

Man and Challenge in John Millington Synge's Riders to the Sea

Lecturer: Suaad Abd Ali Kareem
Al- Esraa University College

Abstract

This study deals with Riders to the Sea which examines critically the qualities of Irish life and characters that Synge made attempts to invoke, as well as the distinct qualities that inaugurate this play as one of the most successful Irish play of the 20th Century. However, Synge, whose plays are concentrated on the Irish tales and myths, shows peculiar interest in the life of the Irish peasants who have become characters in his plays. He is one of the playwrights who raise the common Irish idiom to a high dramatic form of expression. Though his plays are essentially set in Irish surroundings, their significance is universal.

The concern of the present study is to shed significant lights on the social, economic and political aspects of Ireland. It comes across the peasant community and focuses on challenge to this society. It also presents the romantic elements in Synge's life and examines his play in which man shows challenge to nature and shows how characters express challenge to authority which is represented by government, law, family and religion. Hence, natural love is much stronger than authority, and however authority stands powerful and strong, it is defied and challenged by people to whom love is everything, even if they are powerless and defenseless. Consequently, characters defy nature, the sea and fate for a chance to improve the economic stability of the family particularly when they are left with sea which is the only means that provides the islanders with the living needs. Hence, the harsh nature, which caused poverty and need did not make the Irishman submit to his circumstances. Synge succeeds in showing the reality of Aran life and the struggle of man with the merciless sea, on one hand and reflecting "joyful" picture of the Irish people on the other hand.

Keywords: Challenge to nature and society, Irish rural life, Irish nationalism.

الإنسان والتحدي في مسرحية "راكبو البحر" لجون ميلينجتون سينج

م. سعاد عبدعلي كريم

كلية الإسراء الجامعة

المستخلص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة مسرحية "راكبو البحر" التي تدرس بشكل نقدي صفات الحياة الأيرلندية والشخصيات التي حاول سينج استحضارها، فضلاً عن الصفات المميزة التي جعلت هذه المسرحية واحدة من أنجح المسرحيات الأيرلندية في القرن العشرين. ومع ذلك، فإن سينج، الذي تركز مسرحياته على الحكايات والأساطير الأيرلندية، يُظهر اهتماماً خاصاً بحياة الفلاحين الأيرلنديين الذين أصبحوا شخصيات في مسرحياته. إنه أحد الكتاب المسرحيين الذين رفَعوا المصطلح الأيرلندي الشائع إلى شكل درامي رفيع المستوى من أشكال التعبير. وعلى الرغم من أن مسرحياته تدور أحداثها في الأساس في محيط أيرلندي، فإن أهميتها عالمية. إن الاهتمام الحالي للدراسة هو إلقاء الضوء بشكل كبير على الجوانب الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والسياسية في أيرلندا. وتتناول مجتمع الفلاحين وترتكز على التحدي لهذا المجتمع. كما تقدم العناصر الرومانسية في حياة سينج وتفحص مسرحيته التي يظهر فيها الإنسان تحدياً للطبيعة وتوضح كيف تعبر الشخصيات عن التحدي للسلطة التي تمثلها الحكومة والقانون والأسرة والدين.

Man and Challenge in John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*

ومن هنا فإن الحب الطبيعي أقوى كثيراً من السلطة، ومهما كانت السلطة قوية وممتينة، فإنها تتعرض للتحدي والتحدي من قبل الناس الذين يمثل الحب بالنسبة لهم كل شيء، حتى وإن كانوا عاجزين وغير قادرين على الدفاع عن أنفسهم. وبالتالي فإن الشخصيات تتحدى الطبيعة والبحر والقدر من أجل فرصة لتحسين الاستقرار الاقتصادي للأسرة، وخاصة عندما يتبقى لهم البحر الذي يشكل الوسيلة الوحيدة التي توفر لسكان الجزيرة احتياجاتهم المعيشية. ومن هنا فإن الطبيعة القاسية التي تسبب الفقر والحاجة لم تجعل الأيرلندي يستسلم لظروفه. وينجح سينج في إظهار حقيقة حياة أران وصراع الإنسان مع البحر الذي لا يرحم، من ناحية، ويعكس صورة "مبهجة" للشعب الأيرلندي من ناحية أخرى. الكلمات المفتاحية: المستوى التفاعلي البصري، الرسوم الكرتونية السياسية، قادة عرب/غير عرب، مقارنة ثقافية، كرس وفان ليوين، مارتنينيك وسالواي، الإسقاط والتوسع.

