Background

The play takes place against the background of the civil war between those Irishmen who accept the Irish Free State Treaty with England, giving Ireland the status of a dominion within the British Commonwealth, and those 'die-hard' or entrenched Republicans who consider the Treaty a betrayal of their ideal of a completely independent Ireland.

The play can be examined from the points of view of four central characters. Surprisingly, the play is held together in a family ambience, although the driving force for each of the four main characters is not exactly the same. The central character, Juno Boyle, appears in all the four viewpoints. The canvas is the family of Jack and Juno Boyle, with their daughter, Mary Boyle, and son Johnny Boyle, living together. The play is set in a tenement house in Dublin, in the poor 'two room tenancy' of the Boyle family.

From the point of view of Johnny Boyle

O'Casey himself is credited with the view that the play, Juno and the Paycock, is about Johnny Boyle, a young Republican who betrays his comrade, Robbie Tancred and is hunted by the 'Irregulars'. It is said that O'Casey was
wanting to write on a certain Johnny Boyle and his tragedy. There is no mention about the other characters. O’Casey was a witness to one such tragedy (to one such person) in his neighbouring tenement. But the ultimate play may not be the same as the one he wanted to write.

Johnny Boyle, a young Republican, has taken part in the Republican conflicts of 1916 and 1920. He is wounded in an encounter and is made immobile. He betrays his colleague Robbie Tancred, who is shot. Robbie Tancred’s mother, Mrs. Tancred lives in the same tenement.

Johnny is living in mortal terror as he fears that his betrayal will be discovered sooner or later and that he will be summarily executed. He has kept a 'votive light' almost as an hourglass, and is ticking out his living hours. He has not informed his parents about his betrayal.

The mysterious knocks and the visit of the two 'irregulars' or extreme Republicans who take him away finally to be shot at add to the tension. The hysterical 'vision' of Robbie Tancred adds to the suspense and awe.

Juno Boyle as the mother is his only link with the external world. He is doting on her even as he is very critical about his father and his sister Mary Boyle. While he
cannot condone himself of his betrayal and the shame he has brought on the family, he raises moral questions about Mary Boyle becoming pregnant and bringing down the reputation of the family, a typical example of his intransigent values. Johnny Boyle does not seem to have any respect for his father either. The fall of the Boyle family happens concurrently with his fall. While there is no resurrection for him, Juno Boyle is Mary Boyle’s resurrector, volunteering to be the additional mother for the yet unborn child of Mary Boyle.

The "will" does not have any direct impact on Johnny Boyle, as the fruition of the "will or not" is not going to alter "the inevitable flow of consequences on him. The "will episode", "the disappearance of Charles Bentham", the pregnancy of Mary Boyle are "absurd", "existential elements" happening on the periphery of his conditioned existence. His comrade had a funeral which is well organized and even seen by his parents and only heard by him, but his death is only reported, at best informed, by Mrs. Madigan, a co-tenant, to his mother, Juno Boyle, which coincides with her decision to quit the tenement, her family and husband for the sake of her daughter, Mary Boyle.
From the point of view of Mary Boyle

Mary Boyle, although living in extremely poor conditions in the tenement, is a self-educated person. Not depending on her father, she has secured a job for herself. But when the play begins, she join the strike as a matter of 'principle'. For her, life is living only on principles and it is her disillusionment with her alien lover, that opens her eyes to reality. For a girl, who is temporarily unemployed, she cares far too much for her dress and appearance.

It is her mother who pooh-poohs her 'principles' of socialism, as money and not abstract philosophy will encourage their grocer to give them provisions on credit.

While she has moral support for her brother, Johnny Boyle, she will not as much move to fetch him a glass of water. She lets her mother do it.

She is being courted by another Trade Unionist, Jerry Devine, with whom she falls in love, till she meets Charlie Bentham, a school teacher, whose ancestry is vague and unknown. She deserts the love of Jerry Devine and prefers Charlie Bentham for considerations of status, better-living, and, perhaps a desire to get away from the tenement.

It is Charlie Bentham who brings the news of the 'will'
to the Boyle family. Whether it is a well-deliberated ploy by the crafty Charlie Bentham to eliminate Jerry Devine from the love race, or the will, in fact, existed is a moot point. Mary Boyle's anxiety and deep desire to transcend the tenement world perhaps induces her to go nearer Charlie than Jerry, as loving Jerry would only confine her to tenement, her dreary world.

She believes in the abstract 'principles' of socialism and only her mother, Juno Boyle, makes her see the realism of day-to-day living, borrowing from the grocer. She has no idea of what happened to her brother, but makes no attempt to know what has happened to him. Her world is restricted to love and better living. Even when Jerry Devine brings news about a job for her father, Jack Boyle, she spurns him. She treats him like dirt and she behaves as if she has risen above the level of Jerry Devine.

She does not help her mother in any way. When the 'will' is made known her only exclamation is 'fortune?' Once Charlie is in, her entire values are only in terms of Charlie; if Charlie would like this, like that. She converts Charlie into a barometer of her values to realize that the barometer is faulty.
She confides with her mother only after Charles has deserted her. Juno Boyle has to prod her on to know the truth. When Jerry Devine meets her again after the double mishaps—the disappearance of Charles Bentham and the faulty will—she expects him to restore her love. But when he swears true love on one breath, he only rejects her in the next breath when he discovers that she is pregnant. She accuses him of “falling low”, but she is the one who has “fallen lower”. In one way, it is a kind of poetic justice that she is rejected, deserted by the one for whose sake, she spurned her first beloved.

The will does not really bother her much. When Johnny Boyle accuses her of bringing shame to the family she has no answer. The gamut of her relationship lies only on two directions—with her mother, and with her lovers.

In the end, it is her mother who comes to her rescue. In an askew way, her ambition is realized—she gets out of tenement with her mother to another world, with better values. It is the story of betrayal and punishment. Mary betrayed her love for Charles, and she is punished for the ungrateful act. Seen from a different point of view, it is she who creates the need for another new generation of tenement dwellers with new
values (with an unborn child). When the child is born, it will be in a new environ with new values. Her story though related only through her mother to the plot, shows that everything has a price, and one must pay it for changes to happen.

From the point of view of Jack Boyle

O’Casey paints a rather unsavoury picture of a husband and a father in the character of Jack Boyle. Seen from his point of view, this play is about a dilettante sailor who prefers to dream and live off his wife’s earnings preserving his inflated ego. He has talents to turn every event to his best advantage. He spends most of his time in inns with his friend, ‘Joxer’ Daly, and is in constant need of money. He pretends to know everything. His relationship with his wife keeps fluctuating as his values from time to time.

The ‘will’ changes his perspective and he gives himself to a certain generosity which extends to entertaining others in the tenement. He behaves rich, a parvenu though. With Charles Bentham he pretends he is educated and expresses his opinions on many a subject. This is another shade of his pretensions. No where in the play does he ever ask what is really the matter with Johnny Boyle. Even when Johnny screams
sighting spirits, he does not exhibit courage enough to enter his room, talking about his bravery all the while. He criticizes the church, the national happenings at the political level, his daughter after she becomes pregnant even as the will fizzes out. He is the moving spirit in his world. When the 'will' peters out and things are removed from his house, there is no regret in him. He does not exhibit any remorse at Johnny being taken away for execution. He did not exhibit any at the death of Robbie Tancred, or during his funeral.

