
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Acoustic Space and Existential Identity: A Study of Domesticity and Filial Conflicts in John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea*

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| ABSTRACT

John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea* present rural Irish life through complex interactions among domestic space, sound, family relationships, and individual identity. This study, titled "Acoustic Space and Existential Identity: A Study of Domesticity and Filial Conflicts in John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea*," examines how acoustic space and soundscape shape domestic experiences, existential identity, and filial conflicts in the two plays. The study draws on R. Murray Schafer's Soundscape Theory, Marshall McLuhan's concept of Acoustic Space, and Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of Existentialism to investigate how sound, silence, voices, oral storytelling, and environmental noises contribute to the psychological and existential experiences of the characters. Through a qualitative, interpretive, and comparative analysis of dialogue, stage directions, vocal expressions, silences, off-stage sounds, and domestic environments, the study explores the relationship between acoustic experience and human identity. In *Riders to the Sea*, the sounds of the sea, wind, surf, voices, prayers, and silence create an acoustic environment that reflects Maurya's emotional suffering, maternal loss, and confrontation with the inevitability of death. The surrounding natural soundscape becomes closely connected with domestic grief and reveals the vulnerability of human existence in the face of uncontrollable natural forces. In *The Playboy of the Western World*, storytelling, gossip, laughter, shouting, and communal voices transform the public and domestic acoustic environment and significantly influence Christy Mahon's changing sense of self. His relationship with his father and his interaction with the villagers demonstrate how identity is shaped, challenged, and reconstructed through language, listening, and communal response. The study argues that Synge's domestic spaces function not merely as physical settings but as acoustic, psychological, and existential spaces in which familial tensions, emotional isolation, identity crises, and struggles for autonomy emerge. Sound and silence operate as significant dramatic elements that reveal filial conflict, domestic instability, alienation, freedom, choice, and the search for individual identity. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that an acoustic reading of Synge's plays provides a deeper understanding of how sound, silence, domestic space, and existential identity interact to shape familial relationships and human experiences.

| KEYWORDS

Acoustic space, soundscape, existential identity, domesticity, filial conflict, sound and silence, oral storytelling, family relationships, alienation, individual identity.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Literature often preserves the emotional geography of a nation more profoundly than historical records, and drama transforms ordinary spaces into living sites of psychological struggle, cultural memory, and existential reflection. Within the context of the Irish Literary Revival, the plays of John Millington Synge emerge as powerful dramatic articulations of a society negotiating colonial anxiety, rural hardship, familial disintegration, and the search for identity. His dramatic landscapes are not merely visual; they are profoundly acoustic. Sound, silence, sea-noise,

storytelling, communal gossip, lamentation, and ritualized speech become structural forces shaping emotional experience and existential consciousness. This research seeks to investigate how acoustic space functions within Synge's dramatic interiors to construct existential identity and domestic conflict in *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea*. The study argues that Synge's domestic spaces are not passive theatrical settings but emotionally resonant acoustic environments where identity, authority, rebellion, grief, and human vulnerability is continuously negotiated. Why should we care about sound in Synge's drama? Because sound in these plays is never incidental. In *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea*, sound and domestic life play an important role in shaping the characters' emotions and identities. In *The Playboy of the Western World*, the tavern conversations and villagers' repeated speech, and in *Riders to the Sea*, the family silences and the sound of the sea create emotional and psychological experiences within domestic life. These sounds reflect the fears, suffering, loneliness, and struggles of Irish peasant life. The research mainly focuses on domesticity and filial conflict in Synge's plays. The family spaces in these dramas are not peaceful; instead, they reveal tension between parents and children, emotional distance, and struggles for authority. Christy Mahon's rebellion against his father in *The Playboy of the Western World* and Maurya's fear of losing her sons in *Riders to the Sea* show how family relationships become sources of pain, anxiety, and identity crisis. The study also examines how sound and silence shape the characters' understanding of themselves and their surroundings. Through storytelling, lamentation, silence, and everyday speech, Synge presents the instability of identity within domestic life. The research uses the idea of acoustic space developed by Marshall McLuhan and soundscape theory introduced by Raymond Murray Schafer to analyze how sound creates emotional and dramatic meaning in Synge's plays. Overall, this study explores how acoustic space, domesticity, and filial conflict together shape existential identity in the dramatic world of John Millington Synge. The early twentieth century was an important period in Irish cultural and literary history. During this time, the Irish Literary Revival sought to promote Irish culture, folklore, language, and rural traditions to establish a distinct national identity (Kiberd, n.d., p. 112). Writers associated with this movement focused on the everyday lives of ordinary Irish people and explored the social and cultural realities of rural communities. Among these writers, John Millington Synge gained recognition for his realistic representation of Irish life and his deep understanding of human emotions. Synge's plays often portray people living in isolated rural communities where family relationships, social expectations, and economic hardships strongly influence everyday life. Rather than presenting rural Ireland as an ideal place, Synge reveals the emotional struggles, fears, and conflicts that shape human existence. His dramas explore themes such as loneliness suffering, identity, family tension, and death. These concerns are particularly visible in *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea*, where characters face personal and social challenges that affect their sense of self and their relationships with others. To understand these experiences, the present study employs the concept of acoustic space, developed by Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan argues that acoustic space is created through sound, speech, silence, and listening rather than through visual perception alone (McLuhan & Carpenter, n.d., p. 67). Acoustic space surrounds individuals and influences their emotions, thoughts, and interactions. In dramatic texts, conversations, storytelling, silence, and environmental sounds contribute to the creation of such spaces and shape the experiences of the characters. The study also draws on Raymond Murray Schafer's concept of the soundscape, which emphasizes the role of sound in shaping human perception and experience (Schafer, n.d., p. 15). Sound is not merely a background element. It influences how people understand themselves, others, and the world around them. In Synge's plays, sound functions as an important dramatic device that affects both the emotional atmosphere and the development of character identity. In *The Playboy of the Western World*, Christy Mahon's identity is largely constructed through language and communal response. When he tells the story of killing his father, the villagers listen with fascination and repeatedly discuss his actions. Their praise, laughter, admiration, and retelling of his story gradually transform him from an unknown outsider into a celebrated hero. Through these verbal exchanges, Synge demonstrates how identity can be shaped by sound, speech, and collective perception. The acoustic environment of the village plays a significant role in Christy's growing confidence and changing self-image (Synge, n.d., pp. 45–62). In *Riders to the Sea*, acoustic space operates differently. The play is dominated by the constant presence of the sea, whose sound serves as a reminder of danger, loss, and death. Alongside the sound of the sea, silence, mourning, lamentation, and interrupted conversations create a tragic atmosphere within Maurya's household sounds and silences contribute to a sense of fear and helplessness as family members struggle with repeated loss. The domestic space becomes emotionally charged because death is continually present through both physical absence and acoustic experience

