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Broadway and the Paycock: The Broadway Musical Adaptation of Sean O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock

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BROADWAY AND THE PAYCOCK

The Broadway Musical Adaptation of

Sean O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Masters of Arts Degree in Modern Drama Studies

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ABSTRACT

The 1959 Broadway musical Juno, based on Sean O’Casey’s 1924 classic Juno and the Paycock, is notable despite its ultimate artistic and financial failure. Musical adaptors Joseph Stein and Marc Blitzstein were inspired by the inherent musicality of O’Casey’s play. However, O’Casey’s linguistic complexity, profound characterization and political commentary were impossible to translate onto the Broadway stage. Instead, Stein, Blitzstein and de Mille emphasized ritualism and psychology within the story of the Boyle family, and were careful to conform O’Casey’s world to that of 1950s Broadway. In doing so, however, the adaptation became different thematically from its predecessor. Whereas O’Casey’s world vision was a cynical one, the Broadway musical glorified fantasy, underlined the importance of community and attempted to illustrate the benefits of tragedy.
INTRODUCTION

Juno and Jack Boyle, the bickering title characters of Sean O'Casey's classic 1924 play *Juno and the Paycock*, have a relationship that is complex indeed. Throughout the play, Boyle tests Juno's limits with his laziness, his propensity for singing and his maddening tendency to wildly exaggerate his few attributes. Juno, of course, is gradually revealed as heroic, partly through her proximity to such an unenviable husband. Yet despite their generally rocky relationship, one that inevitably fails at play's end, Juno and Boyle are inextricably linked. They define each other: Juno's nobility delineates the weaknesses in Boyle's character, while Boyle's undeniable charm contrasts Juno's world-weariness.

The relationship between Juno and her 'Paycock' is obviously fictional, but like any good narrative invention, it finds parallels in reality. Among these parallels can be counted the relationship of *Juno and the Paycock* to its Broadway adaptation, a 1959 musical called simply *Juno*.

The musical *Juno* was adapted by Joseph Stein, later to write *Fiddler on the Roof*, and Marc Blitzstein, famous for both his respected translation of the Brecht/Weill *The Threepenny Opera* and his original musical *The Cradle Will Rock*. Agnes de Mille was responsible for a third vital element of this adaptation: dance. Despite these three distinguished presences, *Juno* lasted just sixteen performances on Broadway.

The musical *Juno* echoes Boyle's penchant for bursting into song, his charm and his eventual failure; on the other hand, O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* is impassioned and angry, like its heroine Juno. Furthermore, the greatness of *Juno and the Paycock* becomes clearer through comparison to the musical.
Another parallel: at the end of *Juno and the Paycock*, it is obvious that Boyle will not last long without Juno. Similarly, it is difficult to discuss *Juno* without due respect to O’Casey’s original. Unlike that of Juno and her husband, this relationship is one-sided: the little-known musical does not usually merit much mention in discussion of the O’Casey classic. Though there are clear resemblances between the two, in no way did *Juno* eclipse the fame or greatness of its predecessor. Therefore, the correlation between play and musical is not nearly as famous as the relationships between *Pygmalion* and *My Fair Lady* or indeed, *West Side Story* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Yet the complexity and depth of this relationship from the original to the adaptation and back again merits further study.

When examining an adaptation’s relationship to its source material, two questions quickly emerge: *why?* and *how?* Why did the author choose to adapt the work, and how did he do so? Those two questions are, respectively, the subjects of the first and second chapters of this paper. Having answered them, a third question emerges: *to what end?* What does the adaptation’s changes in plot and expression end up meaning for the audience? An attempt to answer this question is the concern of the final chapter.

By examining the meanings and motivations behind the changes made during the adaptation from play to musical, a great deal is revealed about musicality, form and meaning within the two plays. In the musical, a new and considerably more optimistic outlook emerged; new themes were emphasized. Though they tell the same story, the two works deeply diverge, for they are bound to their intended audience. Therefore, an examination of their differences reveals much about the societies for which they were intended.
CHAPTER 1: MUSICALITY WITHIN O’CASEY’S JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK

Stage plays have always been one of the richest sources for adaptation into musical theatre. The works of playwrights from William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe to George Bernard Shaw and Ferenc Molnár had already been translated into Broadway musicals. It was no surprise, then, that librettist Joseph Stein saw in Sean O’Casey’s Juno and the Paycock a play abounding with possibility for musical theatre.

First of all, the Irish period setting could prove appealing for audiences who had seen musicals take place in many foreign locales, from ancient Athens, to 19th century Siam, to a mythical Scotland, to Voltaire’s Westphalia. And the success of South Pacific and West Side Story proved that musicals with a violent backdrop could succeed. It had a clear and straightforward plot: dramatic, but not too complicated or intricately structured. Juno and the Paycock was fairly tragic for musical theatre, but as Ethan Mordden pointed out, ‘The story was not that much darker than those of The King and I, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, or even Fanny.’ Most important, though, was the richness in character and dialogue in O’Casey’s famous play: Stein felt it might lend itself to musical theatre.

Stein wasn’t the only writer to find such possibilities of musicality in a Sean O’Casey play. In 1998, Marc-Anthony Turnage successfully adapted O’Casey’s World War I play The Silver Tassie into an opera; earlier Elie Siegmeister had done the same for The Plough and the Stars. Clearly, O’Casey’s work holds a certain resonance for musicians. Unlike many other twentieth century masterpieces that have been left alone, O’Casey’s plays seem to invite adaptation. The attraction O’Casey holds does not, however, mean that his plays are easy to adapt.
Through an examination of *Juno and the Paycock*, this chapter will examine the promise of musicality in the work of Sean O’Casey, found in his characterization as well as his use of language and song. Even more than the period setting or foreign locale, this musicality invited Stein and Blitzstein to infuse a more outward use of song within the piece. A scrutiny also will reveal the challenges Stein and Blitzstein faced in adapting a work so full of musical possibilities and dramatic depth.

**O’CASEY’S SONGFUL CHARACTERS**

Musical theatre abounds with outsized characters: *Porgy and Bess, The King and I, My Fair Lady* and *Gypsy* all feature vibrant characters memorable enough to demand titular status. Similarly, *Juno and the Paycock*—as its title suggests—features extraordinary and fascinating characters at its core. They are full of paradoxes: we see highly individual people nevertheless defined by their social group, and passionate characters who are not afraid to speak their mind, even if they cannot always articulate themselves. O’Casey’s brilliance in creating the slum world of 1922 Dublin has been well documented, as has the acidity of his satiric vision. As John O’Riordan noted, ‘O’Casey makes his drunkard a comedian and his tragic heroine something of a shrew. […] The characters are neither heroes nor villains, but some magical mix of both.’ In addition to their distinctiveness, O’Casey’s characters are in fact outwardly musical, for many of them burst into song.

Incredible possibilities for musicalization lie in a play with folk songs, a gramophone and a funeral march in just one scene.

Yet there is much musicality (or possibility for musicalization) in the Boyles and their friends even when they are not singing. *Juno and the Paycock* is a character-driven
play. O'Casey didn't so much tell a story of the Irish Civil War as color in a group of people, and examine what happens when they are sorely tested. The Boyles are not only characters who sing: they are figures that have something to sing about, outsized enough to merit musical theatre treatment. Juno's anger, Boyle's fantasizing, Mary's passion and Johnny's fears are a potential gold mine for a librettist. As Joxer exclaims, 'You could sing that if you had an air to it!'

In addition, O'Casey's characters become interesting not only as their own creations, but also through their juxtaposition with the other characters. Boyle, in particular, is rarely seen without Juno or Joxer. The banter that defines the relationship between the three crackles with humor and tension. In addition to being rich with meaning in their own right, these relationships offer a wealth of musical possibilities.

