

Textualizing History in Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

In a radical reaction against the idealism and sentimentality of melodrama, a few dramatists in the second half of the nineteenth century shifted the dramaturgy style into what came to be known as realism. This school of thought emphasizes the presentation of life as it is without exaggeration, illusions or artifices. It is evidently reflected in the dramatic works of some playwrights like John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey who are the main concern of this paper. In this respect, the textualization of history is significantly an important aspect of realist plays. Therefore, this comparative study explores the textualization of history in two iconic Irish plays: John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904) and Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* (1924). These plays are realistic portrayals of Irish society and the profound impact of historical events on the lives of ordinary individuals. By utilizing a new historicist and postcolonial reading, this study aims to uncover how historical events are recorded, reinterpreted, and recreated within literary works. It investigates the ways in which Synge and O'Casey incorporate these historical elements into their plays, demonstrating the dual nature of the relationship between history and literature. Besides, the study will conclude by proving the indirect commitment of these playwrights to their nations, countering accusations leveled against them.

Keywords: Realism, Synge, *Riders to the Sea*, O'Casey, *Juno and the Paycock*, new historicism, postcolonialism

1. Introduction

In a radical reaction against the idealism and sentimentality of melodrama, a shift towards realism emerged among several dramatists in the second half of the nineteenth century. This new dramaturgy style aimed to present life as it truly is, devoid of illusions or artifices. In this respect, the plays written by those dramatists can be considered as historical texts that mirror human experiences in intricate detail. Despite the fact that such realistic plays were not direct reproductions of reality, they followed a system of conventions that created a lifelike illusion of the world outside the text through selective representation, "exclusion, description, and manners of addressing the reader" (Baldick, 1990, p.184).

As a new historicist, Michael Foucault believes that there is a reciprocal relation between the literary text and the historical context. He states that "there is in all societies, with great consistency, a kind of gradation among discourses" and that what "are said indefinitely remain said, and are to be said again" (2001, p. 215). In this context, Edward Said's postcolonial theory intersects with Foucault's new historicism, offering valuable insights into the political and social dimensions of texts. Said asserts that authors are "very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience" (1993, p. xxii). Said underscores the significance of the political and social aspects of the text in the process of interpretation from a postcolonial perspective. Furthermore, Bhabha, a prominent postcolonial critic, in *The Location of Culture*, emphasizes the importance of hybridity and ambivalence in comprehending colonial dynamics: "It is in the emergence of the interstices-the overlap and displacement of domains of difference-that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (2012, p. 37). This quotation aligns with the interpretation of symbols and themes in the selected plays. It highlights the complex negotiations and struggles between the colonizer and the colonized.

Realist playwrights explored social issues, urging their characters to confront rather than ignore them. Moreover, their works featured unconventional subjects, direct observation of human behavior, and realistic details and settings. Significantly, the realistic tradition continued as many twentieth century playwrights favored the realistic representation of life, infusing it with innovative approaches and experimental techniques. Among these playwrights were John Millington Synge (1871-1909) and Sean O'Casey (1880-1964), both hailing from Ireland, whose plays *Riders to the Sea* (1904) and *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) are the main concern of this study.

Synge and O'Casey lived during an era dominated by social and political crises, liberation movements, bloodshed, and revolutions. In this respect, this paper examines how the two playwrights realistically depict their societies. The focus is made upon the realistic representations of social and political upheavals in the selected plays. While the two playwrights may initially appear to have different

themes and traditions, a comparison of their works may reveal striking similarities, particularly in their realistic portrayal of life. Therefore, the significance of this study lies in comparing these two seemingly distinct Irish writers to demonstrate their shared qualities. To analyze the selected plays of Synge and O'Casey, this study will follow the perspectives of new historicism and postcolonialism. By employing these frameworks, the paper aims to illustrate how Synge's and O'Casey's plays textualize history in the early years of the twentieth century, effectively showcasing how history is represented, reinterpreted, and recreated in literary works. Additionally, the study will highlight the indirect commitment of these playwrights to their nations, countering accusations leveled against them. Thus, the current study argues that Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* share the characteristics of textualizing history and realistically representing the lives of their characters.

