

Sean O'Casey's Feminist Vein: Empowered Female Representations in Juno and the Paycock

Claudia Parra

Abstract: *In a period when the stereotype of womanhood in Irish drama was determined by political influences, and the male figure was the sole representation of the active force of humanity, Sean O'Casey's women were a type of subject which was apparently non-existent, even though they demonstrated the real significance of the power they withheld among their families and communities. In Juno and the Paycock (1924), the playwright surprises the audience by staging representations of Dublin tenement women which subvert the prevailing image of powerless females in Irish drama. O'Casey's female characters, Juno and Mary, undergo a process of strengthening which enables them to surpass domineering structural forces and challenge conservative and oppressive gender expectations about power. They are depicted as being imperfect, just as men are, but they are also representations of autonomous individuals who embody characteristics that lead us to envisage female empowerment. This article seeks to demonstrate that when applying notions of personal empowerment, O'Casey's play confers visibility and appropriate representation to those strong marginalised women.*

Keywords: *Sean O'Casey; Juno and the Paycock; Female Representation; Empowerment.*

Resumo: *Em um período em que o estereótipo de feminilidade no drama irlandês era determinado por influências políticas, e a figura masculina era a única representação da força ativa da humanidade, as mulheres de Sean O'Casey eram indivíduos aparentemente inexistentes, embora demonstrassem o verdadeiro significado de poder junto a suas famílias e comunidades. Em Juno and the Paycock (1924), o dramaturgo surpreende ao encenar representações de mulheres provenientes dos tenements, em Dublin, que subvertem a imagem de impotência que lhes era atribuída no drama irlandês. As personagens femininas de O'Casey, Juno e Mary, passam por um processo de fortalecimento que lhes permite superar as forças estruturais dominantes e desafiar as expectativas conservadoras e opressivas de gênero sobre poder. Elas são retratadas como imperfeitas, assim como os homens, mas são representações de indivíduos autônomos, que incorporam características que nos levam a pensar sobre empoderamento feminino. Logo, este artigo visa a demonstrar que a peça de O'Casey confere visibilidade e representação a essas mulheres fortes e marginalizadas ao aferir-lhes noções de empoderamento individual.*

Palavras-chave: *Sean O'Casey; Juno and the Paycock; Representação Feminina; Empoderamento.*

Received: 11/01/:2020

Accepted: 15/02/2020

Sean O'Casey produced his early plays at a time when the politics of Irish society were incorporated in performances. *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), O'Casey's second Abbey Theatre production, depicts two female characters, Juno and Mary Boyle, at variance with the dominant powerless model which constituted typical theatrical portrayals of women. The female representations configure an assumed deconstruction of the Irish traditional order considering that, to some extent, these female characters act as subversive elements, since they undergo a strengthening process in which they overtake conventional masculine representations.

Juno and the Paycock was performed at the Abbey for the first time in 1924 and was extremely successful after its premiere.¹ The play drew such large crowds in its first week that its run had to be extended. Juno's financial success gave impetus to O'Casey's career as a playwright and allowed him to quit his job as a manual labourer to become a full-time writer. In fact, O'Casey's first plays were of crucial importance in saving the Abbey from bankruptcy, in that they repeatedly brought audiences back to its subsequent performances. (Murray 104) The play depicts the Boyle family living in the tenements² during the Irish Civil War in 1922, which, rather than proposing solutions to the country's problems, aggravated the misery of victims, who were mainly poor citizens from the Dublin slums. The death of two characters in the play, Robbie Tancred and Johnny Boyle, serve as example of the fatal effects of this conflict on the Dublin poor.

Most of the play takes place in the Boyle family's two-room apartment, in a tenement house in Dublin. The family consists of four members: 'Captain' Boyle, Juno Boyle, and their daughter and son, Mary and Johnny. Boyle is an irresponsible and idle man, who puts more effort into avoiding work than in searching for it. Johnny, who was hit in the hip and had an arm blown off by a bomb during the Easter Rising, skulks in his bed on account of his infirmity. Mary has a job in a factory, but she is on strike in protest against the layoff of a fellow worker. She is very engaged in trade union activities. Juno is the family's powerhouse. She runs the house and has the whole burden on her.

The setting reflects the poverty of the family. It is too difficult for Juno to make ends meet, with Jack spending money drinking in pubs with his friend, Joxer Daly. Mary is attracted to Charlie Bentham, a schoolteacher, who brings the news that the Boyles have come into a large inheritance. Exited by the news, two days later Jack borrows money and makes purchases on credit in anticipation of receiving the inheritance. After two months, Mr. Bentham abruptly ceases all contact with the family and Jack discovers there is no inheritance at all. Abandoned by Bentham, Mary finds out she is pregnant and all the male characters, including her father and brother, reject her. Juno, however, is the only one who supports her and offers help to raise the baby.

