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Transformations within (Existentialist)  
Invariance in *Ariel* by Marina Carr with Reference  
to John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*

## ABSTRACT

This article is a comparative analysis of Marina Carr's *Ariel* (2002) and John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. The main research context comes from common critical treatments of Carr's oeuvre within the scope of Synge's influences. The plays discussed in this essay have not been subject to comparative studies before (to the best of the author's knowledge). The main argument consists in examining the loci of invariance and their transformations with reference to themes, characters' roles, and their relationships, which will be compared in terms of notions of necessity, generational suffering, reliance on the worldly, and death in the unknown realm, partly treated within existentialism.


**KEYWORDS:** Carr, Marina; Synge, John Millington, *Ariel*; *Riders to the Sea*, comparison, invariance, existentialism

## STRESZCZENIE

Transformacje w (egzystencjalnej) niezmienności: analiza porównawcza *Ariel* Mariny Carr i *Riders to the Sea* Johna Millingtona Synge'a

Celem artykułu jest dokonanie analizy sztuki *Ariel* Mariny Carr i *Riders to the Sea* Johna Millingtona Synge'a. Twórczość Carr często traktowana jest jako kontynuacja dramaturgii Synge'a i utwory tej irlandzkiej dramatopisarki są analizowane w odniesieniu do dramatów Synge'a. Porównanie *Ariel* i *Riders to the Sea* wydaje się jednak tematem, który wciąż warto podejmować i wykazywać aspekty niezmienności i ich transformacji. Omówione porównania dotyczą takich motywów, jak: konieczność, pokoleniowe cierpienie, poleganie na doczesności oraz śmierć w nieznannej przestrzeni. Zostaną one częściowo potraktowane w swoim ogólnym odniesieniu do egzystencjalizmu.

**SŁOWA KLUCZE:** Carr, Marina; *Ariel*; Synge, John Millington; *Riders to the Sea*; analiza porównawcza, niezmiennosc, egzystencjalizm

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This article is a discussion of Marina Carr's play *Ariel* as compared to, or, more correctly, referred to, John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904). Produced in 2002 for the first time, the play is freely based on ancient Greek tragedies, specifically *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Euripides (see González-Chacón, 2007; Mesquita, 2010; Elrahman, 2021). In "John Synge in context; or, re-positioning Synge: the point of balance," Ann Saddlemyer treats Carr as the continuator of Synge's dramatic tradition in contemporary Irish drama, claiming that "If I were to identify Synge's most obvious descendant I would choose Marina Carr" (Saddlemyer, 2007, p. 25). She argues that "Carr too reveals the dysfunction and damage of a society the world would rather ignore" (Saddlemyer, 2007, p. 25). Among other scholars, Saddlemyer opens up possibilities for discussing Carr's *Ariel* and Synge's *Riders to the Sea*:

Marina Carr's work is, as Synge felt all art should be, possible to only one person at one period and in one place. Her most recent play, *Ariel*, digs deeply into psychic darkness, moving far beyond Synge in her exploration of the passion of destruction (Saddlemyer, 2007, p. 26).

Considering *The Well of the Saints* and *The Playboy of the Western World*, she adds that

[t]he other play by Synge forever anthologised is, of course, *Riders to the Sea*, which leads us back to Marina Carr. As powerful as it is brief, at first sight the play seems the odd one out in Synge's eight hours of theatre (Saddlemyer, 2007, p. 26).

Saddlemyer also stresses the origins of the story behind the plot of the play (Saddlemyer, 2007, p. 26).

Saddlemyer's treatment of Synge's and Carr's works within the poetics of continuity has a lot of validity shown in other analyses of the playwrights' oeuvres. Two examples are worth considering: Anthony Roche's "The woman on the threshold: J.M. Synge's *The Shadow of the Glen*, Teresa Deevy's *Katie Roche* and Marina Carr's *The Mai*" (1995) and "Globalisation and adaptation in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*... and *Blood Wedding*" by Kübra Vural Özbey (2023). In Özbey's essay, the comparison between Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and Carr's *Blood Wedding* is indirectly present via reference to John D. Ajala's article "Similarities between J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and F.G. Lorca's *Blood Wedding*" (1985). Interpreting *Riders to the Sea* and *Blood Wedding*, Ajala puts forth a hypothesis that "*Riders* is a play about the common man's struggle with nature, represented by the sea.... *Wedding* is also a play about the common man's struggle with nature; however, this time nature is man himself" (1985,