On another level, O'Casey's characters are akin to those in a musical. As noted earlier, he used music to help define his characters. Yet surprisingly, he also built his characters similarly to the way a musical theatre librettist would. Thus, O'Casey's characterization is most clearly like that in a musical through construction, not song. To begin with, the characters of Juno and the Paycock are similar to those of a musical because they are quickly and concisely introduced. O'Casey succinctly reveals the essence of his characters, through both dialogue and stage directions. As Heinz Kosok noted, this is clear from the opening lines:

The first two sentences of dialogue introduce all four areas of the action... In a few sentences, without violating the limits of probability, a wealth of important information is introduced. [...] In alternately direct and indirect characterization the personality of all the central characters is sketched in and their relationship towards each other is introduced.
Musicals are similarly constructed. This is due, of course, to the nature of song in the musical, wherein characters reveal deepest thoughts and wishes. Lehman Engel noted that while characters in a play are often slowly and intricately developed, musical theatre characters must declare themselves immediately and honestly. 'The importance of introducing characters as early as possible in a musical cannot be stressed too strongly. [...] One of the chief differences between most plays and most musicals is that characters in plays are often not what they seem; in musicals, they invariably must be.'

Musical theatre characters need to be revealed quickly to allow time for song and dance. Concise characterization permitted O’Casey, on the other hand, to explore the political and social atmosphere of the Irish Civil War through his onstage characters. O’Casey took potshots at Irish people and issues of the day, most obviously the futility and inhumanity of the civil-war fighters. But O’Casey also criticized the Irish Catholic Church, the trend of theosophy, the shallowness of socialism and much more. For this reason, the Boyle family and their friends represent a microcosm of Ireland. O’Casey thereby illustrates not only the effects of the Irish Civil War, but also the reasons for it. This political influence both defines his characters and adds a contemporary significance to the play, a significance that the Broadway adaptors found difficult to replicate.

In addition, O’Casey’s juxtaposition of varying political viewpoints enables a further illustration of the fragmentation of the community comprised of the Boyles and their friends. These characters are distinctive through wildly differing philosophies and principles, their debates emphasize the lack of communal vision among the residents of the Dublin tenant. It is here, then, that his characterization emerges at a level of complexity and depth that could not be reproduced in the musical version.
An examination of O’Casey’s concise yet complex characterizations reveals both attraction and peril for any adaptor. *Juno and the Paycock* offered much possibility for musicalization, and Stein was correct to seize upon the dramatic story and lively characters. Despite the possibilities, however, O’Casey’s use of language—though deeply musical—proves far less suited to adaptation.

**Singing Words of O’Casey**

*Juno and the Paycock* has long been famous for its moving and vivid language: highlights include O’Casey’s humor and vibrant words like ‘chiselur’ and ‘hillabaloo,’ both of which are part of its memorable Dublin-accented speech (complete with phonetic spellings). Even the character names—like Joxer Daly, Maisie Madigan and Juno Boyle—are colorful and juicy. Phrases such as ‘darlin’ man’ and ‘what is the stars’ were quickly expanded into songs in the Broadway version of the story, and with good reason. O’Casey’s use of language is indeed very musical.

The musicality of language in *Juno and the Paycock* becomes apparent through the complex build of the words themselves. *Juno and the Paycock* features a loosely structured plot, but the language itself is a highly developed mechanism of expression. Though his phrasings adapt easily to song, O’Casey’s distinctive linguistic sensibility—with its intricate rhythms and imagery—becomes incredibly difficult to translate into music.

Captain Boyle best represents this type of linguistic structure, which helps to subtly realize O’Casey’s original stage direction for Boyle: ‘His cheeks, reddish-purple,'
are puffed out, as if he were always repressing an almost irrepressible ejaculation.'

(O’Casey 55) Note the intricacy of his rantings on the Church, for example:

BOYLE [...] But that’s what the clergy want, Joxer—work, work, work for me an’ you; havin’ us mulin’ from mornin’ till night, so that they may be in better fettle when they come hoppin’ round for their dues! Job! Well, let him give his job to wan of his hymn-singin’, prayer-spoutin’, craw-thumpin’ Confraternity men! (O’Casey 73)

It’s clear from the quote that there’s not only bluster in the Captain’s words, and a love of expression, but also frustration. Yet this is only the face value. As Kearney noted, O’Casey supports his development of imagery ‘by the fabric of alliteration, consonance, and rhythm.’ O’Casey uses a wealth of linguistic devices, beginning with slight alliteration (‘mulin’ from mornin’”), internal rhymes (‘better fettle’), a colorful selection of verbs (‘hoppin’”, ‘singin’”, ‘spoutin’”, ‘thumpin’”), and repetitive sentence structure (the Clergy is the active voice in all of the above sentences). These are all techniques a musical theatre lyricist would use in developing a song; O’Casey’s work doesn’t need music to be lyrical and succinct.

O’Casey is unusual as well for infusing a mixture of literate wit and mundane reality into the dialogue. The tendency is well evidenced in Boyle’s explanation for his wife nickname of Juno:

BENTHAM Juno! What an interesting name! It reminds one of Homer’s glorious story of ancient gods and heroes.
BOYLE Yis, doesn’t it? You see, Juno was born an’ christened in June; I met her in June; we were married in June, an’ Johnny was born in June, so wan day I says to her, ‘You should ha’ been called Juno,’ an’ the name stuck to her ever since. (O’Casey 80)

The mythical heights to which Bentham refers are quickly shot down by reality. However, mythology and classical literature continue to appear. As O’Riordan noted,

‘The formal plot is rooted in the continuous fount of words and endless, bibulous rhetoric.’ For example, Joxer is full of references to great poets—from Robert Burns to
William Carleton—even as he’s acting as a comic crony to Captain Boyle. He begins quoting from just his third line of dialogue:

**JOXER** Ah a cup o’ tay’s a darlin’ thing, a daaarlin’ thing—the cup that cheers but doesn’t...

Here Joxer is in usual form: he uses his trademark word, ‘darlin’’, then promptly misquotes a W. Cowper poem. Joxer continues to do so throughout the play. As Colbert Kearney noted:

> He has a treasury, or an arsenal, of brief quotations from verse, proverbs, and idiomatic saying. [...] The implication is that Joxer only has ‘the wind of the word,’ that he is all right for a couple of lines or so but no more, that his knowledge of the verses he quotes so constantly, his comprehension minimal. 9

Joxer, who may not even understand the classical references that he constantly quotes, best represents O’Casey’s hilarious technique of merging the sublime with the ridiculous.

With that, O’Casey roots his characters in a mythical tradition, but doesn’t allow these glimpses of rhetoric to provide an escape from the ingrained reality onstage. Not, that is, until the gramophone scene, in which music takes precedence.

**O’CASEY’S USE OF MUSIC**

The third and most obvious aspect of the musicality of O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock* is song itself. The play features much music: O’Casey permeated his story with folk songs and poetry, and a major, lengthy scene even revolves around a gramophone. Since *Juno and the Paycock* isn’t a musical, there is significance in the function of music in the drama. Song plays a very important role throughout the play: it heightens theatricality, sets the mood, infuses humor and defines character.
The character most prominently defined by music is certainly O'Casey's Paycock. Boyle sings often. One of Juno's first criticisms about her husband is that he is 'constantly singin', no less, when he ought always to be on his knees offering up a Novena for a job!' (O'Casey 50). Boyle's perpetual singing has several immediate and conscious effects. It sets him off from the other characters and helps to illustrate the type of person that he is: charismatic yet lazy, for Boyle sings instead of doing anything constructive (as Juno bitterly notes). In addition, the songs heighten Boyle as a character. His habit of singing sets up audience expectations of a blustering-but-merry Irishman, expectations that will be destroyed in the third act.

