The first three plays in this dissertation, though written by different authors have at first glance itself, a common thread that seems to link one with the other as all of them were “society” plays in which, some of the characters belonged to the aristocracy and some to the middle and upper middle classes. With *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), for the first time in this dissertation, the settings move from lush lawns and cosy apartments down to the tenements of the impoverished lower classes. For the first time we have an author who is not uncomfortable with his Irish background. Unlike Shaw and Wilde, Sean O’Casey remains rooted in Irish society and tries to portray the problems faced by the natives, in this ‘Irish’ play. Nonetheless, the play does become “universal” in its treatment of the war theme, especially as it was produced soon after World War I, when bitter memories of the war were still afresh in the minds of a wider audience.

This was Sean O'Casey's second play and was proudly produced by the Abbey Theatre whose founders realized the significance of the theme, and more importantly O’Casey’s genius of a powerful play. Set against the backdrop of the Irish civil war of 1922, the play projects the travails of an impoverished Irish family affected by the war. The negative effect of Ireland’s constant trysts with war and the cruel irony of Irishmen killing their own countrymen are skillfully portrayed through the tragic lives of the characters in the play. The characters shaped by O'Casey are realistic, and in Juno Boyle, the matriarch of the family, he sketches a woman who suffers unendingly.
From a feminist perspective, the play is about the difficulties of a woman grappling with the twin evils of war and poverty. Though coming three decades after *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, the play tackles similar issues in its approach towards women and shows how women continue to remain in a vulnerable position in a society that has remained unchanged in its treatment of “the second sex”. Here too, a mother-daughter duo breaks patriarchal assumptions of ideal womanhood with respect to work and economic and emotional independence from the men of the family. The play also traces the ruinous effects of war and the problems it creates for common people, especially women.

Interestingly the germ of the play came from O’Casey’s own first hand experience of the brutality of war, when he was once roughly awakened by the Free State forces in the middle of the night with revolvers pointing at his head as they queried his name. The men were actually after a young man who had shot one of their own. He was soon found out and according to O’Casey, battered so badly that he was barely recognizable the next day. Joseph Holloway asserts that O’Casey had been witnessing a lot of brutality lately.

A friend of his was riddled with bullets and mutilated in a horrible way by the Green & Tans….Another lad he knew was taken out and tied up by his hands-his feet dangling some distance from the ground while they poured salts through a tin dish down his throat. The poor fellow was cut down alive. ¹

O’Casey’s highly sensitive nature did not allow him to be a mute spectator to this Irish “savagery” and what resulted was a play that combined elements of pathos, mirth and tragedy to emerge as a classic that questioned the very “patriotic” concept of war. Ironically, O’Casey first intended the play as the tragedy of the young son, Johnny, the IRA man who is killed by his own comrades. However, as is widely acknowledged, O’Casey’s gift lies in characterization and as he started drawing his
other characters, they gathered shape to become part of a “contemporary universal tragedy” involving the whole of humankind.

No doubt Sean O’Casey sat down consciously to write a play about a tragic young man called Johnny Boyle, but underneath, other forces were at work and total result emerged in a blistering indictment of the stupidity of men and in one of the great tragic masterpieces of our time. ²

Yes, the play definitely showcases the tragedy of humankind, but more than that it showcases the tragedy of womankind; how women have to bear the brunt in war situations. In its own way, the play is an appeal against the futility of war. War which is a wholly masculine concept is a perpetrator of patriarchy, where men supposedly fight to protect their motherland and their women and children. Helena Swanwick's pamphlet against war criticised the hollow claims made by soldiers that "we never war upon women and children".

All wars are and must be waged upon women and children as well as upon men. Women have to make good the economic disasters of war, they go short, they work double tides, they pay war taxes and war prices, like men and out of smaller incomes. ³

After each war the sufferers are mainly women irrespective of whether they belong to the winning or the losing side. Swanwick believed, that men got a kind of exhilaration after fighting a war, while the women suffered pangs of agony. Right from ancient times, the women of the defeated side were taken over by the winners as war trophies, to be used as slaves or concubines. Though women are not directly involved in a war, they suffer the emotional and economic hardships that are a necessary consequence. Women from the losing side have the added disadvantage of sexual harassment, the indignity of being raped, and of being forced to see their loved ones suffer and die. Women from the winning side are no better off as they too suffer emotional and economic hardships by losing husbands and young sons in the war.
Gertrud Baumer in the context of World War I voiced the feelings of thousands of women with her sentiments on the trauma of losing loved ones.