According to James Agate, "*Juno and the Paycock* is as much a tragedy as *Macbeth*, but it is a tragedy taking place in the porter's family." (qtd. in Murray, Introduction, ix) The play could more readily be called a tragicomedy because, in "*Juno... you're in what's almost a parlour comedy for much of the second act, until they're in the middle of the party, drinking and singing... and it's a long way into that play – it's all been very amusing.*" (Stewart 96) The initial mood, with scenes like Juno trying to hide in order to surprise Boyle and Joxer as they make themselves at home, or when Boyle, hearing steps approaching from outside, which he assumes to be Juno's, abruptly "*whips the pan off the fire and puts it under the bed, then sits down at the fire*" (O'Casey 83), creates several comical moments, but it does not displace the tragedy.

The comic vein is broken when Mrs. Tancred, another resident of the tenement, comes in very distraught because her son's coffin is being taken out. There are also other

moments which from which the tragic tone of the play unfolds, such as when the Boyle family discover they are not receiving any inheritance; Mary's pregnancy after being abandoned by Bentham; Johnny's death, and the final entrance of Boyle, drunk and indifferent to what has happened to his family. Although, at a first sight, the play seems to be about the disaster in the Boyle family, it goes beyond domestic melodrama to touch on larger questions, such as personal struggle and female autonomy. *Juno and the Paycock* became known at the Abbey as a play exhibiting modern warfare which brings violence and terrorism into ordinary people's lives. By way of a family tragedy, O'Casey illuminates other aspects of problems the Irish nation was experiencing: "the tragic waste of civil war changes nothing in the social conditions still awaiting revolution." (Murray *Mirror up to Nation* 103) The play deepens this perception by focusing on the family's struggle to survive amidst the casualties of the Civil War, in which context Juno Boyle is at the heart of her family's efforts to survive.

The play begins with a description of the Boyles' room, where Mary is reading a newspaper and her brother is sitting crouched beside the fire. The depiction of daughter and son at home is the first female versus male opposition validating the superiority of the feminine characters: "*Johnny Boyle is sitting crouched beside the fire. Mary... is arranging her hair before a tiny mirror perched on the table. Beside the mirror is stretched out the morning paper, which she looks at when she isn't gazing into the mirror*" (67). Based on the way they are positioned, and, on their actions, this excerpt juxtaposes a contrasting view of the two characters in the room. Whilst Mary is sitting at the table, doing two things at the same time, Johnny is only described as "sitting crouched." The way he sits squatting close to the ground denotes lack of physical motion and inferiority towards Mary, not only in terms of space, but also regarding attitude. Johnny represents inaction, while Mary is a picture of action. This can also be seen in Johnny's first appearance:

Johnny appears at the door on left. He can be plainly seen now; he is a thin, delicate fellow, something younger than Mary. He has evidently gone through a rough time. His face is pale and drawn; there is a tremulous look of indefinite fear in his eyes. The left sleeve of his coat is empty, and he walks with a slight halt. (71)

The idea of powerlessness is reinforced by the author's description. Johnny is thin, delicate, and fearful. This description accentuates the portrayal of an impotent male figure. Additionally, his isolation from the other characters: "Let me alone, let me alone, let me alone, for God's sake" (103), and his infrequent appearance throughout the play, establishes Johnny as a minor character in relation to the other members of his family. Nevertheless, according to Gabriel Fallon, O'Casey attributed considerable importance to this character, implying that Johnny Boyle's tragedy was a central portion of the play: "I recalled O'Casey's insistence that he was writing a play about a young man called Johnny Boyle." (24) Johnny is a victim of the violent effects of the Irish national campaign, for his experiences in the conflict brought him irreparable loss and an unfortunate existence. He fought in the 1916 Easter Rising, when he was only a teenager, and was wounded in the hip. Later, during the Civil War, he lost his left arm in a fight on O'Connell Street. Besides these physical injuries, he has been psychologically damaged. He never leaves the apartment because he is haunted by memories and hallucinations:

A frightened scream is heard from Johnny inside.

MRS BOYLE. Mother of God, what's that?

He rushes out again, his face pale, his lips twitching, his limbs trembling.

JOHNNY. Shut the door, shut the door, quick, for God's sake! Great God, have mercy on me! Blessed Mother o' God shelter me, shelter your son!

MRS BOYLE. (*catching him in her arms*). What's wrong with you? What ails you? Sit down, sit down, here, on the bed — there now — there now.

MARY. Johnny, Johnny, what ails you?

JOHNNY. I seen him, I seen him — kneelin' in front o' the statue — merciful Jesus, have pity on me!

MRS BOYLE. Get him a glass o' whisky — quick, man, an' don't stand gawkin'.

Boyle gets the whisky.

JOHNNY. Sit here, sit here, mother — between me an' the door.

MRS BOYLE. I'll sit beside you as long as you like, only tell me what was it came across you at all?

JOHNNY. I seen him — I seen Robbie Tancred kneelin' down before the statue — an' the red light shinin' on him — an' when I went in — he turned an' looked at me — an' I seen the woun's bleedin' in his breast — Oh, why did he look at me like that? — it wasn't my fault that he was done in — Mother o' God, keep him away from me!