The actual lyrics of the songs Boyle sings aren't vitally important. Notably, however, they are all romantic ballads, familiar to the public. Watt notes:

Given the closeness of both Joxer Daly and Jack Boyle to the shiftless, blarney-talking, hard-drinking Stage Irishman of the London stage, the ascendance of the comic myth in the play seems inevitable. Pastoral love songs in act 1 of Juno and the Paycock, much like those in Boucicault's plays, mark the presence of the green world myth in the play. 10

Boyle's seeming harmlessness, however, is belied in Act 3, when he becomes responsible for Mary and Juno's banishment. The presence of music as part of his character undermines both the Green Irish myth and our tentative belief in Boyle, the man who sings of it. As Ayling says, 'Not only did he use material that was common knowledge, but he also wrote with specific audience attitudes and prejudices in mind, and these could be exploited for his own purposes, too.' 11

Boyle is not, of course, the only character who sings. In Act 2, Boyle purchases a gramophone, and the characters celebrate by having a party with singing and dancing. Here is the most outwardly musical passage in the script. The audience witnesses a
mostly joyous moment, the type of musical expression upon which musical theatre thrives.

Naturally, Sean O'Casey did not write the lyrics for these songs. Therefore, any character definition stemming from these songs comes not from lyrics but from presentation. Mrs. Madigan, for instance, sings a then-popular ballad, 'If I were a Blackbird'. The song is about a sailor who's lost his true love, which cannot particularly be applied to *Juno and the Paycock*. However, O’Casey personalizes the moment by having Mrs. Madigan get the lyrics wrong: instead of 'lily-white breast,' she says 'Willie's white breast.' Of course, her mistakes are immediately offset by Joxer, who cannot remember the lyrics to his song, ‘She is far from the Land’, either. Their inability to remember the proper lyrics breaks the moment of sentimentality; O’Casey does not, for the most part, allow song to take precedence as a musical would.

As noted above, the lyrics to all the songs in Act 2 are very romantic ballads. O’Casey uses a wealth of sources for songs: traditional Irish ballads, arias from operas, even American folk. But as compared with the cleverness and technical brilliance of the Broadway musical, nearly all of the songs O’Casey uses are very trite and cliché. There was certainly room for improvement in terms of lyrical expression. However, the folk songs served to root the characters in a certain time and place and also to heighten both the comedic elements (as evidenced in Madigan and Joxer’s trouble with lyrics) and the tensions within the piece (the Gramophone as divisive element). There were certainly many possibilities, then, for musicalization.
Notes to Chapter 1

1 William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* had become *West Side Story*, *Kiss Me Kate* and *The Boys from Syracuse*, respectively. Marlowe’s *Faust* was adapted into the hit *Damn Yankees*; Lerner and Loewe famously turned Shaw’s *Pygmalion* into *My Fair Lady* and Molnár’s *Liliom* was the basis for 1945’s *Carousel*.

2 Ethan Mordden, *Coming Up Roses: The Broadway Musical in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.222. *Fanny, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, and *The King and I* were three of the more serious musicals attempted early in the 1950s; *Brooklyn* flopped, but *Fanny* was a big hit and *The King and I* became an instant classic.


4 Sean O’Casey, *Juno and the Paycock*, intr. by Seán Moffatt (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1988), p.72. All subsequent references to *Juno and the Paycock* will refer to this edition and are noted parenthetically within the text.


8 O’Riordan, p. 43.

9 Kearney, pp. 76-77.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS OF EXPRESSION IN THE MUSICAL JUNO

As discussed in the previous chapter, O'Casey emphasized the musicality of his play through various means: characterization, language and song. Much of O'Casey's poetry was diluted or lost in the transformation of Juno and the Paycock into a musical, most notably the work's linguistic complexity. The creators of the musical version decided instead to simplify O'Casey's words into a skeleton of what they had been. In exchange, Blitzstein, Stein and de Mille emphasized more visceral forms of expression. Their endeavours led to varying levels of success.

There were three major aspects of the adaptation of O'Casey's play into the Blitzstein/Stein/de Mille musical. The first aspect was almost entirely created by choreographer Agnes de Mille: the insertion of a ritual element into Juno and the Paycock. In addition, the characters were refocused, changing the emphasis from a political to a psychological one. Finally, O'Casey's work had to be confined into a convention—in this case, into the world of 1950's musical theatre. All of these aspects of the adaptation, when examined, will enable a deeper discussion of the relationship between play and musical.

JUNO AS A CELTIC RITUAL DANCE

Perhaps Agnes de Mille faced the greatest challenge in transforming much of O'Casey's aural and word-based characterization into dance. Dance in late 1950's musicals was expected to be not only visually impressive, but also to move the plot forward and reveal character. De Mille herself was partly responsible for these expectations after her legendary contribution to Rodgers and Hammerstein's Oklahoma!
and *Carousel*. As Broadway scholar Ethan Mordden noted: 'By 1955 balletic dance—and especially de Mille-type balletic dance—had become the idealistic musical’s badge of identification.'

De Mille provided two major ballets for *Juno*. Each act featured a major dance interlude: ‘Dublin Night,’ in the first act, laid out the political and social backdrop of Johnny’s revolutionary friends, and the ‘Johnny’ ballet in the second act was an expression of the young informer’s feelings just before his capture by the IRA. In addition, de Mille supplied various energetic clog dances as well as a show-stopping and joyful solo dance break (performed by future choreographer Glen Tetley) during the first-act closer ‘On a Day Like This’. Throughout the musical, dance is an interesting presence: a combination of authentic Irish dance and de Mille vocabulary, of psychological study and ritual energy. Her choreography for *Juno* is often referred to as one of her lesser works, both in its original incarnation and its 1988 reconstitution into a freestanding ballet, The *Informer*. Yet regardless of its value in her overall oeuvre, the dances are fascinating, both as choreography and as a function of the text.

The ‘Dublin Night’ and ‘Johnny’ ballets examine the character of Johnny Boyle to an extent unprecedented in the O’Casey play. The musical’s version of Johnny is almost entirely developed through dance; he is the only major character who does not sing at all. ‘Dublin Night,’ the first ballet, occurs just after Johnny and his family find out about their inheritance; it is an odd combination of flashback, fantasy and narrative. When he goes for a walk, he encounters his fellow rebels and a feisty girlfriend, and we gradually discover the reasons why he betrayed Robbie Tancred. We see that Johnny gets easily distracted from his IRA duties by a flirtatious girl (performed by Gemze de Lappe
Johnny’s rage becomes increasingly apparent, as does the danger of the times. Much of his rage stems from his girlfriend’s frequent taunts, through which she alerts Johnny to his own weakness. When she pushes him back into the rebel gang, he gains more respect from those around him, but his self-hatred seems to have overwhelmed his passion for fighting. De Lappe is left alone among the crowd as the ballet ends.

The piece is visually and aurally arresting. A Dance Magazine critic noted its debt to the dance vocabulary of Martha Graham\(^2\); de Mille was clearly influenced by Jerome Robbins’s gang dances for *West Side Story* as well. The act-ending Tetley dance solo relied on the Irish slip-jig dance to convey joy. Conversely, in both ballets thunderous clogs denote anger and supplement the Celtic tunes (arranged by Blitzstein and de Mille collaborator Trude Rittman) which act as accompaniment.

‘Johnny,’ the second act piece, is no less striking. It is a showcase for the actor/dancer who played Johnny, Tommy Rall. De Mille biographer Carol Easton described the work.

\[\ldots\] A twelve-minute dance for a scene in which Rall realizes that the IRA are coming to arrest him for informing on his friend. The dance, one of Agnes’s most powerful pieces of work, was called a “haunt.” It was pure emotion—terror, grief, rage, defiance, self-hatred, and despair. As the tension mounted, the music and Rall’s feet moved faster and faster until he seemed about to explode with grief and rage.\(^3\)

Beyond the visual impact, though, de Mille’s efforts have major dramatic consequences for *Juno*. ‘Dublin Night’ tells Johnny’s story, but clearly, it also is about those around him—his girlfriend, his troop of IRA rebels and the Irish public. Throughout the musical, the extra characters generally serve as Brechtian witnesses to the Boyle drama, but it is only in the ballet that the chorus becomes a powerful dramatic force.
Their presence raises the stakes in the drama. The audience actually sees Johnny’s cohorts and comrades, rather than just hearing about them. This has the paradoxical effect of both humanizing Johnny—his emotions and rage become more palpable by putting them in context—and making him into an icon. Johnny becomes one of many, and thus a symbol: a representation of the inner conflicts of a soldier. All of this is represented not realistically (through dialogue) or psychologically (through song), but physically (through dance). Richard Schechner has argued that all drama is in effect a ‘transformation of real behavior into symbolic behavior’. De Mille’s dances perform a similar function within the text of the musical: Johnny and the chorus transform a realistic situation into one fraught with symbolism and subtext.