The present moment does not kindle a mood of battle in us. Many thousands have to part from their husbands, their sons, and their brothers; none of us can watch the departure of a host of glowing manly youth without fearing the somber fate that they themselves approach with such firmness. Our feelings cannot go beyond the immeasurable sacrifices that the war will exact, whatever happens.\(^4\)

*Juno and the Paycock* too highlights this situation. Here war is portrayed as the perpetrator of suffering and emphasizes that again it is women who suffer irrespective of which side they belong to. In the Irish Civil War depicted in the play, Mrs. Tancred, whose son belonged to the Republican army, voices the plight of mothers who have lost their sons- the sons are politically divided in belonging to different party lines; however the mothers are united in their suffering. Her lamentations assert that the sufferings of a mother are universal and have no boundaries, whatsoever.

MRS. TANCRED: Me home is gone now; he was me only child.....An’ I’m told he was the leadher of the ambush where me nex’ door neighbor, Mrs. Mannin’ lost her Free State soldier son. An’ now here’s the two of us oul’ women, standin’ one on each side of a scales o’ sorra, balanced be the bodies of our two dead darlin’ sons.\(^5\)

Apart from the emotional trauma; these women suffer physical and material hardships when they are pushed into a man's world to earn a living. Magda Trott, a prominent figure in the German women's movement documented the effect that World War I had on the psyches of both men and women. She concluded that it was impossible for men to accept women as colleagues and clearly outlined the pressures suffered by women when they ventured into the “masculine” world of the labour market.

With the outbreak of war men were drawn away from the management of numerous organizations and women
were urged to take on their positions. However women were not accepted easily by male colleagues. They were looked upon as intruders who dared to usurp the position and bread of a colleague fighting for the fatherland. Moreover they received exactly half of the salary of their male predecessor.  

In our play the person worst affected by the war is the forty-five year old Juno Boyle who has to shoulder the responsibility of running the house apart from doing her domestic chores. Her son has got handicapped in the civil uprising and sits out at home. The hardships of war make her see its futility and she defies the establishment in not having any conventional patriotic attitudes towards the war or war heroes. Juno is a practical woman, full of common sense. She knows wars lead to food shortages and chides her trigger happy son wondering if “no bread’s a lot betther than half a loaf”. To Juno work is worship and she rates it above everything else in contrast to the idle life pursued by her husband and son. Thus when her son vainly boasts about losing his arm for Ireland, Juno remains unimpressed-

Johnny (boastfully): I’d do it agen, ma, I’d do it agen; for a principle’s a principle.
Mrs. Boyle: Ah, you lost your best principle, me boy, when you lost your arm; them’s the only sort o’ principles that’s any good to a workin’ man. (214)

Irish chauvinists and nationalists were enraged that an Irish woman could harbour such “unpatriotic” feelings. During this period, tensions between England and Ireland had escalated to an all time high. Nationalist Irishmen in fact marked a specific role for the Irish woman also, to join the freedom struggle indirectly if not directly. The Irish woman was supposed to manage whatever she could from the small incomes brought home by Irishmen and spend wisely, only in local goods and support the cause of freedom; in short she could not complain about hardships brought on by the war. This attitude shows that the society expected its women to conform to its notions of patriotism and Juno becomes a rebel by questioning these notions. David
Krause elaborating on this aspect says Juno has "no romantic illusions that the soldiers die bravely and beautifully for their country." Rosika Schwimmer, an active member of the International Women's Organisation, in her petition to U.S. president Woodrow Wilson condemned World War I as a "relapse into barbarism" wherein women suffered all kinds of atrocities—physical, emotional, and material. Juno’s tenement lodgings itself has many war casualties and Juno too realizes it is women who suffer most when they lose their loved ones in wars.

