
**The Function of Theatrical Properties in J. M. Synge's
Riders to the Sea**

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Abstract

This paper is to unfold the function of the theatrical properties (henceforth props) employed by J. M. Synge in his one-act play *Riders to the sea*. The action of the play starts and ends in the kitchen of a small cottage in the Aran island in Ireland; yet, the outside world is projected to the audience through props which act as characters and are regarded as symbols, images and connotations that give many and various emblems, ideas, events, meanings and images. They contribute to pushing forward the action towards many significant events. They allow the dramatist to economize the events, characters, and action to the minimum position possible. For instance, the white wooden pieces hanging on the wall, the rope, Michael's clothing, the colours and more many props besides have particular effects on the themes and atmosphere of the play. Furthermore, the use of props in the theatre can be considered one of the greatest innovations which the modern world theatre has ever witnessed.

Stage properties, often abbreviated as theatrical props, are in drama the physical objects which are used on the stage when producing a play; they are those things belonging to stage when represented as a living room, a battlefield, a saloon, or a chocolate house—telephones, chairs, books, balls, clothes, letters, etc. They vary from handy items to pictures and any sort of objects belonging to a human being. In a story or a drama, the reader is informed of actual items or objects which can be employed to represent something else, being symbols or metaphors. When in a jungle, for instance, a character may need a weapon like a knife or any other deadly object, which may aid it to do a certain action and it thus assumes a role in the work of art. Hence props in a story or a drama are very much

significant and have particular effects on character and action. The choice of the design of the props depends on the dramatic technique and the costumes employed to be in accordance with dramatic situation, character and action presented on the stage. They can be inferred from the narration or the plot with a view to taking into account the items from a particular period of time and a specified location. There may be unavailable props which cannot be located or manufactured, especially those which represent a period setting and which require a thorough examination of how they were used and made in their time.

Physical things employed in drama have not received significant attention, for theatre productions have concentrated on subject matters, theme, controversial discussions, rather than the sceneries, handy materials, furniture, and other things. According to Andrew Sofer (2006: v), Aristotle neglects what Sofer calls the "spectacle" which comprises elements like props, and other effects made by physical objects, considering them the least important objects of a tragedy; Sofer (Ibid.) comments that

The spectacle has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own, but, of all the parts, it is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry. For the power of tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors. Besides, the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet.

This research paper revolves around the function of props in one of J. M. Synge's one-act plays—*Riders to the Sea*. In it, the props employed have certain effects on characters and spectators as well. Those effects have also their functions in the play, in addition to their important presence and spectacles, not to mention the sense of realism created in the mind of the audience on the grounds that what they watch seems to be real. The audience thusly gets the uttermost joy when watching things familiar to them—things of every-day situation. In his Preface to his play entitled *The Playboy*, Synge, (in Elizabeth Coxhead 1969: 17) makes it certain that on the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of

the false joy of the musical comedy, that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality.

Riders to the Sea, Synge's second play, is regarded by critics the finest one-act tragedy that has ever been written in the English language. It has been noted that the play presents ideas and images that are suggested without being told directly; that is to say, Synge heavily relies on props to create the kind of emotion, sensibility and atmosphere. So, the play abounds in tremendous overtones employed for this dramatic purpose. The props presented on the stage are directly related to the sea which always forms the image of death and the atmosphere of despair on the part of the characters. Synge has been prompted by the tragedy of women whose sons are usually to get their livelihood from the sea which often devours them when they face unfavorable circumstances. In Coxhead's (1969: 13) words, Synge has noticed of Aran that the maternal feeling is so powerful on these islands that it gives a life of torment to the women. Their sons grow up to be banished as soon as they are of age, or to live here in continual danger on the sea. Accordingly, old Maurya, who has already lost five sons to the sea and is about to lose the sixth, becomes a universal symbol of maternal grief.