MRS BOYLE. There, there, child, you've imagined it all. There was nothin' there at all — it was the red light you seen, an' the talk we had put all the rest into your head. Here, dhrink, more o' this — it'll do you good — An', now, stretch yourself down on the bed for a little. (*To Boyle*) Go in, Jack, an' show him it was only in his own head it was. (106-7)

Johnny's personal tragedy is rooted in the national plight, which was one of O'Casey's main concerns. However, whereas an important aspect of the *Three Dublin Plays* is O'Casey's emphasis on representations that transcend oppressive circumstances, Johnny's role is far from fulfilling such an intention. On account of his infirmity and his guilty conscience, since he gave off information that led to the murder of Mrs. Tancred's son, he is afraid of every noise he hears on the street: "His sufferings are therefore self-induced and involve him in a form of guilt manifested by superstition and hallucinations. His very life seems to depend on the trembling of a votive light, the extinction of which sends him into paroxysms of terror." (Murray, *Mirror up to Nation* 103) Johnny's attempt to avoid the avengers stresses the extent to which he is riddled with guilt and fear. He feeds his own sufferings, making his miserable condition worse. His "action" in the play is thus reduced to stagnation. His self-imposed means of dealing with

his personal tragedy shows that he has no scape for improvement. Johnny is right to suspect that something bad will happen to him. In Act Three, he is shot and killed for his act of betrayal.

Johnny's cowardice, indifference and fear transform him into an image opposed to the idea of power, or of someone who is able act against a process. Self-efficacy, knowledge, competence and action – essential components for personal empowerment – do pertain to his characterisation. He does not contemplate making decisions to change his destiny, for he lacks the skills to empower himself. Consequently, his lack of self-perception prevents him from any active engagement in the collective domain, which may be exemplified by the fact that his sister, who is a 22-year-old woman, has a job in a factory, while he, who “is something younger than Mary”, does not bring any financial support for his family.

Compared to her brother, Mary is a proactive figure. She is designated as a lively person when we first meet her in the play: “*She is a well-made and good-looking girl of twenty-two.*” (67) Her vivacity and energy contrast with Johnny's lethargy and disablement. She carries traits of self-love as she cares for her appearance, looking in mirrors and trying on different ribbons around her head: “I don't like this ribbon, ma; I think I'll wear the green — it looks better than the blue.” (69-70)³ Her character is more participative in the narrative as she frequently interacts with other characters, for example, with Jerry Devine and Charlie Bentham, well-educated men. Jerry “*is about twenty-five, well set, active and earnest. He is a type, becoming very common now in the Labour Movement, of a mind knowing enough to make the mass of his associates, who know less, a power, and too little to broaden that power for the benefit of all.*” (72) Bentham, an English schoolteacher, “*is a young man of twenty-five, tall, good-looking, with a very high opinion of himself generally. He is dressed in a brown coat, brown knee-breeches, grey stockings, a brown sweater, with a deep blue tie; he carries gloves and a walking stick.*” (91) Jerry has feelings for her, but these are unrequited since she is attracted to Charlie:

JERRY. (*appealingly*). Mary, what's come over you with me for the last few weeks? You hardly speak to me, an' then only a word with a face o' bitterness on it. Have you forgotten, Mary, all the happy evenin's that were as sweet as the scented hawthorn that sheltered the sides o' the road as we sauntered through the country?

MARY. That's all over now. When you get your new job, Jerry, you won't be long findin' a girl far bettther than I am for your sweetheart.

JERRY. Never, never, Mary! No matter what happens, you'll always be the same to me. (81-82)

Throughout the dialogue, Mary shows her determination to end the relationship, which is a move to rid herself of him in order to be free to stay with Charlie. She is not even interested in Jerry's apparently successful career:

MARY. If you go on talkin' like this, Jerry Devine, you'll make me hate you!

JERRY. Well, let it be either a weddin' or a wake! Listen, Mary, I'm standin' for the Secretaryship of our Union. There's only one opposin' me; I'm popular with all the men, an' a good speaker — all are sayin' that I'll get elected.

MARY. Well?

JERRY. The job's worth three hundred an' fifty pounds a year, Mary. You an' I could live nice an' cosily on that; it would lift you out o' this place an'...

MARY. I haven't time to listen to you now — I have to go. (81)

Even though Mary is disappointed in her romantic association with Charlie, who abruptly ceases all contact with the family and abandons her, she is the kind of woman who puts her "happiness" in first place before any promise of a good life or financial stability. She pursues what she wants, rather than being constrained by what life has already designed for her. Although her resoluteness may reveal a certain dose of idealism concerning romantic relationships, it also reveals personal mastery over circumstances.