MRS. BOYLE: …look at the way they're afther leavin' the people in this very house. Hasn’t the whole house, nearly, been massacred? There's young Dougherty's husband with his leg off, Mrs. Travers that had her son blew up be a mine....Mrs. Mannin' that lost wan of her sons in an ambush a few weeks ago, an' now, poor Mrs.Tancred's only child gone west with his body made a collander off.(228)

Very few women have had the courage to explicitly defy war and risk being termed unpatriotic. The German feminist Werner Thonnessen was openly against war for its negative implications on women and children.

The psychological burdens of the war which women in particular had to bear as wives, mothers and sisters of soldiers, as housewives facing difficulties of food production and as mothers of small children growing up without their fathers...were now made even worse by physical and psychological exertion at work.  

War remains a backdrop in this play, but it nevertheless affects Juno. Burdened with a handicapped son and a good for nothing, drunkard of a husband, it falls upon Juno to become the breadwinner of the family. Juno defies the traditional patriarchal view that since "woman was by divine design given a different biological function she should also be assigned different social tasks." Juno Boyle ventures to leave the private world of family and home to go into the public realm, wherein she
works from morning till night. Traditional gender roles take a beating here as women become breadwinners while men sit at home. Both Juno and her daughter Mary work outside, while Johnny who is handicapped and Jack Boyle who hates working, sit idle, frustrating Juno.

MRS. BOYLE: If there was e'er a genuine job goin’ you’d be dh’other way about - not able to lift your arms with the pain in your legs! Your poor wife slavin’ to keep the bit in your mouth, an’ you gallivantin’ about all the day like a paycock! (204)

Capitalism had paved the way for women entering the factories in a big way from the late nineteenth century. During World War I, women got more and better job opportunities as the men were away on the battlefield. However, this acted as a double edged sword, as women were forced to labour both at home and at work. Women's exploitation increased as women were inducted as a cheap source of labour where they had to work for longer hours on lower wages. Documentary evidence confirms the terrible pay conditions of working women-

Average wage for men was fourteen shillings for a week of seventy hours, and women worked in some cases as many as ninety hours for anywhere between five and ten shillings a week. 10

Heidi Hartmann in her essay, "Capitalism Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex" delves deep into the roots of division of labour and concludes that

The division of labour by sex appears to have been universal throughout human history. In our society sexual division of labour is hierarchical with men on top and women on the bottom". 11

Juno who is caught in this monstrous system keeps "slavin' " all day and at the end of it is barely able to support her family. The class of working women to which Juno belonged suffered the most. O'Casey realistically portrays the physical plight of working women through the persona of Juno-
She is forty five years of age, and twenty years ago she must have been a pretty woman; but her face has now assumed that look which ultimately settles down upon the women of the working-class; a look of listless monotony and harassed anxiety, blending with an expression of mechanical resistance. (199)

Juno who is still young, already looks years older due to overwork. Physical fatigue and exhaustion, heightened with excessive work took its toll on women. Sheila Rowbotham elaborates that because of this 'double duty', "married women who worked were exhausted by the time they were thirty". 12

Conventional society expects a woman to be an ideal wife, an ideal mother and an ideal housekeeper irrespective of her professional duties. Juno conforms to these idealistic notions of a woman's duties by working hard both at home and outside. She also complies with the idle demands of her lazy husband.