Introduction:

The Irish dramatic movement which is part of Irish literary renaissance began in Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century by William Butler Yeats, lady Gregory and was carried forward some few years later by John Millington Synge (1871-1909). It was based on Irish folk-tale, legends, myths and poetry. In fact, William Butler Yeats, Edward Martyn, George Moore, and lady Gregory founded the Irish literary theatre, (The Abbey Theatre), in 1899".¹ John Millington Synge's one-act play, *Riders to the Sea* (1904), is one of the early plays of the national theatre of Ireland. Synge, who lived and spent long period of time among the people of Aran Islands, observed and absorbed the characters of the islanders ,their stories, their attitude to life and their unique, earthly and naturally-poetic language, and he found in peasant humor and resourcefulness, toughness of spirit and intensity of feeling. He centered his plays on the life of Irish peasants which is threatened by certain harsh conditions and death in the sea. His experience on Aran Islands, as well as his contact with country people of Galway, Wicklow, Mayo and Kerry, provided him with many of the elements that went to shape the strange and fascinating world of his plays and this was the making of the dramatic studies. Peter Costello tells us that Synge was attempting to give the peasants of Ireland "a dramatic existence which gives their whole life a perspective of humanity".²

Synge's literary career was very brief and his reputation and influence in the world rest on the six plays he wrote for the Irish Dramatic Movement: *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903), *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *The Well of the Saints* (1905), *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), *The Tinker's Wedding* (1908), and *Deridre of the Sorrows* (1910). Synge's views were versatile and he was "viewed as primarily a satirist, as essentially a romantic as a thoroughgoing realist, and as the most subtle of symbolists".³

In addition, Synge realized the real life and feeling of his people and he was well aware of the realities of Irish life. His notes and observations on the islands and their inhabitants appeared in a book entitled, *The Aran Islands*. He derived his plots from the events of the islanders' lives. "Synge's plays are concerned with the struggle of the individual to achieve freedom, adventure and a new life by which the individual detaches himself from society" as Nicholas Grene puts it.⁴ He shows us through the characters of his plays how the islanders live and suffer in their society and how they rebel against and challenge authority which is represented in the government, or a father, a mother and a husband who are the most powerful members in the family. Hence, natural love is much stronger than authority, and however authority stands powerful and strong, it is defied and challenged by people to whom love is everything, even if they are powerless and defenseless.

Synge was greatly influenced by the lifestyle of the islanders. He was naturally sympathetic to the Irish rural peasants and he had deep harmony with the Irish countryside. According to Gregory Castle, Synge “regarded the Aran Islanders as a wild and primitive, inherently noble people cut off from modern Europe”.⁵ In fact, Synge articulated his own worldview through the lives of islanders. It can therefore be argued that, “those islanders produced a sort of mirror effect”.⁶ He created and established the peasants’ admiration and in most of his plays, he portrayed them. In *Riders to the Sea*, “an aesthetically pure form, but with an added mythological dimension, those people of the earth and of the sea and reaching up skywards, become a microcosm of general human relevance”.⁷

Challenge to Nature Force:

Riders to the Sea portrays the struggles of the people living on the island against the forces of nature. The play is set in one of the Aran Islands off the Coast of Ireland. It concerns life on the Aran Islands, nature’s strength and death. Raymond William characterized the play as, “a dramatic fragment”.⁸ Synge records the desperate situation of the peasants in a land where the sea is a powerful force that consume their lives. While the life of the sea decides the fate of Irish islanders, its dependency on the water around the Aran Islands also leads to death. This image of the place and life of the people living on the island shows toughness of its reality. T.R. Henn described *Riders to the Sea* as one of the “few effective one-act tragedies in literature”.⁹

