

Riders to the Sea By John Millington Synge

- **Setting:** It is in a cottage on one of the Islands of off the coast of Ireland, known as Aran Island
- It's written in 1903 and produced in 1904
- **Author:** John Millington Synge
- **Tone:** this short drama is written in peasant dialect or language
- **Characters:**
 - **Maurya:** the mother
 - **Cathleen:** the eldest daughter
 - **Nora:** the youngest daughter
 - **Bartley:** last living son
 - **Michael:** He is one of the sons, although he doesn't appear in the story, yet his character plays an important role in story's plot.
- **Themes:**
 1. Life and Death
 2. Tradition and Modernization
 3. Christianity and Paganism
 4. Superstition
 5. Sea

1. Life and Death

The theme of Life and Death is represented through the image of the 'sea' in the Riders to the Sea By John Millington Synge. Since the 'sea' represent the source of life for those who get their food from it, however many of them die because of it. Bartley dies after being thrown into the sea during the inclement weather.

2. Tradition Vs. Modernity:

Maurya represents tradition, her children and the young priest on the other hand, represent modernity. Maurya knows everything about the island and its particulars; her religion is more Paganistic than Catholic. She does not embrace new ideas of comforting Catholicism or commerce. Maurya's children, in contrast, deride her "senseless" behavior and rigid adherence to her beliefs. They look beyond the island to the wider world; the young priest is the connection between these two spaces. The tensions between the two worlds is most evident through the characters of Bartley, who understands that the sea is dangerous but feels its pull because he is a man and must secure a livelihood for his family. At the end of the play, it is clear that modernity will ultimately

dominate, but it is also clear that Maurya's world view is still important and has much to teach the younger generation.

3. Christianity and Paganism

This theme is presented through the character of the priest and Maurya. Thus, the priest represents the religious side while Maurya represent the paganism since she fear the power of the sea rather than the power of God. She does not listen to the priest but she is seen watching the stars and other natural phenomenon for warnings and signs. 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.

4. Theme of superstition

Q/ Comment on this line “He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now, and when the black night is falling I'll have no son left me in the world.”

This lone is said by Maurya in the Riders to the Sea by John Millington Synge. She mourns the departure of her son. Sometimes people become superstitious after a series of unfortunate events occur because they feel there must surely be some causation to these occurrences. Such is the case with one of the main characters of Synge's one-act play, the character named Maurya. After the misfortunes of having lost six of her sons, this mother now believes that something will happen to her son Bartley. Because of her fears, Maurya does not want her son Bartley to travel on the sea, and she has even asked the local priest to talk with him. Nevertheless, Bartley insists upon departing, sailing with two horses to the mainland where he will travel to a fair in Galway in order to sell these horses. Before he departs, Maurya cries out as Bartley stands in the doorway “He's gone now” Maurya expresses a superstitious fear that she will lose Bartley because six of her other sons have died on the sea. She also attributes supernatural powers to the sea that "takes" her sons from her.

Important questions

Q/ Why is the play important to the Irish Literary Renaissance?

Because it is quite successful and have brought literary pride to the country.

Q/ Why do you think Bartley decided to go to the sea after all the men in his family had died because of it?

Because he felt pressure to provide for his family.

Q/ Who are the Riders to the Sea and why are they so called?

It refers to both those who ride horses and the Biblical Horseman of the Apocalypse.

Q/ What is the conclusion of the Riders to the Sea?

Bartley's dead body is brought to the family. Maurya blesses it with holy water and says they must be satisfied with a good burial because no one can live forever.

Noorulhuda A. Aladhami