s “about fifteen, but she looks to be only about ten”. Her ill health and poverty have forced her to face the possibility that she may not even survive to adulthood, or have a chance to begin her own family. Many people would associate youth with hope. However, she seems almost hopeless at the end of Act 1 when she says to Nora — ‘I often envy you, Mrs Clitheroe, seein; th’ health you have, an’ th’ lovely place you have here, an’ wondherin’ if I’ll ever be sthrong enough to be keepin’ a home together for a man. ’ Mollser’s words also make us think more carefully about Nora and her relationship with Jack. We realise how well they fool their neighbours into thinking that they’re a happily married couple, and we’re reminded how important it is to many of the characters to ‘perform’ for one another, to ‘keep up appearances’. Mollser also gives us an idea of the very deep suffering of the poor, workingclass society of Dublin’s tenements in the early 1900s. She is the only character in the play who dies from sickness – Jack and Lieutenant Langon die in the fight for Irish freedom, while Bessie dies trying to save Nora from gunfire. Still, she never seems to complain about her illness. She tries to assure her mother, Mrs Gogan, that she feels “a lot betther”, whereas Fluther panics even at the thought of catching a cold — ‘I think I’m afther gettin’ a little catch in me chest that time – it’s a creepy thing to be thinkin’ about.’