p. 314). The author is also aware of the obvious differences – “man versus the sea in *Riders* and man versus his own passion in *Wedding*” (Ajala, 1985, p. 314; cf. Özbey, 2023, p. 413). Anthony Roche’s essay focuses not so much on comparison as on “transition” in the dramatic portrayal of patriarchy, with its agents of upholding and demolition, tracked down to Synge’s *The Shadow of the Glen*, through *Katie Roche* by Terasa Deevy to end with the new women’s voices in *The Mai* by Carr (see Roche, 1995; Konecniak, 2011). Explicit comparisons between *Riders to the Sea* and *Ariel* do not appear in these discussions, but the aspect of transition, within invariance,<sup>1</sup> or struggles with nature, will be relevant here, as the conflict displayed originally in Synge’s dramatic text<sup>2</sup> can be related to an early twenty-first-century portrayal of the Irish in Carr’s *Ariel*. Such aspects also imply existentialist issues which have been found in *Riders to the Sea* and some of them will be discussed with reference to the similarities found in the two plays.

Transformations have been occurring in all Ireland and the situation of the Aran Islands was no exception; already in 1911, they were signalled by Edward J. O’Brien in his introduction to Synge’s play: “The Aran Islands from which Synge gained his inspiration are rapidly losing that sense of isolation and self-dependence” (1911, p. ix). O’Brien also wonders: “Whether or not Synge finds a successor, it is none the less true that in English dramatic literature *Riders to the Sea* has an historic value which it would be difficult to overestimate in its accomplishment and its possibilities” (1911, p. ix). Carr is Synge’s successor and themes depicted in *Riders to the Sea* can be treated in terms of invariance whose transformations are hidden or, on the contrary, more pronounced, there in *Ariel*.

Comparisons between the two plays may be risky, bearing in mind the structural complexity of *Ariel*: divided into three acts, with a time lapse of ten years between Act one and Act two, and two months between Act two

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1 With reference to Synge’s works, following Francis Mulher’s ideas, invariance has been mentioned by Sean Hewitt as “an increasing awareness of change [that] has a temporalising effect, defining modernity as ‘a form of «temporalization», an invariant production of present, past and future that «valorizes the new» and, by that very act, «produces the old»” (Hewitt, 2017, p. 92). In the examination of the playwright’s familiarity with this feature of modernity, its spatial and temporal inseparability of “old and new,” Hewitt notes that “in his Wicklow essays and *The Aran Islands*, Synge was persistently concerned with two opposing temporalities, the one circular... and the other linear, regulated and thus subject to, and reflective of, modernizing forces” (Hewitt, 2017, p. 92). Hewitt argues that the dynamics of such temporalities is found in *Riders to the Sea* and other one-act plays by Synge (Hewitt, 2017).

2 *Riders to the Sea* has already been analysed from the perspective of the demise of patriarchy and decolonisation in my monograph *Women on Stage and the Decolonisation of Ireland. Counter-discursiveness in the Drama of the Irish Literary Revival (1892–1926)* (Konecniak, 2011, pp. 93–107).

and Act three, and *Riders to the Sea* being only a one-act piece. However, in both plays the setting does not change throughout the developments of their plots, being the interior of an Aran cottage in Synge's play and the luxurious living room of an antiquity-modelled house in Carr's work. In addition, in *Ariel*, there is an accompanying piece of music, the same one in each act ("Mors et Vita," Gounod's *Judex*; see Carr, p. 66). This essay will demonstrate that the original episode depicting the mother losing her last son, after having lost all the menfolk in the family (who have been perishing in the sea for generations), and the murderous cycle set in motion by Fermoy, an aspiring Irish politician, and murderer, but also by his ascendants, have a lot of invariable elements, even though one can find their transformations.