The setting of the play shows the portrayal of one of the Aran Islands, located beyond the western coast of Ireland. In this place people have suffered for centuries from isolation that provides them nothing but a rugged culture which relies on the sea for its livelihood. The sea pervades through every bit of the lives of those islanders, which almost always gives them a sense of melancholy and despair, especially when the sea turns to be a symbol of death and destruction, and not a symbol of food, construction and livelihood. Realistically speaking, Synge's first visit to the island was made in 1898, which was to him a spiritual rebirth that inspired him to write Riders to the Sea. He had subconsciously acquired his knowledge about this place during his idle years, which, according to Coxhead (8); suddenly came into focus; he looked at these primitive people, and through them, into the heart of humanity. He found an almost untouched peasant culture, with Irish as the universal language, and

with an extraordinary beauty and dignity in the bare cottages, the women's red dresses and the men's grey home-spuns against the creamy limestone, the treasure of poems and stories that beguiled the evenings by the light of tiny cod-oil lamps. The chief industry was fishing from curragh, or canoes of lath and canvas, and in the wild seas fatalities were frequent, so that men lived under the shadow of death, and women of bereavement.

In a naturalistic manner, Synge provides every minute detail, and thus the play can be regarded as a slice of life—the bit of life lived by a family that can be considered representative of a family living on that island—the Maurya's family. The following props indicate that the family is very poor: Cottage kitchen, with nets, oilskins, spinning-wheel, some new boards standing by the wall, etc. for they are illustrative of the kind of job the women do in the cottage—spinning. Furthermore, the new boards are indicative of the new coffins to be made for the newly drowned members of the family. The belongings of the family are fully described in an attempt to give a realistic picture of the social status of its members. Ingy Aboelazm (2011: 296) comments that:

Synge insisted on the occasion of the first production that every prop and every costume item must be carefully selected to support this realism. The furnishings of the cottage are meticulously described, and serve an important imagistic function that can only be fully appreciated when they are physically present before an audience.

The action of the play starts in a small cottage in which two sisters try to hide a bundle of clothes from their mother, which belongs to their brother Michael and which look like one removed from a drowned person. Michael has been absent for a week. These props excite a feeling of sadness and sympathy towards the family that has already lost a son at sea. The spectators are then made to expect what kind of feeling and reaction the mother may exhibit when learning about the bundle—a sense of suspense and curiosity on the part of the audience is created. Aboelazm (296) proceeds to add another factor serving the use of theatrical props which are verbally related; he says:

The verbal references to the white boards, and the bit of rope and the flannel shirt are effective linguistic elements rendered far more vivid by their actual presence on stage. This realism extends to the play's language as well, for Synge insisted that he used no more than one or two words he had not heard among the country people of Ireland and his sensitive ear for the uniquely Irish combination of Celtic and English is evident to any reader of the play.

Riders to the Sea can be considered a modern tragedy in the sense that it tells of the tragedy of the protagonist—a common yet poor woman that suffers from the loss of all her sons. In contrast with classical tragedies which always deal with the fate of kings, princes, or great leaders, Riders to the Sea presents simple poor characters without losing its significance. Classical tragedies almost always depend on relating events on character and narrative with little remarks of stage direction like [exit, exeunt, dies, cries, or simple props like letters, sticks, or handkerchiefs, etc.]. Having in mind William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the dramatist has to create the kind of scenery including props to indicate the setting of the play—nature—which is one of celebration, festivity and rituals; yet, there is almost the absence of significant visual illusions at hand in Shakespeare's time, and therefore the spoken words play the role of the visual illusions necessary for the atmosphere which the dramatist wants to create in order to serve his dramatic purposes, and these words are presented by the voice of the fairies for they live among beautiful natural objects, or more specifically in nature which is considered their environment. Almost all the entire atmosphere, symbols, images and objects are created by the characters' narrative. Harley Ganville-Baker (1974: 94) gives his say in this respect, explicating that the play is

about fairies, about the adventures of four lovers and some rustics in a moonlit wood; and he [Shakespeare] wrote it for a theatre in which no visual illusion...was possible. His resource was the spoken word.