The sea plays an important role in *Riders to the Sea*. The sea both provides life and causes death in the play. It is an invisible force which shapes the destinies of all the characters. The readers are aware of its moods and its power. It forms the setting of the play and is also an offstage protagonist. The sea seems to be directing and molding the lives of the people from behind. and makes them, “geographically sequestered people”.¹⁰ Hence, the play tackles the tragedy of an aged female who having lost her husband and all her six sons to the sea, consequently she is resigned to death. Nevertheless, the play is entangled with a tragic tone, and shows the helpless struggle of the mother with the sea. It provides a window into the life of the Aran community as well. It seems to be that the playwright here, “inaugurates an Irish national theatre that not only attempted to diminish the stage Irishman, but also initiated the Irishwoman into the drama in a new and significantly vocal way.”¹¹ Arthur E. Morgan states that “*Riders to the Sea* is, a short but marvelously poignant tragedy, perhaps the most perfect thing Synge ever produced.”¹² From the beginning of the play, the image of death is resolved the atmosphere and the frightful outcome is very clear to the viewers. All the preparations had been settled on the stage and the scenery is very obvious which relies entirely on the lives of poor Irish peasants and their close contacts with nature. In this respect, Finney claimed that:

[t]he fatalistic atmosphere of impending doom and death, given clearest voice in Maurya’s repeated direful predictions that her two surviving sons will go the way of the other four, is enhanced by frequent references to the elements – the wind, waves, and rocks that have been so powerful in determining this family’s destiny.¹³

Man and Challenge in John Millington Synge's Riders to the Sea

It has been recognized at the very beginning of the play that Maurya's husband had drowned in the sea, but only her youngest son, Bartley, still alive. She is waiting for news of her fifth son, Michael, who is missing. A young priest has just brought fragments of clothing found on the body of a drowned man for Maurya's daughters, Cathleen and Nora, to identify. They recognize their brother's clothes and hide them in the turf of "the way that old women won't know of them at all, nor be getting her death".¹⁴ Both girls attempt to remove the clothes so that their mother cannot know the truth. Bartley, the last surviving son, who is about to go to the sea in a terrible storm, refuses to be dissuaded. His decision is part of some mysterious challenging spirit that would be quite destructive. However, it could be some desperate indication towards self-destruction owing to his discovery of the frustrated presence. In other words, his challenge to his mother is a challenge to the whole system that victimized him. He ignores his sisters' request and his mother's entreaties and he departs on his horseback without the old mother's blessings. In order to go down to the sea, Bartley must make a rope for the mare, therefore, he enters looking for "the bit of new rope" (RS.p.97). Cathleen asks Nora to give it to Bartley: "it's on a nail by the white boards, I hung it up this morning, for the pig with the black feet was eating it" (RS.p.97).

The sea is cruel, merciless and ruthless in dealing with human beings. The young riders know the varying moods of the sea well and are not afraid of it. When Bartley has made up his mind to go to the sea, he does not pay any attention to his mother's appeals to him not to go that day. Cathleen says, "it is the life of a young man to be going on the sea". (RS.p.97). The sea offers a challenge to the young men, and they take up the challenge and are ready to go to the sea at all times without caring for the risks involved. In vain, Maurya and her two daughters try to prevent Bartley from setting out in the storm to make the dangerous crossing to the main land: "There's great roaring in the west, and it's worst it'll be getting when the tide's turned to the wind".(RS.p.97). Bartley insists that he should go to Galway fair to sell his horses. Although Bartley's family suffers from poverty as do other islanders, his mother believes that "if it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where is one son only?" (RS.p.98) In fact, Bartley is not aware of his destiny and he will never return home, because, he does not listen to the pleas of his mother and his sisters.

BARTLEY. [*taking the halter*] I must go now quickly. I'll ride down on the red mare, and the grey pony'll run behind me.... The blessing of God on you. [*He goes out*]

MAURYA. [*crying out as he is in the door way*] 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. (RS p.98)

Synge presents one bad omen after another to show us that Maurya feels that her last son is going to face his fate in this journey on one hand, and how he challenges his mother and her feelings on the other hand. The rope, which Bartley has taken, assumes the identity of talisman as it becomes the halter which is associated with Bartley's death. This rope was being eaten by the

Man and Challenge in John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*

pig with the black feet. The black color is the symbol of death especially in Irish folklore for it symbolizes the evil and death, so the black pig is a bad sign.