As regards her stronger representation in relation to her brother, Mary seems to be much more engaged with life; she is well informed about the news and can speak knowledgeably about politics and current affairs. She is a militant trade unionist and seeks a better life for the working class: "The hour is past now when we'll ask the employers' permission to wear what we like." (70) She is on strike in defence of a female co-worker who suffered a case of victimisation. Moreover, Mary demonstrates her disagreement with the domesticity imposed on the female role, particularly the belief that women are supposed to serve men. In Act One when she is at home, her mother arrives to prepare breakfast:

MRS BOYLE. Ah, then, if that father o' yours doesn't come in soon for his breakfast, he may go without any; I'll not wait much longer for him.

MARY. Can't you let him get it himself when he comes in?

MRS BOYLE. Yes, an' let him bring in Joxer Daly along with him? Ay, that's what he'd like an' that's what he's waitin' for — till he thinks I'm gone to work, an' then sail in with the bou' Joxer, to burn all the coal an' dhrink all the tea in the place, to show them what a good Samaritan he is! But I'll stop here till he comes in, if I have to wait till tomorrow mornin'.

Voice of Johnny inside. Mother!

MRS. BOYLE. Yis?

JOHNNY. Bring us in a dhrink o' wather.

MRS BOYLE. Bring in that fella a dhrink o' wather, for God's sake, Mary.

MARY. Isn't he big an' able enough to come out an' get it himself? (69)

...

Voice of Johnny. Is Mary goin' to stay here?

MARY. No, I'm not goin' to stay here; you can't expect me to be always at your beck

an' call, can you? (71)

By means of these features, it is possible to notice the beginnings of Mary's empowerment. However, although she is depicted as an intelligent girl and shows a natural disposition for improvement, she is confined due to the circumstances life imposes upon her:

Two forces are working in her mind—one, through the circumstances of her life, pulling her back; the other, through the influence of books she has read, pushing her forward. The opposing forces are apparent in her speech and her manners, both of which are degraded by her environment, and improved by her acquaintance—slight though it be—with literature. (67-68)

There are various moments in the text where it is possible to see Mary's attempt at intellectual engagement. In Act Three, she talks about attending a lecture given by Jerry in the Socialist Rooms some time ago. At another point, her father comments on her reading habits: "Her an' her readin'!... What did th' likes of her, born in a tenement house, want with readin'? Her readin's afther bringin' her to a nice pass — oh, it's madnin', madnin', madnin'" (134-5). In Act One, Boyle refers to her intellectual aspirations when he refers to her reading of Ibsen's plays:

JOXER. (yielding to the temptation). Ah, I won't stop very long anyhow.(Picking up a book from the table) Whose is the buk?

BOYLE. Aw, one o' Mary's; she's always readin' lately — nothin' but thrash, too. There's one I was lookin' at dh'other day: three stories, The Doll's House, Ghosts, an' The Wild Duck — buks only fit for chiselurs! (85)

In this scene, which also reveals much about Boyle's ignorance, it is evident that Mary's nature is connected to intelligence and the desire to self-improve, but this does not seem to be part of her family's world, as her father condemns her reading. Her love of books and her bond with knowledge are the only things that could push her forward. In addition to her oppressive social reality in the tenements, Mary belonged to a system which restricted women to low-status education and occupation. In fact, it seems there was no place for women like her in Irish society. Like her brother, she is another victim of the effects of the Irish struggle for independence who will suffer the additional indignities of being a single mother.

In terms of empowerment, Mary is a stronger character than Jack Boyle. His reaction towards her efforts at self-improvement is only one of his many features, turning him into someone who holds back his family members, including himself. The only expression of grandeur in this character can be accounted for his false judgment of himself. He is a showy and vain man of about sixty years old. He "*carries himself with the upper part of his body slightly thrown back, and his stomach slightly thrust forward*" (73), a posture which matches Juno's description of him: "I killin' meself workin', an' he shtruttin' about from mornin' till night like a paycock!" (68)

Boyle's delusions of grandeur are perceived by his neighbours as well; Mrs Madigan, another resident in the tenements, also refers to him as a "paycock": "So much th' better. It'll be an ayse to me conscience, for I'm takin' what doesn't belong to you. You're not goin' to be swankin' it like a paycock with Maisie Madigan's money — I'll pull some o' th' gorgeous feathers out o' your tail!" (131) Boyle, who calls himself "Captain", constantly recalls his bygone sailor days and tells exaggerated stories of his "brave life" at sea: "I'm looking for a

place near the sea; I'd like the place that you might say was me cradle, to be me grave as well. The sea is always callin' me." (111) But Juno denounces him: "Everybody callin' you 'Captain', an' you only wanst on the wather, in an oul' collier from here to Liverpool, when anybody, to listen or look at you, ud take you for a second Christo For Columbus!" (77) Boyle only deceives himself with his fantasies, since nobody else seems to be fooled by them, not even his friend, Joxer: "I have to laugh every time I look at the deep-sea sailor; an' a row on a river ud make him seasick!" (96) Boyle's actions have only two consequences: to please himself or to cause more problems for his family.