But this modern tragedy trespasses the classical ones in depending on particular props to illustrate many and various ideas, images and symbols which substitute the narrative of the classical tragedy and reduces the tragedy to the minimum number of characters, events, and

narratives. Hence, props contribute to building up the action of the play and are structural. Thus, without the use of props, images cannot be fully and apprehensively presented to the audience; they are part and parcel of the action; Sofer (vi) asserts the importance of theatrical props and envisions that "on the mostly bare stage of the Elizabethan playhouse, props are both searing visual emblems and vital participants in the stage action. A production of *Richard II* without the crown, or *Othello* without its handkerchief, or *Hamlet* without York's skull, is virtually unthinkable." As a matter of fact, every prop cited on the stage develops the story and communicates symbols and images which are closely related to the action, themes and characters of the play. They act in the same way the characters' speeches do, and transplant in the mind of the audience many significant ideas and implications—a role that could have been elaborately given to characters, had not the dramatist made use of the theatrical props. The following passage from the play is rich with images, symbols and many and various moods which have been instigated by the theatrical prop the knife—sorrow, surprise and fear. It occurs when Cathleen is trying to open the bundle:

Cathleen....Give me a knife, Nora, the string's perished with the salt water, and there is a black knot on it you wouldn't loosen in a week.

Nora (giving her a knife). I've heard tell it was a long way to Donegal.

Cathleen (cutting the string). It is surely. There was a man in here a while ago—the man sold us that knife.

(*Riders to the Sea*: 5)

The pieces of clothing are here taken as a symbol of the image of Michael who was once dressed in them. The knife which is used to cut the string in order to unfold his clothing is symbolic of cutting Michael's life off. The knife is significant because it is to determine the element of surprise and suspense on the part of the audience, not to mention the element of imagery related to the sea and the horror Michael has encountered when drowning in it. The black knot which the knife is going to cut is symbolic of the black death of Michael and the black atmosphere of sorrow which prevails in this situation. Nevertheless, the verbal expressions are also needed to portray in the mind of the audience the image of the sea, the tides, the waves and the rocks, which are all inserted into the narrative. It can be concluded that both the theatrical props and the spoken word are to create

particular images, symbols and ideas in the mind of the audience, and as it is shown in the following extract:

CATHLEEN: Is the sea bad by the white rocks, Nora?

NORA: Middling bad, God help us. There's a great roaring in the west, and it's worse it'll be getting when the tide's turned to the wind. [She goes over to the table with the bundle.] Shall I open it now? (Riders to the Sea: 2)

The islanders already know about the conflict between man and the sea, which indicates that the former is always the loser, for the sea can devour every one trying to defy it during unfavorable circumstances or during unfavorable weather. The sea is a powerful object of nature which cannot be controlled by any one on the island. This is not to deny the fact that it is a giver of life as well.

The conflict between the sea and man is presented at the beginning of the play when the spectators are informed of the drowning man in the far north, and of the shirt and the stocking which are taken off that deed body. If these props belong to Michael, Maurya announces, he will get a clean burial. Thus, she has been deprived of one of her sons, for it is made certain that the clothing in the bundle really belongs to Michael. The bundle thus motivates Cathleen, his sister, to imagine the corpse floating on the surface of the sea over which the ugly black birds hover. This kind of props excites imagination in both character and audience. It is found incidentally when the oar of one of the men has caught it when sailing near it. Thus, all the elements of nature in this environment are the enemy of man and are part of the huge conflict between the islanders looking for their livelihood in the sea, which turns to be their enemy. Ramji Lall (2010: 184) declares that "the sea, the wind, the tide, and the rocks all combine to bring destruction to human beings." It is importantly notable that Maurya is the big loser in the conflict between her and the sea. Aboelazm (296) has his opinion in this respect:

in *Riders to the Sea*, there is a distinct plot centering upon a clash of wills—narrowly, Maurya's attempt to dissuade Bartley from going on the sea, and, in a broader sense, Maurya's struggle against the sea for the lives of her sons. Yet her struggle is doomed to failure. Maurya has lost her husband, her father-in-law and four sons to the sea.

Having lost all the male members of Maurya's family, the sea to her is an instrument of death, though obliged to let her male children to ride it for the sake of livelihood. Instead of giving food to her and her two daughters, the sea kills all her sons. The sea is, therefore, portrayed in the eye of Maurya as a symbol of evil, death and destruction rather than of life and prosperity. To her, now life discontinues and gradually vanishes into the air as her sons are killed one by one by the sea—a destructive power of life. The sea appears to be indifferent to human sufferings, being an image of death.

The image of death represented by the sea is further substantiated and reinforced by the image of the white boards which Synge has placed them in front of the eyes of the spectators in whose minds the image of death has been embedded from the beginning of the play up to its end.