From the very beginning of the play, we learn that Cathleen and Nora have made cake and put it down by the fire, but they forget it. To Donna Gerstenberger “The bread is the bread of life”.¹⁵ especially when Nora says “it’s destroyed he’ll be going till dark night, and after eating nothing since the sun went up” (RS p.99). As Maurya desultorily rakes the fire, she inadvertently takes the turf away from what was supposed to be Bartley’s bread. When Nora rounds upon her mother, she informs her, “You’re taking away the turf from the cake” (RS p.99) In the Irish folklore, “the fire is symbolic of human life and must not be allowed to die down”.¹⁶ In addition to all these bad omens, which lead Maurya to think of Bartley’s death and her attempts to prevent him from going to the sea, Bartley has many reasons to refrain from leaving his mother and sisters. He is in charge of the family which urges him to improve its economic stability. His remarks to his sisters provide instructions about the care of sheep, Cathleen’s ability to secure a good price for the pig and the preparation for kelp for fertilizer. He instructs his sisters before he leaves; “if the west wind holds with the last bit of the moon let you and Nora get up weed enough for another cock for the kelp” (RS p.98). He also addressed Cathleen; “let you go down each day and see the sheep aren’t jumping in on the rye and if the jobber comes you can sell the pig with the black feet if there is a good price going” (RS p.99).

In spite of all bad omens, family’s need for him, and for his mother’s attempt to dissuade him from his going, Bartley disobeys and challenges his mother, who represents authority, ignoring her threats, warnings, pleas and entreaties and goes to his journey. His feeling of challenge gets stronger and stronger until it pushes him to leave his mother with no son. Though he knows how difficult the life of his mother and sisters will be after leaving them alone with no man earning their livelihood.

No matter how far such complications dominate Synge’s plays, yet the concept of challenge seems to go hand in hand with them. It even takes a variety of forms according to the topics tackled in every dramatic work. Dramatically, Synge has placed characters in a situation which leads them to challenge their society with its beliefs, traditions and customs. Synge depicts the struggle of the islanders with their surroundings for their existence in *Riders to the Sea*, in which the sea a powerful source of mystery is considered, as Henn remarks, a “taker and giver”¹⁷ of life at the same time. It is a taker because it takes and devours all the women have as Maurya assures: “I’ve had a husband, and a husband’s father, and six sons in this house..... though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them and they coming into the world” (RS p.103). It also a giver because it gives and provides life for the islanders who “made their living largely from fishing”, as Plunka states, and the weather and the sea conditions actually, “controlled their level of sustenance”.¹⁸

The nature force that is accepted by the Irish as a fact. Hence in a play like *Riders to the Sea*, Synge devotes his dramatic treatment to the major character which is in this case the sea itself, since it dominates the destiny of the other characters. In the play, every character is aware of the danger, moods and states of the sea, the signs of the weather, the strength and directions of the

Man and Challenge in John Millington Synge's Riders to the Sea

tide and the set of the wind. The sea is the most impressive character in the play. The peasant family, like all the other people who live on the island, live all their lives near the sea. Thus they become familiar with the behaviors of it, its flow, its behavior in storm and calm and rain and all that. Even little Nora is familiar with its ways. She makes it clear to the reader when she says: "There's strong roaring in the west, and the worst it'll be getting when the tide's turned to the wind rising from the south and west" (RS pp. 96-97). Thus they try to warn Bartley who also knows the sea, not to go to the sea but Bartley, whose courage and hope are un doubtful, assures them that he will not be drowned and he will be "coming again in two days, or in three days, or maybe in four days if the wind is bad" (RS p. 99).

The role of the sea in the play is a dual one. The sea functions as the provider for the family; it is their source of life, as it provides them with food. It is their savior. However, the sea is also a potential killer and a destroyer, it is both a source of life and death. Gabriel Bamgbose says in his article about the play, "The people cannot do without sea, even though the sea holds disaster for them. The paradox here is that the sea is their major means of survival and at the same time, their death trap."¹⁹ The sea is depicted as a prison in the play and the members of Maurya's family are the prisoners in this prison. For example, the nets and oil-skins on the wall represent the family as sustained by the ocean. Joy Kennedy indicates that "the nets have also been construed as symbolic of the family's entrapment."²⁰ The nets can also function as a symbol of both sustenance and suffering like the sea. The fact that the sea is a symbol of life and it symbolically represents the evils of life that surround the island dwellers. It is the enemy, the destructive principle, and the destroyer of human and family continuity. Paradoxically, the sea is also the route to people's survival even though it holds the people's death. The peasants know that the sea is going to do them harm, but there is no choice but to go to the sea for life supplies like food. Judith R. Leder says about that, "Maurya knows that the sea will take her last son as it has taken all her other sons and the father of her sons."²¹

