

RIDER TO THE SEA

In a fit of pique at this only remaining son for not listening to her pleas, Maura lets him go without her blessing. The girls persuade her to intercept him with the lunch they had forgotten to give him and so to make opportunity for that blessing a mother should have given. While Maurya is gone the girls open the package. The clothes are, indeed, Michael's. Their only comfort is the thought that his body has been given good Christian burial there in the north where it was washed up. At this point Maurya returns terrified with a vision she had had of Michael riding on the led horse behind Bartley. Now she is sure Bartley is doomed. When the girls show her Michael's clothes her only response is that the good white boards she had bought for his coffin would serve for Bartley instead.

As Maurya shows signs of waking the girls hide the bundle until sometime when they shall be alone. Maurya's grieving for Michael is now coupled with fear of losing Bartley, her only remaining son. Five sons and a husband she has already lost to the sea. Will that insatiable tyrant insist on taking her sixth. The priest says not. But now Bartley insists that he will cross to the mainland this very day, in spite of winds and high seas, to dispose of a horse at the fair.

AFTER nine days of constant grieving for her missing son, Michael, who, she feels certain, has been drowned, old Maurya has fallen into a fitful sleep. Her daughter, Cathleen, is busy with household tasks, when another daughter, Nora, slips quietly into the kitchen with a bundle given her by the young priest. It contains part of the clothes taken from the body of a drowned man far in the north. They have been sent to Maura's cottage with a view to possible identification.

Besides the Old Testament allusions, certain actions in the play correspond to events mentioned in the New Testament. When Maurya, in the presence of Cathleen and Nora, sprinkles holy water on Michael's clothes, one thinks of Easter morning, when three women came to anoint the body of Jesus. In this sense the scene becomes symbolic of the Resurrection. Cathleen reinforces this notion of resurrection when she refers to "when the sun rises," voicing John Millington Synge's intended pun on "resurrection of the son."

THEMES

Gender Roles

The characters in the text rigidly adhere to the prescribed gender roles of their time and place. Nora is relatively voiceless, while Cathleen is the keeper of the hearth. Maurya is the quintessential Mother, caring only for her family and the extension of its lineage: she worries, chastises, and mourns; her sons are her main focus. She is not at all comforted by the fact that her daughters remain living; they are essentially useless in terms of what they can bring to the family. As the man of the family at the opening of the play, Bartley's role is clear: to provide for his family. Cathleen articulates that "it is the life of a young man to be going on the sea" (64). He is the provider and Maurya's fears that he will die are also related to the problems they will face: "It's hard set we'll be surely the day you're drown'd with the rest. What way will live and the girls with me, and an old woman looking for the grave?"

Catholicism vs. Paganism

The play is steeped in traditional Irish Catholicism: there are priests, blessings, Holy Water, etc. However, traditional Catholicism rests, somewhat uneasily, side-by-side with more pagan religious elements. Maurya doesn't heed the priest's empty, naive platitudes so much as she looks to the stars and other natural phenomena for warnings and signs. She knows more about the island than he does; she is skeptical of his outsider status and he is never even seen within the boundaries of the cottage. She heeds the power of the sea much more than she heeds God. It is only at the end of the text when her battle with the sea is over that she can peacefully submerge herself back into the rituals and rites of her Catholic faith.

The Power of the Sea

The power of the sea the central theme of the text. The Sea is right outside the cottage door, volatile, unpredictable, and implacable. It has taken almost all of Maurya's male family members and is poised to take the rest of them as well. It defies rationality and even God; the Holy Water is a pitiful reflection of it. Different characters relate to the sea in different ways. For Nora and Cathleen, the sea only matters in terms of losing family members; for Maurya, it is the great enemy; for the young priest, it is of little importance; for Bartley, it is dangerous but is a way of life. The potency of the sea in this play is Synge's meditation on the power of nature and of suffering.

Bartley must choose between following the old way, which would entail staying with his family to face an impoverished future, and becoming a part of the newly commercialized society by selling the family's last animals and risking death. The individual is pitted against society, and the conflict results in his death.