2. Literature Review

Recent studies in the field of literary and historical analysis have demonstrated a growing interest in exploring the intersection between literature and history. Moreover, scholars have been examining how literary works, particularly plays, reflect and reshape historical narratives. In the case of Irish drama, recent research has focused on the works of John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey, considering their plays as significant contributions to the understanding of Irish history and society. In this respect, Kurdi (2020) conducted a comprehensive analysis of Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, exploring its representation of the socio-political landscape in early twentieth-century Ireland. The study emphasized the ways in which Synge's play serves as a historical document, providing insights into the lives of ordinary individuals amidst the backdrop of political turmoil. Similarly, Johnson (2021) conducted a postcolonial examination of O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, highlighting the playwright's exploration of the complex relationship between Ireland and Britain during the Irish War of Independence and its aftermath. The study highlighted O'Casey's nuanced depiction of the impact of colonialism and socio-political upheavals on the lives of his characters.

Therefore, this study analyzes how these playwrights textualize historical moments into their works. It explores the ways in which history shapes characters and themes. To achieve this, a methodology combining the perspectives of new historicism and postcolonialism is adopted.

3. Research Methodology

In this study, John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* are examined through the lenses of new historicism and postcolonialism. By employing these theoretical frameworks, the analysis illustrates how these texts function as historical artifacts, shedding light on the socio-political landscapes of early twentieth-century Ireland. Furthermore, this approach highlights the authors' engagement with their nation's concerns and their artistic responses to the prevailing historical events. While the discussion section primarily focuses on the artistic discourses written by talented artists, it is essential to consider the postcolonial perspective when interpreting the symbols and themes in the plays. By integrating the insights of new historicism and postcolonialism, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* textualize a specific period and reflect the authors' societal concerns. It contributes to the broader scholarly conversation on Irish drama and demonstrates the multifaceted nature of these plays as social historical texts.

4. John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey: Life and Works

John Millington Synge lived part of his life in Germany, France, and Italy, devoting his life to music, European literature, and Celtic culture. It was there in Paris that Yeats met him and persuaded him to go back to Ireland for inspiration. Accordingly, Synge went to Aran Islands where he lived among its people and expressed their life in unique dramatic actions and dramatic speech. In Paris, Synge encountered two trends of modernism; naturalism and symbolism, which shaped his artistic career. He avoided addressing moral and social problems of the middle class and focused on the ordinary people. Besides, his artistic creativity enabled him to be committed to his nation indirectly and ironically.

Likewise, Sean O'Casey made the poor and the uneducated the subject of his tragicomedy. In this respect, the characters in *Juno and the Paycock*, as will be clarified, are taken directly from the slums of Dublin which he knows very well. For him drama is a mixture of tragedy and comedy because life itself is a combination of both. He, as a matter of fact, was a member of the Irish Citizen Army, but later after realizing the futility and uselessness of war, diverged his ideology. Like Synge, he lived in exile in London which made some problematic relations with the Abbey Theatre. His works had been criticized of low artistic quality since he left Ireland in 1926. "Exile", said O'Casey:

may not only be necessary, but even enjoyable, ay, and profitable too. Profitable so as to be able to earn a better living; and enjoyable because of coming to a closer and tingling attachment to Art, Literature, and Science, all of which, unfortunately, England can furnish forth a fuller and a richer share than Ireland ever did or Ireland ever could (1994, p. 231).

Living in exile provides writers with a unique vantage point that allows them to gain a profound understanding and perspective on various aspects of life. The distance from their homeland often grants them the freedom to reflect deeply and critically on their experiences, society, and culture, offering them an opportunity to explore themes, ideas, and emotions with heightened depth, richness, and intensity. Their literary productions, shaped by the exile experience, become imbued with new dimensions and nuances. Edward Said, for instance, experienced the positive effects of exile which improved the quality of his writings. Forced to leave his homeland of Palestine, Said developed a unique perspective on issues of identity, colonialism, and power dynamics. In his influential book *Reflections on Exile and*

Other Essays, Said discusses the creative possibilities that arise from the experience of exile, asserting that “Exile is compelling to think about because it conveys two contradictory yet contiguous ideas: one, that to be displaced is to experience loss and alienation; but also that to be in a state of departure and re-arrangement is to be creatively engaged” (2002, p. 173).