In fact, the Captain is the opposite of the notion of empowerment. In view of the adversities which affect the family, while his wife and daughter display characteristics of empowered subjects, striving for improvement, he is also a source of difficulty for his family. He is depicted as a symbol of indolence; there is no sign of proactiveness in his characterisation, as Juno points out:

MRS BOYLE. Shovel! Ah, then, me boyo, you'd do far more work with a knife an' fork than ever you'll do with a shovel! If there was e'er a genuine job goin' you'd be dh'other way about — not able to lift your arms with the pains in your legs! Your poor wife slavin' to keep the bit in your mouth, an' you gallivantin' about all the day like a paycock! (77)

Whenever Juno urges him to work, his excuse is that his legs hurt: "It ud be better for a man to be dead! U-ugh! There's another twinge in me other leg! Nobody but meself knows the sufferin' I'm goin' through with the pains in these legs o' mine!" (80). Curiously, it is a "terrible" pain which mysteriously appears only when someone mentions work to him:

JERRY. Oh, you're takin' a wrong view of it, Mr. Boyle; I simply was anxious to do you a good turn. I have a message for you from Father Farrell : He says that if you go to the job that's on in Rathmines, an' ask for Foreman Managan, you'll get a start.

BOYLE. That's all right, but I don't want the motions of me body to be watched the way an astronomer ud watch a star. If you're folleyin' Mary aself, you've no pereogative to be folleyin' me. (*Suddenly catching his thigh*) U-ugh, I'm afther gettin' a terrible twinge in me right leg!

MRS BOYLE. Oh, it won't be very long now till it travels into your left wan. It's miraculous that whenever he scents a job in front of him, his legs begin to fail him! Then, me bucko, if you lose this chance, you may go an' furrage for yourself!

JERRY. This job'll last for some time too, Captain, an' as soon as the foundations are in, it'll be cushy enough.

BOYLE. Won't it be a climbin' job? How d'ye expect me to be able to go up a ladder with these legs? An', if I get up aself, how am I goin' to get down agen? (79-80)

Jack is profoundly lazy. He is "never tired o' lookin' for a rest" and misses no opportunity of slipping out into the pub. (77) When Jerry Devine comes with news about a job, he suddenly develops a severe pain in his legs which is just one of his repertory of tricks. The

only time Boyle envisages a transformation in his family's life is when Bentham comes with the false promise of an inheritance: "Johnny — Mary — you're to keep yourselves to yourselves for the future. Juno, I'm done with Joxer — I'm a new man from this out." (97) Boyle's impotence is reinforced by this new event. Even before this newfound wealth, instead of mobilising his efforts in making plans or using effective strategies to improve the chaotic financial situation of the family, such as controlling their budget or saving money, he reaffirms his lack of self-mastery. He values superfluous things, purchases unfashionable furniture and other luxuries on credit, in anticipation of receiving the inheritance.

Act Two opens with this description of the family room: "*the furniture is more plentiful, and of a vulgar nature. A glaringly upholstered armchair and lounge; cheap pictures and photos everywhere. Every available spot is ornamented with huge vases filled with artificial flowers. Crossed festoons of coloured paper chains stretch from end to end of ceiling*" (98). Boyle also throws a party for his neighbours to celebrate his forthcoming prosperity, where the centre of attention is a gramophone he had bought, but that is carried home by Juno:

Voice of Juno (at the door). Open the door, Jack; this thing has me nearly kilt with the weight.

Boyle opens the door. Juno enters carrying the box of a gramophone, followed by Mary carrying the horn and some parcels. Juno leaves the box on the table and flops into a chair.

JUNO. Carryin' that from Henry Street was no joke. (101-2)

The presence of the gramophone on the stage is an indication of Boyle's flimsy view of life. It also corroborates the image of himself as a self-centred man with an air of smug superiority. Even when given the opportunity for change, he is no good at decision-making, and his attitudes cause disorder and additional problems for his family in the long run.

In the midst of these unfortunate events, Juno emerges at the heart of the plot: "I don't know what any o' yours ud do without your ma." (71-72) She is the most admired woman in O'Casey's plays (Benstock, Sean O'Casey 74) and her image is reproduced in some of his other female characters. (Benstock, Paycock 66) The matriarch's diligence and compassion for others are contrasted with her husband's laziness and self-importance. Juno's first appearance stresses her diligence: "*she enters by the door on right; she has been shopping and carries a small parcel in her hand.*" (68) She arrives home to organise breakfast and minutes later goes out to work. Boyle, in turn, despite it being early in the morning, has not yet returned from a night of drinking with his friend Joxer. O'Casey describes Juno as a woman of "forty-five years of age" who

. . . twenty years ago . . . must have been a pretty woman . . . but her face has now assumed that look which ultimately settles down upon the faces of the women of the working-class; a look of listless monotony and harassed anxiety, blending with an expression of mechanical resistance. (68)

Juno is the representation of countless poor Irish women who struggled valiantly to hold their dysfunctional families together in the oppressive context of the process of independence of Ireland. "Juno is not a stand-in for Ireland, but a character who represents real Irish women." (Wilson 325) She is the breadwinner and powerhouse of her family. She is the epithet of the working-class female struggle which was waged by strong women who did

not have the same opportunities as middle and upper-class women. Seen in these terms, her behaviour breaks with the traditional order of the Irish family and may be equated with Perkins and Zimmerman's classification of individual empowerment. As O'Casey stated about the character Minnie Powell via an observation made by Davoren in *The Shadow of a Gunman*⁴: "Had poor Minnie received an education she would have been an artist. She is certainly a pretty girl. I'm sure she is a good girl, and I believe she is a brave girl." (37) Likewise, in Juno and the Paycock, O'Casey reiterates this idea with Juno: "*Were circumstances favourable, she would probably be a handsome, active and clever woman.*" (68) Both characters embody positive attributes which are constrained by external factors.