(Synge, n.d., pp. 3–21). Another important aspect of the study is domesticity and filial conflict. Domestic spaces in Synge's plays are not merely physical settings. They are places where family relationships, emotional tensions, and personal struggles are expressed. In *Riders to the Sea*, Maurya's relationship with her sons is shaped by anxiety and loss, while the repeated deaths of male family members create profound emotional suffering.

In *The Playboy of the Western World*, the conflict between Christy and his father becomes central to the formation of Christy's identity. These parent-child relationships reveal how filial conflict influences individual emotions, social position, and self-understanding. The study also examines how these experiences contribute to existential identity. Existential identity develops when individuals confront uncertainty, isolation, suffering, and mortality. Synge's characters frequently face situations that challenge their sense of meaning and security. Christy seeks recognition and a new identity within the community, while Maurya struggles to accept the inevitability of death. Their experiences reflect broader existential concerns about human existence and the search for meaning in a world marked by loss and uncertainty. Therefore, this study investigates how acoustic space, domesticity, and filial conflict interact to shape existential identity in Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea*. By examining the role of sound, silence, family relationships, and domestic environments, the research aims to demonstrate how Synge portrays the emotional and existential dimensions of human life within rural Irish society.

1.1 Problem Statement

Although John Millington Synge's plays have received considerable critical attention, most studies focus on Irish nationalism, folklore, rural life, language, and realism (Kiberd, n.d., p. 112; Roche, n.d., p. 57). Comparatively, limited research has examined how acoustic space contributes to the construction of existential identity and family relationships in his dramas. Acoustic space, created through sound, silence, speech, storytelling, and listening, plays an important role in shaping the experiences of Synge's characters (McLuhan & Carpenter, n.d., p. 67). However, existing scholarship rarely explores how these acoustic elements influence domestic life, emotional suffering, and filial conflict in *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea*. In *The Playboy of the Western World*, Christy Mahon's identity develops through storytelling and the responses of the villagers. Their repeated conversations, praise, and admiration transform him from an unknown young man into a celebrated figure within the community (Synge, n.d., pp. 45–62). In *Riders to the Sea*, the sound of the sea, moments of silence, and expressions of mourning create a tragic domestic atmosphere marked by grief, fear, and loss (Synge, n.d., pp. 3–21).

These acoustic elements significantly influence how characters understand themselves and their situations. Filial conflict is another important issue in both plays. Christy's troubled relationship with his father and Maurya's fear of losing her sons reveal tensions within family life. These conflicts are expressed through speech, silence, and emotional interactions, which contribute to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and uncertainty. Despite their importance, the relationship between acoustic experience, domesticity, and filial conflict has not been adequately explored in previous studies. Therefore, there remains a significant gap in Synge scholarship regarding how acoustic space functions within domestic settings and how it shapes existential identity, emotional suffering, and parent-child relationships. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the interaction of acoustic space, domesticity, and filial conflict in *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea*.