In effect, Johnny’s struggle becomes, in de Mille’s ballets, a ritual of rage and powerlessness. De Mille had earlier provided Broadway with a series of outwardly ritualistic Celtic dances: the various Scottish dances in Brigadoon. The dances for Juno were more subtly sacramental. As she had with Brigadoon, she merged a pre-existing dance vocabulary with her own style. Irish dancing perhaps is closer to entertainment than ritual. However, dance gained a ritual element (to an American audience) simply by being an authentic Irish form of expression, in addition to its placement in the narrative.

Johnny’s journey turned into a rite of passage, a visceral interpretation of the journey of all the major characters. The audience saw Johnny struggling to define himself amidst the societal pressures, sexual desires and patriotism threatening to engulf him. The dance represented a struggle between duty and desire—a problem that all of the Boyles had to face. Though Johnny is the focus of the dance, it foreshadows the real challenges in store for the entire family later in the piece.
Whether or not the audience sensed the emphasis on ritual is questionable. However, de Mille unmistakably invoked a ritualistic form of physical expression—both authentic Celtic music and Irish dance—to tell Johnny’s story. Schechner has noted the power of ritual within traditional twentieth-century entertainment: ‘Money is exchanged for a peek at theatricalized esoteric ceremonies. And “new rituals” are manufactured as entertainments.’ In this case, a ballet based on authentic Irish dance vocabulary becomes, in this context, a ritual.

Stein and Blitzstein supported de Mille’s work. They set the scene for the choreographer’s Celtic ritualism by reworking the religious elements already present in the O’Casey original. While O’Casey used imagery steeped in Catholicism and Greek mythology, Stein and Blitzstein invoked a fascinating secularity within the text. Though O’Casey made numerous critiques of the Catholic church in *Juno and the Paycock*, he also used the power of Catholic imagery. Johnny’s prayer candle, the funeral march and Juno’s prayers to the Virgin Mother all conveyed tragic depth at crucial moments during the play. All evidence of the Virgin Mary is deleted from the musical, as is Johnny’s candle. On the other hand, the funeral march is emphasized. Unlike O’Casey’s original, Blitzstein and Stein actually show Robbie Tancred’s funeral march onstage. O’Casey tinged the moment with ironic comments from the Boyle apartment (‘Oh, it’s a darlin’ funeral, a daarlin’ funeral!’) as they strain to catch a glimpse; as Mitchell noted, ‘the high moment is lost in morbid fascination with the trappings of death’. Stein and Blitzstein make the song—and not the Boyle reaction to it—central. However, Blitzstein altered the lyrics to the traditional hymn to mitigate its Catholic emphasis: ‘Jesus’ Heart all burning’
became 'God's own heart all burning', and 'The Sacred Heart of Jesus' was rewritten to sing 'The Sacred Heart of Heaven'.

Perhaps the most telling of these changes, however, occurs at the end. In the musical, Juno still cries out, 'Dear Lord God, take away this murderin' hate. Give us Thine own Love, Thine own eternal Love!' (Juno 2-5-31) Yet conversely, Mary no longer rails against a nonexistent God, as she does in the original: 'Oh, it's throe, it's throe what Jerry Devine says—there isn’t a God, there isn’t a God; if there was He wouldn’t let these things happen!' (O’Casey 140) Instead, she sings a reprise of an earlier song, 'Bird Upon a Tree', with a surprising optimism ('’Twas the storm that made the bird free'), and asks her Mother: 'Will there be room for a few books?' (Juno 2-5-33). This Mary is not concerned with God at all; it seems she will find comfort in fantasy.

The reasons for these changes are obvious. The authors were Jewish men who were writing for a secular audience, and neither had much interest in the trappings of Catholicism in Ireland. As such, the physical expression of de Mille’s ballets would mean more to an American audience than the Catholic references created for an Irish audience. It allowed them to focus instead on the more universal problems of the Boyle family. Yet in doing so, they obliterated much of what was genuine and uniquely Irish about O’Casey’s original.

FROM IRISH POLITICS TO AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGY

Juno and the Paycock was always a story about a family in crisis. Yet in addition to its authentic Irish imagery, the original play also contained much political commentary and
social satire—elements almost entirely missing from the musical. A major reason for this readjustment of perspective was the theatrical climate of the time.

Mordden has argued that by the 1950s, Broadway had long lost the passionate political plays that ‘invented Broadway as art’ during the 1920s and 1930s. Tennessee Williams, Mordden notes, ‘typifies postwar American drama (at least through the 1950s) in that he never held his plays answerable to “social conscience”. His people are apolitical; with all that sex and liquor to deal with, one doesn’t get much time for voting.” The sophistication and daring of the Broadway stage was slowly vanishing; politics had to be coded (as was the case with Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*).

Washington’s House Un-American Activities Committee, voraciously hunting for communists on American soil, was greatly responsible for the change. Blitzstein himself was questioned by the HUAC while writing the music for *Juno*. Emory Lewis commented upon the effect of the HUAC:

McCarthyism affected the arts and our general cultural life in complex and often indirect ways. During this timorous, confused, and apathetic decade, the arts took a sharp turn away from content to an inwardness, a preoccupation with self, a frenzied interest in form for its own sake. It was a full-scale retreat from political struggle and social commitment.

Even the plays of Sean O’Casey, whose admittedly outward politics centered on a nation an ocean away, had few productions in 1950’s New York City. *Juno and the Paycock*, for instance, was produced only once in New York in the twenty years before the musical made its debut.

In this atmosphere, then, it comes as no surprise that the musical *Juno* focused not on politics but instead on the emotional life of the Boyle family. Both their relationships with each other and their neighbors became central. Stein’s decision to change the date of
the musical from 1922 to 1921 is the clearest example of this change in perspective. The change deeply affects the Johnny Boyle plotline, for as Heinz Kosok noted, 'It is in this line of action that the historical background events enter the play'.9 Johnny’s decision to betray Robbie Tancred in the original play was certainly based on his weakness and fear, just as in the musical. However, O’Casey was also intent on portraying the effects of the Civil War’s muddled politics on Johnny, his fallen hero. He later wrote: ‘The difference between the two parties was trivial, almost insignificant, not worth a fight with fists, much less cannon, machine gun and rifle. [...] But they went to war about it, and devastated Ireland between them.’10

O’Casey’s Johnny betrays Robbie to fellow Irishmen; in Stein’s version he betrays his friend to enemy British soldiers. It’s a simpler version of the story. Stein saved himself a great deal of exposition by making the change. In exchange, he sacrificed believability. It is certainly less likely that a patriot such as Johnny would betray his friend to the British. The decision to date the musical back a year also nullified any significant political statement O’Casey intended, as well as any ambivalence as to which side was morally in the right during the Civil War. Yet as noted above, Stein’s concern was the psychology of the Boyle family, not their politics. As such, he and director José Ferrer added another twist upon the original, one that is ultimately more significant than the date change. In the musical, the prologue, ‘We’re Alive’, reveals Johnny as an informer; O’Casey’s original Johnny doesn’t let on that he is an informer until late in the second act.

Critics have noted O’Casey’s brilliance in slowly revealing Johnny as a traitor: ‘Had O’Casey revealed Johnny’s disloyalty earlier than he does in the play, we would
certainly have failed to enjoy the scene were the Boyles luxuriate in the prospect of the elusive legacy.¹¹ Yet Ferrer and Stein were correct to go against O’Casey’s example, for it is this disclosure that makes Agnes de Mille’s ballets dramatically viable. The audience knew what was tormenting Johnny; the immediate revelation of his treachery allowed the ballet to portray him as more than a victim. Here again is evident the importance of character and psychology in the musical.