The spirit of adventure which Bartley has and the material necessity by which he wants to improve the economic stability of his family, provides Bartley with feeling that enables him to challenge the sea which frustrates the life of the young as Cathleen says: "It's the life of a young man to be going on the sea". (RS p. 99). In the Aran Islands, most of the fishermen who ride the sea and drown are young and so Maurya says: "In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old" (RS p.100). Bartley, who is young challenges the sea and insists on riding in spite of his knowledge about its danger and insecurity. Going to the sea does not only mean Bartley's challenge to nature, which is represented by the sea itself, but it also means that Bartley defies and confronts his fate. As a result of the loss of Maurya's sons in the sea, she asks Bartley, who is her last son, not to go to the sea because she is sure that if he goes he will follow his brothers. She complains: "It's hard set we'll be surely the day you're drowned with the rest". (RS p.98). Cathleen tells her mother, "It's the life of a young man to be going on the sea." (RS, p.95).

Maurya braces herself for a final struggle to prevent him from carrying on his resolve. She tries desperately to change her son's decision to "carry on the ageless tradition of their kind"²² as Alan Price states. But Bartley, who does not know how to swim like other islanders and knows

Man and Challenge in John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*

that he will face his death in the sea, does not fear it because he underestimates in a suicidal manner the risk of the sea considering it is his destiny to accept the challenge. He however, justifies this submission by hope that if the sea stops his life, it finally cannot stop the life in general because "humanity does live and survive".²³

However, with the rigid and morbid tendency of the natural forces, the Aran people constituted a resourceful framework of a superstitious world. This is why Synge's characters alternatively use the sea as the superstition to uncover their feeling and defiance. For Maurya, the wind "rising the sea" and a star being "up against the moon" are valid reasons for Bartley not to undertake his voyage because the "star up against the moon". (RS p.98) portends ultimate evil as to her and she keeps trying to prevent Bartley from going. Yet, Bartley leaves this superstition aside and does not stop his journey. It seems here as if he took upon himself to challenge nature.

Although, Synge described Bartley's death as an avoidable on one hand, he also stressed on Maurya's failure to bless her son on his journey on the other hand. Maurya is worried about her family, and she is afraid that Bartley will be "drown'd with the rest", which causes her to not respond to Bartley's: "The blessing of God on you." (RS p.98). Cathleen states when her mother took the bread that: "God speed you" and "the dark word will be broken." (RS, p.98). According to the Aran Islands tradition, this greeting should be answered by uttering "God and Mary bless you."²⁴ Moreover, inhabitants are aware, "the failure to respond to the opening phrase."²⁵

The sea has powers of giving life and taking life. The play starts within a midst of crisis and it is related to the sea as Nora answers her sister's question about what is it she has, "The young priest is after bringing them. It's a shirt and a plain stocking were got off a drowned man in Donegal." (RS p.95). The drowned man's clothing makes the crisis because they try to understand if it belongs to their lost brother Michael or not. The sea is given as a hostile figure even in the beginning but it is also the only way of survival. It could be interpreted as that the sea is killing men because they try to expend the traditions of survival by going away from their little islands to the outer world, the big island. "*Riders to the Sea* is not a tragedy in the Greek or Shakespearean sense as there is no causality which dictates a fitting punishment."²⁶

The changing of customs by Bartley could be a reason for his death; he feels the need of going, as no man can be the provider of his family while doing nothing because of his fear of fate. Kopper acknowledges that: "the evil influence of Michael [as a ghost on the grey horse] could have been mollified had Maurya been able to bless Bartley either before he left the house or when she saw him at the spring well."²⁷ Leder asserts about Bartley that "He chooses the logical, the practical, the modern route, thereby ignoring both custom and subtleties of island talk."²⁸