Certain superstitions appear in the play. Some peasants believed that the dead could control the lives of the living--for example, to assuage its loneliness, a ghost could cause the death of a loved one. It was also believed that the dead minded other people wearing their clothes or using their possessions. Bartley, then, who wore Michael's shirt, could have been selected for death on two counts: Michael's spirit could have wanted company in the world beyond, and he could have been annoyed that Bartley appropriated Michael's shirt for his own use. Then there is the instance of Maura using Michael's walking stick-and not being able give a blessing while using it. At many other points in the play Synge shows folkloric influences blended with Christian believe

Characters are the victims of nature:

The theme of the play "the Riders to the Sea" is human fate in this world, man's hopeless struggle against death and his will to live. Mourya the old lady represents the whole Aran Island which is at the shore of the sea. Sea represents nature and nature has been presented hostile towards humans. Characters are the victims of nature. Sea is an inevitable doom constantly hanging over the people of Aran Island. Their fate depends on the sea. Humans are helpless before the sea. There is an elegiac mood in the play because instead of life death looms large over the play. There is not only a conflict of man versus sea but a conflict between life and death that's why in the end Mourya accepts that no man is mortal on this earth. This acceptance shows that she accepts not only death dignified way but accepts the challenge to start anew life.

Quotations:

- **"In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old."**

These lines are spoken by Maurya, the heroine of the play "Riders to the Sea" written by J. M. Synge. In this play the life of the people of Aran Island who live on the shore has been depicted .Their life is dependent on the sea. The sea or nature has been shown hostile towards man, / These lines express the utter sorrow of the old people who have lost their

children at a very young age. The old ones depend on young people for their life but if young die an early death then there is nobody left to support them. Old parents live in sorrow throughout their life. (Maurya lost her son Michael so she says that normally old people leave behind property for the youngsters but her case is just opposite to it, she has been left behind a property by her son)

I'm after seeing him this day, and he riding and galloping.

Bartley came first on the red mare; and I tried to say "God speed you," but something choked the words in my throat. He went by quickly; and "the blessing of God on you," says he, and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the gray pony, and there was Michael upon it - with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet."

These lines spoken by Maurya, the main character, have been taken from the one act play "Riders to the Sea", written by Irish playwright J. M. Synge. This play presents the life of the people living on Aran Island by the sea. The theme of this play is nature versus man. It shows the hardships of life of this particular place. Maurya, who has recently lost her son Michael, goes behind the last son Bartley to give him bread and to bless him which she didn't do at the time he was departing from da home for a sea voyage against her wish. She sees Michael and Bartley in her vision on her way to sea which she takes as bad omen and comes back home broken hearted./ When her daughter inquired of her early return, Maurya said that she saw Bartley riding on his pony on this day when he left home for his voyage and informs them of her vision. She tells them that she first saw Bartley on his red mare and she tried to bless him by saying, " May god soon bring you back home." But she could not do so because she felt as if something had choked her throat from uttering these words. Bartley passed quickly and said to her, "God bless you" but she could not respond to him. Instead she realised that she was crying. As she looked up she found out that Michael who died recently was riding on his grey pony with fine clothes and new shoes. Maurya was very much perturbed to see her two sons in her vision because she had already lost many family members and her heart was full of suspicions about Bartley. Somewhere she was assuming the death of her last son Bartley because she had seen him / with Michael who had already died. Through this dialogue Synge not only shows the feeling of a mother but also throws light on the superstitions prevailing in the society.

**"They're all gone
now, and there isn't anything more the sea can
do to me. ... I'll have no call now to be up crying and
praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is the
east, and the surf is in the west, making a
great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the
other. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy
Water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what
way the sea is when the other women will be keening."**

These lines are dialogue of Maurya who is the central character of the play, written by J. M. Synge, "Riders to the sea." When she hears the news of Bartley's death actual then these words automatically come out of her mouth. It not only refers to the hardships in her life but also indicates that she is ready to embrace challenges imposed by life for her. She says that the sea has taken everything from her. Now there is no male member alive in the home who can go for sea voyage and whom the sea can snatch from her In her utter grief Maurya expresses that nobody is left in her family /She says that now she has no reason to be afraid of the storm from south wind or to lament about the loss of dear ones/Now there will be no more praying for the family members surrounded by sea storms. No more fear of killing of them by the sea will haunt her Now she doesn't need to go for the holy water for the family members because she has nothing to lose,, Now on wards she doesn't require to take care of the temperament of the sea when other women will be eagerly cautious of it for the well-being of their family members, Now what Maurya means to say that she has no connection with the sea as she has no one in home who can go for sea voyage again. She is free from the tortures of the sea/ These lines are the nucleus of the play. Maurya has lost the happiness of her life by losing almost all her family, members but she accepts her lot and shows courage to start new life that is why she discards the nature which is hostile towards man.