The white boards standing by the wall of the cottage remind not only Maurya and her daughters of the idea of death but also the spectators. paradoxically speaking, the boards are to represent the image of the sea-white death. For the new white boards are made use of when making a coffin for Michael, Maurya's son, who has been lost at sea. They are always there hanging on the wall as a symbol of death, for they will be used to make a coffin for Maurya and another one for Bartley, her last son and victim of the sea at the end of the play. Therefore, death continuously assumes its presence in the mind of both characters and audience, being represented by the white boards—a clever reminder of death and coffins. In Aboelazm's (296) wording of the idea, "The boards are therefore a continuously operative symbol of the presence of death."

The white-washed Aran cottage is a reminder of Maurya's family's destitute, with the nets and a spinning wheel and white boards laid against the wall which are supposed to be used as a coffin for Michael's corpse when it is found and prepared for burial. On the other hand, they will make the coffin out of these boards for Bartley's body, the last son of Maurya's who takes permission from his mother to ride off to the sea in order to sell the remaining horses. The white

boards act as a premonition to predict the death of Maurya's sons and to create an atmosphere of sadness and despair. The boards, as theatrical props, are made available, hanging on the wall to excite the feeling of the fear of death as to Maurya's sons. She herself expects Bartley's death in a vision which will soon be fulfilled. She says:

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

(Riders to the Sea: 9)

Another reminder of the image of death represented by the sea—a symbol of death in the eyes of Maurya's family—is well expressed in Michael's bundle of clothes brought to them to indicate his drowning at sea. The bundle is not only a reminder of the image of death, but also a reminder of the image of the sea that assumes its presence in the minds of characters and of the audience too. Although the action of the play does not go out of Maurya's cottage, the bundle of the drowned Michael is indicative of one part of the setting which is the sea:

[NORA comes in softly, and takes a bundle from under her shawl.]

CATHLEEN: *(spinning the wheel rapidly)* What is it you have?

NORA: The young priest is after bringing them. It's a shirt and a plain stocking were got off a drowned man in Donegal.

[CATHLEEN stops her wheel with a sudden movement, and leans out to listen.]

NORA: We're to find out if it's Michael's they are; some time herself will be down looking by the sea.

(Riders to the Sea: 1)

The bundle of clothing, the boards which are made available for the sake of the dead, and the sea set the mood of the play; that is an atmosphere of horror, fear and death is created, which has a particular effect on the characters and audience as well. Further, Aboelazm (296) gives his word in this regard, saying:

Perhaps the most powerful effect the play creates in a theater is an evocation of mood, a mood of despair and acquiescence to a harsh fate, but tempered by a kind of nobility rising from mankind's perseverance despite death.

Then, a shirt and a plain stocking are found when removed from the body of the drowned man in Donegal. This indicates that there is somebody who has already drowned. The mention of the drowning event at the beginning of the play creates fear from the sea as a symbol of destruction, and at the same time, these props contribute to setting the mood of death, which will pervade through the entire action of the play. The following extract illustrates the action which the piece of props represented by Michael's clothing has stirred the emotions of all characters, the neighbors, and the spectator as well:

CATHLEEN: It's Michael, God spare him, for they're after sending us a bit of his clothes from the far north.

[She reaches out and hands MAURYA the clothes that belonged to MICHAEL. MAURYA stands up slowly, and takes them in her hands. NORA looks out.]

(Riders to the Sea: 8)

An ominous view comes to the mind of Cathleen, Michael's sister, who begins to think of the danger which may face her other last brother, Bartley, who decides to sell their horses for the sake of money. Cathleen anxiously asks Nora, her sister, if the priest of the island would prevent him from going to the Galway fair on that day. Galway is located on the mainland and Bartley has to sail to it, taking the horses with him. It is made clear by one of the woman characters that Bartley has drowned into the sea by a knock from his pony:

NORA: They're carrying a thing among them and there's water dripping out of it and leaving a track by the big stones.

CATHLEEN: *(in a whisper to the women who have come in)* Is it Bartley it is?

ONE OF THE WOMEN: It is surely, God rest his soul.

[Two younger women come in and pull out the table. Then men carry in the body of BARTLEY, laid on a plank, with a bit of a sail over it, and lay it on the table.]