Juno was given this nickname by Boyle owing to several important events that had taken place in June: she was born in June, married in June and had a child in June. The link between her name and the goddess Juno is reflected in the making of her character. Whilst the Roman goddess Juno is the protector and advisor of women, as well as the goddess of love and marriage, in Greek mythology, Juno is the goddess of the household and has been depicted riding a chariot pulled by peacocks. These associations offer an insight into the feminist aspect of the play. Juno is depicted as a conventional wife/mother who struggles to serve and protect her family, suffering as an exploited figure. However, since she is the main spring of her family without any masculine support, her relationship with Boyle frequently involves her controlling his actions:

BOYLE. (*to Joxer, who is still outside*). Come on, come on in, Joxer; she's gone out Long ago, man. If there's nothing else to be got, we'll furrage out a cup o' tay, anyway. It's the only bit I get in comfort when she's away. 'Tisn't Juno should be her pet name at all, but Deirdre of the Sorras, for she's always grousin'. (73)

It is noticeable that Juno exercises authority over domestic issues. At home, she is generally in control. In her presence, Jack, who is always giving himself an air of bravery, reveals his mediocrity and compliance.

JOXER. It's a terrible thing to be tied to a woman that's always grousin'. I don't know how you stick it — it ud put years on me. It's a good job she has to be so ofen away, for (*with a shrug*) when the cat's away, the mice can play!

BOYLE. (*with a commanding and complacent gesture*). Pull over to the fire, Joxer, an' we'll have a cup o' tay in a minute.

JOXER. Ah, a cup o' tay's a darlin' thing, a daaarin' thing — the cup that cheers but doesn't...

Joxer's rhapsody is cut short by the sight of Juno coming forward and confronting the two cronies. Both are stupefied.

MRS BOYLE. (*with sweet irony—poking the fire, and turning her head to glare at Joxer*). Pull over to the fire, Joxer Daly, an' we'll have a cup o' tay in a minute! Are you sure, now, you wouldn't like an egg?

JOXER. I can't stop, Mrs. Boyle; I'm in a desperate hurry, a desperate hurry.

MRS BOYLE. Pull over to the fire, Joxer Daly; people is always far more comfortable here than they are in their own place.

Joxer makes hastily for the door. Boyle stirs to follow him; thinks of something to relieve the situation. (74)

Much of Juno's agency and strength are communicated through her actions and interaction with other characters, whereas Boyle lives in his own world of fantasy and is indifferent to what takes place around him: "that's enough about them things; they don't affect us, an' we needn't give a damn. If they want a wake, well, let them have a wake." (117) Juno confers realism to the play, since her role reminds the audience of the real context of the family. Adverse circumstances enable her empowerment power and, hence, her struggle to bloom: "When the full brunt of the series of tragedies fall, it is only Juno who is capable of holding the pieces together." (Benstock, *Sean O'Casey* 75) She supports her family financially and emotionally. The grim realities of tenement life and "the end of the financial dream leave Juno a resolute woman, determined to start life again with her daughter." (Benstock, *Sean O'Casey* 55) As the play unfolds and the family discovers that the inheritance was a false promise, she gradually increases her potential for empowered attitudes, a process which culminates after she acquires awareness and finally comprehends that her errant husband will never change his way of life.

It could be said that Juno facilitates her own tragedy, displaying a certain ambivalence regarding her consciousness and disposition for change. In Act One, she is a steadfast woman who has struggled in life and does not comply with her husband's indolent behaviour. However, in Act Two, Juno suspends her empowered posture, when, overjoyed with the news, she gives in to the appeal of the improbable legacy and surrenders to Boyle's foolishness, ending up as an image of pathetic disappointment. As Johnny himself tells his mother: "You're to blame yourself for a gradle of it — givin' him his own way in everything, an' never assin' to check him, no matter what he done. Why didn't you look afther th' money? why..." (138) She even facilitates Boyle's alcoholism:

BOYLE. I thought you said you were goin'?

MRS. BOYLE. I'm goin' now; come on, Mary.

BOYLE. Ey, Juno, ey!

MRS. BOYLE. Well, what d'ye want now?

BOYLE. Is there e'er a bottle o' stout left?

MRS. BOYLE. There's two o' them here still.

BOYLE. Show us in one o' them an' leave t'other there till I get up. An' throw us in the paper that's on the table, an' the bottle o' Sloan's Liniment that's in the drawer.