**"Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of
the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the
white boards, and deep grave surely. What more can
want than that? No man at all can be living forever, and we
must be satisfied."**

This dialogue is spoken by Maurya, the central figure in the play of J. M. Synge "Riders to the Sea" In these lines Maura who recently lost her two sons shows the courage to accept the truth which is a universal law that nobody is immortal in this world./ Sorrows and sufferings teach her the most valuable lesson of life. After she receives the news of the death of her last son Bartley, all of a sudden her insight develops and she accepts the lot of her life that she has lost all the male members of her family. He comes out of her sorrow to accept the challenge of life that even after losing everyone dear to her she has to live; she could not die with them. She decides to come out of the sad demise of her sons to start life again and says that this is the blessing of God that her son Michael has got a ceremonial burial and Bartley will be buried in a fine coffin and in a finally dig up grave. These are her motherly feelings that her sons were not drowned in the cruel sea; at least they will be getting a loving and caring cremation,, Secondly she has the satisfaction that the sea could not destroy the bodies of her sons as he does in his hostility. Above all she accepts the law of nature that nobody is immortal in this world. One who is born has to die one day. She says that they must be satisfied that whatever happened it was due to law of nature not the injustice done to them by God or anybody else.

CHARACTERS

Maurya is an old peasant woman living on one of the Aran Islands at the mouth of Galway Bay on the western coast of Ireland, a wild, desolate, impoverished area. She has reared Six sons, four of whom are known to be dead, as are her husband and her husband's father all from the ravages of the sea, whose fierce tides and winds make life difficult and dangerous. is She is afraid that Michael, the next from youngest son, who has been absent unexpectedly for some time, is drowned also, and she tries to dissuade her last son, Bartley, from crossing over the tumultuous sea to sell two horses at the fair on the mainland. Twice unable to give him a journey's blessing, she has a vision foretelling his death. When her two daughters, after identifying as Michael's some clothes found on a drowned body, inform her of Michael's death, she recites the list of the others' deaths and the circumstances. As she is being persuaded that he is dead, villagers enter to announce the death of her last son, Bartley, who was knocked into the sea by his pony. Instead of becoming bitter and angry, Maurya recognizes that the sea can do no more to harm her, because she has lost all her men. There is an end to anxiety and a beginning of peace for her, though there will be little to eat. She realizes that she will not long survive these deaths. Maurya's nobility and maturity of spirit enable her to see the good in all of her men now

being together. She sprinkles Holy Water over the dead Bartley and asks God's mercy on the souls of her men, on her own, and, generously, on the souls of everyone left living in the world.

Bartley:

Bartley, the youngest of six sons, now the sole support of the household. He earns income by riding horses into the sea to the steamer anchored far offshore, so that they can be sold at the mainland fair. Preoccupied with practical' exigencies, he ignores his mother's request that he not go to sea, being the last surviving male of the family. He nevertheless asks God's blessing on the family and rides off on the red mare, leading the pony. His mother foretells his death and omits the giving of a blessing to him, a an omission considered bad luck. When his mother subsequently stands on the path trying in vain to say the blessing, he gives her his blessing.

Cathleen:

Cathleen, a daughter about twenty years old. As the older of two, sisters, she takes the lead in expressing concern_ and, making arrangements. She sympathizes with her brother's need to go to sea and criticizes her mother for repeatedly trying to stop him and for not giving him a blessing. She sends Maurya with some bread to give him. Cathleen is effective in dealing with practical details, as when she identifies some clothes as belonging to her other brother, Michael, drowned nine days earlier. Cathleen is matter-of- fact and impatient with her mother's lamentations and visions, telling Maurya of the evidence of Michael's death. Filled with life herself, she sees her mother as old, broken, and lamenting excessively. Cathleen stands in sharp contrast to her mother's deep, powerful, and mature emotions.

Nora:

Nora, a young girl, another of Maura's daughters. Her main function in the play is to talk with Cathleen and enable the exposition of background and commentary on the action. She speaks more respectfully to her mother than does Cathleen and with pity about her dead brother.