CATHLEEN: *(to the women, as they are doing so)* What way was he drowned?

ONE OF THE WOMEN: The gray pony knocked him into the sea, and he was washed out where there is a great surf on the white rocks.

(*Riders to the Sea*: 8)

Maurya's family encounters a series of calamities. After having made sure that it is Michael's clothing removed from his body at sea, which is an indication of his death, the family is shocked by the dead body of Bartley which is brought to the cottage; some men are carrying it; there is water dripping out of the dead body they are carrying collectively. The wooden pieces which have been bought in advance to be made a coffin to whoever is drowned are now to serve the family to prepare a coffin for Bartley. Maurya thinks of the sea as a huge grave for her young six sons—the bread winners of the family. The sea even deprives the mothers of their drowned sons of weeping and showing their sorrow over their bodies, being lost among the waves of the sea. Therefore, Maurya is quite sure that the sea is a symbol of destruction, which has killed all her sons, husband and father-in-law, the last of whom is Bartley.

It is important to notice that the wooden pieces referred to at the beginning of the play may serve as a classical chorus that announces the ominous prediction of the deaths in the Maurya's family. For they are always there in front of both characters and spectators—a reminder of death which is always associated with the image of the sea as a taker of the lives of those who try to defy it. Everything found and exposed on the stage and all the other ingredients of this drama have a certain function to contribute to the action. Lall (188) declares that it is "the complex significance of the symbols that elevate the play to tragedy, that set the mind wandering from idea to idea and from emotion to emotion, and that extend the play from local to universal significance."

As Bartley puts the second shirt of Michael, Nora and Cathleen have been confused. There appears another hint at an ominous disaster. Nora tries to compare Michael's shirt with his other shirt to recognize whether the two shirts are made of the same flannel, but she does not find the second shirt. She asks Cathleen about the missing shirt and the latter replies that Bartley has put on Michael's other shirt because his shirt is said to be unsuitable for the special journey which he wants to make. This confusion may give the hint to the two sisters

that a disaster may soon happen to Bartley, and as explicated by Lall (174): "Now, the fact that Bartley has put on the second shirt of Michael who has already been drowned put Bartley in the same category as the man who has already drowned. Thus Bartley's act in putting on Michael's second shirt becomes a symbolic act suggesting a danger to his life." It may be conceived that attention at the beginning of the play is focused on the theatrical props like the wooden pieces made available for an expected death to occur in Maurya's family, and like the bundle of clothing which is a symbol of death, which prepare the audience and characters for the two deaths which have occurred in the family one by another. In Lall's (188) words: "In structure, language, imagery, as well as by its supreme economy, the play has what may be called the 'felt authority' of great drama." Besides, the new rope, which has been bought for the sake of lowering Michael's coffin into the ground in case he is found, is used by Bartley as a halter for the red mare which leads to his death. In addition to that, the white boards, which have been bought to make a coffin for Michael, are now used to make a coffin for Bartley. S. B. Bushrui (1972: 43) comments that "the most impressive emblem of newness is in the white boards meant for Michael's coffin but used for Bartley's." Before he sails to Galway Bartley asks for the new rope: "BARTLEY: (*comes in and looks round the room; speaking sadly and quietly*) Where is the bit of new rope, Cathleen, was bought in Connemara? (*Riders to the sea: 2*)

It can be inferred therefore that the new shirt of Michael which has been worn by Bartley, the new rope and the new white boards are symbolic of the new death that is to occur in the family—the unexpected death of Bartley. On the other hand, the new nails used for the coffin, the new rope and the new cake made by Cathleen, which they eat while building up the coffin are paradoxically conducive to suggestions related to the new life the family is going to encounter, and at the same time, as shown by Bushrui (49), "the newness that this building process will herald is the newness of Maurya's exhausted peace." It is the kind of the new life characterized by an atmosphere of death, loss of the dear sons and brothers, and despair to be mingled with poverty.