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 brings in the things asked for, and comes out again.) (233)

For the major part of the play, Juno is a patriarch's delight, with her indulgent attitude towards her husband and son. The anger at being the only 'responsible' person in the house will assume a major proportion during her daughter's crisis and is hardly noticeable in the initial part of the play. However it is clear in the beginning itself, that Juno’s attitude of compliance is saturated, and she is exasperated playing her role of an ideal mother, when in one of her rare outbursts she declares to her bickering children-

MRS. BOYLE: Amn't I nicely handicapped with the whole o' yous. I don't know what any o' yous ud do without your ma. (201)
Nevertheless it is as “ma” that Juno's anti conventional and anti patriarchal views come to the fore. Mary's betrayal by Bentham and her illicit pregnancy push back the conformist, appeasing nature of Juno, and her pro feminist revolutionary ideas are suddenly exposed. Juno's resolve to support her daughter in her hour of crisis shows she has the courage to defy the puritanical standards of a narrow minded society. She realises the difficulties her daughter would face in this convention obsessed society which considers a woman's chastity as a premium social issue. A society's treatment towards its unwed mothers has been derogatory for centuries and Juno sympathises with her daughter for the mental torture she would have to face, as she tells her husband to be more patient towards Mary.

MRS. BOYLE: 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 , and most of our years is spent; but Mary'll have maybe forty years to face an' handle and every wan o' them'll be tainted with a bitther memory. (238)

Mrs. Boyle knows people's "narrow humanity" will make life miserable for Mary. Society would come in later, but her chauvinistic husband and son are the first to condemn Mary and demand that she "should be dhriven out o' the house she's brought disgrace on." (238) Jack Boyle is more concerned about his reputation in that conventional society than about his daughter's well being-

BOYLE: … Isn’t this a nice thing to come rollin’ in on top o’ me after all your prayin’ to St. Anthony an’ the Little Flower! An’ she’s a Child o’ Mary too- I wonder what’ll the nuns think of her now? An’ it’ll be bellows’d all over th’ districth before you could say Jack Robinson; an' whenever I'm seen they'll whisper, ‘That's the father of Mary Boyle that had the kid be' the swank she used to go with; d’ye know? (238)

Jack Boyle's behaviour reflects the extremely negative reaction that a patriarchal society demonstrates in the face of a woman breaking its moral codes. In
our play, both father and brother verbally abuse Mary for bringing disgrace to the family, while Bentham, the child’s father, is hardly blamed. In fact, Bentham is more of a sinner, as he took advantage of Mary’s vulnerability, when he hoped to gain money because of the will. However, he deserts Mary, the moment he realizes that the will is falling apart. This betrays a universal situation that though the man is equally and sometimes more to blame in the case of a girl becoming pregnant out of wedlock, the society condemns the woman as loose and immoral while the man is allowed to go scot free. For traditionalists and patriarchs "active female sexuality is not merely a breach of decorum but also a flagrant breach of the public and political order". They fear the hierarchical and moral structure of society would collapse if women were left unpunished for their "sinful" activities.

BOYLE: I’m goin’ out now to have a few drinks with th’ last few makes I have, an’ tell that lassie o’ yours not to be here when I come back; for if I lay my eyes on her, I’ll lay me hans on her, an’ if I lay me hans on her, I won’t be accountable for me actions!(240)

Some feminists blame woman's biology as adding to her woes in a patriarchal society. Mary, in a way would not have suffered if she had had a different biological make up. According to the Radical Feminist Shulamith Firestone, women are oppressed because of their reproductive capacity, and once women have the technology to control the ways and means of reproduction, they will be truly liberated.

It was women's reproductive biology that accounted for her original and continued oppression and not some sudden patriarchal revolution. In the play analysed here, Mary is ostracized because she is a woman. Her body would soon ‘expose’ her guilt while her lover Bentham, unaffected by any physical or moral effects, has already left Ireland for newer opportunities. Juno's resolve to
support her daughter in this orthodox environment is indeed courageous. She does not deter from her stance even in the face of adverse reactions from her husband and son; in fact her determination to stick by her daughter's side becomes stronger and her decision that, "If Mary goes, I'll go with her" shows she has the courage of her convictions to swim against the current.

