

Beauty queen

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



'The Beauty Queen of Leenane' is set in an isolated cottage situated in a small Irish town called Leenane, during the latter half of eighties. The two characters that anchor the play are the mother-daughter duo of Maureen and Mag Folan. Maureen is a forty-year old spinster who had lived all of her life with her mom, while Mag is the seventy-year old mother who is not prepared to let go of her daughter. Mag is very ungrateful and unappreciative, in spite of Maureen dedicating her life to help Mag lead a somewhat normal life.

Although both of them have gotten used to each other's idiosyncrasies over the years, there still exists a power struggle of sorts between the two of them. At times, they even loathe and blame each other for their own miserable plights. The mother character is portrayed as a mean, selfish woman who believes that her daughter should feel indebted to serve her. The daughter desperately wants to find love, rather a husband who could free her from the bleak existence. Maureen somehow wants to escape from the clutches of her mother and get married like her sisters.

She even believes, at times, that her mother pretends to be sick to keep her confined to the four walls of the house. On the other hand, Mag tries to make her daughter feel guilty by accusing Maureen of ignoring her. As both of them had remained isolated for many years, they were reaching a state of social and emotional void. Many aspects of the play's storyline draw parallels to Ireland's socio-political standpoint. Many rural areas of Ireland like the one featured in the play are economically dead zones, where misery and dullness rule the day.

This tone reflects in the play as Maureen and Mag lead a dull life which seldom lightens up. They also endlessly complain about how bad their lives are due to natural calamities and atrocities committed against the Irish community. It is quite ironic that the only time they enjoy talking is when they discuss their death. The ambiance of the play is quite claustrophobic as it takes place in a confined, darkly lit environment. The gray walls of the room are analogous to the sleepy town of Leenane, which breaks the usual conception of Ireland being associated with greenery and hills.

This gives the viewer an unsettling feeling and conveys a sense of helplessness that haunts the play's main characters. The other two characters in the play are Pato and Ray Dooley who happen to be brothers. Pato is a well-mannered gentleman who is sick of working in England for low wages and plans to go to America to try his luck there. He is instantly attracted to Maureen as he expected every little. This made Maureen to be overjoyed over the prospects of being together with Pato and getting a second chance in life.

On the other hand, Ray is a brash and irresponsible young man, but nonetheless amusing. This element of the play shadows on the restless youth of rural Ireland. The youth in Ireland apparently have only two possible choices; they would have to either rot their lives in boredom. or seek greener pastures in London. Although immigrating into England was not the easiest task in the world, it was their only hope to flee from poverty. The two brothers represent the two equally helpless groups of the rural youth in Ireland.

This theme is universal since it can very easily be related to almost anyone living in any rural part of the world. Mag relentlessly tries to disrupt Maureen and Pato's chances of falling in love, fearing solitude. Pato tries to pacify the situation between Maureen and Mag by talking to them, and gains Maureen's respect. Maureen's initial physical relationship with Pato was a result of several factors; it was due to sexual repression caused by Ireland's ridiculously strong moral code and she also wanted to go against her mother for once in her life.

However, she eventually falls in love with Pato and longed to be with him. Maureen's final ray of hope gets shattered as Mag's purposely lets out certain sensitive information about their family. Mag also unscrupulously destroys a letter written by Pato which asks Maureen to come with him to America. Since Maureen does not get her hands on the letter on time, she does not get the opportunity to leave Leenane and unite with Pato. Ray inadvertently plays a role in the disaster that Mag plans to prevent Maureen and Pato from getting together.

The violent unfolding of events, her medical history, Mag's death and the grief of not being with Pato forces Maureen to go into a state of chronic depression and eventually turns into the person she dreaded most, her mother (Chang 2001). Mag was not only her daughter's captor but also a captive of her own lifestyle and choices. Although Mag might seem like the root cause of the disaster, she was also barely a victim of the human condition. Maureen being forced to take care of her mother is a motif to Ireland's culture where love plays second fiddle to family responsibility.

Maureen could not leave her old mom alone because she grew up on Irish values that condemned people leaving their elder alone during old age. The world needs to view Mag's character as a self-indulgent parent from Ireland's cultural perspective. In the rural parts of Ireland, children were raised merely to be additional hands in the family workforce, contrary to the western world's perception of children being objects for showering love and care (Cobbe 2008).

Since love is not a big part of the practical Irish life wherein arranged marriages are still the norm in certain areas, it gives the Irish another reason to escape to England. Also, the violent scenes in the play are not only an indicator of the true domestic violence that has become commonplace in the day-to-day lives of Irish people, but also signifies that the petty fights that we as citizens of the world go through in the name of war and so on (Gonser).

Like love and hate in human relationships, there is a fine line separating tragedy and comedy in plays. What 'the Beauty Queen of Leenane' successfully does is strike a fine balance between the two elements, making it quite engaging albeit intense. Ultimately, the play is a strong cultural satire of sorts that showcases rural Ireland's way of life to the rest of the world. One could interpret this play as ironical for relating the lack of economic wealth to the people's lives devoid of happiness, thereby criticizing the state of our modern soulless existence.

Beyond the dark humor is a darker message signifying that the worst of human qualities can very easily come out under suitable circumstances. 'The Beauty Queen of Leenane' is a play that makes us look past the obvious
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and think about things that we usually avoid because they are too complicated and stressful. However, these kinds of plays do remind us of the true nature of human beings that lies dormant behind years of cultural training. Also, Maureen growing old and turning into her mom is a classic case of the vicious cycle of life.

Reference: Chang, E. (2001, May 7). Theatre: The Beauty Queen of Leenane. Retrieved 27 June 2008, Cobbe, E. (2008, June 20). Review - The Beauty Queen of Leenane. Austin Chronicle. Retrieved 27 June 2008, Gonser, J. “Welcome to McDonaghland – About Language, Biscuits, and a Certain Taste for Aussie Soaps”. Retrieved 27 June 2008,