MRS. BOYLE. (*getting the liniment and the stout*). What paper is it you want —

the Messenger?

BOYLE. *Messenger! The News o' the World!*

Mrs. Boyle brings in the things asked for, and comes out again.

MRS. BOYLE. (at door). Mind the candle, now, an' don't burn the house over our heads. I left t'other bottle o' stout on the table. (125)

Juno's fluctuating behaviour at some moments of the play may be explained through a provisional perspective regarding identity. Summerson Carr claims that during the personal empowerment process, more specifically through the interpretative process inherent to consciousness-raising, provisional identities are created and recreated. (17) It can be an ongoing event in the empowerment process. Furthermore, Teresa de Lauretis argues that "Consciousness therefore is never fixed, never attained once and for all, because discursive boundaries change with historical conditions." (116) Bearing in mind this notion of volatility as an essential feature of one's identity is helpful because it avoids a static perspective on individuals; on the contrary, it positions the subject as someone who is struggling to create himself/herself, as Juno is.

According to Armstrong, "what a small hope for humanity there is at the end of this play is due to the courage of its women." (14) Even though a few of Juno's actions in the play may reveal discordance with her image as a determined woman, her final attitude dispels any doubt concerning her disposition to change. In the closing scenes of the play, she is the only character who supports Mary and shows compassion for her, offering help to raise the child. She realises how much her daughter will suffer:

"What you an' I'll have to go through'll be nothin' to what poor Mary'll have to go through; for you an' me is middlin' old, an' most of our years is spent; but Mary'll have maybe forty years to face an' handle, an' every wan of them'll be tainted with a bitter memory." (134)

While Juno expresses her concern for Mary, Boyle has an opposite reaction: "she'll leave this place, an' quick too!" (135) Johnny also condemns his sister's situation: "She should be dhruven out o' th' house she's brought disgrace on!" (135) Not only Boyle, Johnny and the baby's father reject her, but so does Jerry. In addition to revealing the true character of the men in the play, Mary's plight also generates Juno's response:

[B]ut then when Jerry rejects Mary, if you get it right, it's all the more shocking.... You cross the line and it seems that all the political convictions are fundamentally bogus and that he doesn't trust any man's ability to be consistent with his words, and winds up celebrating the resilience of a woman who can be knocked down repeatedly and yet stand up, bless herself and go on. I think he actually has a grudging respect for the strength that Juno's faith gives her, not for the faith itself but in that as a function of that woman's make-up. (Stewart 111)

The play juxtaposes female characters as agents of power and struggle, with male characters who are impotent and indolent. Johnny is obviously weak and disturbed from the

beginning. Captain Boyle is an irresponsible father who refuses to change. In contrast, Juno and Mary are empowered characters who survive and are allowed the possibility of creating a reordered world for themselves. (Keaton 85) Although there is this equilibrium, at the end of the play, Juno stands out as the strongest female characters for she must restore Mary's faith:

MARY. Oh, it's throe, it's throe what Jerry Devine says — there isn't a God, there isn't a God; if there was He wouldn't let these things happen!

MRS. BOYLE. Mary, you mustn't say them things. We'll want all the help we can get from God an' His Blessed Mother now! These things have nothin' to do with the Will o' God. Ah, what can God do agen the stupidity o' men! (145)

According to Benstock, "Juno marshals her resources, cuts herself free from the useless Captain and the empty apartment, and goes off with Mary to start a new life, one that she knows full well will always be a hard one. Grief, self-awareness, and determination are all present in her attitudes." (*Sean O'Casey* 75) Apart from the political aspect, O'Casey was saying much about women in Juno and the Paycock by creating a female character who survives alone and no longer accepts being subordinate to her (drunken) husband: "That was a very brave thing to say at the time he was writing.... But O'Casey almost seems to suggest at the end of that play that no matter what disasters befall her, the strength of a woman is that she can start again" (Stewart 94), as Juno promises Mary:

MRS. BOYLE. We'll go. Come, Mary, an' we'll never come back here agen. Let your father furrage for himself now; I've done all I could an' it was all no use - he'll be hopeless till the end of his days. I've got a little room in me sisher's where we'll stop till your throuble is over, an' then we'll work together for the sake of the baby.

MARY. My poor little child that'll have no father!

MRS. BOYLE. I'll have what's far bettther — it'll have two mothers. (145-6)

Despite Mary's despondence, "My poor little child that'll have no father!", Juno reveals her strength, because she does not give up in face of downfalls. Although she knows she is going to face difficulties in her new life, her final words and attitudes indicate her determination to survive. Juno is represented as an empowered character, because she in the context of the play, she goes beyond what is expected from a woman, demonstrating that real heroism emerges wherever and whenever it is least expected, mostly in women like her. (Kiberd 222) Juno undergoes a change as the play unfolds; she shifts from being a conventional housewife who accepts her circumstances to an independent woman who is going to make a new life, not only for herself and for Mary, but also for the baby. It is an individual struggle, but for the well-being of the collective. She has already worked hard her whole life, remaining physically and mentally strong, despite facing adversities, as the execution of Johnny and the discovery of Mary's pregnancy, she gathers strength not only to cope with her sorrows, but also for those around her.