However, the comparison between the two playwrights is still fascinating as the views of the two playwrights about the theatre are widely different. Synge, often seen as non-political, was primarily interested in folk drama and believed in the importance of Irish culture and the portrayal of human crises. On the other hand, O’Casey was a social dramatist who viewed theater as a vehicle for social change. He believed that through the theater, audiences could confront their weaknesses and faults, ultimately compelling them to seek transformation. Both Synge and O’Casey faced criticism from some quarters for allegedly neglecting their native land. However, a closer examination of their works reveals a deep-rooted love for their nation. Christopher Murray notes that Synge’s plays “move to the point of emancipation, where a marginalized figure finds voice and gesture to revolt against oppressive circumstances” (1997, p. 64). Despite the nationalist attack on Synge, Murray highlights the irony that Synge’s agenda, like theirs, was one of emancipation.

In his essay “Playwright in Exile,” O’Casey responds to accusations of being disconnected from Irish nationalism, asserting his profound understanding of Ireland. He declares, “As for those Irish critics who hint or shout that O’Casey knows Ireland no longer, I send the reply that I know her so well that they clap their hands over their dull ears, so that they may not have to hear” (1994, p. 233). O’Casey challenges those who criticize him to display a broader perspective than his own, emphasizing that his style should be honored by those who learn from it and work to surpass him. His ideology centers on the belief that violence should not be perpetuated by further violence, for many lives were being torn apart by involvement in organizations, like the Irish Citizen Army or the Irish Volunteers. For O’Casey, the main purpose of nationalism is to unite the country. These insights reveal the playwrights’ deep engagement with their homeland, despite their different approaches to theater and political activism. But the contrasting perspectives of these two playwrights provide a rich exploration of Irish culture, human struggles, and the complexities of national identity.

5. Synge’s *Riders to the Sea* and O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock*

Riders to the Sea is based on a natural setting, a real place, the Aran Islands off the western coast of Ireland, where Synge lived for a long period after his return from France which was the source of his inspiration. The people whom we see in his plays are the same peasants of the community in which he lived, depicting their way of life, their folk and their colorful language. His experience on the Aran Islands made him aware of the Aran’s people who ride to the sea, expecting hardship and early death and how they meet it as an inevitable reality. O’Casey chooses different setting for his three-act tragicomedy *Juno and the Paycock*, which is also based on a realistic setting and a historical event; the Easter Rising 1916. It is set in an urban setting in the slums of Dublin; an apartment of two rooms. The first act introduces the setting and the major characters of the play: Captain Jack Boyle, the father, Juno his wife, and their two children Johnny and Mary. The play depicts their stay in a two-roomed flat in Dublin tenement house in 1922; a period of political strife.

Riders to the Sea is one-act tragedy which ends as it begins with the death of one member of the family. The death is caused by the sea, the inevitable fate for the fishermen of Aran Islands. The play is set in two places; inside Maurya’s cottage and outside the cottage in the Aran Island. The plot is simple and the stage is bare where most of the events happen or have happened off-stage. Moreover, the play has a classical unity and completeness. It falls in three movements, the exposition, the complications, and the resolution. The action takes place on one of Aran Islands, off the west coast of Ireland. It is a “cottage kitchen, with nests, oilskins, spinning-wheel, some new boards standing by the wall” (1961, P. 3). Maurya, the central character in the play, is an old peasant woman who suffered the loss of her family; her husband, her father-in-law, and four of her sons who all were drowned in the sea, leaving only two sons, Michael and Bartley, and two daughters, Cathleen and Nora. Significantly, O’Casey deviates from the Aristotelian convention of tragedy’s plot structure by following Chekhov’s second structure. His play consists of three acts and three actions which start in act one and end in the final act represented in the three characters of the play: Jack Boyle, Johnny, and Mary. Their actions are linked together by Juno, the mother, who has internal as well as external action, providing a framework of the play. Most events happened in the past and thus the play shows the effect of the events on the characters.