The props, as a matter of fact, allow the dramatist to economize words without deforming the action, themes and character. As to Michael's props, the old shirt and the plain stocking, it can be suggested that they represent the futility of man and his weakness towards forces beyond his control; Michael is being reduced to mere paltry objects already removed from his body at sea. The play has got a unity, and the plot is so cleverly knitted that the omission of only one part of the play will deform it, and as Donna Gerstenberger (1964: 45) sums up this idea in her own wording:

The most immediate effect of *Riders to the Sea* is its sense of inevitability and economy. There is nothing that is extraneous; there is nothing that is without meaning in a total pattern, a pattern which works toward an almost symbolic integration of theme and expression....Everything in the work grows out of the natural life which Synge observed in the Aran Islands, and this realistic equivalent for all that happens is a part of the play's inevitability and its art.

The human experience depicted in *Riders to the Sea* is then presented to the spectators who identify themselves with the sorrows and calamities of Maurya's family is supposed to be a universal one, being representative and expressive of the sorrows and calamities which inflict humankind as a whole. Synge has employed many and various theatrical props besides the verbal expression to convey that kind of a universal experience—universal in the sense that it addresses most poor people afflicted by calamities besides their destitution, who are made to endure human loss, despair and profound sadness, and as explained by Aboelazm (206), the physical facts of life not only of Aran Islanders but of a great many of the less fortunate people on earth. The play ends with Maurya's fatalistic submission for as far as she is concerned; there isn't anything the sea can do to her now that all her sons are gone. At this point of her grief, Maurya touches a wellspring of common humanity, and her experience of death is so universally the human experience that an audience identifies with.

The slice of life is represented by the small world of the play, being indicated by the Maurya's small cottage, or more specifically the "Cottage kitchen, with nets, oilskins, spinning-wheel, some new boards standing by the wall etc." (Riders to the Sea: 1). In this small space Synge succeeds in presenting a wider picture of the world with its sea as a great enemy of the youths of the island, that surrounds the cottage. The world beyond finds its reflection in the world within which should endure the forces of nature represented by the sea. Thus, the natural atmosphere which surrounds the cottage is projected inside it through the use of images, symbols, objects and even colours, although the spectators are made to watch just a cottage kitchen. The image of the sea is always there in the cottage despite its largeness. The sea which has taken all the male members of Maurya's family. In Gernstenberger's (45) wording of the thought, the sea "fills the small kitchen with its presence, just as it fills it with death before the quiet resignation with which the play ends—a quiet which the audience feels in the cessation of struggle like a silence on the sea itself at the storm's end."

Bartley's death is accepted by Maurya who withholds the loaf from him which she tries to give to him near the spring well. The bread which Bartley has not had is symbolic of the life which he has been deprived of. In Gerstenberger's (47) wording:

The bread is the bread of life—'And it's destroyed he'll be going till dark night, and he after eating nothing since the sun went up'—on any level one may choose. And it is, further, the pathetic attempt of the cottage kitchen to comfort and sustain the riders to the sea—the hopeless attempt of the small world to reach into the large.

Furthermore, Maurya sprinkles the holy water over Bartley's corpse and Michael's clothing brought from the sea—a process which symbolizes a Christian tinge. Besides, the drops of water, holy as it were, according to Gerstenberger (47) "are themselves pathetic reminders of the implacable appetite of the waters of the sea and the meaningless assurance of the young priest that 'the Almighty God won't leave her destitute with no son living. "There are no sons left."

As part of the theatrical props, the colours employed by Synge have certain significant effects on the action, of which red is the most effective one. Bartley rides a red mare when going to meet his doom; Patch, Maurya's other son, was wrapped by red sails when he was brought home at the time Bartley was still a child in his mother's lap. The three women wear red petticoats when coming to console Maurya. Generally speaking, red is the colour of blood, which is a symbol of fighting and sacrifice. Here, it is made a symbol of death and tremendous sadness. However, the red colour fills the women with great joy when wandering here and there on the island. Other colours are referred to; the white boards, the white rocks, which are identified with death; the black knot on the bundle of Michael's clothing; the birds or the black hags as they are called by the dramatist, when flying on the sea; the pig with black feet had been eating the rope. Thus, the colour black can be identified with the image of death. What deepens Maurya's sorrows is the stick brought to her by Michael on which she leans when taking the bread to Bartley near the spring well; she concludes that it is the dead young who leave things to the old and not the old who naturally leave things to the young—the stick acts as a reminder of her calamities.

