

Lecture (6)

Synge: Riders to the sea.

The setting is in Island off the West of Ireland.

Cottage kitchen, with nets, oil-skins, spinning wheel, some new boards standing by the wall...etc.

The characters are Cathleen and Nora. Cathleen is making cake whereas Nora puts her head at the door and asking about her mother.

The themes:

1-Paganism: Synge observes that the people of rural Ireland is pagan. This play is an examination of that idea as he has a set of deeply religious characters find themselves at odds with an unbeatable force of nature (the sea). While the family is clearly Catholic, they still find themselves wary of the supernatural characteristics of natural elements, an idea very present in Celtic paganism.

Tradition vs. modernity: There is tension between the traditional and modern worlds in Ireland at the time. Whereas Maurya, represents the old Irish generation who immovably tied to the traditional world and inward-looking. Nora is the prototype for the younger and modern generation who like to change with the outside and therefore outward-looking. Cathleen is the bridge between the two world, In order to create balance.

Fatalism: the character will come to accept the reality of death, the sea drowning especially being a constant threat. They are caught between the dual realities of the sea as a source of livelihood and fatal threat. The objects and culture of death in the form of coffins, keening, and mourning are prevalent in the play and are closely based on Synge's observations of the culture of the Aran Islands.

The other theme is the sea and omen and the reader can guess from the title the theme of the play. Maurya is the protagonist who talks about her son as he sacrificed their lives to the seas, the whole play revolves around fears concerning the sea. Maurya omens that the death of her

son because he goes to the sea without her blessing. Also he has a bad dream of her son and soon she learns of Bartley's death at the sea.

The symbolism of the sea: It is symbol of brutal and fierce against the characters who continuously struggle, and out of this they achieve a rare quality of heroism that Synge celebrates in *Riders to the Sea*. The sea is both preserver and destroyer for these Islanders. The characters seem to interlocked in a life-and-death combat with the sea. The Islanders depend on the sea to gain their livelihood.

The sea is the antagonist for Maurya the protagonist of the play.

The significance of the title is metaphorical and literal. The metaphorical is that "we are all moving toward mortal death".

This title has biblical allusion as in the Exodus mentions how Pharaoh's horsemen pursued the Israelites to the sea but themselves perished in the process.

In *Riders to the Sea*, Maurya and all the characters have ill-fated about their journey in life. She loses her husband and five sons in the Sea. This play is timeless because of its own theme. This theme is universal and for all ages.

Twaij & Alsoudani. (1986) *One Act Plays*, University of Baghdad Press.

Donoghue, Denis (2012) "Synge: *Riders to the Sea*", *University Review*. Vol.1, no.5 (Summer, 1955), pp.52-58)