1.2 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- a. How does acoustic space function within the domestic settings of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea*?
- b. In what ways do sound, silence, oral storytelling, and auditory expression contribute to existential identity formation in the selected plays?
- c. How do domestic acoustic spaces shape filial relationships and reveal the tensions between individual identity and familial expectations in Synge's selected plays?

1.3 Research Objectives

This study has the following objectives:

- a. To examine the function of acoustic space within the domestic environments of Synge's selected plays.
- b. To analyze how sound, silence, storytelling, and oral performance contribute to existential identity formation.
- c. To examine how domestic acoustic spaces influence filial relationships between individual identity and familial expectations in Synge's selected plays.

2. Literature Review

There have been numerous scholarly studies on John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and *The Playboy of the Western World*. These studies discuss Synge's plays from different perspectives such as existentialism, ecocriticism, cultural identity, grief, epistemology, naturalism, storytelling, and carnivalesque theory. However, comparatively less attention has been given to the relationship between acoustic space, domestic life, existential identity, and filial conflict in these two plays. The following studies are important for the present research because they provide different perspectives on the characters, their environment, conflicts, suffering, language, and relationships.

Pradip Kumar Bera's ecocritical study, "The Man and the Sea: An Ecocritical Study of John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*," argues that the sea is not merely a physical background but an active force that shapes the lives and destiny of the Aran Islanders. Bera emphasizes that the sea functions both as a source of survival and as a destructive force. He also draws attention to the domestic setting of the play, particularly the cottage kitchen, which contains "nets, oilskins, spinning wheel and some new boards" (Bera, 2013, p. 3). These objects make the relationship between domestic life and the sea visible within the cottage itself. Bera further explains that such objects "represent peasants' "tightly-knitted life with the sea" (Bera, 2013, p. 4). His argument therefore challenges a purely interior understanding of the cottage because the domestic space remains closely connected to the external natural environment. Bera also observes that the sea can appear indirectly within the cottage when the "sea-breeze blows open the door" and seawater enters the room with Bartley's body (Bera, 2013, p. 6). This observation is particularly valuable for the present research because it suggests that the boundary between the domestic interior and the natural world is not fixed. However, Bera primarily examines this relationship from an ecological and material perspective rather than investigating the acoustic dimension of the environment. The present study therefore develops Bera's ecological insight by examining how the sounds of the sea, wind, surf, and silence enter the domestic space and become emotionally and existentially meaningful. In this sense, the cottage can be understood not only as an ecological space but also as an acoustic space in which natural forces affect family relationships and existential experience.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay's "The Tragic Rhythm of the West: A Re-evaluation of J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*" challenges the tendency to read the play simply as a folk drama or a realistic representation of peasant life. He argues that *Riders to the Sea* has a deeper artistic structure connected with the tradition of Greek tragedy. Particularly important for the present research is his attention to the play's linguistic and dramatic form. Chattopadhyay describes the work as a sophisticated dramatic experiment rather than merely a simple account of fishermen's lives, emphasizing the importance of its linguistic construction and tragic form. His discussion creates an important opening for an acoustic interpretation because rhythm, repetition, speech patterns, and the musical quality of Synge's language contribute to the emotional force of the tragedy. The importance of this approach becomes especially clear in relation to Maurya's final speech, whose repeated expressions and rhythmic movement intensify her acceptance of suffering and death. However, Chattopadhyay primarily understands these features as elements of tragic rhythm and dramatic structure rather than as components of an acoustic spatial environment. The present study extends this argument by moving from sound as a dramatic effect to sound as a spatial and existential experience. It examines how voices, repetitions, pauses, silences, and environmental sounds interact within the cottage and contribute to the characters' experience of grief, uncertainty, and mortality.

Mary Röine Doolan's "The Playboy of the Western World: A Carnavalesque Reading" interprets Synge's play through Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. Her study emphasizes inversion, subversion, grotesque humor, ambivalent laughter, and the unstable relationship between reality and fantasy. Particularly relevant to the present

research is Doolan's discussion of language and performance. She describes the play's dialogue as a "catalogue of speech acts" and argues that language contributes to the movement between fantasy and reality (Doolan, 2018, p. 9). Christy's identity develops through his stories and through the reactions of the people who listen to him. His speech therefore does not simply communicate information; it becomes part of his social performance and transformation. Doolan also shows how humor and language challenge established forms of authority, including "parental" hierarchy and other social conventions. Her analysis is useful for understanding the connection between speech, performance, and identity in "The Playboy". However, Doolan concentrates mainly on the carnivalesque and social function of language rather than on the acoustic conditions in which language is produced and received. The present research extends her argument by examining storytelling as an acoustic performance involving voice, listening, repetition, laughter, silence, and communal response. It therefore considers how the sound of Christy's storytelling participates in the temporary construction and reconstruction of his existential identity and in his conflict with Old Mahon.