While the women Juno and Mary are portrayed as strong and independent women, the male characters are shown to be idle, lazy, good-for-nothing persons, living off the women and relying on them for even their basic needs. Johnny even calls for “a dhrink o’ wather” in his bed while Jack orders for his stout and food in the same way. David Krause calls Jack Boyle the "universal braggart warrior". He is the anti hero who is "satisfied to see as much of himself and the world as he chooses to see." In the play, his character reveals his inefficient qualities, but more than that, it reveals Juno’s positive elements and her true worth. Juno too sees through Boyle’s shallowness and no longer harbours any hopes from her husband. Juno has realised that the big hue and cry raised about a man being the "head of the house" is nonsensical. Jack Boyle has proven to be an inefficient man of the house when he continues spending money even after knowing that there was nothing coming from the will. He is undoubtedly an incapable husband and an unworthy father, which is admitted even by his own son Johnny-

JOHNNY (to Boyle): An’ you let us run into debt’ an’ you borreyed money from everybody to fill yourself with beer! An’ now you tell us the whole thing’s a washout! Oh, if it’s thrue, I’m done with you, for you’re worse than me sisther Mary!....
MRS. BOYLE: Johnny, Johnny, Johnny, for God’s sake, be quiet!
JOHNNY: I’ll not be quiet, I’ll not be quiet; he's a nice father isn't he? Is it any wonher Mary went asthray when.....
MRS. BOYLE: Johnny, Johnny, for my sake be quiet-
(239)

It is thus apt that when Jack Boyle condemns Mary, Juno reprimands him and reminds him of his worthlessness as a father-

MRS. BOYLE: You'll say nothin' to her, Jack; ever since she left school she's earned her livin', an' your fatherly care never throubled the poor girl. (238)

Juno's feelings about her husband's worthlessness have perhaps been latent in her for years; now, during her daughter's crisis they find vociferous expression. Like the protagonist in Mrs. Warren's Profession she now considers the father as a totally unimportant element in a child's life. Juno's maternal concern towards her daughter and unborn grandchild has a fierce possessiveness and when Mary laments the fact that her child would have no father, Juno consoles her by saying that it would indeed be a blessing in disguise; for she has finally realized the significance of the mother figure in a child’s life.

MARY: My poor little child that'll have no father.
MRS. BOYLE: It'll have what's far betther- it'll have two mothers. (244).

Juno thus ensures that Mary and her unborn child are neither alone nor deserted in the bitter moments of life. At this point, according to Durbach, O’Casey brilliantly combines Roman myth and reality through the character of Juno. The morbid, impoverished common working woman gradually assumes a supernatural character.

Juno Boyle comes to incarnate those life sustaining principles subsumed by her Roman counterpart: Goddess of childbirth who, by extension, ensures the multiplication of the race; protectress of the pregnant wife, ...the Goddess who cares for the unborn child;...and above all the Goddess of domesticity, of the family hearth.16
Juno Boyle in her human form performs all the functions that are generally attributed to her mythical namesake. She gradually assumes a mythical status in the play which ultimately transcends reality without compromising her essential humanity. James Simmons however, takes a negative view of Juno’s heroic declaration of taking care of Mary’s child and says that "this is very homely and Juno is never more than a very limited woman". He also criticises Juno's failure to understand the patriotic implications of her son and the high standards that both her children place on discipline and justice. When Mary justifies her walkout for a colleague on the basis of “principles”, Juno considers it an impractical decision. For her work is more important than hollow principles and not worth abandoning.

MARY: It doesn’t matter what you say, Ma- a principle’s a principle.
MRS.BOYLE: Yis: an’ when I go into oul' Murphy's tomorrow, an' he gets to know that, instead o' payin' all, I'm going to borry more, what'll he say when I tell him a principle's a principle? (8)

Simmons criticises this "narrow" attitude of Juno and concludes that "Mrs. Boyle still understands nothing about political freedom or social justice". But critics like Simmons fail to understand the woman's viewpoint and her practical way of tackling social problems, because she has to take care of her children in any situation. They are only concerned with the larger political picture that involves men in a dominant role and women are relegated to the background. Thus, Juno has her share of detractors who look upon her practical approach as an unwomanly vice. William Armstrong, on the other hand, sees a sharp contrast between the male and female characters in the play " from which the women emerge as far superior to the men because of their capacity for love, altruism and wisdom."
According to O' Riordan the play's success lay in the strong characterisation that O'Casey gave to his heroine making her stand out as an unconventional woman who challenges the narrow minded conventions of society to protect her daughter.