These, comprising the importance of the notion of necessity, reliance on worldly possessions, generational suffering and death in the unknown realm, will be investigated within the thesis – based on an interpretative commentary, given in Act two by Boniface, a Catholic monk, both to Stephen (his nephew, Fermoy's son), and to the readers: "Everythin ya can possibly imagine has happened already or, if ud hasn't, will shortly" (Carr, 2009, p. 121). The argumentative structure will follow the division of Carr's play into three acts. Boniface's words can be interpreted as a universal commentary on the unpredictability of the surrounding reality and people's behaviours; however, they may also imply the existentialist belief in the singularity and fragility of human existence in the ever-changing reality – never to be mastered in an individual's worldly struggle. This article does not aim to stress the advantage of the existentialist thought other potential sources underlying the dramatic correspondences between Synge and Carr, which justifies the use of the parentheses in the title; instead, it will explore the possibility of applying selected existentialist approaches, specifically the notion of existentialist necessity,<sup>3</sup> as one of the foundations upon which the similarities between *Riders to the Sea*<sup>4</sup> and *Ariel* may rest.

As a more theoretically complex construct than such themes as generational suffering or the quest for worldly possessions, the concept of necessity requires extended commentary, since, specifically in its context of

3 The development of this interpretative thread has been suggested in one of the reviews, for which I am enormously grateful.

4 A regards the application of existentialism in a comparative analysis of Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and Derek Walcott's *The Sea at Dauphin*, one has to mention Fiyinfoluwa Onarinde's article "Fate and freewill: a critical overview of the existentialist theory in Derek Walcott's *The Sea at Dauphin* and John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*" (1992), which considers the conflict between the inevitability of human death and "disposition," the necessity, to make choices – the continuous state and process determined by the power of the sea. Thus, the present article is yet another attempt at showing existentialist issues in *Riders to the Sea* in comparison with another play.

existentialism, it manifests itself most saliently in both plays. This, correspondingly, can be used as evidence for the deep framework found in the plot invariance of Synge's and Carr's works. Although scholars have already attempted to interpret Synge's oeuvre through the prism of existentialist thought and *Riders to the Sea* in no exception in this respect,<sup>5</sup> the notion of necessity can serve as the crucial conceptual *tertium comparationis* for interpreting both plays. In general terms, necessity is seen as the choice limitation imposed upon the apparent freedom and bestowed on human beings, and in the human existential condition is used to dictate the conditions that control one's "sphere of existence" and, thus, also decision-making, as postulated by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, whose stance, "situated freedom," is that "choice is always embedded in and dependent upon the meaningful choices disclosed by a specific social and historical situation" (Guignon, 1998; cf. Chakraberty, 2013). The scope of freedom paradoxically becomes the realm of necessity, as a human being is involved in the invariant process of "choice- and decision-making" (Tatarkiewicz, 1981, p. 352; cf. Onarinde, 1992; Chakraberty, 2013). What is relevant in this process is that, in the existentialist vision of human existence, there are no external moral and ethical referents that an individual could use and, thus, the understanding of necessity that one is determined by may remain misunderstood by others (see Tatarkiewicz, 1981, p. 352; cf. Onarinde, 1992).

Existentialist considerations of necessity, noticed by other scholars with reference to *Riders to the Sea*, presuppose similar treatments of suffering, which constitutes unavoidable part of human existence, and also treated by other scholars addressing Synge's play, within existentialist thought (cf. Chakraberty, 2013; Onarinde, 1992), and the worldliness, linked to the aesthetic way of life in Kierkegaard's understanding of the human life, as one of the three possibilities, along with the ethical and religious ones (see Tatarkiewicz, 1981, p. 66; cf. Lippitt, 2023). The focus on the worldliness adds to the similarity between Synge's and Carr's plays in terms of their

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5 *Riders to the Sea* has already been analysed from the perspective of existentialism in Puja Chakraberty's article "Damned forever. Fatalism in John Millington Synge's *Riders To The Sea*" (2013). Chakraberty focuses on the seeming manifestations of "free will" as determined by the features of the context that one has been functioning in, which is part of the notion of existentialist necessity, and, specifically, addresses the pervasive influence of the sea, both the "giver" and "taker," on the presence of pessimism to which the Aran people, specifically Maurya, are subject. The issue of necessity itself, in Arthur Schopenhauer's understanding – "every man being what he is and placed in the circumstances which for the moment obtain, but which on their part also arise by strict necessity, can absolutely never do anything else than just what at that moment he does do" (as cited in Chakraberty, 2013) – is discussed there as well. Chakraberty refers to the former comparative analysis of *Riders to the Sea* by Onarinde. Existentialist problems are also touched upon by Monami Mukherjee in "The role of the sea in *Riders to the Sea* by J.M. Synge" (2023).

plots and can more or less closely be related to the existentialist framework, but it may as well inspire other, oftentimes contrary, readings.