But he shouts at Mary Boyle's unwed pregnancy as a slur to his status and prestige in society. He does not take one positive step to restore Mary's life. He is so concerned with himself that when his son is lost, his daughter is faced with a tragedy, and his wife and daughter have deserted him and the tenement, he still clings to his liquor and his friend, and proclaims that the world is in a 'state of chassis'. He is the centre of his universe and would like to remain so, no matter what changes take place within and without. He displays a joie de vivre that others in the play lack.

Though he meets all the other characters in his varying fortunes, and in their vicissitudes, he dominates the show
either by his loudness, or by his lack of practical intelligence, or by a combination of both. He is a witness to many an event that concerns him and that takes place right in his presence but does precious little to take any action, learning little from them.

The main flow of action is not radically altered by his action. He neither influences nor is influenced by the main action.

From the point of view of Juno Boyle

Perhaps it is this point of view that holds the key to understand the others' points of view. It is Juno's involvement that finds its course in the lives of the other members of her family. And it is she who takes positive, and perhaps, momentous decisions and her decisions change almost cataclysmically the direction of the play, helping her emerge as the strongest character and the first woman who rises several cuts above an ordinary tenement woman.

Juno Boyle may not bear the name for reasons explained by her husband to the alien, the stranger, who lands in her house bringing hope and destruction. It is sheer coincidence that she was born in the month of June and this helps her husband Jack Boyle, to use it as a piece to show off his love
for his wife.

She is a working woman who shows particular interest in caring for the entire family. She goes out for shopping, buys the needs of the home on credit. She has her own principles but not of the variety of her daughter, Mary Boyle. While the daughter strikes work, she does not question her decision, but the so called principles behind it. For her, empty slogans and abstract philosophy will not clothe and feed the family.

She is downright practical. She knows where her husband is likely to be at any given moment and in what company. She has understood him very well—that he is an empty boast and a day dreamer, that he couldn’t care to take up a job to keep himself employed and bring home money.

When the play opens, she is a little noisy and domineering. She makes the audience understand as to who runs the family and who is really the central figure. She cares for everyone, including her idle husband and his breakfast!

When Jerry Devine brings the offer of a job, she knows her husband would pretend illness and might not accept it. However, she goads him, coaxes him and subtly threatens him as well, to accept it.
Her inter-relationship with her son, daughter and husband is evenly poised. She attends to her ailing son and makes it plain to him patriotism per se is of no relevance and use, as people are killed every day.

She is human enough to be moved when Charlie Bentham reveals the existence of a will that might allay their financial misery. The agony of a tenement woman is universal and she becomes a symbol of a tenement woman. She is argumentative and, perhaps, teasing as well.

She is moved by the 'will', and its prospects, envisaging and promising a comfortable, trouble-free life. She allows her husband to indulge in extravagance. She is inordinately polite to Charlie Bentham and does not want to contradict him in his views.

She does not discuss with her son what actually led to the loss of limb. She is aware that the son and the daughter do not see eye to eye, and that their principles are mutually antagonistic. She is also aware that her husband's financial contribution to the family is virtually zero. On this score, she does not take it out on her children. She is balanced in her relationships.

She is human enough to fall prey to a temporary, a
fleeting, time of joy. In Act Two when Johnny Boyle is unable to bear the noise, she when quietens him. Again, when Johnny sights an apparition, she is not afraid but is hind-sighted enough to convince him that they are ‘figments of his imagination’. She brings in the gramaphone and records to celebrate with her husband. She has not switched on to new dress. She shares her new-found joy with her neighbours in a less ostentatious manner.

On a human level, she fails (when she knows that Mrs. Tancred has lost her son) to convey her condolences during the funeral. She does not join the funeral, but only watches it. She tries to seek reasons if Robbie Tancred’s death (murder) can be justified. That may be because, she finds her home secure and intact.

It is Juno Boyle who finds the winds of change in Mary Boyle. She is shrewd enough to discover that Charlie Bentham has deserted her and that Mary is, in fact, pregnant. This weighs upon her mind more heavily that the non-realization of the ‘will’. That is, perhaps, explicable, as she is prepared to live in the worst economic conditions. She has indeed lived before and will not be a stranger to living in penury. She faces tragedy on two fronts—a let down by Charlie Bentham
who fails her as her would-be-son-in-law; and the 'will' that never came to be. It is these simultaneous attacks on two fronts that make her character more sympathetic, and perhaps, stronger.

She does not care anymore about the 'will' as the will-bringer himself is lost. She does not react to the removal of the 'furnishing' at home; much less about the fact of Jack Boyle screaming at her daughter. Her only concern is the restitution of her daughter's life. It is precisely at this moment that tragedy strikes her. Johnny Boyle is taken away by the 'irregulars' and she is only informed of his death, nay execution, she is honest enough to admit that she did not react as honestly, deeply and genuinely as she should have done on the death of Robbie Tancred. In a dramatic way, she becomes a surrogate Mrs. Tancred and utters the same prayer as Mrs. Tancred did on the death of her son at the funeral. It comes as an atonement as well.

She walks out of the tenement deserting her husband to his liquor and values, and the tenement to its rotting values, and goes out to a brave new world with her daughter, to play 'a second mother'. She has principles of life affirmation. She emerges as a new woman with bravery, courage and
conviction.

In a way, the play can be viewed as a morality play. There is temptation for material wealth and happiness, through the ‘will’ and when the mammon disappears, the tragedy sets in -- son’s execution and daughter’s unwed pregnancy.

She resurrects herself by looking at the realities. She does not surrender to events and circumstances but conquers them by rising above self-interest and cynicism.

**Criticism about the performance**

Ivor Brown comments this way: "Dublin has seen this play (Juno and the Paycock) I believe, without much protest, though it is twenty times as strong an accusation as ever lay beneath the laughter of Synge."(1)

Almost in the same vein but with a different tenor Desmond MacCarthy remarks, "... This play, thank God, is not about us."(2)

Joseph Halloway writing on March 3, 1924, reports. "It is powerful and gripping and all that, but too damned gruesome it gets you, but it is not pleasant ... The last act is intensely tragic and heart-rendingly real to those who passed through the terrible period of 1922 ..."(3)

In the same writing he observes elsewhere, "He
(O’Casey) is a strange odd fish, but a genius in his way."(4)

Pitted against these two reviews, it will be worthwhile examining O’Casey’s views on the play written in 1953. "Juno and the Paycock was written many years ago, when strife ruled Ireland and men and women took a sadistic pleasure out of injury to, and death of others."(5)

Writing on Juno he observes, "To give a lasting sunny disposition in poverty is not possible; the whole damned, rotten system must go, before the good word always comes to the tongue, smile shines forth from the eye."(6)

W.J. Lawrence comparing Synge with O’Casey, remarks thus. "He has been the means of showing us ... that what the great public hungers after is not poetic or historical drama, not even peasant drama, but the drama of palpitating city life. Democracy has at last become articulate on both sides of the curtain."(7)

Elsewhere, he comments, "O’Casey is at once iconoclast and new-Elizabethan. One cannot place his plays in any recognized category."(8)

He concludes, writing on the climax of the play. "This is a natural climax, a climax of rich nobility, leaving the echo in our hearts of the wish for peace on earth and good
will towards men. The drunken epilogue which follows is artistically indefensible." (9)

His final remark is worth noting. "... Mr. Sean O’Casey has something yet to learn; but, despite its blemishes, *Juno and the Paycock* running as it does over the entire gamut of the emotion, is distinctly, a play to be seen." (10)

Critical studies

Sir Lawerence Olivier, the most authentic voice in English Theatre makes very pertinent observations. "Realistic would not be quite the right word to describe this piece, nor naturalistic. I think ‘life-like’ would be nearer the mark. Though there is fantasy in the characters ... O’Casey wished the play itself to be kept out of the realm."

