

Semester V

Paper- CC 12 (British Literature: The Early 20th Century)

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SYMBOLISM IN *RIDERS TO THE SEA*

The great attempt of Irish Revival was such a literary movement that highly contributed to the regeneration of not only Irish nationalism but also of an all-round literary, linguistic and cultural identity. The plays, performed at Dublin: Abbey Theater, were infused with multi dynamic approach in terms of theme and language. Symbolism is a major component in the literary texts produced under Irish Revival. In *Riders to The Sea* we can find the complex use of symbolism that contributes to the development of the different demotions of the play as a tragedy .

The Sea is one of the or rather the most important symbol used in the play. From the title itself we can guess its importance and its obvious to see that two major opposing forces that are contributing to the dramatic conflict of the play are mentioned in the title . The sea is the symbol of **fate** , the merciless, punitive , destructive one which is invincible as well. It simultaneously is the symbol of **death** , which predominates the entire play . The sea is not an inactive object that is used in the setting rather a very active, omnipresent one that determines the future of each of the character . It is the initiator of the tragedies that are happening in the lives of Aran island's inhabitants. Ironically it is the same sea which provides the livelihood of Aran people. The sea is the "destroyer and the preserver " , the male characters are bound to ride to the sea to earn bread for their families . Bartley has no other choice than to ride to the sea to sell his horse and earn bread. Thus the sea becomes unavoidable just like fate and death and at the same time accelerates the play to achieve a tragic end.

The Wind is another symbolic element that represents the shadow of death which is always prevailing and projecting its presence. When Nora and Cathleen were discussing about the probable death of Michael, the wind pushed the door and voiced its presence. Symbolically it represents the overwhelming omnipresent shadow of death.

The colours mentioned in the text, are also symbolic. While red and green are colours of life, the grey and black are colours associated with death. When the red mare was followed by the grey pony it means death will follow life: Bartley will die just like Michael. The feet of "Black" pig is also representing the sinister and inauspicious symbolizing the upcoming doom.

The characters are also to some extent symbolic, the three female characters are representing the three sisters of fate: Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos in the play where fate functions as most vital element. Even the Greek goddess of fate Moirai can be easily associated with the name Maurya. The Christian character also represents Christian values that are highly contradicted and shattered against the pagan beliefs of Aran Island.

The stage props are highly symbolic; the nails, nets, coffins all are related to death suffering and pain that are prevailing throughout the play, especially the coffins and the nails, in spite of carrying the significance of Biblical reference, are continuously representing the threat against Christian hope. Thus the symbols are contributing to the thematic conflict of the play.

The symbols masterfully crafted by J.M. Synge in *Riders to the Sea* collectively build up the corpus of symbolism to highlight the thematic aspects of the play. Synge has created a milieu replete with symbols that pinpoint the inscrutable fatal impact of nature upon the Aran islanders. As a Modern playwright like Synge, it is not surprising that he will take recourse in symbolism as a literary tool to present the picture of the society of Aran Island.