The dominance of Juno, in her moments of suffering, in her day to day existence of resisting and doing instead of yielding and dreaming is the play’s fortitude and triumph.  

Johnny Boyle is another pale and weak male character in the play. It is indeed ironical, that O'Casey originally intended to base the play on him as the chief protagonist. He epitomizes a few “masculine” elements in the play like war, patriotism and sacrifice; however these elements are merely a foil to his true character of a detractor and betrayer. Throughout the play, Johnny seems to be living on tenterhooks, anxiously awaiting something. It is only in the last Act, that we realize he is bogged down by guilt for betraying his friend Tancred. It is indeed ironical that when he comes to know of Mary’s pregnancy, he is livid at her breach of decorum; for he himself has breached the code of honour by betraying his friend and getting him killed. No wonder then that the coward in him blames others for his state of being and induces the death wish in him.

Johnny: (throwing himself on the bed) I’ve a nice sister, an’ a nice father, there’s no bettin’ on it. I wish to God a bullet or a bomb had whipped me ou’ o’ this long ago! Not one o’ yours, have any thought for me! (240)

At the end of the play, even when we realize he is being led to his death, we feel no sympathy for him. Even in his death, it is Juno who shines through as an inspirational character. At this point, she is totally overburdened with grief; not only with Johnny’s death, but also with Mary’s problems and Boyle’s recklessness. In spite
of this, the ‘woman’ in her rises above her own grief and suffering and appeals for universal peace and compassion.

MRS. BOYLE: Mother o’ God, Mother o’ God, have pity on us all! Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin’ son was riddled with bullets, when me darlin’ son was riddled with bullets? Sacred Heart o’ Jesus, take away our hearts o’ stone, and give us hearts o’ flesh! Take away this murdherin’ hate, an’ give us Thine own eternal love! (245)

Jerry Devine is the other major male persona in the play and holds the promise of a revolutionary character. He is young, enthusiastic and an active leader of the Labour Union. He is in love with Mary Boyle, who after initially dating him, starts ignoring him completely in favor of Charles Bentham. In spite of Mary’s rude behavior though, Jerry keeps trying to woo her. In the last act when we know of Mary’s illicit pregnancy, Jerry Devine’s unexpected and unconventional reaction gives us hope that society does have its share of “bold” men also, willing to go against the tide.

JERRY: Mary! (Mary does not answer) ….Your mother has told me everything, Mary, and I have come to you…I have come to tell you, Mary, that my love for you is greater and deeper than ever….

MARY: After all that has happened.

JERRY: What does it matter what has happened? We are young enough to be able to forget all those things. …..I want to forget Bentham, I want to forget that you left me- even for a while. (241)

However this turns out to be a false assurance as it turns out that Mrs. Boyle had not told Jerry “everything” and when he realizes the truth, his reaction is as conventional as anybody else’s.

MARY: Oh, Jerry, Jerry, you haven’t the bitter word of scorn for me after all.

JERRY: (passionately). Scorn! I love you, love you, Mary!
MARY: (rising, and looking him in the eyes). Even though….
JERRY: Even though you threw me over for another man; even though you gave me many a bitter word!
MARY: Yes, yes, I know; but you love me, even though….even though…I’m….goin’…goin’….
(He looks at her questioningly and fear gathers in his eyes.)
JERRY: My God, Mary, have you fallen as low as that?
(241)

In her moment of crisis Mary is deserted by her closest people—significantly, all the men in her life: her father, her brother, her lover as also the man who confessed to love her eternally. It is only a woman, a mother who stands by her, alienated from the rest of the world.