"It is, in fact, closer to Osborne than to Chekhov. The play, deals in eternals and there isn’t a character who hasn’t made a turning-point mistake in his life ..."

"O’Casey might have described *Juno and the Paycock* as a hooley?." (11)

More or less on these lines but with a change in stress, Errol Durbagh contends: "A form of realism, perhaps -- but it is far closer to that of Dickens than the realism of Robertson or Shaw. It distorts. It emphasizes something non-
human within the recognizably "true" depiction of a character, so that what we observe in action is a human being moving slowly out of the realm of the real into the surreal."(12) "It is his (O'Casey's) meticulous control of the mother as a myth, symbol and realistic presence that most clearly reveals O'Casey's craftmanship and technical economy."(13)

Making comparisons with Synge, the critic observes: "If Synge's The Play Boy of the Western World, celebrates the magnificence of the self-creating hero, O'Casey in Juno and the Paycock shows the catastrophic consequences to men who live dream lives of impossible wish fulfillment. They present a splendid study of two contrasting Irish temperaments."(14)

Writing on the technique of O'Casey, he declares: "Fantastic illusion and crude reality keep cutting across each other."(15)

Discussing the structural design of Juno and the Paycock, Michael W. Kaufman concludes, "Juno and the Paycock is a play of betrayed expectations."(16) "... Each act is built upon the discrepancy between the characters' expectations—and the very actuality they confront."(17) "... All the three plots present variations on the common theme of the vanity of human wishes variously related wealth -- and status, love and
honour."(18)

There are some sharply dissenting notes, voices, to the almost universal praise. Joseph Woodkrutch maintains that "O’Casey offers no solution; he proposes no remedy; he suggests no hope. Artistically as well as intellectually there is only the clash between the preposterous and the terrible. Like Captain Boyle, he finds nothing to say except that ‘Everything is in a state of chass‘."(19)

This is countered by Heinz Kosak. "While O’Casey indeed offers no ‘solution’ the hope embodied in Juno remains as a bulwark against chaos."(20)

Comparisons are often made about Maurya’s prayer in Synge’s Riders to the Sea and Juno’s prayer in Juno and the Paycock. “Maurya succumbs to an inexorable fate and accepts defeats without murmur. For Juno, her prayer is not an ending but the beginning of a new development; her (possibly irrational, but nevertheless admirable) optimism leads her into a new battle against fate for the existence of the people entrusted to her.”(21)

But Rene Frechet’s contention seems to be different. “Evidemment la superiorite la synge est ici incontestable.”(22) Writing on under the title "Sean O’Casey
et la tragedie des "tenements", Robert de Smet observes about the much debated last scene that "il n'ajoute rien a la signification de l'oeuvre." (23)

Enlightened criticism looks at the play in a better perspective. What is the central theme of the play? "... Human integrity is put to the test in numerous different situations where several characters, confronted with the same task succeed or fail, and where success or failure, determining moral rank, provides the co-ordinates for the evaluatory system of the play." (24)

Considerable criticism exists on the last scene. The emptying of the room, it is suggested, itself "a physical symbol of a disintegrating family and a disintegrating country." (25)

Heinz Kosak looks at the play from a perspective that is distinctively different from his predecessors. In his opinion, "the play shows how an individual life can be determined through a single irreversible decision", (26) and how it contributes to the fate of the family.

Again looking at the sufferings, in the play, he writes: "While the Boyle's suffering is presented in detail, the suffering of the Tancred family appears in one scene only, and that of the Mannings is only alluded to a few times. Thus
in precise gradations from the extended stage events to the merest hint, a chain of suffering is revealed, reaching far beyond the family and the community of neighbors. Suffering, personified in Mrs. Tancred's stage appearance in Act Two, is not limited to the Boyles, it concerns the whole country and points even beyond those national limits."(27)

Looking at the play from the point of view of Johnny, he writes, "... he (Johnny) flees both from his conscience and from his pursuers. In the person of Johnny, O'Casey has depicted the fate of some one who through a single rash deed has jeopardized all the principles of his life, who has made his past worthless and his future hopeless, a Lord-Jim situation without a second chance."(28)

In another place he observes, "O'Casey's specific contribution to the literary tradition may be seen in the unobstrusiveness with which he has depicted Mary's seduction."(29)

Writing on Captain Boyle he comments: "he (Captain Boyle) epitomizes his chronic incapacity for self knowledge and the blind inadaptability which, contrary to his heroic understanding of himself, has contributed to the
disintegration of the family.” (30)

Not without reason, Kosak feels that “Juno in several ways is the central character of the play. Dramaturgically she is the most important link between the different lines of action participating equally in all of them ... she is the dramatist’s most important device in preserving the unity of his play ... If one wants to do justice to this play one should note that Juno is not, portrayed from the start as the author’s ideal.” (31)

Robert Abirached considers Juno as “une sorte de mere courage qui ignore le marxisme et qui ne comprend pas ce qui lui arrive.” (32)

While Starkie tends to hold O’Casey as a pacifist and a fatalist, Brugere holds a different view: “O’Casey’s interdit scrupuleusement de preter a des personnages ses propres idees. It ne permet pas a ses preferences individuelles d’obscurir sa vue claire et courageuse des donnees de l’experience. Ami des desherites, il ne les a point idealises.” (33)

Juno’s prayer combining echoes of Shelley’s Adonais with reminiscence of the prophet Ezekiel (XI 19) perhaps allows a critic to conclude that it is “possible to see these
various attitudes to religion simply as part of the
dramatist’s technique of characterization.”(34)

The same critic discussing the genre to which Juno and
the Paycock can be assigned, concludes: "If Juno and the
Paycock is to be placed in any category at all, it belongs to
tragicomedy, but only if tragicomedy is considered as an
autonomous genre and not simply as a combination of comic and
tragic scenes.”(35)

Act I

O’Casey has so meticulously described the two room
tenement that a film art director would vie with jealously.
It is a selective piece of naturalistic setting. It looks as
though O’Casey is describing every thing on the stage to a
camera. First, there is silence. Only action. That the play
is going to be only about the younger generation is clearly
established by the presence of Johnny Boyle and Mary Boyle.
"Johnny Boyle is sitting crouched besides the fire." This is
a very self evident and symbolic visual indicative of what the
character is in need of -- warmth, and protection. He is
‘crouched’. "Mary Boyle is arranging her hair before a tiny
mirror perched on the table." Her attitude is quite
contrasting to Johnny Boyle’s. She cares for appearances.
Though the audience may have no chance to know the clues to understanding her character, O'Casey none the less gives them. "The opposing forces are apparent in her speech and her manners, and improved by her acquaintance -- slight though it be -- with literature. The time is early forenoon." Two adults are at home in a forenoon in labourer's house. This shows the climate of job opportunities in Dublin at that time.

From silence, O'Casey slowly but very subtly introduces the first "aural" element. Mary reads a news item in the newspaper. Is it a house where the inmates are keen on knowing what is happening around? Or is it entirely the choice of Mary Boyle? It is very likely, but no clue is available. The paper is just a starting point, a vital catalyst in setting the action mobile. What she reads is most important and concerns the entire family and changes the course of action.