## 1. Uncertainty and reliance on the worldly

In Act one of *Ariel*, we are invited to the birthday celebrations. The Fitzgerald family is complete and the happy party participants include Fermoy and Frances, the parents of Ariel; Fermoy's monk brother (Boniface) and their maternal aunt (Sarah); and three children: the eponymous girl, her younger sister (Elaine) and even younger brother (Stephen). The unexpected guest is Fermoy's political contestant, Hannafin, who comes to blackmail Fermoy that he should remove his ministerial candidacy to avoid being discredited in public. There are important secrets from the past. Fermoy's mother was murdered by her husband, her body thrown into a lake. This issue is raised by Hannafin and is worth scrutinising in detail. Insinuating remarks are exchanged by the two political rivals, and they address the inconvenient pasts involving their families. Hannafin delivers his warnings and shows his superiority of knowledge about Fermoy's past: "You were forged in a bloodbath, Fitzgerald, and the son allas carries the father somewhere inside of him" (Carr, 2009, p. 96).

Hannafin presents his version of how the generational criminality has shaped Fermoy (cf. Elrahman, 2021, p. 172). This focus on the family "lineage" – of course, not in the history of murders – is the aspect which may make *Ariel* relate to *Riders to the Sea*. In Synge's play, one can observe the insistence on generational fate passed down, although here it is linked to the unavoidable injustice of the natural world, the sea. The suffering of Maurya's family has reached the consecutive generations and it has been impossible to prevent further deaths till the last man has perished (cf. Konecniak, 2011, p. 107). In *Ariel* the generational circle of tragedies is evident from the beginning, whereas in *Riders to the Sea* this realisation comes later, as emotionally admitted by Maurya, when she is ascertained that Michael is dead, and she is about to find out that the same has befallen Bartley:

There was Sheamus and his father, and his own father again, were lost in a dark night, and not a stick or sign was seen of them when the sun went up. There was Patch after was drowned out of a curagh that turned over (Synge, 1911, p. 39).

The old woman expresses her sorrow over those who have died so far and realises that her last son will follow this tragic path, too (cf. Konecniak,

2011, p. 100; cf. Chakraberty, 2013), which shows the existential inevitability of death inscribed within the fate of a human being (see Chakraberty, 2013).

In *Ariel* Hannafin criticises Frances for letting the grave of her first-born son, James, become overgrown with weeds, as if she did not remember the late beloved any more: “I passed by your son’s grave, tiny little yoke of a yoke, fierce neglected lookin, reminded me a you” (Carr, 2009, p. 94). This form of unfair criticism can be another point of tangency with the dramatic situation in Synge’s play, specifically the criticism that Maurya experiences in *Riders to the Sea*. One of the neighbours says that she has not been prepared for the death of her son as she has forgotten to buy the nails for the coffin: “It’s a great wonder she wouldn’t think of the nails, and all the coffins she’s seen made already” (Synge, 1911, p. 43). The two critical voices, that of Hannafin and the Aran neighbour, miss the depth and the real dimension of suffering. Frances has been fostering the memory of her dead son (and first husband) through her attachment to the locket she keeps wearing (cf. Elrahman, 2021, p. 180) and Maurya does not remember to bring the nails as she has already buried her son in her heart. In this aspect, the two plays show the presence of miscomprehension of the deep suffering experienced by the mothers.