Synge’s major theme in the play revolves around the conflict between man and fate, epitomized by the power of the sea as both a giver and taker of life. The sea, in its mystery and potency, can be seen as a symbol of the “Other,” representing the imperialism of England, when viewed through the lens of postcolonial theory. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain, “the Other” signifies the “colonizing power”, the oppressor, in a colonial relationship (2007, p.156). In this context, Maurya’s poignant last words, “No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied” (Synge, 1961, p. 14), reflect Synge’s ironic and revolutionary nature. It can be interpreted as an indirect commentary on the plight of the Irish people, who are condemned to a cycle of death and oppression under the dominance of the English “Other”. It is a tragedy of the Irish destiny which cannot be escaped or changed but has to be received with complete acceptance. “Boards”, “string”, “nets”, and clothes which convey a sense of realism and are all connected to the sea have political implications. The “net” symbolizes the Irish life as if they are trapped in constant struggle. The “white boards” which stand by the wall of the cottage from the beginning of the play are symbols of the presence of death caused by their resistance to the British colonialism. Besides, the “string” which is destroyed by the salt of water stands for the destruction of the Irish unity. When the two sisters could not untie the knot because of the salt, they cut it, an act which represents that the string of the Irish life is being cut by death. Synge uses symbols to unite the varied meanings of the play: oppression, suffering, death, folk traditions, and the sense of fear. Therefore, the play portrays the tragedy of the fishermen and the suffering and sorrow of women’s loss. The women figures are shown as having an ability of understanding the danger of the sea, while men, being livelihood supporters, ignore the same signs of danger as Bartley does. The women are left alone to suffer

and endure all the responsibilities of their families with agony and lamentations. In this respect, the portrayal of women in *Riders to the Sea* reflects the unequal gender dynamics and the burden placed upon them in the face of tragedy. From a feminist perspective, the play highlights the women's ability to comprehend the dangers of the sea, contrasting with the men who often overlook these warning signs. Bartley's disregard for the sea's potential danger serves as a poignant example. Through this gendered lens, the play emphasizes the resilience and endurance of the women who are left to bear the weight of their families' responsibilities. Significantly, Synge's depiction of the women's suffering underscores the injustices faced by Irish women in a patriarchal society. Their agonizing struggle is further amplified by their marginalized position within the larger context of British colonialism.

In *Juno and the Paycock*, O'Casey deals with the social problem of poverty in the slums of Dublin, while also expressing his main concern about the futility of military conflict. The play illustrates the impact of the Irish Civil War on two families who serve as representative of the entire Irish community. Mrs. Tancred's son, who participated in the Irish rebellion, is introduced at the beginning of the play with multiple wounds. Similarly, Juno's son, Johnny, becomes crippled during the fight in O'Connell Street. The loss of their sons can be attributed to the influence of the Irish Civil War, highlighting the devastating consequences of the conflict. Through the characters of Mr. Boyle and Joxer, O'Casey presents a portrayal of Irish men as fun-loving but irresponsible and ineffective. These men are depicted as idle wastrels who escape the harsh realities of Dublin through drinking and daydreaming. However, their retreat into escapism only worsens their own suffering and brings destruction, hunger, pain, and suffering to their families in the name of patriotism. The rape of Mary by an English colleague symbolizes the occupation of Ireland by the dominant power of England. This act of betrayal expresses O'Casey's views of the English as deceitful nation who do not keep their promises. Furthermore, the Boyle family within their tenement are described as "microcosm of Ireland – a family like a country divided against itself: the picture of a nation at bitter war" (Oriordan, 1984, p. 45). Thus, *Juno and the Paycock* portrays the futility of military conflict, the impact of the Irish Civil War on families, and the passive attitude of Irish men. By presenting characters who escape their realities and avoid responsibility, O'Casey highlights the detrimental effects of this behavior on themselves and their families. These characters, portrayed as caricatures of idleness and escapism, perpetuate a cycle of stagnation and despair in their community.

The titles of both plays are rich with implications. *Riders to the Sea* refers to Michael and Bartley who represent the other Irish citizens killed by the sea which again is a symbol of all other forces even the "other", the colonialism of England. O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* are the names of the two major characters of the play. Juno is called so because everything of importance happened in the month of June as her husband states "Juno was born an' christened in June; I met her in June; we were married in June, an' Johnny was born in June" (1998, act 1, pp. 93-94). Paycock is nicknamed so by his wife because he is useless and as vain as the paycock. What O'Casey wants to stress is that they should stop escaping their realities and be more careful of their personal idealism. It can be argued that the choice of the month of June in the play serves as a narrative device to emphasize the significant moments in Juno's life, highlighting the cyclical nature of important events occurring in June. The mention of Juno being born, married, and her son Johnny also being born in June adds a sense of pattern and repetition to their lives. Thus, the choice of June as a significant month for the characters is more personal and tied to their individual experiences rather than being directly linked to broader historical events.