O'Casey introduces another major character by an entry. Mrs. Boyle enters after shopping. The sympathy of the playwright is evident. "Were circumstances favourable, she would probably be a handsome, active and clever woman." Already O'Casey has given his views on the tenement dwelling and its crippling power. At the end of the play where Mary
and Juno Boyle walk out of the dwelling, they go for an environment of their choice, declaring their freedom to discover themselves.

The central character Jack Boyle is introduced in absentia by his wife with a question that is an answer to an unasked question: "Isn't he come in yet?" What impression can one have of this as yet, the unseen member of the family? In what esteem is he held at home by the bread winner? "...oh, he'll come in when he likes; struttin' about the town like a paycock with Joxer, I suppose." Whose company does Jack Boyle choose even in preference to his family's? Is there a tinge of anger, or despondency that Joxer substitutes the role of the wife in the voice of Juno Boyle? The time-bomb that is going to snap all her hopes in her son, Johnny Boyle, is planted by Juno Boyle herself. There is an absence of sympathy in her reference to Mrs. Tancred's son's death. The peremptory manner with which she dismisses the death is ironically contrasted when she repents, later in Act Three. This is a master stroke in the craft of playwrighting. While the daughter describes the nature of killing, Johnny gets enraged and quits abruptly. The first expressed and exhibited emotion of Johnny is anger, an over-charged animosity to his
own people. The audience can get a clue to his ranting, as they themselves are used to it in the then times.

The exit of Johnny seems plausible. Juno Boyle takes the opportunity to blame her husband, initially with a threat of no breakfast, and later for the company she keeps with Joxer and his largess to Joxer.

When Johnny calls for a glass of water, Mary, declines to go but she needs her mother’s help towards the end of the play. This incident gives the audience a clue to the existing relationship between Mary and Johnny which is none too cordial.

The scene is on two wave lengths, while Mary is concerned over what to wear, Juno Boyle is worried about her husband, and his style of living. Mary’s and Juno’s values in life are mutually conflicting. Mary lives in a world of imagination, while Juno is down right practical; albeit wrong. It is Juno’s philosophy of life that saves Mary in the end. For Juno Boyle, living is important and that is the only truth. It is a sort of existential survival. Their talk shows the poor living conditions of the tenement dwellers; living on credit as it were.
Johnny reappears this time complaining of his inability to sleep because of the noises created by the neighbours. The noise itself is a continuation of the technique employed in *The Shadow of a Gunnman* where Seumas Shields is constantly upset by noises from outside. Johnny shows his wrath asking his mother to bring him tea to assuage his thirst and soothe his nerves. He is high strung. He exits again shouting; and, in exasperation. It must be noted here that in less than five minutes after the action opens, he shouts, taking out his anger on his mother and sister. Johnny chooses to speak from his room.

Johnny’s attitude to his father is made plain when he says, "I hate askin’ him for anythin’ ... He hates to be asked to stir ..." By now, Jack Boyle’s portraiture as done by the members of his family is complete.

Mrs. Boyle also shows her exasperation soaked in pride: "Amn’t I nicely handicapped with the whole O’yours! I don’t know what any O’you ud do without your ma."

The connection that Johnny Boyle tries to build between his life and the votive light is made explicit by his own question: "Is the light lightin’ before the picture O’ the Virgin?"
The family atmosphere changes with the entry of Jerry Devine, an outsider. His arrival brings hope to the family. He informs them of a job opportunity for Jack Boyle. He is prepared to seek him wherever he may be and therefore rushes out.

Captain Boyle lives up to the description of his wife. On the stage there is only Juno: The steps and the song "Sweet spirit, hear me prayer" prepare the audience for Jack Boyle's arrival. The situation is naturally humorous. Juno Boyle hears the song and Joxer Daly's solemnizing it as "Ah, that's a darlin' song, a daarlin'song."

O'Casey perhaps wants a comic situation built and that is the reason why he allows Juno Boyle to make 'visciously' a sarcastic comment; "Sweet spirit hear his prayer! Ah, then, I'll take me solemn affeydavey, it's not for for a jab he's prayin'!". Not content with the verbal repartee, O'Casey lets her "sit down on the bed so that the cretonne hangings hide her from the view of those entering."

"The Captain comes in". But joxer is still outside. Only on Captain Boyle's command does he get in. The Captain makes jokes about his wife's name as she did only a little earlier. "'Tisn't Juno should be her pet name at all, but
Deidre of the Sorras; for she’s always grousin’.

The basic contradiction in the family, between the husband and the wife, daughter and mother, brother and sister, is made clear. Everyone is accusing someone or the other.

Joxer’s entry, done cautiously, is humorous on its own and a self-proclaimed estimation about themselves is even more humorous and apt. "... When the cat’s away, the mice can play!"

Captain Boyle’s momentary boldness is cut short by Mrs. Boyle’s sudden emergence, resulting in the two cronies behaving like clowns. This is a comic device. The ironical side is Joxer is facing Mrs. Boyle, under fear, which Jack Boyle is unaware of. He keeps talking as if only Joxer Daly is with him.

Captain Boyle’s resourcefulness is seen for the first time when he realizes his wife’s presence on the scene. He puts on a front as if he is the master of the situation. The scene is repeated in the last act when the two cronies come scrounging for food, when they need not be wary of Juno’s presence as she has already walked out on them.

Mrs. Juno Boyle’s attitude towards Joxer Daly is emphatically shown when “she shuts the door with a bang”. All
the sham tricks of Jack Boyle for not taking up a job that Mrs. Juno Boyle is familiar with, but yet they are shown to keep the audience entertained by a character comedy coinciding with an appropriate situation. When Juno Boyle makes it plain she will not accept 'fairy tales', Jack Boyle relieves 'the tenseness of the situation' by subdued coughs, setting up the rhythm of this scene.

The ensuing scene is a family quarrel, comic outwardly, but painful inside. When Juno Boyle informs him of the job offer, it is not as if she is not aware of her husband's stances and reactions, but it is more to show the audience 'the type' of person he is--a strutting paycock. She shows a decision that is indicative of the events to come later. "Nobody's goin' to coax you - don't think that." The action that O'Casey gives is definitive. "She vigorously replaces the pan and the sausages in the press." The most beautiful sentence, a double-entendre follows: "I've a little spirit left in me still".

But for the entry of Jerry Devine (his second entry), the First Act would have come to a tame end, and his seemingly honest statement betrays Jack Boyle as a rank liar. This encounter also is more to show Jack Boyle's imperviousness, and his reluctance to do any job, all adding up to the image
of a paycock.

Mrs. Boyle excusing herself saying she's 'terribly late already' reveals that she is employed. This is the only clue in the play. Later on, there is no reference to it at all, this being one of the loose ends of the play.

The episode with Jerry and Mary is more to show the arrogant attitude of the father that is extended in his daughter as well. Mary's reply, "That's all over now" is decisive enough to reveal that she is as much an opportunist to spurn aside a bird in the hand. This episode is important in another aspect. Jerry's declaration: "Never, never, Mary! No matter what happens, you'll always be the same to me" is going to be contradicted in the last act when Mary really needs help, Jerry withdraws accusing her of 'falling so low'. Jerry Devine describes Mary's choice of a new lover as 'Micky Dazzler', with a walkin'-stick an' 'gloves'!

'Mary breaks away and rushes out', followed by Jerry. On the stage there is only one figure, that of Jack Boyle, commenting on his daughter's behavior. "This is nice goin's on in front of her father". This is not surprising as he is cast in the traditional mould, dismissing' the whole worl' being in a state of chassis'!