Julie Henigan's "The Power of a Lie: Irish Storytelling Tradition in The Playboy of the Western World" examines the importance of Irish storytelling traditions, folk narratives, legends, tall tales, and folk expressions in Synge's dramatic method. Henigan argues that Synge drew upon "traditional Irish narrative and storytelling" to represent both Irish society and broader aspects of the human condition (Henigan, 2002, p. 92). Her study is particularly important for the present research because Christy's identity is closely connected with his ability to tell a convincing story. His invented account of killing his father changes his social position: the apparently insignificant young man becomes an admired and celebrated figure among the villagers. Storytelling therefore becomes a means of identity construction, social recognition, and personal transformation. Henigan's emphasis on the cultural and narrative power of storytelling provides a strong foundation for understanding the relationship between voice and identity in "The Playboy". Nevertheless, her study concentrates mainly on storytelling tradition and the cultural function of the lie rather than on the wider acoustic environment surrounding Christy's performance. The present research consequently moves from the function of storytelling to the acoustic conditions of storytelling, examining how voice, listening, repetition, silence, and communal response participate in Christy's existential identity and in his troubled relationship with Old Mahon.

Yumiko Kataoka's "Loss and Resolution in Riders to the Sea: Reflecting on the Theory of Grief" focuses on Maurya's repeated experiences of loss and her gradual movement toward acceptance. Her analysis applies the theory of grief to Maurya's experience and emphasizes the fact that Maurya must continue living after the deaths of her sons. Kataoka observes that "the mother Maurya must live on after all her sons' death," making her situation different from an earlier version of the character who appears to have lost the will to live (Kataoka, 2017, p. 20). This argument is significant for the present study because it connects grief with Maurya's identity as a mother and with the destruction of her family. Her movement toward acceptance can therefore be understood as a transformation in her emotional and existential condition. However, Kataoka primarily examines the psychological process of grief rather than the dramatic means through which grief becomes audible. Maurya's lamentations, pauses, repeated expressions, prayers, and final speech provide important acoustic manifestations of her suffering and eventual acceptance. The present research therefore extends Kataoka's grief-based interpretation by examining how grief is not only psychologically experienced but also acoustically produced and spatially experienced within the domestic setting.

Şebnem Kaya's "John Millington Synge's Riders to the Sea in Terms of Epistemology" examines how the characters acquire knowledge in an isolated environment where modern communication technologies are unavailable. Kaya identifies testimony, perception, memory, and intuition as major sources of knowledge in the play (Kaya, 2005, pp. 155–156). She argues that these sources cannot independently provide reliable knowledge and that their contradictions create an "atmosphere of uncertainty" for the characters (Kaya, 2005, p. 155). This argument is particularly important for understanding communication in the domestic setting. Cathleen and Nora depend on spoken testimony, remembered statements, and reports from people outside the cottage to understand what has happened to Michael and Bartley. Kaya's discussion therefore demonstrates that communication in the play is

closely connected with uncertainty, fear, and the limitations of human knowledge. However, she primarily treats communication as a means of acquiring knowledge rather than as an acoustic phenomenon. The present study develops her argument by asking how the sounds and silences through which information is communicated create an atmosphere of uncertainty inside the domestic space. In this way, Kaya's epistemological uncertainty can be reconsidered as an acoustic and existential experience. The voices of the characters do not simply provide information; their hesitations, repetitions, remembered words, and silences also reveal their emotional insecurity and limited understanding of death and loss.

Gabriel Sunday Bamgbose's "Naturalist Aesthetics in John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and *The Playboy of the Western World*" provides an important comparative foundation for understanding the relationship between environment, human behavior, and psychological experience in the two plays. Bamgbose argues that individuals' attitudes and actions are conditioned by the forces of the environments in which they live. His study connects naturalist dramatic theory with Freudian psychoanalysis in order to explore the relationship between human beings and their surroundings. In *Riders to the Sea*, the harsh island environment and the sea shape the characters' lives, while in *The Playboy of the Western World*, the social and environmental conditions of rural Mayo influence Christy's behavior and development. Bamgbose's discussion of the "symbiotic relationship between person and place" is particularly relevant to the present research because it connects environment with human psychology and behavior. He also describes Synge's dramaturgy as a space where "art and life in its wild realities co-exist" (Bamgbose, 2013, p. 18). His comparative approach therefore provides a useful basis for connecting environment, psychology, behavior, and identity across both plays. However, Bamgbose's understanding of environment remains primarily naturalistic and psychological; he does not examine the environment as a soundscape or acoustic space. The present research consequently extends his argument by investigating how environmental sounds, silence, domestic space, and family interaction contribute to existential identity and filial conflict. Thus, the present study brings together Bamgbose's environmental perspective with Schafer's concept of soundscape, McLuhan's concept of acoustic space, and Sartre's existentialism.

3. Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

In the study of modern Irish drama, physical space, most notably the rural cottage has long been recognized as a site of intense cultural, postcolonial, and domestic negotiation. However, traditional critical approaches have predominantly relied on visual paradigms: spatial boundaries, stage properties, and bodily blocking. This theoretical framework proposes that the domestic space in Irish drama, particularly in the works of John Millington Synge, is fundamentally an acoustic construct. The cottage interior is defined not merely by stone walls and timber doors, but by the sonic currents that pass through them.

R. Murray Schafer's *Soundscape Theory* (Acoustic Ecology), which provides the vocabulary to analyze the sonic environment and its structural mechanics. Jean-Paul Sartre's *Existential Phenomenology*, which frames human consciousness as a continuous struggle for radical autonomy against ambient, unchosen conditions (facticity).

Intra-domestic sound includes dialogue, whispers, footsteps, household activities, knocking, movement, and significant moments of silence occurring within the domestic interior. Extra-domestic and off-stage sound includes sounds originating outside the domestic space, such as the sea, waves, animals, crowds, shouting, cheering, and other environmental or social noises. These sounds are examined as forces that penetrate or disturb the apparent boundaries of domestic space. Linguistic and vocal acoustics focus on the rhythm, repetition, tone, cadence, pauses, intensity, and distinctive Hiberno-English speech patterns in Synge's dramatic language. Particular attention is given to storytelling and verbal performance as mechanisms through which characters construct, negotiate, or challenge identity. Through these categories, the study examines how acoustic elements establish emotional atmosphere, create psychological tension, strengthen or weaken spatial boundaries, and influence relationships among characters.

Sartre's concepts of freedom, self-definition, and the tension between being-in-itself and being-for-itself provide a basis for examining how characters attempt to move beyond identities imposed by family and society. In *The Playboy of the Western World*, Christy Mahon's identity is examined as an unstable and performative construction. His storytelling and verbal confidence allow him temporarily to transform his social position within the shebeen. His relationship with Old Mahon further reveals the conflict between inherited familial identity and the desire for individual self-definition. In *Riders to the Sea*, the analysis focuses on Maurya's relationship with her children and her repeated confrontation with death. The sea is interpreted not simply as a physical setting but as an overwhelming environmental presence whose sounds and movements continually remind the family of human vulnerability and mortality. The play therefore provides a significant context for examining existential identity through filial attachment, loss, and acceptance of death.

Acoustic and Existential theory and models:

Theorist	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Raymond Murray (1977) Soundscape	Keynote sounds – sea, waves	Signal sounds – cries, knocking, voices,	Listening – characters interpret sounds	Place identity – sound connects people, home and environment
Application to <i>Riders to the Sea</i>	Sea as continuous acoustic presence	Seashore cries and external sounds anticipate danger	Cathleen and Nora listen for sings	Acoustic environment produces an identity shaped by loss and island life
Application to <i>The Playboy of the Western World</i>	Rural sounds, fire, animals and village activity	Knocking, voices and shouting, storytelling	Characters listen to Christy's narratives and rumors	Community soundscape constructs and transforms Christy's identity
Marshall McLuhan Acoustic Space	Simultaneity	All-at-once perception	Participation	Margin
Application to <i>Riders to the Sea</i>	Past and present coexist through sound and memory	Sea, voices and memories overlap	Family members actively interpret sounds	Home and sea from an interconnected acoustic field
Application to <i>The Playboy of the Western World</i>	Past identity and present performance coexist	Storytelling creates simultaneous identities	Community participates in Christy's construction	No single voice permanently defines Christy
Jean-Paul Sartre Existentialism	Facticity	Freedom and choice	Inauthenticity	Authenticity
Application to <i>Riders to the Sea</i>	Poverty, widowhood, death and island life	Bartley's decision to travel to the fair	Desire to resist unbearable reality	Maurya's recognition of the human condition
Application to <i>The Playboy of the Western World</i>	Christy's violent family past	Choice to construct a new identity	"Playboy" identity as unstable	Movement toward an independent identity

3.2 Method

The principal method employed in this research is close textual reading combined with dramaturgical analysis. Relevant sounds, silences, pauses, vocal expressions, environmental noises, and off-stage sounds are identified in both plays. The identified acoustic elements are classified according to their spatial origins: intra-domestic, extra-domestic or off-stage, or linguistic. The study examines how sounds operate within the dramatic structure. Attention is given to stage directions, dialogue patterns, pauses, entrances and exits, off-stage events, and changes in vocal expression. The identified acoustic elements are then interpreted in relation to psychological conditions such as fear, anxiety, isolation, desire, grief, rebellion, belonging, and emotional dependence. These conditions are subsequently connected to existential concerns such as freedom, selfhood, thrownness, mortality, and the search for meaning. Particular attention is given to parent-child relationships and the ways in which authority, dependence, separation, loss, and resistance are expressed through speech, silence, and acoustic interaction. Finally, the findings from the two plays are compared to determine how Synge uses acoustic space differently or similarly to represent domesticity, existential identity, and filial conflict.