The tragic heroines of the two plays have some parallels though Juno in the latter is more ideal, more hopeful, and stronger in faith. Both Maurya and Juno are old hard-working mothers supporting their families with a strong sense of responsibilities, yet they are unfortunately left alone at the end of the plays. The two mothers are miniature representations of their countries. Maurya is portrayed as an old peasant woman living on one of the Aran Islands, in a small cottage suffering the loss of eight members of her family. Like the constant movement of the sea between ebb and flow, Maurya's feelings fluctuate between hope and pessimism. When people enter to announce the death of her last son, she accepts his death and her fate. She is relieved that the sea cannot harm her anymore because it is the end of her tragedy. Death for the Irish mothers becomes a relief from the fear that dominates their lives for there remains nothing that can threaten them. The portrayal of Maurya in *Riders to the Sea* and Juno in *Juno and the Paycock* as strong, hard-working mothers with a sense of responsibility reflects the resilience and determination of women in the face of adversity. Their experiences mirror the struggles of their respective countries, emphasizing the parallel between their personal tragedies and the broader societal challenges they represent. Maurya's character in *Riders to the Sea* embodies the hardships faced by the Irish people, particularly those living in rural areas. Her acceptance of the deaths of her loved ones and her relief that the sea can no longer harm her symbolize a sense of resignation and fatalism that pervades the Irish community. Despite her grief, Maurya finds solace in the finality of death, which releases her from the constant fear and uncertainty that dominated her life. Similarly, Juno in O'Casey's play is a working-class mother and the only one who works in the family. She works to support her family. Besides, she takes care of her crippled son, protects her daughter when everyone turns against her, and tries in vain to push her husband to find a new job. The play's power lies in delineating Juno's power in controlling the whole family in moments of suffering and pain instead of dreaming as her husband does. Cowasjee confirms that:

Her grasp of reality . . . is not only brought in every scene of the play, but is made to contrast with the stupid idealism and imaginative flights of the other members of her household. Captain Boyle solves his problems through bottles of stout, Mary through books, and Johnny by cutting himself off from the others into a living death (1964, p. 50).

Juno is a strong believer and tries to keep faith in God. When Mary collapses at the end of the play, she gives her a moral lesson and strengthens her belief:

Mary: Oh, it's thru, it's thru what Jerry Devine says- there isn't a God, there isn't a God; if there was He wouldn't let these things happen!

Mrs Boyle: Mary, Mary, you mustn't say them things.

We'll want all the help we can get from God an' His Blessed Mother now! These things have nothin' to do with the Will o' God. Ah, what can God do agen the stupidity o' man! (1998, Act 3. P. 145).

Juno always feels the pain of others. Therefore, she is the life force of the family. This is the idealistic figure that O'Casey wants to stress and through her wants to prove the union instead of separation. Like Maurya, she does not blame God for their misery but the political situation of her time. Juno's anguish is intensified at the end of the play upon the death of her son: "What was the pain I suffered, Johnny, bringin' you into the world to carry you to your cradle, to the pains I'll suffer carryin' you out o' the world to bring you to your grave! Mother o' God, Mother o' God, have pity on us all!" (1998, act 3, p. 146). Her anguish speech echoes Maurya in Synge's play when she takes Michael's stick: "In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old" (1961, p.7). In both plays, the tragic heroines represent the indomitable spirit of the Irish people, particularly Irish women, who bear the responsibility of their families and communities on their shoulders. Their experiences serve as microcosms of the larger struggles faced by their countries, highlighting the resilience and endurance of the Irish people in the face of hardship and tragedy.

