

The Lonesome West

Girleen

and her character's use for the Comparative Modes

Before focusing on Girleen, think about the following points, bearing in mind the other texts you are studying for the Comparative.

GENERAL VISION AND VIEWPOINT

The quotes and comments listed below can also be adapted to the issues of daily life experience, fulfilment of characters, moral values, hopes and expectations of characters, bright or dark atmosphere etc in GVVP. Girleen is a character who influences others and that can be considered a positive contribution by her character to the GENERAL VISION AND VIEWPOINT. However in the end she flees the stage defeated and that suggests a negative GVVP as her hopes and dreams centring on Fr. Welsh were thwarted.

THEMES

Girleen's involvement in the story of the play illustrates certain THEMES as well. The various key moments and references listed below offer plenty of areas where you can ground any one of the following themes in the text:

- Struggle
- Good Versus Evil
- Relationships
- Search For Identity
- Isolation
- Rebellion
- The Search For Happiness
- Journey
- etc

LITERARY GENRE

The following material, focusing mainly on Girleen, is useful for LITERARY GENRE:

- Her sharp tongue sparks conflict but she eases tensions as well.
- She acts as a commentator, critic and informant on Leenane and the other characters.
- She is entertaining as there is humour in her actions, language, dialogue and imagery.
- Her character is memorable, she undergoes character development etc.

'The Lonesome West': How to tune in to the Comparative Modes

- The play opens as a funeral of a murdered family member has taken place, itself a bleak event to kick off any reflection on GENERAL VISION AND VIEWPOINT.
- This makes for a riveting opening, a consideration for an essay on LITERARY GENRE.
- The rural village where the play is set appears to be barbaric; Fr Walsh claims '*I'd have to have killed half me feckin' relatives to fit in to this town*'. It's a place where '*three slaughterings*' have taken place without the law intervening. Thus, there are grounds for arguing that the GENERAL VISION AND VIEWPOINT is negative, depending on the texts you intend to compare it to. In Leenane the truth is a '*rumour*' [P34].
- Shouldn't a retro Irish setting be all cute? Hardly 'barbaric'! Well, Valene, the bickering brothers, and alcoholic priest Fr Welsh together give the impression that Leenane contains a male dominated world of feuding alcoholics. Killing family relatives, firing shotguns at home and burning property seem everyday actions, unchecked by legal niceties that normally prevail in civil society. Welsh labels it '*the murder capital of fecking Europe*'. Sneering seems to be a dominant attitude in various relationships and comments. Mistrustful Valene marks his figurines and personal stuff with a 'V', while Coleman's envious pleasure is to antagonise his brother. Acrimonious jealousy prevails. Coleman waters down his brother's poteen, melts his cherished figurines and cuts the ears of his dog, Lassie. Personal space is violated in this story rather than respected.
- The sole female character is Girleen, a teenage girl '**going round flogging poteen**'. She appears in some ways to be a typical hormonal teenager but her behaviour is unconventional; she earns an income from a poteen round and flirts with the drunken priest. In her final part in the story she holds a butcher knife to Coleman's neck to stop a feud between the brothers [P47]. On the surface she's a wild, violent girl; beneath she opposes the stupidity of the brothers and cares deeply about the angst ridden priest.
- Society's values seem depressingly low as crimes of murder, patricide etc, go unpunished. Suicide could be described as rampant by the middle of the play. There is no evidence of the rule of law and sexual mores seem absent. This suggests a grimness in the setting that should produce a negative GENERAL VISION AND VIEWPOINT.
- But that is to ignore the comical tone of the drama that prevails throughout. An intelligent approach to the play takes account of the mocking/satirical tone of the drama. Often what can seem dark in the literal sense can reverse to bright when you consider the irony involved. Take whichever approach suits the texts you are comparing the play to.
- While the events appear to be shocking and brutal and the dialogue is aggressive, the audience don't usually feel horrified by these events. They laugh at them because they are so extreme as to appear unbelievable. The intention is to mock rather than shock, to amuse rather than horrify. The play is build around the egoism of two characters. Normally uncontrolled displays of egoism are unpleasant, off-putting. By mocking the egoism of the brothers and the structural failures of Leenane society, McDonagh wishes to portray family and social disharmony making the final transition to harmony. The costume, language and antics of the characters make the events seem funny.

- The play is ironical in spirit; that is, the chaos is not to be taken seriously. The world of the play is turbulent and disorderly. This is so in order that the audience may take a fresh look at society and its absurdities. The play is deliberately ridiculous, over the top by design.
- Fr. Walsh's suicide letter is a sort of internal condemnation of all the selfishness.
- Girleen's transformation from scandalous and loose teenager to social healer and a caring individual is the most significant and lasting change to emerge from the barren and wild society of the play. She provides the moral barometer of the action.
- The view that the play is ironical provides a lot of interesting material for Literary Genre. The fact that the play is written partly as a social satire may be useful when considering comparative points in the Literary Genre mode. The play is more an exercise in Magic Realism than Realism, from the LITERARY GENRE aspect.