His initial rejection of breakfast at a verbal level and taking it immediately at an action level is an exposition of the contradictory character of Jack Boyle. This O'Casey brings off in silence: "A pause; he rises, goes to the press, takes out the sausage, puts it on the pan, and puts both on the fire. He attends the sausage with a fork. He breaks into a song in exuberation of the joie de vivre. He lifts his head at the high note, and then drops his eyes to the pan."

Here again, the action would have come to a dead end but for the entry of "a bearded man, looking in" and asking, "you don't happen to want a servin' machine?" As in The Gunman, there are interruptions by other characters to carry forward the action. Another knock, and this time Joxer Daly enters. These knocks bother Johnny as they did Seumas Shields in The Gunman. He reacts violently. Two levels and dimensions of fear are projected. One for Jack Boyle, and entirely another, at a personal and moral level for Johnny Boyle.

The exit of Johnny and entry of Joxer with his hand struck between the doors is tragi-comic in import quite contrapuntal to the actual fears of Johnny. Joxer appearing as he does now is afraid of Juno Boyle, and, therefore, very
cautious. The audience might not be able to appreciate the 'personal fears' of Johnny right now.

The second encounter of Joxer Daly and Jack Boyle, is a continuation of the earlier one revealing and confirming Juno's assessment that Jack will not consent to go for a job; he would remain and continue to be a Paycock.

O'Casey uses this occasion to tear the mask of Jack Boyle as a brave man and sailor, particularly after his attack on Father Farrell.

O'Casey introduces off stage dialogues almost overlapping on Joxer's and Jack's bluffs. "The voice of a coal block vendor is heard chanting in the street. "Blocks .... Coal blocks! Blocks.. Coal blocks." Blocks can be conveniently mispronounced 'blokes', serving almost as a comment on Jack Boyle and Joxer Daly. This technique is repeated with an avowed reiteration, when after the Captain recalls his valiant days in the sea, and 'amen'ed by the Joxer, the voice comes up, this time rather loudly: "Any blocks, coal blocks; blocks, coal blocks." Their world of self-induced hallucination is disturbed soon by sounds. O'Casey puts this thus: "Rapid steps are heard coming towards the door. Boyle makes desperate efforts to hide everything;
Joxer rushes to the window in a frantic effort to get out. Boyle begins to innocently lilt "Oh, me darlin' Jennie, I will be there to thee, when the door is opened, and the black face of the coal vendor appears." One would have have expected the entry of Juno Boyle. But the sticking head of the coal vendor is a comic device of surprise. The description of the emotions of the characters is worth noticing. Boyle speaks 'with a roar' and Joxer 'comes back with a sigh of relief'. Their behavior is like the 'three stooges'. Joxer giving Jack Boyle tips on bravery after he ran helter-skelter, and begged to disappear is most amusing. "Be firm, be firm, Captain; the first few minutes'll be the worst; if you gently touch a nettle it'll sting you for your pains grasp it like a lad of mettle, an' as soft as silk remains!"

His (Joxer's) 'pep talk' shows he is the master of the game and his hasty retreat 'flying out of the window' does not build up an image of an arrogant and termagant wife, but of their weakness to face up truth and reality. Boyle 'packing the things away with a rush in the press' and 'sitting down by the fire' is an extension of the comic chore.

There is an inconsistency in terms of time. Juno Boyle left for work commenting she was already late. The action
between her exit and her entry now, does not show much time has elapsed. Either O'Casey has overlooked this time element; or, erred into making Juno, a working woman.

Juno asking Jack Boyle to take off the "moleskin trousers" must come funny to the audience, as only a little earlier she wanted him to put on the trouser. It gives the impression that Juno is the driving force of the family.

Mrs. Boyle brings the "good news of the will". Boyle exits to change the dress and Juno Boyle "tidies up the room, puts the shovel under the bed, and goes to the press." Suddenly an element of calmness descends on to the atmosphere of the house. Her disgust, anathema, to Joxer's presence is obvious "Oh, Joxer was here, Joxer was here!"

One would expect a chain of reactions. But the atmosphere changes by the unexpected entry of Mary; "Mary enters with Charlie Bentham; ... he carries gloves and walking stick" to confirm Jerry Devine's description of him as Micky Dazzler.

This scene is more to show how the family retunes its behaviour patterns to a stranger who may bring them a fortune. It is Mrs. Boyle who brings in Charlie Bentham. She believes
in appearances and orders her husband to look decent. In the
final analysis, the intention is to rise above the tenement
living and get rid of financial drudgery. O’Casey continues
to maintain a comic atmosphere making Jack Boyle blurt out
sentences unaware of a vicious visitor. Two people are not
seen and their wordy duel is heard by three people on the
stage, and the audience:

Voice of Johnny inside: What are you kickin’ up all the racket for?

Boyle (roughly): I’m taking’ off me moleskin trousers
A visitor can easily guess the atmosphere. Charlie Bentham hearing the wordy exchanges, can see a house divided. Juno’s help is required even for a small thing like finding braces. "Look at your braces, man, hangin’ round your neck!"

While this continues to sustain the comedy, it also shows Juno Boyle is the king pin.

Johnny’s assertion that "I’d do it again, ma, I’d do it again, a principle’s a principle’s" is contested. While this may show his patriotic disposition, it is soon destroyed by Juno when she counters, "Ah, you lost your best principles, my boy, when you lost your arm; ..."

O’Casey rapidly changes the atmosphere as there is nothing more that the visitor can discuss. He lets Boyle enter. Only a little earlier did the audience see him in ‘moleskin’ trousers, and earlier to this in his own usual dress. In a short while, he has made three changes in dress giving varying impressions.

The ensuing scene brings up the prospects of a ‘will’ and an inheritance. The whole family reacts with joy and excitement. Jack Boyle gives the impression he is a fool by his half-baked knowledge.

When he announces ‘he’s done with Joxer’, Joxer appears
"climbing angrily through the window and bounding into the room". Joxer plays Boyle’s game of ‘hallucinations’ of self-grandeur, till he is driven out by Juno Boyle. His assessment of Jack Boyle is unimpeachable. "Lookin’ for work, an’ prayin’ to god he won’t get it!"

The First Act ends on a note of the family in great joy and the head of the family is giving himself to singing. It began with only Mary on the stage, but ends with the entire family in a happy mood.

Act Two

If Act One, was a rambunctious bit of comedy, there is change in tone, in the Second Act, even at the beginning. O’Casey is crafty enough to show Jack Boyle at home ‘voluptuously stretched on the sofa’, smoking a clay pipe. In the First Act, O’Casey let the audience hear Jack Boyle singing even before he appeared on the stage. As a piece of contrast, he now lets Joxer Daly sing softly a song. Jack Boyle swore he would never see Joxer, but ironically enough, he invites Joxer in: "Come along Joxer, my son, come along".

The stage picture is repetitious. Joxer props his neck only, which is a comic device. Joxer is reassured that Jack is the ‘masther now’. Joxer enters. Juno Boyle behaves a par-
venu. The stage is set in a “vulgar nature, exhibiting the lack of taste of the Boyles.”

The scene between Joxer and Jack Boyle shows the topsy-turvy values of Jack Boyle, on many an issue. Again, a comic episode between these two.

As Joxer goes out, Johnny enters. “Johnny comes from room on left, and sits down moodily at the fire. Boyle, looks at him for a few moments, and shakes his head. He fills his pipe.” This action is very significant. Whereas Johnny wants warmth, protection, Jack fills his pipe to enjoy the warmth, the comfort of the pipe. It is also significant to note that there is no exchange whatsoever between the father and the son. The voice from outside links them. It is Juno’s voice: "Open the door, Jack, this thing has me nearly kilt with the weight." It is a piece of visual irony. In the first Act, she entered with provisions for the family. Now, she brings things to keep up with her newfound status. "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."