However, the songs are the most obvious evidence of a psychological reevaluation of *Juno and the Paycock*. They are also, in general, the loveliest and most successful aspects of the adaptation. O’Casey’s characters are well-suited to musicalization because they dream too much—a tendency which Michael Kaufman referred to as a blindness to actuality.

*Juno and the Paycock* is a play of betrayed expectations; the family’s anticipation of the legacy; Mary’s romantic dreams and social aspirations; Johnny’s desperate hope of escaping his retribution; the paycock’s vain anticipation of never having to work again; and Juno’s profound wish to keep her family together.¹²

These fantasies are particularly affecting when expressed musically. As such, dreams are strongly emphasized throughout the musical. Thus, Mary’s vague dreams of a better existence in ‘I Wish it So’ gain emotional weight, and Boyle’s ridiculous tales of the sea become oddly attractive and convincing in ‘What is the Stars?’.

Ideally, a song in a musical expands the moment both lyrically and musically. For instance, the semi-comic ‘Song of the Ma’ introduces us to Juno’s pragmatic, embittered personality through its lyrics. The music itself also foreshadows her tragedy, since the tune is markedly similar to her ‘Lament’ near show’s end. In addition, Juno and her husband’s ‘Old Sayin’s’ reveals affection beneath the bickering because of its playful melody. All of which should work together to involve the audience emotionally and to
make the ending all the more heartbreaking. However, in order for a musical to be emotionally affecting, the book must be as well constructed as the songs are.

CONFORMING O’CASEY TO THE MUSICAL STAGE

This accentuation of the internal struggle of the Boyle family—this exploration of their secret desires and insecurities—was not only dominant on Broadway at the time, but also is a natural emphasis for a musical. Since these issues already were present in the original, Juno and the Paycock promised to become an excellent musical. Yet the show was a fast flop. Somehow, the Boyles’ story failed to translate onto the musical stage. O’Casey’s play is universally regarded as superior to Stein’s adaptation and critic Ken Mandelbaum explained why:

It was true that the musical Juno watered down the poetics of its source and cut a good deal of O’Casey’s script. What was perhaps worse is that the original Juno refashioned O’Casey into the form of the standard late-’50s Broadway musical, with in-one scenes alternating with full-stage scenes, large production numbers that took the home-bound original out onto the streets of Dublin, and some fairly standard-issue musical comedy humor. 13

O’Casey set his entire play inside the Boyle apartment, a claustrophobic and grim backdrop to the drama. It offset Juno and the Paycock’s poetic and lyrical references, as well as the script’s comedic elements, with a realistic and unforgiving environment. The setting, in effect, helped emphasize a major theme of the play, in which ‘human reality is juxtaposed with mythical identity’. 14 Stein decided to open up the story to the street in front of the tenement, to Foley’s pub, to the park and so on.

Stein reset the scenes outside of the apartment for several reasons. First of all, the conventions of musical theatre mean that ideally, background becomes irrelevant during song as the audience views the characters on a deeper level. As such, a musical confined
to a single set is, even today, very uncommon. Secondly, bringing the Boyles out into
Dublin meant that the creators could bring Dublin into the theatre. It was the only way to
believably include a chorus; it allowed de Mille to incorporate the people of Dublin into
her ballet.

Stein was correct in trying to tastefully reshape O’Casey’s world into that of a
Broadway musical. A librettist, as Lehman Engel noted, has specific and distinctive
challenges in adapting a work:

He must simplify, be more succinct than would otherwise be his custom,
eliminate complex intellectual ideas which, to the audience, can only be confusing
in a musical (because of the natural difficulties of comprehending such ideas
within music, and because of the shortened space he has in which to expose
them).

In addition, there were many practical as well as thematic concerns in the adaptation. For
instance, the scenes set in front of the tenement allowed time for scene changes, and
Mary was given all of the soaring love melodies because of actress Monte Amundsen’s
excellent voice.

One of the more famous script changes in Stein’s version was a change of
location that, in fact, the audience never saw. In the play, Juno’s sister is just another
Dublin tenement resident; in the musical she lives on a farm outside Dublin. It seems, as
the curtain falls, that Mary and Juno will indeed find a better life outside Dublin. The
tinge of hope is evident in one of Juno’s final lines:

JUNO We’ll live, Mary—Tomorra will be comin’ an’ it must be lived—But not here,
Mary, not here. We’ll be goin’ to my sister’s place—to the farm—where you can take
a full breath without the smell o’ sadness in it. (Juno 2-5-32)
O’Casey also forced Juno to go see Johnny’s body before moving on to her new life with Mary; Stein omits this passage. These changes had the effect of softening the ending by giving a hope of happiness and freedom to Juno and Mary.

Stein’s rewrite of the final scenes was widely criticized, and all subsequent productions of Juno have reverted to O’Casey’s original version. Most agreed with Lillian Hellman’s assertion that it was a ‘real, if unconscious betrayal of O’Casey. Point is they have really nowhere to go, but are still undaunted in spirit. That’s what makes it daring, and true. So pat, so sentimental, the farm.’

The criticism assumes, of course, that harsh reality was better for the Broadway audience than hope for a better life. Yet Stein’s changes are to be expected in a 1950s Broadway musical, and certainly no more detrimental that Alan Jay Lerner’s happy ending for My Fair Lady or Arthur Laurents’s decision to let Maria live at the end of West Side Story.

That said, some of Stein’s other alterations in terms of setting are undeniably detrimental. An example is the relocation of the party scene, which takes up the greater part of Act II in the play and opens the second act in the musical. As in the original, it begins in the gaudily decorated Boyle apartment, but during the ‘Music in the House’ sequence, the guests dance their way to the back garden, where, as the stage directions have it, ‘several tables have been set up; it is decorated for a party, with hangings, etc’. (Juno 2-1-9) The existence of a back garden in a derelict Dublin tenement is not only implausible, but also damaging to the view of the Boyles in financial distress.

Stein also set several scenes in front of the tenement, intending to feature several of the tenement women not only as comic relief, but also as cynical Brechtian witnesses to the Boyle drama. In these scenes, though, characterization (and not location) is
detrimental to the progression of the story. Most importantly, the fact that these women sit in front of the tenement all day—choosing to gossip rather than work—once again belittles the suffering of the tenement folk. In addition, it detracts from the characterization of Jack Boyle. It seems he is only one of many who chooses not to work, rather than the unusually irresponsible blunderer of the original play. Thirdly, the scenes bear little relevance to the unfolding story, and worse, the jokes are not funny. O’Casey’s Dublin humor was rooted in the characterization of integral figures such as Joxer and Boyle; Stein reverted to clichééd images of Irish blarney. It is perhaps the weakest aspect of Stein’s adaptation.

Broadway convention also required a love story, but *Juno and the Paycock* does not focus on romantic love per se. As Kosok noted, O’Casey was less interested in Mary’s ‘relationship to Bentham and her specific disaster than in its effect on the whole family, especially on Juno.’ The musical theatre, however, required a stronger romantic focus. The musical showcases Mary (‘I Wish it So’) and her affair with Charlie Bentham (during ‘My True Heart’ and ‘For Love’) as well as the unrequited feelings of her suitor, Jerry Devine (who sings ‘One Kind Word’).