Act one of Carr’s play ends with a joyous departure of Ariel and her father, as Fermoy wants his daughter to take him for a ride in her new car, the birthday gift. We do not exactly know what happens next, as, when Fermoy is interviewed by Verona, we learn that Ariel disappeared after leaving to show the car to her friend (Carr, 2009, p. 109). Yet, if we were to associate Ariel’s disappearance with the vehicle, both a gift and means of transportation, we could find a transformed analogy to the disappearance of Bartley in *Riders to the Sea*, wherein he is reported to have been knocked by the pony that he was riding to catch the boat. In Synge’s play the pony serves as a means of transportation but also as a commodity offered for sale at the fair in Galway. It is what he has been given in the world, as a commodity, and on which he has relied too much. Such a duality of function also features in *Ariel*, wherein the car is a vehicle and a valuable gift, the commodity that Fermoy bought for his daughter (cf. Elrahman, 2021, p. 1740). Both the pony and the car become related to the symbolic and literal punishment, via the infliction of death (cf. Ajala, 1985, p. 324; Özbek, 2023, pp. 414–415), due to the human reliance on the possessions, which might be indicative of the Kierkegaardian notion of the aesthetical way, wherein the dependence on materialism and seeking worldly pleasures and experiences is the affirmation of the transitoriness of human existence and the escape from the awareness of there being not now and here only (see Tatarkiewicz, 1981, p. 66; Lippitt & Evans, 2023; cf. Chakraberty, 2013).

To use Kierkegaard's words, "the God-forsaken worldliness of earthly life shuts itself in complacency."<sup>6</sup>

With reference to Synge's play, Ajala notices the death-bringing symbolism of horses when comparing *Riders to the Sea* and *Blood Wedding*: "The horses themselves whether red, grey, or white, are agents of death in both plays" (Ajala, 1985, p. 324; cf. Özbey, 2023, p. 414). When relating this symbolism to *Ariel*, we should expand the original scope to cover the car, which, as a gift and bringer of happiness, an example of human reliance on worldly things, brings death. This is only a subtle indication, maybe exaggerated, of what would become of Fermoy following his quest for power and pursuing the worldly career.<sup>7</sup> This interpretative thread could be valid and relevant as one of the attempts made at comprehending Fermoy's obsession with lavishness. Fermoy's existence, the affluent way of life and gift giving suggest the aesthetic way with no interest in deep religious and ethical dimensions of the human life, which, otherwise, would require the abandoning of the worldly (cf. Mesquita, 2010).

In the first act of *Ariel*, yet another aspect for comparison emerges. Boniface is presented as playing an intermediary role in the conflicts among the family members. Still, we should speak of ambiguity in his depiction, as what Carr does is focuses on the human side of him, and other clergymen, too, not avoiding such problems as alcoholism and senile dementia (see González-Chacón, 2007, p. 195). The former, experienced by Boniface himself, has been defeated by him before the play begins, and the latter is particularly crucial in the context of the fall in vocations, and the aging clergy left on their own. Boniface wants to comfort his family members and he has been helping his older priestly mates, even though the way he describes his assistance again is crudely exaggerated (see Carr, 2009; cf. González-Chacón, 2007). What is also crucial is that he exercises some authority in the play. It is he whom Fermoy asks for helping him succeed in his political career and it is him whom Frances asks the same as she is afraid that, with another failure, her husband will no longer be bearable.

In *Riders to the Sea* the role of the young priest can be inferred from utterances of other characters. He gives Nora the bundle of clothes and informs her that the clothes have been left in Donegal and might have belonged to Michael. The same priest assures the girl that if Michael is dead, Bartley

6 S. Kierkegaard, an excerpt from *Works of Love*, quoted in the *Wikipedia* entry on existentialism ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existentialism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existentialism)).

7 Mesquita links the play's focus on materiality with necessity: "*Ariel* points to the necessity of renewal. The many problems we are faced with in our contemporary world demand a persistent evaluation of the dominant values which rule our lives. Material progress is not to be condemned, but spirituality and ideality must prevail" (2010, p. 306).



is not going to die, too, being the only remaining son, although he cannot stop him from departing (see Synge, 1911, p. 19). The young priest's role is linked to providing information and solace, a kind of mediator between people's tragedies and their suffering (see Koneczniak, 2011, p. 102). However, if the daughters trust, and their mother seems to trust, the priest's words, the local men are certain that Bartley will go (cf. Koneczniak, 2011, p. 102). Thus, the role of this young priest is ambiguous, and this ambiguity is further developed in Carr's *Ariel*.

