

# ***RIDERS TO THE SEA***

By John Millington Synge

## **DIALOGUE**

### **A. Choice of words**

1. Poteen: illicitly distilled whiskey of Ireland.
2. Jobber: a wholesaler who operates on a small scale or who sells only to retailers and institutions; one who works by the job or on job work.
3. Keening: to lament, mourn or complain loudly.
4. Hooker's Tacking: (hooker) a one masted fishing boat used on the English and Irish coasts.....(tacking) the direction of a ship with respect to the trim of her sails.
5. Green Head: the upper level of growth of grass found on cliffs.
6. **OVERALL INTERPRETATION:** All of these words are peculiar of Ireland and reflect the cultural environment in which the characters live in. Geographically, the characters live high above the sea on a cliff. The green grass indicates it is spring or summer in which plants are in full growth. Hooker's tacking reflects the economic environment. These characters live in a fishing community in which certain types of boats are used to help them on the sea. Politically, there are laws which govern these people, since whiskey is illegally. Work politics are also important in this community since the stores (small merchants) come to the local people to do business. Finally, women mourn over the dead as they pray to God to save their souls, which reflect socially and religiously. The choice of words for Riders to the Sea, not only stress the Irish traditions, but truly define to world of this play.

### **B. Choice of phrases and sentence structures**

1. "Herself does be saying prayers half through the night, and the Almighty God won't leave her destitute."
  - a. reflective instead of a personal pronoun, she
  - b. does be is improper verb usage
2. "Where is he itself "
  - a. an unnecessary pronoun
3. "Tell me is herself coming, Nora "
  - a. reflective instead of a person pronoun, she
4. "I seen the fearfulest thing."
  - a. no verb (have)

5. The characters in Riders to the Sea speak in short, choppy sentences. Their sentence structure is lacking grammatically, since there are many cases of improper verb usage, as in number one, and improper pronoun placement, as in number one, two and number three. Especially in number three, there is a reflexive pronoun used in place of a personal pronoun. Herself is not reflecting anyone, therefore a personal pronoun like she, should be used instead. Lastly in number four, there is again a verb problem but this time the verb is just simply dropped from the sentence. The phrases and sentence structures found in this play, reflect the characters' speech and therefore, directly reflects the language of Ireland.

### C. Choice of Images

1. "pig with the black feet"

a. text: "I hung it up this morning, for the pig with the black feet was eating it."....."And if the jobber comes you can sell the pig with the black feet if there is a good price going."

b. image: Black is the predominate image in this phrase. It symbolically represents death, despair and fear. The pig is a source of income for these characters, because they sell it for money. Therefore, the pig is destined to die. The "black feet" is the pig's marking, a birthmark", which is a constant reminder of it's fate. Although it will die, at the same time it is giving life to the family.

2. Rope

a. text: "Were is the bit of new rope, Cathleen, was bought in Connemare." "It's on a nail by the white boards.

b. image: Bartley comes in wanting the rope to make a halter for his horses which will help him lead the horses safely to the next town. Interestingly, it is a horse which knocks him off into the sea, and to his death, symbolizing life and death. Also, the rope hangs on the nail by the white boards. The same white boards which will be used to make his own coffin. Lastly, the rope hangs there because the pigs were eating it. This rope represents the characters' livelihood, their hope, since it is used for so many chores and jobs. The pigs eating it shows this hope disappearing.

3. Red Sail

a. text: "I looked out then, and there were men coming after them, and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it - it was a dry day, Nora - and leaving a track to the door."

b. image: Maurya is describing what she saw the day her son Patch was brought home after being drowned at sea. This image of a "thing" wrapped in a red sail with water dripping from it, represents his blood dripping from his body. The color red symbolizes life and death, for blood runs through our body to maintain our lives, yet is drained from our bodies at death. Red also is a sign of emergency. When Maurya saw the men with the red sail, she was alerted that something was wrong, and that a

tragedy had occurred. Lastly, the red sail with this "thing" is being brought to Maurya. As she once gave birth to a son and gave it life, she will now bury him and face death.

#### **D. Choice of peculiar characteristics**

1. Can you change the geographical environment - NO
2. Can you change the play without using a dialect - NO
3. WHY: It would be impossible to change the location because the story is about life and death that the characters experience with the sea, in Ireland. If the location was changed, the plot would not make sense, the language would not be peculiar to that area and the images which relate to the local would not matter. The dialect can not be changed or omitted because it is unique to that area of Ireland. It reflects the characters geographically, politically, economically, socially, and religiously. By omitting the dialect would change all of these givens and affect the meaning and idea of the whole play.

#### **E. Sound of the dialogue**

1. Units
  - a. Unit One: Nora and Cathleen's secret
  - b. Unit Two: Barley and Cathleen's confrontation
  - c. Unit Three: Maurya's acceptance
2. Unit One
  - a. This first unit is spoken at a varied pace. Nora is young, and full of excited energy. When she enters she speaks at a fast pace and at a loud volume. Cathleen, the older sister, is more in control and mature. She reprimands Nora to be quiet by speaking softer, because their mother is sleeping. She also speaks slower and at a more moderate pace than Nora. This continues when the mother enters as well. Maurya speaks with maturity, slow and at a monotone. This helps establish the relationship of the characters and the environment that they live in.
3. Unit Two
  - a. When Bartley enters he is very assertive. He helps to set the pace for this unit, which is faster than Unit One, because he is in a hurry to get his things together for his journey. He speaks at a medium pitch. Maurya does not want him to go and therefore, she picks up the pace in which she was speaking, in order to get Bartley's attention. As the scene progresses, Maurya gets upset with Bartley's lack of attention to her and becomes louder and more abrupt with her speech. Perhaps strident at times too. Bartley continues to speak in a medium pitch, but slows down his pace to calm his mother and sisters.
4. Unit Three
  - a. The last scene of the play, when Maurya finally accepts what has happened to her children and the power of the sea, is a much slower scene. Maurya accepts reality and therefore is reflective in thought. Her speech is softer since she is more at peace

with herself and the sea now. Both sisters, especially Nora, are also reflective of what has happened and very quiet in this last unit. Their pace is slower and more calm.

**F. Structure of lines and speeches**

1. Riders to the Sea is structured so that the lines are give and take. A character speaks and another reacts and responds. The action is reciprocal, called give and take. It is not until the end of the play that there is a speech, given by the main character, Maurya.

2. The last speech in the play is there for many reason. First, it is the final polar attitude of the main character, Maurya. Being placed at the end of the play leaves the last idea strong and powerful in the reader's mind. Also, since this is the only long speech in the play, makes it even more meaningful. If it were placed any where else but at the end, it would not make sense. Since Maurya speech about acceptance is due to the her experiences in the play, it must be located after those incidents.