USEFUL AREAS OF THE STORY TO VISIT FOR KEY MOMENTS

Girleen plays the role of critic of what is wrong in Leenane. She is also the most humane character. Girleen may appear silly at times, but her voice speaks the truth.

- Girleen, though the lone female on stage and a teenager, is forward and explicit in her comments about her sex-appeal: *'I think he'd like to be getting in to my knickers'*—a sarcastic comment she makes about the postman [P9]. This example of uncouth humour can be used to suggest the world of Leenane is a dark place without social standards. It is possible to argue that the moral outlook seems negative. Or you could argue that Girleen is standing against the prevailing loutish attitude of males by mocking their lewd attitude. From this angle, Girleen alone represents human decency, and her character therefore supports a positive GENERAL VISION AND VIEWPOINT. Girleen jokes about being a gold-digger, saying that a *'postman's wages'* will not be enough for a guy to have it off with her. Again, this is a form of negative social commentary and implies tarnished moral values [GVVP].
- However there is positive energy for the audience of the play or reader when we see that Girleen is capable of standing up to Coleman's insults, as evidenced by her humorous comments to him about what she'll sell her body to him for.

Coleman *Are you charging for entry so, Girleen?*

Girleen *I'm tinkering with the idea, Coleman. Why, are you interested? It'll take more than a pint and a bag of Taytos, mind.*

Her ironical tone is highlighted when she admits she is only *'coddling'* about *'whoring'*. From a LITERARY GENRE angle, her character and what she says is one of the most interesting and entertaining aspects of the play. Her feisty character and her robust response to the unpleasant encounters she meets in daily life show a strength of asserting themselves in other texts. It would be interesting to deal with the GVVP by comparing

Girleen with other female protagonists who struggle against the forces of their world. Or you could look at Girleen's situation as her journey through adolescence and argue that that she offers the reader a positive outlook. Compare this aspect of her daily life and hopes with another texts. Keep interlinking, argue comparatively.

- Girleen stands up to the cheating of Valene by telling him he cheated her out of a pound on the payment for poteen, [P10].
- Girleen is a naïve and yet partially world-wise school-girl, who swears a lot: '*You're the king of stink-scum fecking filth-bastards you, ya bitch feck, Valene*' [p10]. This may also suggest she is a bit of a tom-boy.
- She can be very insulting in a funny way: '*Ah, me hairy arse father*'.
- Girleen criticises Fr Welsh when she blames him for being a '*terrible priest*' [P11].
- She also shows a soft side for Fr Welsh when she offers to guide him home after he being hit by a cow the previous time, itself a funny anecdote [P11].
- Although not known for her soft side and rarely seen in an emotional state, she admits vaguely to crying over '*different things*'.
- Girleen admits jokingly to '*a mad passion deep within me for*' Fr Welsh [P33]. In turn, she is the one he entrusts the letter to [p34].
- In a comical way Girleen declares she has '*plenty of morals only I don't keep whining on about them like some fellas*'-[P34].
- Ironically, Girleen claims that people should be shot in the head for animal cruelty [P34].
- Girleen reveals her fondness for Fr Welsh [P35] when she acts hurt at Fr Welsh when he makes little of her sympathy and her claim that she listens to his advice.
- She also claims she is not flighty with money and that she is working as a poteen saleswoman to save up money for practical purchases out of 'Freeman's Catalogue'.
- Girleen is a rough character as well, resorting to violence against Fr Welsh when she tires of his sarcasm: *she wrenches Welsh's head back by the hair*.
- Girleen has no time for self-pity—she calls Fr. Welsh '*maudlin*'.
- She is irreligious, mocking the name of '*the mammy of our Lord*': '*Fecking Mary*'. [P37]
- But as well as being flippant like this, Girleen has an affectionate side which she displays by brushing the hair out of Fr Welsh's eyes and gently slapping his face. It becomes obvious she has a crush on Welsh when she looks away '*embarrassed*' from his smile. She begs him to write to her after he announces he is leaving [P37].
- Girleen is realistic, saying it took Guinness rather than courage for 'Poor Tom' Hanlon to walk into the lake.
- Girleen shows wisdom when she offers the best advice in the play against suicide: '*At least you've got the chance of being happy...it's more than them dead have...when you're still here there is the possibility of happiness*'.
- Fr Welsh admires her intelligence: '*You have a million thoughts going on in the back of them big brown eyes of yours*'.
- Girleen's hilarious sense of humour is shown when she tells Fr Welsh that the two brothers would only get the chance to use condoms on a '*blind hen*'. He tells her affectionately that she has a '*terrible mouth on ya*'.

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- It turns out she has been saving her pooten money to buy Fr Welsh a chain. [P48]
- At the end of her part in the story, she feels a failure: Fr Welsh is dead and he asks that the brothers stop feuding to save his soul. She is bereft at his death and that he asked two *'mad drunken pig-shite feck-brained thicks'* to do the necessary to get him to heaven. Girleen wanted that role for herself and storms off in a huff that Welsh didn't give her the honour of saving his soul. She feels helpless and defeated at the end of the story.

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