

Juno and the paycock

[Family](#), [Mother](#)



uno and the Paycock “ O’Casey’s women in Juno and the Paycock are strong and admirable characters”. Juno and Mary Boyle’s lives aren’t very pleasant in this 1920’s play which is separated into three acts which contain a mixture of both tragic and humorous elements. Juno, the wife of Captain Boyle, is the mother of two children who are in constant need of attention from her. Furthermore, as the play continues this need of attention grows with the facts of financial difficulties, the pregnancy of Mary (daughter) and also her son’s, Johnny, death in the end.

O’Casey clearly shows that Juno certainly has her work cut out for her, as she is not only the one person in the family who has a job, but also she is the house-wife and must render her family by making all the meals, going to buy the groceries, doing any form of house work and looking after the family in general. For example, on page 8 she says, “ I killin’ meself workin’,” and also on page 12 she says, “ Your poor wife slavin’ to keep the bit in your mouth...” these two references show just how hard Juno works to keep her family happy and alive. This is not made any easier when Mr.

Boyle spends any money Juno has saved, in hope for any decent future for the family, on alcohol in the local pub. Therefore Juno cannot afford any type of luxuries for herself as she definitely does deserve it. The poverty is evident on page 12 in Juno’s comment to Mr. Boyle, “ eat your breakfast... it may be the last you’ll get for I don’t know where the next one is goin to come from. ” But even this will not cause concern for Juno’s principles when on page six we learn that Juno is against Trade Unions, “ When the employers sacrifice wan victim, the Trade Unions go wan betther be sacrificin’ a hundred. Then Mary tells her that, “ a principle’s a principle”, but Juno stays realistic and thinks

well it's all good and well having principles - if you can afford them. She is the one who seems to keep the family as a unit and this is evidently shown when Juno says, ' I don't know what any o' yours ud do without your ma'. Juno is a well respected member of the family and might even be superior to Mr. Boyle and Joxer, a family friend, because when the pair is talking on page nine, Mrs. Boyle enters and both are said to be ' stupefied'.

After this, she offers him an egg, and he makes the excuse that he's in a desperate hurry - this may be because he does not want to spend much time there with Juno. Also the fact that Mr. Boyle lies on page thirteen about the fact he was drinking may indicate he was scared of Juno's reaction if he had have told the truth, but later on in the same page we see that Juno will take no nonsense from her husband when he says he doesn't want any food and she just says, 'Nobody's goin' to coax you-don't think that. This suggests she's a strong person, and if she doesn't take nonsense from her husband, she won't take any nonsense from anyone else. Johnny is a man who relies on a woman to bring him all that needs, displaying men to be controversially the weaker sex. He uses his ' sickness' to demand Juno to bring him glasses of water, when he could have easily fetched one himself.

Even worse though, is that he is generally very bad-tempered towards his mother, constantly asking her to do things for him, which wears Juno down and makes her irritable, and ensures that she is nearly always in a bad frame of mind because she is never in this state unless annoyed by a family member, so she has her causes for being in bad moods whereas Mr. Boyle has none whatsoever. Then, when she speaks out to Johnny's complaining, it is with fervent remonstrance, she ' cries', " who has kept th' home together

for the past few years - only me? An who'll have to bear th' biggest part o' this trouble, but me? but whinin' an whingin' isn't goin' to do any good. " - this point is typical of the way Juno reacts to and deals with life. Juno knows what is important in life and when Johnny talks about his principles, " I'd do it agen ma; for a principle's a principle. " To which Juno replies " Ah, you lost your best principle, me boy, when you lost your arm; them's the only sort o' principles that's any good to a workin man. " This shows she thinks that fighting for your country and getting injured or dying isn't going to solve anything, but bring grief, and more work.

Juno's outlook on life is ultimately more important than the others. She has not lost in principles, like her children, but she acknowledges what's going on in the world around her - which may be the fact of the poverty they live in and the restrictions because of this and also her family which she cares for so much. Mary seems like a confident girl who knows what she is doing all the time, but when Bentham decides to leave her, she loses this spirit. Before this, Mary was trying to better herself and lift herself out of her surrounding environment.

This is shown when on page 12 she talks about her principles and wants to belong in the upper class, but feels where she lives may be degrading her. She was always willing to be challenged for example trying to better herself and becoming fully independent towards the end. Mary also becomes very much like her mother as the play proceeds and we see Mary's other side, the side who works and it is shown that her mother and she have been brought closer together throughout the story. She now confides in her mother and this is shown at the end when she talks to Juno about Jerry.

Also, it is significant that Mary is reading Ibsen plays as they are realistic and unromantic which is similar to this play, but contrasts with her life in general. I see Mary as an admirable person because of these points, but she is not totally sensible because she buys all sorts of luxuries with the money. Religion in Ireland was a very important thing and Mary and her family were catholic. Having sex before marriage was a sin in the eyes of a catholic so Mary was seen as a fallen woman in her culture, and Jerry Devine is one of the people who criticises her for this. 'My God, Mary, have you fallen as low as that?' he says when finding out she is pregnant, as would any man in 1922 if they met a woman pregnant with an illegitimate child. Throughout "Juno and the Paycock", Juno is linked to the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary is an archetypal mother figure. O'Casey likens Juno to the Virgin Mary especially with reference to her relationship with Johnny; the link is strengthened when, at the end of the play, Johnny is murdered, just like the Virgin Mary's son.

Additionally, O'Casey gives Juno the same name as the Roman goddess, wife of Jupiter, King of the gods. Throughout the entire play, she battles against poverty, ignorance, laziness and deceit all to keep her family from disintegrating. The dictionary definition of the word 'heroine' is "a woman with the attributes of a hero". We expect our heroines to understand more than those around her and with this in mind I would contend that Juno is indeed the heroine of the play.