Mary’s emotions are indeed outsized enough to be expressed through song. In addition, all three songs are lovely and articulate. However, their existence causes dramatic problems within the text. The songs are obvious and excellent musical expressions of a moment. Yet *Juno* is not about Mary, and by providing her story with several of the most prominent songs, Stein and Blitzstein are making dramatic promises they couldn’t keep—not if they were to remain faithful to the spirit of O’Casey.
It is evident that they were attempting to compromise between the practicalities of the day and the artistic demands of the text. The adaptation of a play into a musical will always involve sacrifice, since the inclusion of song and dance precludes the deeply complex verbal interaction possible in a play. Yet what becomes apparent is the power of the external factors in producing a musical: the theatrical climate, the secular audience and the practicalities of staging. Stein and Blitzstein had to conform not only to audience expectations, but also to the abilities of the cast and technical production requirements. All of these elements helped to define Juno as a musical that did not live up to its source material.
Notes to Chapter 2


2 Leo Lerman, 'At the Theatre: Juno, On the Town, Lute Song', Dance Magazine, April 1959, p. 22.


5 Schechner, p.144.


17 Kosok, p.45.
CHAPTER 3: THEMATIC DIVERGENCE BETWEEN MUSICAL AND PLAY

In its various incarnations—from the original 1950s version, to a 1970s revision, to yet another modified version in the 1990s, Juno has never been able to escape unfavorable comparisons to O’Casey’s original. Its worth has been defined almost entirely in contrast to Juno and the Paycock, and with good reason. Stein, Blitzstein and de Mille created an adaptation that follows quite closely to its source material, inviting comparisons to O’Casey.

Yet as illustrated in the previous chapter, Juno’s creators did much more than simply rework O’Casey with different forms of expression. Clearly, Juno was not an attempt to exploit O’Casey’s words into a spectacle of songs and dances. Rather, it was an attempt to create a new show based on a classic play. As O’Casey himself said, ‘I think the musical should be brighter in spirit & look than the play, for it is in another form, &, actually, a different work.’ By constantly comparing the musical Juno to O’Casey’s Juno and the Paycock, many have missed what is thematically original about the musical. In fact, Juno has much to say. Yet oddly enough, the major themes of the musical only become clear when contrasting the adaptation to the original, for the musical is often deeply opposed to the messages and attitudes of its source material.

The previous chapter examined Stein, Blitzstein and de Mille’s methods of storytelling; this chapter will examine the themes emanating from these new forms of expression and their ultimate relation to O’Casey. To begin with, the musical’s creators portrayed fantasy as a viable escape, whereas O’Casey scorned the use of fantasy to avoid reality. Secondly, Juno emphasizes the importance of community as a major force
(be it positive or negative) in coping with tragedy. Finally, tragedy in the musical *Juno* becomes something of a lesson in morality for its characters.

**FANTASY AS VIABLE ESCAPE**

As noted in the previous chapter, fantasy features heavily in both play and musical. O’Casey illustrates the fallacy of an unrealistic world vision, as noted by Saros Cowasjee: '[Juno] alone shows courage and common sense. In scene after scene her hard grasp of the facts of life is brought into contrast with the stupid idealism of her daughter and son and the dream world of her husband.' O’Casey’s criticism is apparent throughout the play on several levels.

Mary Boyle is intent on escaping her environment. O’Casey portrays this desire through her fascination with Charlie Boyle and her acquaintance with literature. As Kearney noted, ‘Some of the younger generation, notably Mary and Jerry Devine, have glimpsed in their reading a vision of a better life.’ Education has had a major effect on Mary, which is apparent from O’Casey’s opening stage directions: ‘Two forces are working in her mind—one, through the circumstances of her life, pulling her back; the other, through the influence of books she has read, pushing her forward’ (O’Casey 48). Her books introduce to her the possibility of a better life, which leads to her trouble with Bentham. In short, Mary’s interest in literature bolsters her desire to escape, and she suffers as a result.

In the musical, however, Mary’s love of fiction and fantasy is a coping mechanism. According to Mary, she reads because ‘It’s the difference between staring at the wall and lookin’ out the window’ (*Juno* 1-2-9). Her books serve a similar dramatic
function to Mary’s frequent walks to the park, as well as her efforts to beautify herself.

Books here are not a cause, but a solution, an effort to ameliorate the ‘unrest inside’ (Juno 1-2-10). The fact that she still wants to read them at the end of the show indicates her belief in their power to help. It’s a stark contrast to O’Casey’s version, in which books are far from Mary’s mind at play’s end.

In the original, Mary serves as an example of the dangers of fantasy. However, as Cowasjee argued, the character of Juno is the most obvious aspect of this derision of fancy. Throughout the play, she is a champion of the prosaic and the only Boyle truly entrenched in reality. She also criticizes another aspect of fantasy: the submersion of one’s beliefs into a single political mindset. Here Juno represents O’Casey’s own beliefs.

He later remarked:

We should, however, be careful of personal idealism; good as it may be and well-meaning, its flame in a few hearts may not give new life an new hope to the many, but dwindle into ghastly and futile funeral pyres in which many are uselessly destroyed and enormous damage done to all.4

Juno is quickly revealed as not only the strongest character onstage but also the most pitiable: ‘He wore out the Health Insurance long ago, he’s aither wearin’ out the unemployment dole, an’ now he’s thryin’ to wear out me!’ (O’Casey 50).

At first, Stein’s Juno seems equally grounded. She offsets her idealistic children with contempt of their principles: ‘Don’t be gettin’ whiney because you’re hurt, Johnny. It was you made a fool of yourself gettin’ into the fight and into trouble’ (Juno 1-2-6). Her discontented attitude, however, is certainly more easygoing than O’Casey’s Juno, who argues passionately against her children’s convictions. While O’Casey’s Juno rails against the uselessness of vague ideals, Stein’s counterpart is contented with platitudes.
She tells Johnny, for instance, that 'One hard or two, it's time you stood up a bit straighter' (*Juno* 1-2-7).

Further, an examination of her dialogue reveals that she actually tends to indulge her children's dreamy natures. For example, she remarks to Johnny: 'I know, boy, it's hard to face a body's sorra and you were always the soft one, Johnny. There now, go lie down and I'll bring you a nice cup of tea' (*Juno* 1-2-6). Then, after Mary sings 'I Wish it So', Juno admits: 'I know, Mary, it's not easy to be young. [...] You're like I was, Mary, like I was in my springier days' (*Juno* 1-2-10).

Her attitude towards her husband is no different. Herbert Goldstone argued that O'Casey's Juno herself is much responsible for Boyle's laziness: 'Not only has she let Boyle take advantage of her by being so shiftless, but she may even prefer such a situation. In this way she can exult her importance by exposing Boyle for being so lazy and tricky.' The criticism has little evidence in the O'Casey play, but is actually an apt comment when looking at the musical. The original had a desperate Juno threatening to leave Boyle several times in the first act: 'Then, me bucko, if you lose this chance, you may go an furrage for yourself' (O'Casey 62). However, the musical Juno offers no such warning. O'Casey's Boyle maddens his wife through a combination of tall tales, constant singing and astonishing laziness; Stein's Juno is only truly irritated by the latter. Their bantering has a lighter tone, most clearly in the song 'Old Sayin's', in which Juno seems to enjoy matching wits with her husband. Further, the reprise of 'Old Sayin's', sung just after the Boyles are informed of their inheritance, reveals that this Juno is far more susceptible to Boyle's charms:

**BOYLE** I'll make your days shine, Juno, now that the burden's off me back. I'll make your days shine.
JUNO Will you, Boyle?
There's an old sayin'.
It's never too late to change—
I wonder, surely. (Juno 1-6-37)

Juno's attitude in the musical doesn't exactly amount to a tacit approval of Boyle's antics. She still clearly disapproves of his slothfulness and his friendship with Joxer. However, her attacks on his tendency to fantasize and exaggerate are far less pointed, and in spite of everything, he seems to be able to charm her on occasion.

Juno's mollified attitude towards fantasy becomes most unmistakable, however, through song. Her dreams are a major focus in the Act I closing number. 'On a Day Like This' is arguably the happiest moment in the show; Juno gets caught up in the excitement and rattles off her own fondest dreams as well: 'a finish to ills, a finish to bills, an' love, an' a bower of daffodils' (Juno 1-10-51). As Gordon notes, 'In the ensemble number "On a Day Like This", when the entire cast assembles to voice their hopes from the new sudden legacy, two main desires emerge: for wealth and for love." Song, along with dance, is the deepest method of character revelation in a musical. Therefore, Blitzstein's decision to muse on fantasy, dreams and expectations for much of the score is significant.