Mary gets her strength and confidence from her mother. She is in many ways her mother's daughter. Smart and self-confident, she manages to stay independent by earning her own living. She supports her mother in running the house by working outside. O'Casey portrays her as a specimen of the modern young woman who hopes to improve her social and economic position in life. Leslie Thomson feels that her untimely pregnancy puts a spanner in her hopes for a better life-

The possibility of Mary's escaping from the world of her parents suggested in the initial stage directions is eliminated when this child o' Mary discovers she will become another of the play's mothers. 20

Before this, however, Mary is portrayed as a young enthusiastic girl who makes the best possible use of her slight acquaintance with literature in reading books relevant to women's treatment in society. The fact that she possesses a copy of Ibsen's plays and reads the highly feminist A Doll's House and Ghosts shows her inclination towards the New Woman. Unfortunately, her father behaving in a typical chauvinistic fashion resents her reading. He symbolizes the general patriarchal mindset that considered Ibsen's modern notions about women and society as "thrash" and "buks only fit for
chiselurs”. (209) He blames Mary's education and reading for bringing her to her present state of affairs.

BOYLE: Her an’ her readin’. That’s more o’ th’ blasted nonsense that has the house fallin’ on top of us! What did th’ likes of her, born in a tenement house, want with readin'. Her readin's afther bringin' her to a nice pass. (238)

Jack Boyle's chauvinistic nature is exposed when he resents Mary's education and learning. He belongs to the set of male patriarchs who believe that a woman's submission lies in her being ignorant and uneducated. As early as 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* had argued that since women were rational beings they ought to be educated.

Society owes girls the same education as boys simply because all persons deserve an equal chance to develop their rational and moral capacities so that they achieve personhood.  

Obviously Jack Boyle and the society at the time did not value women as rational beings. Mary manages to put her stamp of indifference and unconventionality on that patriarchal society. She is very different from the stock lot of conventional women. Apart from being independent monetarily and temperamentally, she is also aware of her rights in society and women workers in particular. Thus when her colleague Jennie is sacked, Mary, though not a great friend of hers, opts to join a strike in her support.

MRS. BOYLE: I don’t know why you wanted to walk out for Jennie Claffey; up to this you never had a good word for her. MARY: What's the use of belongin' to a Trades Union if you won't stand up for your principles? Why did they sack her? It was a clear case of victimisation. We couldn’t let her walk the streets, could we? (200)

Women's political and legal rights had expanded in England after World War I. Harold Smith in his book *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* documented that
the working class wife-mother was heeded as a powerful and responsible figure. Mary is probably aware of the rights of women workers and so takes a strong stance in supporting her colleague.

Towards the end of the play, though she is hurt by Bentham's sudden betrayal, her spirit refuses to break. She is ready to begin a new life along with her mother and "work together for the sake of the baby."(244.) Mary now belongs to the breed of single mothers whose lovers/husbands have deserted them in their hour of crisis. In her resolve to work for the child and nurture it as well, Mary overthrows the traditional view that women should confine themselves to the house while men should work outside. Unlike Rebecca West's heroine Marion in The Judge (1922), Mary, like Rachel Arbuthnot, has no plans of getting married to give her illegitimate child a name. Her character, we realize is beyond her period, when about three decades later, Shelagh Delaney's heroine Joe in A Taste Of Honey (1958) will reject the "degrading" idea of hunting down her child's father and will work for the sake of the child thus defying patriarchal notions of the role of an ideal mother. The courage of these heroines arouses our admiration; however, it also points to the fact that society has remained unchanged in its treatment towards women and as long as this injustice in society persists, women will be treated as the "second sex".

Juno and the Paycock managed to ruffle quite a few feathers in the narrow minded society of the time. By combining the so called "masculine" and "feminine" ideals of society in their personal and professional lives, both Juno and Mary assert their independence and self reliance. From a feminist perspective, they become rebels in a highly patriarchal society; by taking their own decisions that incidentally do not involve men in any way. Thus both mother and daughter deserve to be termed as
heroines in the assertion of their rights and in their overthrow of patriarchal authority. Juno’s character would be similar to the character of the protagonist in our next play, *Riders to the Sea* where again a mother on losing her son, rises above her grief and appeals for universal peace.
NOTES


5. Sean O'Casey, "Juno and the Paycock", *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed. John P.Harrington (New York: W.W.Norton 1991) 227. (This edition has been used throughout the chapter and page numbers have been mentioned in parentheses.)


18. Ibid. 564.