The daughters have some aspects in common. Cathleen in the former play is about twenty-years old and the one who takes care of the house. Her sister Nora has a main function in the play. Through her speech with Cathleen, it becomes obvious that she is the one who carries the truth about Michael's death. She has a good observation when she identifies the dead man's personality by picking the four stitches in his stocking, a minor detail that eventually reveals Michael's identity. It seems that like their mother, they will face the same feeling of fear and loss of their future's husbands and children, a circular chain of isolation and death which symbolizes the constant violence in Ireland. Synge focuses on the sense of fear that haunts his characters in order to actualize the situation. Mary, in *Juno and the Paycock*, is the same age as Cathleen. She is twenty-two years old, intelligent, and a good reader. Her intelligence, as already hinted, fails to save her from her colleague's betrayal and hence she was abandoned by everyone except her mother. Though she is well-educated and financially independent, yet she lacks her mother's wisdom and experience.

The two sons have, to some extent, some similarities. In *Riders to the Sea*, Bartley, the youngest and is the last living son whose death brings peace to his mother's soul. His livings are based on riding horses into the sea and selling them at the fair. It was his ignorance to his mother's request not to go to the sea and his insistence on traveling without her blessing that led to his death. Bartley is rarely heard in the play and this signifies the male's escapism and sense of defeat. In *Juno and the Paycock*, Johnny is shown as having a pale face with a "tremulous look of indefinite fear in his eyes" (1998, act 1, p. 71). He is broken up physically and psychologically and he lost his arm by his vague principles and is finally, like Bartley, killed by his own weakness. His vision of seeing the corpse of Tancred's son looking at him reflects the effect of terror and horror of war on him. Again, similar to Bartley, he does not talk much and most of the time he is shown alone. Jack Boyle, the father, is depicted as a man of sixty, grey-haired, whose walk is very slow and his clothes are "dingy, and he wears a faded seaman's-cap with a glazed peak" (1998, act, 1, p. 73). This description reflects his character and indicates the male's passivity. Both Boyle and his son are frustrated, defeated and escapists.

The two plays, though they seem to be different, have similar techniques. Through the use of Irish place names, irony, and identification of Irish culture, the two playwrights succeeded in proving their commitment to the Irish cause; each in his own way. The essence of Synge's play lies in its language which as Malone claims "if not indeed the ordinary language of the average Irish peasants, is in idiom and diction that of English-speaking Ireland selected and arranged by an artist in speech" (1929, p. 156). Synge rejected the current attitude of Ibsen and Emile Zola in their treatment of reality in "joyless and pallid words". For him:

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 (1961, p.18).

Synge's play does not use "joyless or pallid words" but rather based on peasant's poetic speech which he knew since his boyhood in Dublin, Wicklow, and Galway countryside. Synge used expressions and speech patterns of the local dialect to intensify the Irishness of the play. He achieved depth through his complex symbols where his artistic talent enabled him to establish his own individual style. O'Casey's language, on the other hand, is racier, more comic and more direct. The flavor of his play lies in its colloquial dialogue which dominates the whole play, given the liveliness of his own personality. Like Synge, O'Casey uses the idioms of common Irish people to make it typical Irish. The play is, as Atkinson called it, "a comedy of Irish character and a tragedy of Irish political life" (1982, p. 27). The power of his characterization and the comic quality of his dialogue add to the play its intensity and depth. Moreover, the play retains "the highest rank because of the comic extravagance of the dialogue, the mercurial temperament of the characters, and the earthiness of the themes" (Atkinson, 1982, pp. 12-13).

6. Conclusion

It has been noted that though *Riders to the Sea* and *Juno and the Paycock* differ in certain aspects, they still share many characteristics. In this respect, Synge's natural setting and O'Casey's urban one with their inhabitants are microcosms of Ireland in the early years of the twentieth century. The two main characters of the plays, Maurya and Juno, are depicted as emblematic representations of the motherland. Both are realistic, hard-working, self-sacrificing mothers, yet they are disappointed by circumstances. Though they experience the loss of their sons, they retain a strong will to survive and fulfill their responsibilities towards their daughters. In contrast, the male figures in the

two plays, expected to be the pillars of their societies and provide stability, fail to fulfill their roles. They abandon their families, leaving them to endure the burdens and traumas of life alone. The tragedies depicted in the two plays reflect wider socio-political realities of Ireland during the early years of the twentieth century. Synge and O'Casey's ability to "textualise history" and "historicize discourse" (Green and LeBihan, 1996, p. 116) aligns with Foucault's new historicist theory, demonstrating the socio-political construction of the texts. The two playwrights were able to paint a striking picture of Ireland at that time which consequently deviates the accusation turned against them.

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