The sea proves itself to be the protagonist of the play, whether a constructive or destructive power, for it is always triumphant over all the male members of Maurya's family in its struggle with the small cottage of the poor. Here is a continuous struggle between the sea and the Aran islanders struggling against a huge power for survival.

At the end of Maurya's tragedy, she declares that now she has got nothing to worry about for she has lost all her dear men and she is going to lose nothing. She will not care for the tides or the storms at sea. Out of the struggle between nature and the old woman is born the theme of endurance:

MAURYA: (*raising her head and speaking as if she did not see the people around her*) 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 in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other.

Finally, despite the fact that *Riders to the Sea* is a one-act-play, it can be regarded one of prominent tragedies of the modern theatre. It is classical drama in that it consists most of the ingredients of classical tragedy—brevity, clarity and simplicity. The theatrical props act like the Chorus of the classical tragedy that give hints to future events, explain characters and create the kind of atmosphere the dramatist wants to create. The general atmosphere created here is one of sadness, despair and death. The play gains a sense of universality, for the human sufferings are not only seen on the Aran island, but also among all destitute families that are not only afflicted by poverty, but they are also afflicted by the loss of their dear sons whether at seas, wars and natural catastrophes.

Conclusion

Theatrical props play a great role in *Riders to the Sea*; they aid the narrative to be more concentrated and economized, for they are declarative, illustrative and expressive many ideas, symbols, images and the kind of atmosphere the dramatist wants to convey to the audience. Though paltry objects, they create the image of the huge sea in a small kitchen, and at the same time they create the impression of sadness, despair and death when they are seen or touched by the characters. Since the props are character substitutes, they contribute to the action of the play in that they act as linking devices and succeed in transforming the audience and the characters from one mood to another; hence, they are structural, for they give predictions and premonitions for future events and prepare the audience, like the classical chorus, for future happenings and atmosphere. Most important is the idea that the theatrical props point to the general fact that all human beings are subject to death—the white wooden pieces, the ladder, the rope, the knife and the paltry clothing are all indicative of the triviality of human life and wishes. These props are symbolic of many ideas that deepen the tragedy of the mother, the central character, who has lost all the male members of her family. Symbolism in the play makes it stand among the best plays of modern time. The most significant symbol in the play which is addressed by

theatrical props is the sea—the source of both life and death simultaneously.

The theatrical props add a sense of reality in so far as they are closely related to the lives of the characters, and at the same time they let the spectators imagine many objects and events that are outside the small world of the kitchen where the action of the play starts and ends—they are conducive to the amalgamation of reality and imagination, which is very necessary to the dramatic experience. The theatrical props create economy for the theatrical ingredients, create symbols, images and thoughts, and above all contribute to the integrity and unity of the play.

الملخص

وظيفة الادوات المسرحية في مسرحية جي. م. سينج "الراكبون الى البحر"

الكلمات المفتاحية: أدوات، سينج، الراكبون الى البحر

المدرس: كمال الماس ولي

قسم اللغة الانكليزية / كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية (ابن رشد)

جامعة بغداد

يبيّن هذا البحث وظيفة الادوات المسرحية التي استخدمت في مسرحية "الراكبون الى البحر" ذات الفصل الواحد للكاتب المسرحي جي.م. سينج. يبدأ حدث المسرحية و ينتهي في مطبخ يعود لكوخ صغير في جزيرة آران التابعة لأيرلندا. ومن الجدير بالذكر ان العالم الخارجي لمكان الحدث قد تم ازالة الستار عنه من خلال الادوات المسرحية التي عملت كشخصيات اخرى والتي تعد كرموز وصور ومؤشرات الى كم كبير ومتنوع من الافكار والرموز والصور والمعاني، وكذلك تقوم بدفع الحدث نحو الامام باتجاه احداث مهمة لاحقة. ان هذه الادوات المسرحية تتيح للكاتب اختصار الشخصيات والحدث والكلمات الى الحد المتاح. فعلا سبيل المثال ان الالواح الخشبية الموضوعة على الحائط وملابس مايكل والالوان وادوات اخرى لها تاثير مباشر على موضوع المسرحية والشعور العام الذي يمتلك شخصياتها و جمهورها ايضا. اضافة لما تقدم تعد الادوات المسرحية من اهم الابتكارات التي جاء بها المسرح الحديث.

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