

*Q1 O'Casey depicts people as victims of their environment. Show how the social and political unrest in Ireland in the early 1920's affects the characters in Juno and the Paycock. In your answer you should examine at least three characters in detail.*

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The play, "Juno and the Paycock" is set in working class Dublin during the 1920's. The family, around whom the play is set; the Boyle family, live in very poor working class conditions. Their home is a two-room tenement and this has to be shared by four adults, Juno, Boyle, Mary and Johnny. The furnishings are very poor "Cretonne hangings strung on twine" and the family used a "galvanised bath". When they believe, in the second act, that they are about to come into some money, they buy things like an "upholstered armchair", such luxuries being absent from their life. The political situation in Ireland at that time was one of great unrest; the civil war had taken place and Ireland had assumed a level of independence although because it was not complete, the "die hards" continued a level of violence. At the same time, the socialist movement was growing across Europe and Ireland through the Labour movement. The Labour movement's aim was to try to improve the lot of the of the working classes and they organised strikes when necessary to protect the rights of the workers and to put pressure on the employers to improve working conditions. During the course of the play we see that Mary is on strike because of the victimisation of a fellow employee and that she believes this to be the right course of action.

The social conditions under which the Boyle family existed were of extreme poverty. They lived much of the time on borrowed money. They owe twenty pounds and are worried in Act 1 "what'll we do if he refuses to give us any more on the tick". O'Casey clearly believed that poverty could show in peoples faces because he describes Juno, in the stage directions "were circumstances favourable she would have probably been a Handsome, active, clever woman but adverse fortune has made her look listless, harassed and anxious". Not only is there very little money in the house, Juno works and Mary is working but is currently on strike, Boyle does not work and actively tries to avoid it, Johnny lost an arm in the civil war and cannot work, but there is also an intellectual poverty in the family. Mary tries to move forward through her reading but the rest of her family hold her back. In the small house, where they live, they have no privacy, as there are only two rooms between four. The Labour movement is seen by Mary and Johnny as a means of improving the position of the very poor "with Labour, Mary, humanity is above everything; we are the leaders in the fight for a new life". At the same time, because they all live so closely together, they suffer and share joy together. When there is the prospect of money, by the will, the newfound wealth will benefit the whole family.

Politically Ireland was in a state of chaos, during the time this play was set Ireland has just signed a treaty with Britain giving some independence to Ireland. However, because it was not complete, many republicans, mainly the die-hards, continued to fight against those who had agreed. There was a lot of violence during this time, Infact the play opens with a report in a newspaper of Mrs Tancred's son's violent death.

The level of violence whilst upsetting Johnny does not surprise the family- it appears to be quite normal. The fact that Joxer is afraid to look out of the window because he was afraid of " a bullet in the kisser", and the numerous references to the troubles all indicate that indeed there is an ongoing level of violence

Juno's life is completely dominated by her circumstances. She is living in a house with very little money and falling deeper and deeper into debt. In the first act she sees n hope for any improvement on the money side of things. When Bentham comes into the scene and indicates that money has been left to the Boyles in a will, Juno sees this as a way out of their financial problems. Whilst she is a little wary of spending she does not object when Boyle buys the gramophone and the other luxuries. When the money does not come her previous bitterness towards Boyle comes back, she is again becomes very annoyed about him being so unwilling to earn any money, "Your poor wife slavin' to keep the bit in your

mouth!" Although she has very little she does not support the Labour Movement; She is uneducated and does not read as Mary does. She sees a strike as many people suffering instead of one. She is a maternal person who looks after her children. Early in the play when Mary is strong, she scolds her about her vanity but when she is in trouble and pregnant, she defends her to the point when she would leave her husband. Her son she sees as always needing her support and she gives this to him, "There dear, lie down in the bed, an ill put the quilt across you". The political situation and Johnny's involvement with it are the ultimate cause of his death. Juno's thoughts from Act two echo the audiences thoughts "Its nearly time we had a little less respect for the dead and a little more respect for the living!" Juno does not believe that violence should be used to support principals. Juno, when she is told of Mary's pregnancy, supports her, even though her father and her brother are so critical. Johnny thought Mary had sunk so low that it was unforgivable "My God Mary, have you fallen as low as that!" Boyle also reacts badly to the news of Mary's pregnancy, but Juno quickly quiets him "you'll say nothing to her Jack; ever since she left school she's earned her keep an' your fatherly care never troubled the poor girl!" The prejudices against unmarried mothers were clearly seen by Juno and she was determined to protect Mary.

Mary, brought up in the slums of Dublin wants to go up in the world. She sees her way out by way of the labour movement "The hour is past now when we'll ask the employers permission to wear what we like". She has gone on strike in support of a co-worker as is prepared to stand up for her principals. She holds the same views as Jerry on trade union matters. She wants to improve her situation, and reads a lot to learn more. Her father considers this a waste of time. She reads realistic plays. Her father blames all troubles on her books "What did th' likes of her born in a tenement house want with reading?"

Mary is a hard working, working class girl but is one who is influenced by what she sees to be middle class, for example, she likes to wear ribbons and silk stockings. She is taken in by Bentham. Although she says she loves him and is impressed by his manners and worldly wisdom, she is caught in the eternal women's trap of being left with the baby. Although her mother gives her support, it is unlikely that she will succeed on pulling herself out of the social situation she is in.

Johnny was also born into this poor social situation, and because of his injuries, obtained in the Easter Rising, he is unable to work. For some unexplained reason, he betrays Tancred, his friend and neighbour. He is constantly portrayed as a coward and is constantly in fear of his life. His sister considered him strong because "He stuck to his principals an no matter how you may argue, a principal is a principal." He sees the possibility of escaping from their home, with the possibility of money "We'll be able to get out o' this place" He does not want to face up to what he has done, he is frightened and wants to escape.. When the mobilizer comes for him, he tries to claim that he is not well and pleads, "Haven't I done enough for Ireland!" Johnny is very like his father, self centred, selfish and cowardly. He is frightened. He has no strength of character. When he learns of Mary's pregnancy all he is concerned about is her shame. He has no feelings for how she will suffer "She should be driven out o' the house she's brought disgrace on!" He is finally taken and subsequently executed. Getting involved with the Republican movement and betraying Tancred leaves Johnny vulnerable, which he knows himself and accounts for his obvious fear. He is also unable to cope with his sister's pregnancy and adopts the attitude of his father with whom he shares so many characteristics. Johnny believes in what he did, during the Easter Rising. The injuries he obtained were in what the family believed to be a justified struggle, unfortunately in such situations ,it is usually the poor suffer, and as in this situation often with their lives. When caught in the centre of warring ideals it is the vulnerable in society who suffer and it is normally the poor who are the most vulnerable. It is the defenceless people like the Boyles who end up paying the price.

O'Casey, in this play uses the Boyle family to show the poor really are able to do very little to help themselves. Juno, having married Jack, is stuck with a lazy husband who refuses to contribute. He is totally selfish and contributes nothing to the family. Juno is left to struggle through on her own. The loss of her son and the pregnancy of her daughter are all troubles to be carried by her. There is no outside help or support. Mary, who had aspirations to better herself is now totally disillusioned, she loves the

father of the child, but has been rejected by him. She is left to deal with this on her own with the exception of the support of her mother, Juno. Her father, Johnny and Jerry all reject her for her mistake. Despite being a hard worker with aspirations she will find it very difficult to rise above the condition. Johnny was involved with fighting and continued his involvement culminating with his betrayal of Tancred. The battalion reveal his cowardly behaviour and have him executed. His death is a direct result of his own behaviour.