Primary Texts and Selection:

The primary textual sources of the study are John Millington Synge's two major plays:

1. *The Playboy of the Western World*
2. *Riders to the Sea*

These texts are selected because both plays strongly associate domestic life with external social and environmental forces while presenting significant conflicts involving family, identity, authority, mortality, and individual existence. Although the plays differ considerably in plot and dramatic atmosphere, both contain domestic spaces in which sounds and voices become important carriers of meaning. In *The Playboy of the Western World*, the shebeen functions as a social and domestic environment where Christy constructs and reconstructs his identity through storytelling, praise, conversation, and confrontation. In *Riders to the Sea*, the cottage becomes a space of mourning and uncertainty in which the sounds and presence of the sea continually remind Maurya and her family of mortality and loss.

Secondary Sources:

Secondary materials include scholarly books, journal articles, critical essays, and academic studies concerning Synge, Irish drama, acoustic theory, soundscape studies, existential philosophy, spatial theory, domesticity, and filial relationships. The secondary sources are used to establish the theoretical and critical context of the study rather than to replace close textual interpretation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Acoustic Space, Domesticity, and Existential Identity

John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea* present domestic space not simply as a physical place but as an emotional and acoustic environment. In both plays, the characters experience their homes through voices, noises, silences, cries, prayers, and sounds from the surrounding rural landscape. The domestic environment therefore becomes closely connected with the characters' psychological and existential experiences. This understanding corresponds with R. Murray Schafer's concept of the soundscape, which refers to the total field of sounds within a particular environment (Schafer, 1977). Similarly, Marshall McLuhan's idea of acoustic space helps explain how sound creates a sense of involvement and relationship between the individual and the surrounding environment (McLuhan, 1962). In *Riders to the Sea*, the cottage is particularly important because it is constantly connected to the sea through sound. The opening stage direction presents the setting as a "cottage kitchen" containing nets, oilskins, a spinning wheel, and other objects associated with island life (Synge, *Riders to the Sea*, opening stage direction). The cottage is therefore a domestic and working space, but it is never completely separated from the sea. The sea remains an invisible but powerful presence outside the house. Through the sound of the wind and waves, the external environment repeatedly enters the domestic interior. This relationship becomes especially clear in Maurya's final speech. After Bartley's body is brought into the cottage, Maurya says :

"They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me.... I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other" (Synge 13).

The quotation demonstrates how deeply sound is connected with Maurya's domestic existence. She does not merely see the sea as a physical threat ; she hears it from within her home. The "surf" in the east and west creates an acoustic environment that surrounds the cottage. The phrase "making a great stir" suggests that the sea becomes an overwhelming soundscape. Thus, the domestic interior is acoustically connected to the dangerous natural world. The sound of the sea also carries psychological meaning. Every time Maurya hears the wind or surf, she is reminded of the possibility of losing another son. Her domestic life is therefore shaped by anticipation, fear, and grief. The house becomes a space where external natural sounds are transformed into internal emotional experiences. In this sense, acoustic space becomes a form of existential experience because the sounds surrounding Maurya constantly remind her of human vulnerability and mortality. The same relationship between domesticity and sound can be observed in *The Playboy of the Western World*. Christy Mahon describes his earlier life with his father through a series of disturbing sounds :

"I'd hear himself snoring out, a loud lonesome snore he'd be making all times, the while he was sleeping, and he a man'd be raging all times, the while he was waking, like a gaudy officer you'd hear cursing and damning and swearing oaths" (Synge 19). This passage is particularly significant for understanding the relationship between acoustic space and domestic oppression. Christy remembers his father not through a visual description but through what he hears : "snoring," "raging," "cursing," "damning," and "swearing." The father's presence is therefore constructed acoustically. Even when Christy does not directly interact with Old Mahon, his father's voice and bodily sounds dominate the surrounding environment.

The expression "loud lonesome snore" is especially meaningful. The word "loud" suggests an intrusive and powerful sound, while "lonesome" suggests emotional isolation. The combination reflects Christy's domestic experience : his father occupies the acoustic space, but this domination does not create emotional closeness. Instead, it produces fear and loneliness. Christy's statement that his father would "put the fear of death" into the animals further demonstrates the destructive power of his presence (Synge 19). The father's soundscape extends beyond the human characters and affects the entire rural environment. The domestic space thus becomes a space of psychological pressure. A significant contrast exists between Christy's experience of his father's noisy presence and Maurya's experience of the sea. In both plays, sound represents a force that the characters cannot easily escape. For Christy, the sound comes primarily from the father ; for Maurya, it comes from the sea. In both cases, acoustic space becomes associated with fear, vulnerability, and existential uncertainty. Therefore, Synge's domestic spaces are not silent or isolated interiors. They are acoustically open spaces through which the surrounding world enters the characters' psychological lives. The cottage in *Riders to the Sea* and the rural domestic environment remembered by Christy in *The Playboy of the Western World* both demonstrate that sound can make an ordinary home a site of emotional and existential conflict.