The talk between them is a different style and there is an absence of fight and fault finding. Jack behaves as if he
were the captain of the family. Juno consults him for everything and Jack has the final say on everything from music to football. Mary’s exit is suggested by Juno Boyle. She is particular about appearances.

It must be noted that Johnny is present on the stage, quiet, and as a witness to what is taking place. Only Juno Boyle talks to him. None else -- Joxer, Jack or Mary.

Mrs. Boyle’s mind is full of Charlie Bentham’s arrival and Johnny’s mind is about a reprisal, a backlash on him for his betrayal. As in The Shadow of a Gunman, a knock means different things to different people. Just to snub Juno’s "flutter and over excitement", Jack is sarcastic by saying "... it’s a pity there’s not a brass band to play him in."

Bentham enters, Jack plays one up by talking about "consoles’ and price fluctuations. "Mary enters charmingly dressed". The talk takes place on religion, "country in a state of chassis’, theosophy, vedas. ‘prawna’, and ‘ghosts’, till a real confrontation arises.

Johnny "hurriedly goes into the room ..." as he hates any talk of ghosts. "A frightened scream is heard from Johnny inside". This is yet one more occasion to prove how O’Casey manipulates events to create terror (mixed with laughter from
Johnny "rushes out again, his face pale, his lips twitching, his limbs trembling". For a moment O'Casey creates, induces extra beats in the heart of the audience with this scream. Johnny, it must be noted carefully, appeals only to "Blessed Mother O' God' and Jesus'.

When Boyle is asked to go in where Johnny saw the ghost, he does not dare, which gives room for laughter in the audience. O'Casey's devices are double edged. No one dares, infact, except Charlie Bentham. He goes and returns. There is dead silence on the stage and the audience is expectant. This is one of the most meaningful silences on the stage. Boyle claiming he knew it was all "nonsense" breaks the silence into laughter, even as he goes down in the esteem of the audience.

Now another knock on the door, but no one is worried. Boyle opens it with fear. "Joxer followed by Mrs.Madigan enters". It is Boyle who introduces the two to Bentham in his pompous style. He refers to Joxer as "Past Chief Ranger of the Dear Little Shamrock Branch of the Irish National Forestors ...". This may mean nothing to Bentham but a bellyful laugh for the audience, knowing as they do Joxer's antics till now. Joxer speaks latin, "Nil desperandum,
captain, nil desperandum" more to the amusement of the audience. Mrs. Madigan does not resist the acceptance of drinks. She is the third outsider in the house now and the first one to talk well of the family. She plays the role of Jack Boyle when she talks about her past. The celebration with songs from Mrs. Madigan, Joxer and Jack Boyle entertains the audience while revealing how easily the tenement dwellers give themselves up to joy. Johnny is a non participant. He, however, asks for the gramophone to be turned on in preference to Joxer's bawling, but before it could be played, the audience hear "voices of persons descending the stairs". O'Casey indulges in surprise like these, purely as a contrasting comic device.

The whole atmosphere of the celebration takes a sudden turn with Juno stalling the playing of the gramophone, and instructing Mary, to let open the door to "give Mrs. Tancred light." She is mentioned only now after the first few lines in Act One.

Now is the most brilliant moment in theatre. The celebration falls into silence, the doors are opened, and the light falls on the way, and the audience see Mrs. Tancred. None in Jack Boyle's family except Juno talk. "Mary opens the
door and Mrs. Tancred -- a very old woman, obviously shaken by the death of her son -- appears, accompanied by several neighbours. The first few phrases are spoken before they appear."

The dimension of her tragedy is focussed in Mrs. Tancred's own words: "What's the pains I suffered bringin' him into the world to carry him to the cradle, to the pains I'm sufferin' now, carryin' him out o' the world to bring him to his grave!". And, again, "I seen the first of him, an I'll see the last of him". Mrs. Tancred does not even step in, but draws all attention. As O'Casey is going to repeat Mrs. Tancred's lines at the end of Act Three by Mrs. Boyle, it would be worthwhile noting that Juno Boyle does not empathize with her enough. She looks a little distant. Mrs. Tancred's prayer is almost a prelude for Juno Boyle's repetition of it later. Mrs. Tancred "moves slowly towards the door". The crowd pass out, silently.

O'Casey very thoughtfully centres the dialogue on Mrs. Tancred and her son, Juno reasons that his Republican involvement brought his end.

Only one person flares up almost as a dissonance to the sombre atmosphere. Mrs. Boyle's reasoning of the tragedy adds up to the gruesome and shocking atmosphere. But her
justification of Mrs. Tancred's son's death is more shocking than the boy's death itself.

Mary and Bentham go out. Boyle again bursts into a song: "He recites in an emotional, consequential manner" a verse and sits down.

Johnny is unable to bear any more mention about death. He insists on the gramophone being played. Boyle's warning, "... you'll want to keep a dead silence" is pregnant with warning and meaning.

O’Casey uses this instance to bring in some sarcasm by letting the gramophone blare "If you’re Irish, come into the Parlor".

Instead of allowing one of the audience to go upstage and question the singing, O’Casey lets in 'Needle Nugent', a tailor, ask "Have none of you any respect for the Irish people’s National regard for the dead?". This is shouted over the blaring of the gramophone. "Boyle stops the gramophone".

It would appear that the Boyles regret; but that is not so. To focus Juno Boyle rejoinder, O’Casey creates a silence: "... it’s nearly time we had a little respect for the dead, an’ a little more regard for the livin!" Mrs. Madigan’s rejoinder only indicates what the so called patriots do and
how they change coats too soon.

O’Casey works out an extraordinary moment in theatre, "Persons are heard running down the street, some saying here it is, here it is; Nugent withdraws, and the rest except Johnny, go to the window looking into the street, and look out. Sounds of a crowd coming nearer are heard; and a portion of them are singing "To Jesus’ Heart all burning to. By every heart and tongue". There is none on the stage except Johnny. The volume of the singing increases. Boyle asks for a song, sings one himself, Mrs. Madigan sings, Joxer sings and finally Boyle again, followed by a non-human source, and finally by an off-stage source -- a chorus. The impact must be absolutely stunning. At the end of the song, Mrs. Boyle identifies the hearse, "Here’s the hearse, here’s the hearse!" Boyle identifies Mrs. Tancred: "There’s t’oul’ mother walkin’ behin’ the coffin." Mrs. Madigan sums up the size of the mourners and the intensity of the mourning; and the respect with which Mrs. Tancred is held; and also the horror of the tragedy. "You can hardly see the coffin with the wreaths".

All these are structured to give the audience a sense of participation of an event taking place outside, and to Johnny Boyle, ruminate over the immensity of his crime of
betrayal. A lighter vein is struck by Joxer's irresponsible and irrelevant remark. "Oh, it's a darlin' funeral, a daarlin' funeral!"

The entire home crowd quits to have a better view of the funeral. The celebration inside is contrasted with the funeral celebration outside, the latter overshadowing the former. "They leave the room, and go down. Johnny sits moodily by the fire". The shadow of the funeral falling on Johnny is beautifully brought out by O'Casey. "A young man enters; he looks at Johnny for a moment." O'Casey makes the young man enter without a knock. As the funeral is going on outside, against that aural background, this encounter takes place, almost foreshadowing another death but without the glory of a funeral and a procession.