Besides, Synge revealed a sensitive sense of color. He indeed used a policy of colors which quite noticeably refers to a certain level of different symbolism. He, in other words, used throughout the play, a determined effort to apply the color imagery and to show us the strength of Bartley's challenge to the superstition of his society in general and his family in particular. Such imagery presents the audience with the most striking representation of the unconscious primitive fear controlling Maurya and her family. Red and grey, which were the most dominating colours on the Aran Islands, are emphasized by Synge in order to maintain the local colour of Aran,²⁹ as

Man and Challenge in John Millington Synge's Riders to the Sea

Plunka goes on telling us that red is the color of the mare, on which Bartley rides, is the colour of the sails that “shroud the dead”³⁰ members of Maurya’s family. Moreover, grey, which is also “associated with death in the Irish tale”³¹, is the colour of the pony, which runs behind Bartley. Synge does not only make Bartley “ride down on the red mare and the grey pony....runs behind” (RS p.99) but, he also makes him intend to sell them in the fair that “will be a good fair for horses” (RS p.98). It means that Michael is trying to get his shirt back and the sea’s determination to have its possession back is the reason of the absurd way of dying of Bartley’s. According to Maurya’s vision Bartley rides the red mare and Michael rides the grey one, the grey is the colour of death and it causes Bartley to die. There are two riders to the sea, one is already doomed and the other one is to be doomed at the end of the play. Hull explains, “Riders may be a static tragedy in which humanity has no role but to suffer and acquiesce to supernatural power, but the play also supports the idea that Maurya takes an active part in determining Bartley's fate.”³² because of her negligence to bless him, he dies.

The foreshadowing of the death of Bartley can be understood as the sea’s determination of getting back what belongs to it. Throughout the play, Bartley’s death is foreshadowed, first by the rising of sea and roaring of the wind and second as Kennedy asserts, “Bartley’s death is also foreshadowed by his taking Michael’s flannel shirt. Irish lore includes suggestions that the dead still own the property they once possessed, and may return to claim it”³³

Nevertheless, *Riders to the Sea* hinges on the lives of poor sea-faring Irish peasants and their close relationship with nature. Synge presents Bartley, who challenges the cruelty and the wildness of the sea, to show us that his characters challenge nature in all its conditions; the wild as well as the beautiful. Nature is always a source of man’s pain in Synge’s works. He reflects his experience and his romantic love to nature in his plays. He also presents various forms of challenge to nature as he wants to show his own challenge, his challenge to death for example.

Conclusion:

In brief, we have seen in *Riders to the Sea*, the struggle of the islanders with their surroundings for their existence. The sea is considered as a powerful source of mystery. It is not only the giver but also the destroyer, it has the power of determining which will it be, therefore the tragedy of the play is caused by the sea playing the role of fate. The people in the play live in a remote island, their life depends on the sea. Their males need to go to the mainland to support their families and the only way to go there is through the sea. The tragedy of the play starts with the family loss of all of their males to the sea and the sea acts like fate taking whatever it wants.

The sea is both the giver and the taker, and Maurya is both the giver and taker of life because she gives birth to mortal things, and the men of islands are both the providers and the reasons of sorrow for their family. The men help their family to survive but they also die while helping their family and it leads to the metaphorical death of the family members as they suffer the loss of too many. In the play *Riders to the Sea*, the sea also causes the metaphorical death of the mother figure Maurya. She says “...for I won't live after them.” (RS p.99), as she has suffered so much for so long and because of it, she feels that she is going to die soon but she is already dead inside. She neglects things as a mother, she has forgotten to buy nails for her son’s coffin, and she forgets to give the bread and the blessing.

Man and Challenge in John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*

The sea's indifference to people makes Maurya afraid of the power of the sea. Unlike the priest, she knows the sea and its indifference to her family. The priest on the other hand, believes that "...the Almighty God won't leave her destitute," says he, "with no son living." (RS p.95) because she prays all the time and she has lost nearly all of her male family members, the sea will not take Bartley and she will not be indigent. The sea has got no feelings for Maurya and her family members, playing the role of fate; it just takes what it needs to take. For Maurya's male family members are getting killed by the sea, she becomes terrified of the dominance of the sea and hopelessly tries to find a way to save her last remaining son Bartley. Nevertheless, she cannot make him stay and the last remaining son ends up dying drowned as well and literary, the breath-taking power of the sea both as an attraction and a destroyer is made apparent. To sum up, the sea is both a source of life and death. As we can see in the play, it offers food, a way to them and life giving essentials and also the reason that Maurya has lost all the men in her family. It is both a killer and a savior.

