

FACTFILE:

GCSE

DRAMA

Component 3



Knowledge and Understanding of Drama, Exploration of the Set Text

Juno and the Paycock

by Sean O' Casey

Social

- The play deals with inner-city Dublin working class people in 1922;
- The living conditions of the Boyle family is a two-roomed tenancy in a tenement house in a street within walking distance of the city centre. The conditions are very cramped for four adults and there is a bed in the living room and kitchen. Bathroom facilities were shared with all the residents of the tenement which could be up to ten families;
- Mary is trying to lift herself out of the working class and Charles Bentham seems to offer her that opportunity as he speaks and dresses better than all the other characters;
- Jerry Devine represents the Labour Movement which was growing at the time just as communism was growing in Russia;
- The play is set just after the Civil War in Ireland and the social unrest continued as Robbie Tancred's funeral takes place during the play and Johnny Boyle is taken away and shot for not continuing to fight for the cause.

Cultural

- O'Casey himself lived in Dorset Street, north Dublin and his family was 'shabby-genteel' but he set his plays in the working-class culture which he would have seen in the streets close by;
- His father died when he was six and his plays are dominated by hard-working and strong women such as Juno Boyle;
- His interest grew in the Irish nationalist cause and he joined the Gaelic League and became General Secretary of the Irish Citizen Army so became steeped in the culture of the Irish cause which he was able to write about from first-hand experience although he was never well enough to fight himself;
- 'Juno and the Paycock' deals with the effect of the Irish Civil War on the working class poor of the city;
- Although Boyle sees himself as the head of the family, he is lazy, avoids work and allows his wife to earn enough for the family to survive which may have been typical for many families at the time;
- Lady Gregory and WB Yeats were the drivers of the theatrical movement of the time encouraging writers such as O'Casey to reflect his cultural background, hatred of violence and social injustice on stage drawing new audiences into the theatre.

Historical

- The play is set in an inner-city tenancy in 1922 at a time of civil unrest and following 'The Easter Rising' of 1916;
- Johnny has lost his arm fighting for his country in 1916 and during the play he is abducted and killed for not doing more. Mrs Tancred's son has been found murdered and his funeral takes place during the play;
- Jerry Devine is part of the new labour Union which was being formed at this time. O'Casey himself became involved in the Irish Transport and General Worker's Union representing the unskilled labourers who lived in the Dublin tenements at this time. He participated in the Dublin Lockout but was blacklisted and could not find steady work for some time. He then began writing;
- Juno and the Paycock was first performed at the Abbey Theatre in 1924 and in the West End, London, the following year.

Theatrical Conventions

- The play was first performed at the Abbey Theatre in 1924 on a traditional proscenium arch stage;
- The set was an authentic representation of the living apartment of a two-roomed tenancy in an inner-city tenement house;
- The set is the same for all 3 acts with some minor changes;
- O'Casey gives very clear positioning of exits/entrances and furniture and specific detailed descriptions of what he sees on stage, such as, 'on the mantleshelf is an alarm clock lying on its face';
- The stage business of cooking sausages and drinking would be performed as naturally as possible by the actors on stage;
- Act II sees the addition of furniture and decorations and act III sees the removal of furniture which are clearly described in the playwright's staging notes;
- Lighting and sound effects are also clearly described and would also have been as authentic as possible and originally created 'live';
- A curtain would be used to open and close each act.

Form and Style

- The play is written in general dialogue and captures the colloquial and natural interaction between the characters using free-flowing conversation;
- There are a few longer speeches in the play and all from women such as the quite humorous reflective monologues in Act II of Mrs Madigan, the sad speech from Mrs. Tancred and the poignant monologue of Juno in Act III;
- The authentic set is of the naturalistic style and period when playwrights developed a stage setting which was close to real life and the actors could feel they were living in scene;
- O'Casey includes a lot of specific detail about the setting but also character detail to help the actor create a realistic performance;
- A composite set is used for the 3 acts of the play and the changes in each act follow the detail required for the development of the story;
- The playwright originally had the death of Johnny included but this was removed in the current text as it was too upsetting for an audience;
- The costumes, lighting, sound effects and properties are intended to be as close to real life as possible.
- Offstage sound effects are used to create an authentic setting and on-stage lighting for the fire, a votive light and lamps etc. are also used to create a very natural and realistic ambience as the curtain rises and the audience are drawn into the scene.

Genre

- The play is a tragic-comedy in 3 acts with a naturalistic set and realistic acting;
- The character of Joxer and his interaction with Boyle provide a lot of the comedy and Mrs Madigan's stories about her past and her observances of life also often provides humour;
- The play is also a tragedy as Johnny is murdered and originally this scene would have taken place on stage;
- The funeral of Robbie Tancred takes place off stage in Act II and Mrs Tancred's speech creates a very sombre moment on stage;
- The demise of the Boyle family with Johnny murdered, Mary pregnant, Boyle drunk and penniless and Juno going to live with her sister, is a tragic end to the play.

Language

- The play is written in the local dialect of inner-city working class people in Dublin 1922;
- The language has a colloquial flow and rhythm with the strong Dublin accents being presented in phonetic spelling to capture the sound of the speech such as 'ud never see a body shuk' and the use of using 'h' in the words to get the flavour of the accent such as 'inthroduce', 'dhrink', and shortening of words such as 'speakin', 'darlin' and 'jus';
- O'Casey uses lyrical language for Boyle as he waxes talks about his imaginary adventures with '- what is the moon?' and develops comedy with his mispronunciation of words such as 'attackey case' and 'dockyments'. The Character of Joxer does the same when he is describing things, 'A darlin' word...';
- The playwright uses latin 'nil desperandum' to make Boyle sound intelligent and create comedy;
- He also uses more formal language to contrast Mr.Bentham who is from England, 'which has been duly filed in the Court of Probate'.

Structure

- The play is written in a 3 Act structure with each act of similar length. This was a structure commonly used in this period;
- There are ten main characters in the play and nine minor characters who may be doubled up as they don't all appear on stage or deliver lines;
- The characters and plot are introduced in Act I, developed with climax in Act II and the resolution and outcomes are portrayed in Act III;
- The playwright gives very clear and specific stage directions for all the actors;
- Blackouts and curtains are used to open and close each act on a proscenium arch stage.