The unnamed young man calls Johnny by his rank, "Quarther-Masther Boyle". And Johnny's spontaneous reaction calling him 'The Mobilizer', reveals what was on his mind, and whom he was expecting.

Only in this sequence is one able to know the truth of Johnny’s betrayal of commandant Tancred.

Johnny's own personal assessment of his doing' enough
for Ireland’ is silenced by the intruder. "... no man can do
enough for Ireland!". He exits. This is a warning for all
politicians.

The stage is empty, and almost barren. Only Johnny
Boyle is there, already a shattered man. Nothing can help him
except the grace of God. O’Casey brings the curtain down
beautifully. “Faintly in the distance the crowd is heard saying:

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee.
Blessed are Thou amongst women, and blessed, etc.”

It’s worth noticing that the crime which Johnny has
committed is not known to the members of his family. The
threat to his life also is given in isolation, to him, and
directly. Only the audience and Johnny are involved. The act
begins and ends with Johnny on the stage.

Act III

There is a lapse of two months between the end of Act
Two and the beginning of Act Three, while there was only a
short lapse of a few days between Acts One and Two. The
audience’s mind will be only on the ultimatum served on
Johnny. The time is evening. The fire is burning in the
grate. There is little change in the setting. It is as it
was in Act Two. "Mary, is dressed to go out, is sitting on a chair by the fire". Incidentally, the very posture that Johnny took at the beginning and the end of Act Two and now are different. O’Casey plays on visual irony. The house is not well lit. "A lamp, turned low, is lighting on the table. The votive light under the picture of the Virgin gleams more redly that ever."

Mrs. Boyle is standing 'putting on her hat and coat'. The methodology is the same as in Act One. It is a free flow of information between the mother and the daughter. It is Mrs. Boyle who sets the ball rolling.

The information that Charlie Bentham has deserted Mary is given too soon to the audience and Mrs. Boyle tries to reason that the fault may lie with her daughter. And this information, the beginning of the crack in Boyle tenement, must come as a surprise to the audience as well. Mary assesses Jerry and Charlie, but prefers the latter. There is a clue as to why Charlie left them. Mary’s statement, "... we weren’t good enough for him", may indicate that Charlie was class-conscious. Mrs. Boyle confesses that only the ‘will’ made her get acquainted with Bentham and only now "after long coaxin’, that you let out that he’s left you." There is room
to think that Charlie Bentham played a clever trick on the family with an inheritance that turned out a myth. Before the myth explodes, he has disappeared, leaving Mary pregnant.

Mrs. Boyle takes a firm decision and just informs Boyle, "We're goin' now to the doctor's. Are you goin' to get up this evenin'?" Though sounding comically sarcastic, the words of Mrs. Boyle come prophetically true "If that's the way you'll go on when you get the money it'll be the grave for you, an asylum for me and the poor house for Johnny". She has deliberately, decidedly omitted Mary's name.

The second crack is revealed by Mrs. Boyle's pressure on her husband to know the time of the realization of the will. The reality of the situation is very effectively summed up by Boyle himself: "I can't get blood out of a turnip, can I?" Mary Boyle is a silent witness to what's going on between her parents.

Mrs. Boyle is no longer the dominating housewife. She is obedient helping her husband with 'stout' and 'The News of the World' and 'Sloan's liniment'. She accepts his pain as true and she exits with Mary. The stage is empty for a while and a solitary 'popping' alone is heard.

Joxer announces his entry by his song, 'Me pipe I'll
smoke' and with him is Needle Nugent. The talk between Joxer Daly and Needle Nugent is the first of its kind in this play in that two rank outsiders talk about the fortunes of a family resting inside the house.

The third crack occurs with Needle Nugent letting the cat out of the bag that "some way or another that will is writ he won't be entitled go get as much as a make!" It is a matter of theatrical irony that the neighbours of Jack Boyle know better the real value of the will than his own family. The audience is informed about the vacuity of the will through a third person, even as another third person only brought in the 'will' and its prospects. The audience can see the travails of the family from a knowledgeable perspective but can do little to help it. An existential situation, indeed. What's the use of becoming aware of this truth?

Even as Joxer plays Boyle in wishful thinking, his comment though may not be applicable to him, however, contains a truth: "... an honest man's the noblest work O' God!" O'Casey's coup de theatre can be seen at this juncture. As soon as Joxer finishes expressing his discovery of truth, "Boyle coughs inside", almost questioning him making the statement.

Joxer incites Needle Nugent against Boyle, but plays a
happy spectator. When Nugent derobes Boyle, Joxer enjoys it but pretends ignorance. This is how O’Casey identifies turn coats. The two go out.

O’Casey by a small change in costume brings in the change in Boyle. "... Boyle enters hastily, buttoning the braces of his moleskin (sic) trousers; his coat and vest are on his arm; he throws these on a chair and hurries to the door on the right."

It may be recalled Juno Boyle wanted him to wear moleskin trousers to seek a job with Father Farrell. The hypocrisy practiced by Joxer is a betrayal of himself and a pointer of his genre to the audience. The remarks on the missing ‘stout bottle’ are amusing enough, as the audience is already aware that Joxer has flicked it. And this is the first time when Joxer shows his real colour and also runs him down in his house. If Nugent ran away with the suit he made for Boyle, Joxer strips him morally and quite needlessly and with total ingratitude.

Like a chain of visitors in The Shadow of a Gunman in Act One, now a chain of neighbours drop in at Boyle’s, to take back their money, or whatever they can in place of money. The technique is the same, though a little contrived.

Now it is the turn of Mrs. Madigan to demand her money
she has lent. Boyle is seen in low key profile. She runs away with the gramophone. Joxer drives Boyle mad by taunting. They mutually accuse themselves as 'twisthers'.

With the entry of Mrs. Madigan the derobing of Jack Boyle takes yet another dimension. She grabs the gramophone, calls Boyle 'oul reprobate' and walks out with it. It must be mentioned here that this was brought in as a piece of respectability; and by a woman. Now, the respectability is removed by a woman. It is ironical as well, because it is Mrs. Madigan who spoke as much to Charlie Bentham, as a neighbour and friend of the family. She takes away "some o' th' gorgeous feathers out o' his' tail!"

The following episode is an essay in hypocrisy enacted by Joxer Daly. Almost like Hamlet's father's ghost, he utters, "The anchor's weighed, farewell, ree ....mem .... ber .... me ... Jack Boyle, Esquire, infernal rogue an' damned liar".

His exit and Johnny's entry coincide. Their mutual recrimination is a routine, as can be gleamed from Johnny's comment.

O'Casey counterpoints a domestic quarrel with the bare-baiting that Jack Boyle just suffered. "Mrs. Boyle enters; it
is apparent from the serious look on her face that something has happened. She takes off her hat and coat without a word and puts them by. She then sits down near the fire, and there's a few moments' pause." The audience can easily guess that something has basically gone wrong. It may be noticed that this is the first time ever, she sits near the fire, and in silence. It is a very symbolic act of her need for warmth, and protection. The total silence between what has happened and what is to follow, is the theatrical power generated by O'Casey. And, this is the first time she calls her husband by his first name and invites him for a serious talk. "Close that door there and sit down here". A piece of black humour arises painfully with Jack's comment. "More trouble in our native land, is it?" Johnny also is in the picture. It must be remembered that Mary has not returned, but the family discusses Mary's problem.