The most arresting images of fantasy come, of course, from Boyle himself. 'What is the Stars', a duet for Boyle and Joxer, is a colorful example. As noted in the previous chapter, the song gives Boyle's falsehoods dramatic weight through its melodic attractiveness. In addition, the lyric (written mostly by O'Casey himself) not only elucidates Boyle's fantasy, but also reveals his motivation. He sings:

The life on the brine is the life full o' wine,
full o' song and no women—hurray!
Where the only dainty curve is the curve of the ship.
There is me, there is me,
And one she, just one she—
It's Venus, a million miles away. (*Juno* 1-6-31)

In the original, Boyle's fantasy is a bluff; 'What is the Stars' reveals a genuine discontent beneath Boyle's exaggeration. The fantasy now contains real underlying emotion, and therefore holds greater importance.

Kaufman argued that *Juno and the Paycock* 'conveys the idea that false illusions invite catastrophes', and much of this message can be found within O'Casey's derision of fantasy. O'Casey's attitude, however, was unacceptable to Broadway of the 1950s, and *Juno* was adapted accordingly.

**The Importance of Community**

Opening up the scenes in the musical to various locations around Dublin and resetting the story to 1921 were, as discussed in the previous chapter, practical decisions. Yet the adjustments had thematic ramifications, as well. Since the Irish in 1921 were united against a common enemy, the concept of community in *Juno* is quite different from the civil war backdrop of *Juno and the Paycock*. In addition, by opening up the scenes to include the people of Dublin—whether as political instigators (as in the ballet), cynical commentators (the ladies on the front stoop) or simply as background figures—Stein, Blitzstein and de Mille were infusing a community spirit not clearly present in O'Casey's original.

The discussion herein—that of highlighting community response—could easily be applied to much of musical theatre. The idea of community as a vitally important character is a natural thematic emphasis for a musical, since Broadway musicals came equipped with singing and dancing choruses. The possibilities for choral interaction and
emphasis are even evident within the complexity of music itself, which combines harmonic and melodic voices to make beautiful sounds. *Juno*’s ensemble acted both harmonically and melodically within the text: both as contrast to the Boyles and important figures in their own right. Which is not to say, of course, that the Dublin neighbors present in *Juno* are always a positive force. It does mean that the Boyles—and the decisions they make—have a more prominent relationship with their community than is the case in *Juno and the Paycock*.

In fact, community is important to the *Juno and the Paycock*, as well. Yet while the *Juno* authors idealized community, O’Casey did not. Goldstone noted that O’Casey’s Boyles are deeply demoralized by Ireland’s chaotic environment, leading to a profound insecurity and thus to a desire for acceptance and respect. Yet there are no true friendships in the play. As Goldstone noted: ‘There is the appearance of community rather than the substance. […] The consequences of settling for appearance and middle-class materialism are disastrous, at least for the Boyles.’

Stein and Blitzstein portray the general community who witness the Boyle drama as far more unified and interactive. The Boyles are framed within their Dublin community from the beginning: ‘We’re Alive’, a moving choral affirmation of being Irish, serves as both prologue and epilogue. Both music and suffering have great power to unite a people, and the Dubliners in this song bind together through persecution. ‘We’re Alive’ is the first of several chorus numbers that glorify the Irish: ‘We Can Be Proud’, ‘It’s Not Irish’, and ‘The River Liffey’ also do so, and traces of patriotism are also apparent in ‘Daarlin’ Man’ and ‘On a Day Like This’. Through these songs, Stein and
Blitzstein portrayed the ensemble—the onstage representation of the Irish public—as unified in their love of country.

In addition to providing the audience with a powerful vision of community, 'We're Alive' sets up an immediate contrast to the Boyles, who do not come together through their mutual suffering. This contrast continues throughout the musical, in which scenes featuring an ensemble (or even just a few neighbors) alternate with dramatic and tension-filled scenes focusing on the Boyles. This contrast between the Boyle family and their unified neighbors is fascinating, and directly opposes O'Casey. In *Juno and the Paycock*, the Boyles represent the problems within Irish community. In the musical, however, the unity of the other neighbors further illustrates great discord within the Boyle clan.

Lyricist/librettist Tom Jones noted that musicals 'alternate between two extremes: the very intimate and the very big, the closeup and the panorama'; *Juno*’s chorus adds this panoramic atmosphere to O'Casey’s original. However, the function of the ensemble goes further than as a counterpoint to the family drama. As noted in the previous chapter, the ensemble generally acts as witnesses to the Boyle family story. The presence of neighbors who watch and comment upon the crisis adds another dimension to the unfolding drama.

This panoramic viewpoint serves to underline the importance of a community’s response to trauma. In O'Casey’s original, the Boyles were certainly concerned about the public reaction to their problems. Boyle himself reveals the extent of his desire for social acceptance when he disowns Mary near the end of the play:

**BOYLE** [...] An' it'll be bellows’d all over th' disthrict before you could say Jack Robinson; an' whenever I'm seen they'll whisper, 'That's th' father of Mary Boyle
that had th' kid be th' swank she used to go with; d'ye know, d'ye know?" (O'Casey 131)

Boyle's sentiments are no more noble in the musical. However, since the public is an actual onstage presence in *Juno*, his fears gain gravity. In *Juno*, public opinion and response is a fact, rather than a phobia.

Since the community gains significance, the content and presentation of public response in the musical *Juno* becomes thematically important. Aside from their function as comic relief, Stein and Blitzstein hoped to utilize the ensemble as a modern Greek chorus. P.E. Easterling noted that a Greek chorus not only bears witness to a tragedy, but guides the audience to the desired emotional response: "Its job is to help the audience become involved in the process of responding. [...] Often, indeed, the chorus combines witnessing with trying to understand, and its guidance is intellectual or even philosophical as well as emotional."  

The *Juno* ensemble members do indeed act as both witnesses and respondents, and as argued in the previous chapter, they even become instigators during the dance sequences. As they witness the drama, they respond with strong opinions and pass judgment on the characters. Their conversations indicate public attitude towards the Boyles, designating who is worthy of audience sympathy. For example: ‘Juno Boyle has her burdens, God love her, with that husband that won’t lift nothin’ heavier than a pint’ (*Juno* 1-3-13).

The ensemble’s greatest thematic influence, however, comes not from their idle discussions of the Boyle drama, but their emotional response to it within song. For instance, ‘We’re Alive’, the closing number, adds punctuation to the tragedy. Oscar Mandel noted that such ending moments in a drama, called post-tragic episodes, serve as
'the final emotional or philosophical commentary on the action. It is here, rather than in
the tragic action itself, that we may on occasion find an uplift, a reconciliation, or on the
other side a final push into the abyss.' It is significant, then, that in this emotionally
affecting finale, it is the community, not the individual characters, who enact the drama’s
final emotional payoff:

Further, the song reveals why community is most important in the story: it is the
community that is ultimately able to find meaning within the Boyle tragedy. They reveal
that the deaths of young men such as Johnny and Robbie were not ultimately pointless (as
they were in the O’Casey original). On the contrary, their deaths give rise to a further
willingness to follow the rallying call of Cathleen ni Houlihan, as becomes evident
through the play’s final verses:

Did you hear what we said?
Hold it high, lift your head.
We’re alive, we’re alive,
As the old woman said.