It was Synge's experience to live in the Aran Islands that was quite conducive to his assimilation of the peasants' hardship and troubles. Synge is quiet identifying himself with these peasants, voicing their thoughts and emotions, and interpreting their actions. He discovered the conflict between man and nature, which is an aspect of the human situation. Man's conflict with the surroundings is for his existence and this is explained by the characters in *Riders to the Sea*. Consequently, characters like Bartley and others defy nature, the sea and fate for a chance to improve the economic stability of the family particularly when they are left with sea which is the only means that provides the islanders with their living needs. Synge intends to show more clearly, through his plays, the extent of his experience of nature than in the variety of portraits he gives of man's challenge to nature. Synge himself is like characters suffered from illness and challenged death since his early childhood and continued this struggle till the last day of his life. He reflects his experience in the lap of nature and his romantic love to nature in his plays. Synge presents Irish man, with the feeling of courage, heroism and defiance that lead him to resist, rebel and challenge for his existence.

NOTES

¹ W. A. Armstrong, ed., "Introduction: The Irish Dramatic Movement" in *Classic Irish Drama* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 7.

² Peter Costello, *The Heart Grown Brutal: The Irish Revolution in Literature from Parnell to the Death of Yeats, 1891-1939* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1977), p. 32

³ Robin Skilton, "Foreword" to *J. M. Synge: A Biography of Criticism*, ed. E. H. Mikhail (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975), p. ix.

⁴ Nicholas Grene, *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975), p. 109.

⁵ Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), P. 45.

⁶ Francis Bickley, *J. M. Synge and The Irish Dramatic Movement* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912), P.73

⁷ David H. Greene, "*J. M. Synge: A Reappraisal.*" *Critical Essays on John Millington Synge*, ed. Daniel J. Casey (New York: G. K. Hall & Co, 1994), P.34.

Man and Challenge in John Millington Synge's Riders to the Sea

⁸ Raymond William , *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 133.

⁹ T.R. Henn, *The Harvest of Tragedy* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 202.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 204.

¹¹ Oona Frawley, "The Shadow of Glen and Riders to the Sea." *The Cambridge Companion to J.M. Synge*. Ed. P.J. Mathews (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), p.16.

¹² Arthur Eustace Morgan, *Tendencies of Modern English Drama* (New York: Books for Libraries P, 1969), p. 159.

¹³ Gail Finney, "Modern Theater and the Tragic in Europe." *A Companion to Tragedy*. Ed. Rebecca Bushnell (Malden: Blackwell P, 2009), p. 476.

¹⁴ John Millington Synge, *Riders to the Sea* in *The Plays and Poems of J. M. Synge*, ed. T. R. Henn (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1963), p.97. For this and all other subsequent references to the text are taken from this edition.

¹⁵ Donna Gerstenberger, *John Millington Synge* (New York: Twayne Publisher, Inc., 1964), p.47.

¹⁶ As quoted in Declan Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language* (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1979), p. 166.

¹⁷ T. R. Henn, Introduction to the Plays" in *the Plays and Poems of J. M. Synge* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1963), p.37.

¹⁸ Gene A. Plunka, *Synge's Homage to Paganism in Riders to the Sea*, "Eire- Island 23,3 (Fall 1988): p. 131.

¹⁹ Gabriel Sunday Bamgbose, "Natural Aesthetics in John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and *The Playboy of the Western World* ." *Humanicus*, (Web. Issue 8, 2013), p 8.

²⁰ Joy Kennedy, "Sympathy between Man and Nature: Landscape and Loss in Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment. Vol. 11.1. 2004), p 16.

²¹ Judith Remy Leder "Synge's Riders to the Sea: Island as cultural battleground." *Twentieth Century Literature*, 36.2. (Summer 1990):207-224. web <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/literary-criticism/9604290977/synges-riders-sea-island-as-cultural-battleground>.

²² Alan Price, *Synge and Anglo- Irish Drama* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1961), p.182.