In spite of her suffering, she is determined since the early scenes to hold the family together. She is the character who, besides doing all the housework, must provide for the family's daily income. In a sense, she stands for all tenement mothers who fought for their

family's survival. At the end of the play, with the news about Mary's pregnancy, she is the only support her daughter has, since her father rejects her. Juno can undoubtedly be seen through the lens of gender. She is strong, assertive, devoted to her family, and the representation of "moral authority above any of the men." (Murray, *Sean O'Casey* 67, 70) Although her domestic and maternal actions correspond to the traditional stereotype attached to the Irish working-class woman, her role is not limited to these spheres. Juno's behaviour breaks with the idea of the traditional Irish family and might be equated with what Perkins and Zimmerman (575) classify as intrapersonal empowerment, which is when the subject acts confidently and competently in a specific situation: "Juno is not a stand-in for Ireland, but a character who represents real Irish women." (Wilson 325)

To conclude, Juno represents personal empowerment since she is able to overcome oppression. She is a character whose actions are a response to external influences, being primarily portrayed in a state of powerlessness, but then, the adversities she deals with throughout the play enable her to temper her empowered attributes to act as a strong and resourceful element before her family and community. Therefore, Juno can be conceived as a product of her interaction with the oppressive system in which she lives, and the way she endures and rises over it, makes her representative of a full process of change from oppression to empowerment, standing as O'Casey's symbol of power.

Notes

- 1 Peter James Harris presents an overview of the critical reception of *Juno and the Paycock* in London Theatre between 1925 and 1996 in his book *From Page to Stage* (2011).
- 2 The tenements, located in Dublin inner-city, were old houses formerly owned by the rich of Dublin. In the 1920s most rooms were occupied by poor Irish families which had to live in one single room under miserable conditions.
- 3 Harris explores the symbolic significance of Mary's preference for the green ribbon in his article "The Colonial and Post-Colonial Moments in Irish Drama: a comparison of Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island* (1904) with O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*" (1924).
- 4 First staged in 1923, the play is the first of O'Casey's *Three Dublin Plays*. It is situated in 1920 and involves the urban guerilla warfare of Ireland's War of Independence. The story takes place in a small improvised room in Hilljoy Square, house of Donal Davoren and Seumas Shileds.

Works Cited

- Armstrong, William. A. *Sean O'Casey*. Longmans, Green, 1967.
- Benstock, Bernard. *Sean O'Casey*. Bucknell U P, 1972.
- . *Paycock and Others: Sean O'Casey's World*. Gill and Macmillan, 1976.
- Carr, E. Summerson. "Rethinking empowerment theory using a feminist lens: the importance of process." *AFFILIA*, v. 18, no. 1, Spring, 2003, pp. 8-20.
- De Lauretis, Teresa. "Introduction." *Feminist studies/critical studies*, T. de Lauretis, editor. Indiana U P, 1986. pp. 1-19.
- Fallon, Gabriel. *Sean O'Casey: The Man I Knew*. Little, Brown and Company, 1965.
- Harris, Peter James. "Juno and the Paycock." *From Stage to Page: Critical Reception of Irish Plays in the London Theatre, 1925-1996*. Peter Lang AG, 2011, pp. 19-51.
- . "The Colonial and Post-Colonial Moments in Irish Drama: a comparison of Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island* (1904) with O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*" (1924). *Crop* (Revista da Área de Língua e Literatura Inglesa e Norte Americana, Departamento de Letras Modernas, USP) São Paulo, Vol. 3, 1996, pp. 58-64.
- Keaton, Maria. "The Mother's Tale: Maternal Agency in 'Juno and the Paycock'." *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*. Vol. 3, No. 4, 1999, pp. 85-97.

- Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland*. Random House, 1996.
- Murray, Christopher. *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama: Mirror Up to Nation*. Manchester U P, 1997.
- . "Introduction." *Three Dublin Plays: The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, The Plough and the Stars*, by Sean O'Casey. Faber and Faber, 1998, pp. vii-xiii.
- . Sean O'Casey. Faber and Faber, 2000.
- O'Casey, Sean. *Three Dublin Plays: The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, & The Plough and the Stars*. Faber & Faber, 2000.
- Perkins, Douglas D., and Marc Zimmerman. "Empowerment theory, Research and Application." *American Journal of Community Psychology*; v. 23, n. 5, 1995, pp. 569-79.
- Stewart, Victoria. *About O'Casey: The Playwright & the Work*. Faber and Faber, 2003.
- Wilson, Christina. "Representations of Women in the Abbey Theatre." *Chrestomathy*. Vol. 5, 2006, pp. 291-332
- Zimmerman, Marc A. *Psychological Empowerment: Issues and Illustrations*. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 23, No. 5, 1995, pp. 581-599.