4.2 Sound, Silence, and Filial Conflict

Sound and silence play an important role in the development of existential identity in both plays. Synge does not use sound simply as background atmosphere. Voices, cries, prayers, storytelling, and silence reveal the characters' inner conditions and their changing relationships with others. In *The Playboy of the Western World*, Christy's identity is initially associated with silence and invisibility. When he describes his earlier life, he says :

"Up to the day I killed my father, there wasn't a person in Ireland knew the kind I was, and I there drinking, waking, eating, sleeping, a quiet, simple poor fellow with no man giving me heed" (Synge 18).

The phrase "no man giving me heed" is central to understanding Christy's existential condition. He is physically present, but socially he is almost invisible. He has a body and a life, but he does not possess a recognized social identity. His silence is therefore connected with his lack of social power.

His arrival at the shebeen changes this situation. The shebeen becomes a space where Christy is listened to. His story attracts Pegeen, Michael, Shawn, and the villagers. Through storytelling, he creates a new identity for himself. His voice becomes the primary means through which he transforms from an insignificant young man into the celebrated "Playboy of the Western World." The transformation demonstrates that voice can become a form of existential self-creation. Christy is not simply discovering an identity that already exists; he constructs and performs a new identity through speech. The more people listen to him, the more confident he becomes.

This process can be understood through the contrast between Christy's earlier silence and his later verbal confidence. At the beginning, he describes himself as a "quiet, simple poor fellow." Later, he confidently tells his story, participates in conversations, challenges other men, and finally confronts his father. His increasing acoustic presence reflects his increasing sense of self.

The final confrontation is particularly important :

"Go on, I'm saying.... Not a word out of you. Go on from this" (Synge 70).

Here, Christy directly controls the father's speech. The command "Not a word out of you" reverses their earlier acoustic relationship. Earlier, Old Mahon dominated the domestic environment through his "raging," "cursing," and "swearing." Now Christy controls the conversation. The son who was previously dominated by the father's voice becomes the person who commands silence. This reversal is important for understanding filial conflict as an acoustic conflict. The struggle between father and son is not only physical or psychological; it is also a struggle over who has the authority to speak and who must remain silent. Christy achieves a temporary sense of independence when he gains control over the acoustic space. His final declaration confirms this transformation :

"Ten thousand blessings upon all that's here, for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment day" (Synge 70).

The speech demonstrates Christy's newly constructed identity. He no longer describes himself as a neglected son. Instead, he imagines himself as a confident individual capable of shaping his own future. His voice therefore becomes an expression of existential freedom. Both *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea* portray the domestic environment as a place where filial relationships become emotionally and existentially complicated. In *The Playboy of the Western World*, the central filial conflict occurs between Christy and Old Mahon. Christy describes his father in highly negative terms :

"He was a dirty man, God forgive him, and he getting old and crusty, the way I couldn't put up with him at all" (Synge 12).

This statement establishes the father as a figure of domination and emotional oppression. Christy does not describe his relationship with his father through affection or mutual understanding. Instead, he remembers Old Mahon through anger, fear, and resentment.

The acoustic description discussed earlier strengthens this conflict. Old Mahon is repeatedly associated with "snoring," "raging," "cursing," and "swearing." His physical authority is therefore reinforced by his acoustic dominance. Christy's identity has been formed within an environment where the father's voice is stronger than the son's. The father's authority also prevents Christy from developing an independent identity. Christy describes himself as someone who was not known or noticed by others. His identity remains largely defined by his relationship with Old Mahon. However, when Christy enters the shebeen, this situation begins to change. The domestic and social space of the shebeen allows him to speak, narrate, exaggerate, and perform. The people

around him listen to his story, and their response encourages him to construct a new identity. The conflict reaches its climax when Old Mahon returns. Christy initially becomes frightened, showing that the psychological power of the father has not completely disappeared. However, he eventually resists his father's authority. He declares :

"I'm master of all fights from now" (Synge 69).

This statement is important because it represents Christy's rejection of paternal domination. The word "master" signals a reversal of power. Earlier, Old Mahon controlled Christy's domestic life ; now Christy claims authority over his own life.

"Not a word out of you" (Synge 70)

Makes the reversal even clearer. The son controls the father's speech, while the father is forced to leave. In *Riders to the Sea*, however, the movement is different. Maurya's existential transformation occurs through a gradual movement from sound toward silence. Throughout the play, the women's crying, praying, and keening create an acoustic environment of grief. When Bartley's body is brought into the cottage, the women are described as "keening softly and swaying themselves with a slow movement" (Synge 13). The conflict therefore develops between maternal protection and filial responsibility. Maurya wants Bartley to remain at home because she has already lost Michael and fears losing another son. Bartley, however, understands that he must continue his work. His decision to leave demonstrates the limits of maternal control.