²³ D. S. Neff, "Synge's Stoic Tragedy in *Riders to the Sea*" *Eire- Ireland 23,3* (Fall 1988): p.119.

²⁴ Edward Kopper, "Riders to the Sea." *A J.M. Synge Literary Companion* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p.44.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Eugene Benson, "Riders to the Sea" *J.M. Synge* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1982), p. 60.

²⁷ Kopper, p.44.

²⁸ Leder, "Synge's Riders to the Sea: Island as cultural battleground." *Twentieth Century Literature*, p. 224.

²⁹ Plunka, *Synge's Homage to Paganism in Riders to the Sea*, p. 139.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p.140.

³² Keith N. Hull, "Natural Supernaturalism in 'Riders to the Sea'." (*Colby Library Quarterly*. Vol. 25.4. Maine: Colby College, 1989), p. 248.

Man and Challenge in John Millington Synge's Riders to the Sea

p.25. ³³ Joy Kennedy, "Sympathy between Man and Nature: Landscape and Loss in Synge's *Riders to the Sea*."

Bibliography

- Armstrong, W. A., ed. "Introduction: The Irish Dramatic Movement" in *Classic Irish Drama*. New York: Penguin Books, 1979.
- Bamgbose, Gabriel Sunday. "Natural Aesthetics in John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and *The Playboy of the Western World* ."Humanicus, (Web. Issue 8, 2013).
- Benson, Eugene. "*Riders to the Sea*" *J.M. Synge*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1982.
- Bickley, Francis. *J. M. Synge and The Irish Dramatic Movement*. Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912.
- Castle, Gregory. *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001
- Costello, Peter. *The Heart Grown Brutal: The Irish Revolution in Literature from Parnell to the Death of Yeats, 1891-1939*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd.,1977.
- Finney, Gail. "Modern Theater and the Tragic in Europe." *A Companion to Tragedy*. Ed. Rebecca Bushnell. Malden: Blackwell P, 2009.
- Frawley, Oona. "The Shadow of Glen and Riders to the Sea." *The Cambridge Companion to J.M. Synge*. Ed. P.J. Mathews. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.
- Gerstenberger, Donna. *John Millington Synge*. New York: Twayne Publisher, Inc., 1964.
- Greene, David H. "*J. M. Synge: A Reappraisal*." *Critical Essays on John Millington Synge*, ed. Daniel J. Casey. New York: G. K. Hall & Co, 1994.
- Greene, Nicholas. *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975.
- Henn, T.R. *The Harvest of Tragedy*. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1961.
- _____. "Introduction to the Plays" in *the Plays and Poems of J. M. Synge*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1963
- Hull, Keith N. "Natural Supernaturalism in '*Riders to the Sea*'." *Colby Library Quarterly*. Vol. 25.4. Maine: Colby College. 1989
- Kennedy, Joy. "Sympathy between Man and Nature: Landscape and Loss in Synge's *Riders to the Sea*." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. Vol. 11.1. 2004.
- Kiberd, Declan. *Synge and the Irish Language*. London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1979.

Man and Challenge in John Millington Synge's Riders to the Sea

- Kopper, Edward. "Riders to the Sea." *A J.M. Synge Literary Companion*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.
- Leder, Judith Remy. "Synge's Riders to the Sea: Island as cultural battleground." *Twentieth Century Literature*, 36.2. (Summer 1990):207-224. web <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/literary-criticism/9604290977/synges-riders-sea-island-as-cultural-battleground>.
- Morgan, Arthur Eustace. *Tendencies of Modern English Drama*. New York: Books for Libraries P, 1969.
- Neff, D. S. "Synge's Stoic Tragedy in Riders to the Sea" *Eire- Ireland* 23,3 (Fall 1988).
- Plunka, Gene A. *Synge's Homage to Paganism in Riders to the Sea*," *Eire- Island* 23,3 (Fall 1988).
- Price, Alan. *Synge and Anglo- Irish Drama*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1961.
- Skilton, Robin. "Foreword" to *J. M. Synge: A Biography of Criticism*, ed. E. H. Mikhail. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975.
- Synge, John Millington. *Riders to the Sea* in *The Plays and Poems of J. M. Synge*, ed. T. R. Henn. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1963.
- William, Raymond. *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.