Mrs. Boyle lets out the news of Mary's pregnancy quietly, whereas Jack Boyle makes quite a noise about it. Bentham impregnating Mary and silently disappearing from the scene is a blow to the family and the generally held values of the audience. Mrs. Boyle counsels patience to her husband, but Jack Boyle is worried only about his image in society and does
not take cognisance of the damage that has happened to his daughter. The family discussing the impact of Bentham’s moral treachery is one of the most beautiful and tender bits in theatre counterpointing all that has happened in the previous two acts. Jack Boyle trying to find the source of her fall, to her reading, dress, etc., shows him as an immature man. The family wants to ostracize her but Mrs. Boyle makes her decision clear. “If Mary goes, I’ll go with her”. This is as important as Nora’s decision in Ibsen’s A Doll’s House.

It is a piece of a double irony that Johnny should talk of Mary for bringing ‘disgrace on the family’. The big crack in the family happens with the news of Mary’s pregnancy.

The ‘wash-out’ of the will comes straight from the horse’s mouth—Jack Boyle himself. ‘The thick made out the will wrong’. This completes the total crack of the family structure. Now, it is Mrs. Boyle who is unable to take it easy, one who took Mary’s pregnancy in the stride. Her hopes that the money would off-set all the misfortunes are dashed to pieces in one blow. Johnny also is as much affected. Mrs. Boyle’s wail “oh, is there not even a middlin’ honest man left in th’ world?” carries the play’s agony. She plays a very subdued role, and responsibly as well. Jack takes a
convenient excuse and quits. This time he invites Joxer for a drink. Joxer’s voice “I’m here” is the temptation.

After the exit of Jack, Juno Boyle takes back her dominant role. “An’ who’ll have to bear th’ biggest part o’ this trouble but me?” is very true as the events will prove later. Johnny is ungrateful and starts finding fault with his mother.

The flow of the play takes a different turn with “a knock at the door. Mrs. Boyle opens it; Johnny rests on his elbow to look and listen; two men enter.”

The family is silenced by the two men’s entry. They dismantle, take away, all the structures of richness in the family. On Johnny’s suggestion, even as Mrs. Boyle prepares to go out to fetch her husband, Mary enters. Juno informs Mary of the ‘wash-out’ nature of the will, and of the trick that Bentham played on them.

Johnny sits down near the fire. “Jerry enters slowly; there’s a look of earnest hope on his face. He looks at Mary for a few moments.”

Johnny discreetly gets in. The altercation between Mary and Jerry is a poignant piece to show how small human beings are and how hypocritical they become with changing
circumstances. Jerry's love for Mary evaporates at his awareness of her pregnancy. Quite naturally Mary declaims, "-your humanity is just as narrow as the humanity of the others." O'Casey makes Jerry go out but Mary's voice halts him. For Jerry she is Mary, the fallen. She chants the verses Jerry pretends, he has forgotten. Mary does not sing during the party in Act Two but does now, for a different objective, and from a different motivation, "the agonizing horror of a violin out of tune."

"There is a pause". This pause is most vital to make the audience search for humanity in them; Jerry Devine exits in silence; Johnny, for reasons of his own, does not want to communicate with Jerry Devine at all, throughout the play.

Johnny re-enters. So does the First Man and they remove whatever else is left over. The Boyle's home is stripped nude. Mary exits as Johnny castigates her at her tactlessness and at her fall little realizing he has brought far worse 'shame' on the family.

"The votive light flickers for a moment, and goes out!" This is the most laboured theatrical gimmick of O'Casey and not quite convincing. It looks as though the votive light has been waiting for its time to go out, to serve as an equated
symbol of Johnny's flickering life, and end. It is none the less, effective. The way Johnny wails, the First Man considers him demented.

Two irregulars enter. On the stage the two men remove the furniture. The two men are pushed to stand against the wall facing it. "The two men turn their faces to the wall, with their hands up". There is a bit of 'theatre of cruelty' in this sequence. Johnny is seen as the worst coward. Only now is it revealed whom Johnny betrayed. "Commandant Tancred lost his life for Ireland". O'Casey shows here that the Christian values are lost. It is only eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. Johnny can only pray, which he does not out of love for God but out of fear and an anxiety to save his life. O'Casey brings down the curtain as the two Irregulars "drag out Johnny Boyle". When it rises again, most of the furniture is gone, Mary and Boyle, one on each side, sitting in a darkened room, by the fire...

The curtain is brought down to show the barrenness of the house. It is a less effective and convincing dramatic device. Even now, she is not aware why her son is taken away while O'Casey has revealed it to the audience. By this she gets more sympathy. She wants to go to the Police Station,
hoping she will get justice there. This is an instance of very mild irony as the police are least helpful. The stage becomes silent and both the characters and the audience hear from below "the sound of voices".

A knock at the door, and it is the voice of Mrs. Madigan, speaking very softly, "Mrs. Boyle". The voice indicates the tragedy in store. "Mrs. Boyle opens the door". Mrs. Madigan has nothing against Mrs. Boyle. She unravels the death of Johnny Boyle. The irony of the situation is the mother is asked to go to the Police Station to identify Johnny's body. It is ironical as only a little earlier did she claim she would go to the Police Station and complain.

The most avant garde act of a wife and a mother is taken now. Mary wails her child will have no father. While Mrs. Boyle assures her that "It'll have what's far better -- it'll have two mothers". She decides to walk out on her husband. A double decision: to quit the tenement; to quit being Mrs. Boyle and live with her daughter for the sake of her daughter, and the progeny. A voice from outside shouts, but that is shouted down by Mrs. Madigan. She rightly declares "the Polis as Polis, in this city, is Null an' Void!"

Now, she repeats Mrs. Tancred's prayer as an expiation
for not having felt adequately at Robbie Tancred's death. Now she realizes a son is a son, no matter where he may belong. Death levels up every thing. Her last words "Take away this murderin 'hate, an' give us Thine own eternal love!" is an appeal to the audience, and it is the message of the play.

"They all go slowly out. There is a pause; then a sound of shuffling steps on the stairs outside".

The audience may not expect Boyle and Joxer. They may expect a sudden turn of events: "The door opens and Boyle and Joxer, both of them very drunk, enter". Out went the family and in comes inebriety.

The Stage (the home of the Boyles, the tenement as a symbol of life) is in darkness. The two figures can be identified only by their voices. They cannot be seen clearly. "Boyle taking a six pence from his pocket and looks at it ... and lets it fall; and exclaims "The last o' the Mohicans:"

The sentences that these two speak may not have any relevance to themselves but they inundate the audience with a lot of meaning. Joxer quotes a poem: "... Breathes then a man with soul ... so ... dead" and Boyle declares, "...th' whole worl's ... in a terr ... ible state o' ....chassis!"

This leads to multiple interpretations, Boyle
"subsiding into a sitting posture on the floor" makes this declaration.

The two entered the house drunk in Act One, and the play ends with the two drunk again. Jack Boyle has not changed at all, not even aware of his son's death and his wife and daughter are not there any longer. Surprisingly, there is no reference to them by Jack Boyle.

The killing may be the 'chassis'. The fighting between the Die Hards and Republicans may be the 'chassis'. 'Chassis' is. And none can question Jack Boyle on this and, the way the play ends, it is a symbol of Dublin's state of affairs.

It may be argued that the play could as well end with Johnny's exit. But the theatrical power gets the better with these two minor scenes. Boyle chooses to stay in the tenement bereft of family and love and unwilling to see the alternatives.

The theme of fall and redemption may be seen in Juno and the Paycock. The temptation is the 'will', and the entire family falls for it paying the consequences. Juno Boyle becomes the redeemer.
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