Maurya's fear becomes clear when she tries to prevent Bartley from going. She is not simply being controlling ; her fear comes from repeated experiences of death. The domestic space has become a place where memories of dead sons and fear for the surviving son exist together. This conflict is especially significant because the sea functions as an external force that challenges the mother-son relationship. Bartley's economic responsibility requires him to enter the dangerous acoustic and physical environment of the sea. Maurya's domestic desire for safety cannot protect him from this external reality.

After Bartley's death, the filial conflict reaches its final stage. Maurya says :

"They're all together this time, and the end is come" (Synge 15).

Her statement shows that the possibility of protecting her children has completely disappeared. The conflict between maternal desire and the sons' unavoidable relationship with the sea can no longer continue.

"What more can we want than that ? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied" (Synge 15)
Represents the resolution of the filial conflict through existential acceptance.

The keen is important because it gives collective expression to grief. Maurya's suffering is not completely private ; it becomes part of the soundscape of the cottage. Yet, at the end, the sound gradually decreases :

"[She pauses, and the keen rises a little more loudly from the women, then sinks away.]" (Synge 15).

This stage direction is highly significant for an acoustic reading. The movement from a louder keen toward silence parallels Maurya's psychological movement from intense grief toward acceptance. Silence here does not represent emptiness. Instead, it represents a moment of existential recognition.

Maurya finally states :

"No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied" (Synge 15).

This statement transforms her personal experience of loss into a universal understanding of human mortality. She recognizes that death cannot be prevented and that human beings cannot control the forces of existence. The contrast between the two plays is important. Christy discovers himself by finding his voice, while Maurya reaches existential acceptance through the reduction of sound into silence. In *The Playboy of the Western World*, sound is associated with self-assertion and identity formation. In *Riders to the Sea*, sound gradually gives way to silence and acceptance.

Thus, Synge presents two different acoustic routes toward existential identity. Christy moves from silence to speech finally to self-assertion, whereas Maurya moves from crying to keening, then to silence and ultimately to acceptance. Both patterns demonstrate that sound and silence are deeply connected with the characters' psychological and existential development.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined acoustic space and existential identity in John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea*, with particular attention to domesticity and filial conflicts. The discussion demonstrates that sound and silence are not merely theatrical elements in Synge's plays; they contribute significantly to the emotional, psychological, and existential experiences of the characters. By applying Soundscape Theory, Acoustic Space Theory, Spatial Theory, and Existentialist perspectives, the study has shown how domestic environments become meaningful through the sounds that surround the characters.

In *The Playboy of the Western World*, acoustic space is mainly created through human voices, storytelling, arguments, laughter, and paternal aggression. Christy's early life is dominated by his father's loud and threatening presence. His description of Old Mahon's "snoring," "raging," and "cursing" shows how sound becomes associated with fear and domestic oppression (Synge 19). However, Christy gradually develops his own voice in the shebeen. His storytelling allows him to gain attention, recognition, and confidence. His movement from being a "quiet, simple poor fellow" to an assertive storyteller demonstrates how voice becomes a means of constructing existential identity.

In *Riders to the Sea*, acoustic space is shaped more strongly by the sea, wind, crying, prayer, keening, and silence. The sound of the sea constantly enters Maurya's domestic world and reminds her of the deaths of her family members. The cottage therefore becomes a space where natural sound and human grief meet. After Bartley's death, the gradual reduction of the women's keening leads toward Maurya's final acceptance of mortality. Her statement, "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied" (Synge 15),

Expresses her movement from personal grief toward existential understanding. Although the two plays present different forms of conflict, they are closely connected through their treatment of sound, domestic space, family relationships, and identity. *The Playboy of the Western World* focuses mainly on a father-son conflict, while *Riders to the Sea* presents a mother-son conflict. In the first play, Christy struggles to escape paternal authority and establish his own identity. In the second, Maurya struggles to protect her son from forces beyond human control. The most important difference is found in the characters' responses to acoustic experience. Christy moves from silence to speech, using his voice to resist paternal authority and construct a new identity. Maurya moves from sound and mourning toward silence, using acceptance to confront the inevitability of death. Thus, the two plays offer contrasting but complementary forms of existential experience. Both texts also demonstrate that domestic space cannot be separated from the wider environment. Christy's home is psychologically shaped by his father's voice, while Maurya's cottage is continuously connected to the sea through its sounds. In both cases, the external or interpersonal world enters the domestic sphere acoustically and affects the characters' identities.

Therefore, the study concludes that Synge uses sound and silence as dramatic forms of psychological and existential expression. The domestic spaces of both plays become sites of memory, authority, fear, loss, resistance, and transformation. The comparison of the two texts reveals that acoustic experience is an important but often overlooked dimension of Synge's representation of human identity and familial relationships.

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