TRAGEDY’S MORAL VALUE

The ensemble’s reprise of ‘We’re Alive’ at the end of the show is just one of a number of
elements in the musical that affirms the moral lesson inherent in tragedy. In this case, the
tragedy spurs the public to a greater determination within the Irish people. This emotional
public reaction to Johnny’s death in the musical Juno is especially fascinating after
considering that Johnny was killed not by the British but by fellow Irishmen. Despite his
traitorous actions, Johnny’s death still moves and rallies the people. Clearly it was very
important to the authors to affirm the value of tragedy as a unifying force, as a lesson in
morality.
This inclination is the third major thematic difference between O'Casey's play and the Broadway musical. The distinction is slight but significant. In Juno and the Paycock, tragedy revealed the true nature of its major characters. Sean O'Casey's use of an inheritance to first raise, then dash the hopes of the Boyle family brings forth the truth about his characters and their moral strength, or lack thereof. Stein and Blitzstein relate tragedy to character strength as well, but do so in a different manner. While O'Casey's tragedy reveals the inner mettle of his characters, Stein and Blitzstein's characters are given moral strength through tragedy.

Throughout the musical, the audience is reminded that suffering begets inner strength. As in the play, however, only the women of the script actually gain strength through this tragedy. As Benstock noted, 'the young men readily disqualify themselves; the old men are far beyond the pale'. Therefore, Juno and her daughter Mary, as the two major women of the piece, best represent this theme. Undeniably, their counterparts in the O'Casey work also gain stature and nobility, but there are telling differences.

For instance, the women in O'Casey's work are depicted from the start as much stronger than they are in the musical. In Juno and the Paycock, 'Juno from the start demands more attention than the others', as Kosok argues. She is clearly angry about the dismal family finances, and does not refrain from making harsh remarks towards her children or her husband. She exclaims, 'Ain't I nicely handicapped with the whole o' yous!' (O'Casey 52), and endeavors to prevent Joxer from access to her family's small supply of sausages. When she attacks Boyle for his laziness, he is wounded and indignant: 'Are you never goin' to give us a rest? [...] D'ye want to dhrive me out o' the house?' (O'Casey 60). In the musical, however, Juno is gentler and more placid; her
anger does not truly appear until late in the show. As noted earlier, she is permissive of Johnny and Mary’s tendencies to fantasize. Juno is still angered by her husband’s unwillingness to work, but her weaker rants merely amuse Boyle: ‘Ah, there she goes! [...] Ah, she’s pickin’ up steam. [...] Ah, she’s in full sail now!’ (*Juno* 1-6-24, 25).

Clearly, the Stein/Blitzstein Juno is not the tower of strength that O’Casey’s Juno quickly reveals herself to be. They have also mitigated Mary’s strength: she is no longer concerned with principles or unionization. Both women blossom, however, in the second act. Juno’s actions and dialogue are nearly identical to those of her O’Casey counterpart. On notable difference, of course, is that Juno sings a lament upon learning of Johnny’s death. The text of the song is taken from O’Casey’s text nearly verbatim; this Juno’s rage is all the more palpable for being expressed through song. Here she finally expresses the anger that O’Casey’s Juno communicated from the start.

Mary, on the other hand, gains not anger but insight and forgiveness. The original Mary is bitterly disappointed in Jerry’s reaction to her pregnancy: ‘It’s only as I expected—your humanity is just as narrow as the humanity of the others’ (O’Casey 136). In the musical, however, Mary is considerably less harsh: ‘I know what you’re thinkin’. An’ I don’t blame you. It’s a saint you’d have to be not to think it, an’ you’re a man—yes. An’ so your understandin’ an’ pity has its limits’ (*Juno* 2-4-30). There is little bitterness in her words. The audience is led to believe, then, that Juno and Mary’s tragedies have caused them to become stronger.

Blitzstein and Stein also illustrate the power of tragedy as instructive force within song, most specifically during ‘Bird Upon a Tree’. Mary and Juno first sing the song early in the second act. It tells the story of a bird whose ‘foot was caught within its own
nest' (*Juno 2-1-5*), but is freed after suffering through wind and storm. Boyle describes it as a family favorite, which 'Juno learned at her Mother's knee an' she's taught it to Mary' (*Juno 2-1-5*).

Since Mary and Juno perform 'Bird Upon a Tree' for the others, it serves as a performative moment within *Juno*, its function (as well as 'We Can Be Proud' and 'It's Not Irish') similar to the music within O'Casey's play. Unlike O'Casey, however, Blitzstein tailored the lyric to the women singing it. With 'Bird Upon a Tree', Blitzstein uses a device mastered by composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist/librettist Oscar Hammerstein in songs such as *Carousel*’s 'You’ll Never Walk Alone'. Hammerstein’s technique was to create 'a kind of extrapolated folk song, something drawing upon eternal verities', which not only provided outward comfort to the characters onstage, but related ultimate meaning to an audience. Blitzstein's technique echoed Hammerstein's in both lyric and function. Note the similarity in imagery between the two songs, beginning with Hammerstein’s lyric:

[... J At the end of the storm is a golden sky  
And the sweet silver song of a lark.  
Walk on through the wind  
Walk on through the rain:  
Though your dreams be tossed and blown...  

And Blitzstein’s:

[... J There came a wind and rushing rain,  
That swayed the nest again and again.  
All beaten back, its feathers wet,  
The bird was truly sore beset.  
[... J And then a strange miracle did happen:  
The bird looked down and was free. (*Juno 2-1-5*)

Blitzstein’s simple song lacks Oscar Hammerstein’s epic sentimentality and the hymnlike grandeur of the Richard Rodgers melody. Yet the dramatic function is the same: the
songs both serve to heal the characters, to assert that this tragedy will lead to a miracle at the end of the storm.

'Bird Upon the Tree' exemplifies the attitude toward tragedy throughout the musical; this perspective is also reflected in the finale, 'We’re Alive'. Stein and Blitzstein were telling the same tragic story that O’Casey did, albeit with a few elements (such as the invented farm of Juno’s sister) to mollify the audience. However, despite its heartrending story, Juno was really no more a tragedy than Carousel or Fiddler on the Roof. The musical may have been sad, but it was ultimately uplifting nevertheless. It certainly did not reach the tragic heights of the play.

Yet, on another level, it was a tragedy far beyond that of Juno and the Paycock. Sean O’Casey’s play has been wildly successful from the moment of its debut; it is continually listed among the best dramas of the century and enjoys frequent revivals in Ireland and throughout the world. After its short Broadway run, Juno was revised twice, failing each time, as the original did. Ironically, O’Casey’s cynical vision and intricate language has triumphed, while Juno, of the optimistic ending and soaring melodies, flopped. It was certainly a tragedy for the creators of the musical, who spent two years working on the piece. Agnes de Mille considered Juno a most painful chapter in her life; she later left Broadway permanently for the world of dance. Composer Marc Blitzstein was murdered, five years after Juno closed, without ever seeing a Broadway hit. The same year, 1964, Joseph Stein found a hit: a musical similar to Juno, about a family in crisis, a charismatic father, and a persecuted people—Fiddler on the Roof.

On the evidence of its negligible effect on the theatre and its role as a major disappointment to creators, cast and crew, one may indeed consider Juno a failure of the
highest order. As illustrated throughout this paper, *Juno* rarely reaches the heights of *Juno and the Paycock*. The analogy of the musical as Paycock to O’Casey’s Juno is indeed accurate. It has been roundly criticized for trying to imitate O’Casey, just as Boyle is made to look foolish in attempting to ape his literate, educated betters. In addition, the original cast recording reveals unintentional hilarity as the very American ensemble makes laughable attempts to imitate the Dublin accent. They fail, just as Boyle does in attempting to speak of consols and Theosophy.

However, the musical *Juno* is notable even so. *Juno* makes an obvious effort to find its own voice within O’Casey’s story, in terms of both expression and theme. Stein, Blitzstein and de Mille wove in their own attitudes and beliefs into the play, generally attempting to illustrate the positive aspects of a sad story. This paper, too, has endeavored to find meaning and value in something sad: a failed and nearly forgotten musical, often ignored and continually underrated.
Notes to Chapter 3


12 The reprise of "We're Alive" was added late in the tryout process and thus is not in the final revised script. The quoted lyrics are documented on *Juno*'s original Broadway cast recording, and are also found at the end of the prologue, on page 1-1-3 of the *Juno* script.


14 Kosok, p.50.


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