## 2. Transformations within suffering and death in the unknown

In the second act of Carr's play, we experience the transformation of the suffering of Maurya from Synge's play into the shared suffering by Boniface and Frances, both unable to come to terms after Ariel's death. The reasons behind their suffering might differ. Boniface cannot deny the fact that he did not prevent Fermoy from his murderous intentions and Frances links it to the fate, having lost her first husband and son, and perhaps the punishment inflicted for betraying Charles, her first husband, which, in this respect, undermines an existentialist reading of the play, wherein the occurrence of death cannot be determined by extra-existential forces. Frances also has no knowledge regarding the whereabouts of Ariel, the body not found yet, and she hopes that her daughter might return. If we were to combine these reasons and relate them to the dilemma faced by Maurya, we could find similar emotions there, as she might feel guilty for not being able to prevent their sons from going to Galway; she may still hope that Michael has not been dead yet, having no evidence of otherwise, and the whole circle of fatalities has been considered the fate of the Aran community, of which she is aware (cf. Koneczniak, 2011, pp. 105–107; cf. Chakraborty 2013; cf. Onarinde, 1992). Along the same line, Boniface feels guilty for not preventing his brother from committing the bloodshed act and he might partly be held responsible for the death of Ariel. When relating this responsibility to *Riders to the Sea*, the fact that the young priest did not stop Bartley from going may also make this figure accountable for the young Aran man's death, as Maurya can be likewise. In the case of both plays, such an interpretative direction would suggest counter-existentialist reading, as, otherwise, the characters would realise that burdening anyone with the responsibility for the death caused by the incidence of reality would be illogical.

Referring to other points of convergence, In *Ariel*, one can find a tacit agreement between Elaine and Fermoy, and she is exerting a profound

influence on her father's career. He trusts her and, naturally, she would have assumed the role of his continuator, if not prevented by Fermoy's death and the ensuing murderous act committed by herself (for which she will definitely be punished). This also marks a salient contrast in terms of transformation of gender roles within the family, which leads to another change, when compared with *Riders to the Sea*. If Nora and Cathleen would be faced with new responsibilities following the departure of Bartley, the last living man in the family (Koneczeniak, 2011, pp. 103–104), Elaine assumes this responsibility when her father is still alive, and nothing heralds his death. Furthermore, if one can also define relationships between Stephen and Elaine in *Ariel*, becoming increasingly strained and showing no agreement between the siblings, in Synge's play the two sisters have a particularly good rapport, understanding each other and showing the same feelings to the mother and the living brother. They reach a consensus as to what to do with the bundle and agree on further activities (see Synge, 1911; cf. Chakraborty, 2013).

The strongest reference to Synge's play found in the second act surfaces in the dialogue between Frances and Fermoy just before the murder. When the wife asks the already famous politician – and her husband – what happened to Ariel, he answers: "I tould ya, I returned her to where she cem from," and thus clarifies: "She rode ouha God from nowhere and to God she returned" (Carr, 2009, s. 125). Fermoy believes in his pact with his distorted image of God and the murder was an act of returning God's "possession" so that the man could prosper. This explanation becomes the central argument in Fermoy's further statements. However, there is also a spatial aspect of Fermoy's answer since, just before the moment of his death, he reveals – "whispers" – that Ariel's body was hidden in Cuura Lake (Carr, 2009, p. 128). When combining the metaphysical and physical dimensions of Fermoy's answer, one can paraphrase Fermoy's statement in this way: "I tould ya, I returned her to Lake Cuura ["where she cem from"]." Regarding Boniface's account of what has been found in the bed of the lake (in Act three), different human bodies, and probably the remains of Fermoy and Boniface's mother, the analogy of this particular lake to the sea in Synge's play may be justified, the sea being the unknown realm of death inflicted upon the Aran men (cf. Hewitt, 2017; cf. Mukherjee, 2023).

Like the situation depicted in *Ariel*, where the body of the girl has been hidden for ten years in the lake, in *Riders to the Sea* the sea has not given most of the dead bodies back immediately. Both the sea and the lake are vast spaces shrouded in the secrets never to be revealed. With reference to Carr's play, María del Mar González-Chacón thus observes:

In *Ariel* the importance of landscapes is (...) well-asserted. It is the Cuura Lake the one in charge of keeping the secrets. Enchantment, mystery, and sense of place are attached to Carr's places and landscapes become characters in themselves (2007, pp. 195–196; cf. Elrahman, 2021, p. 178).

Correspondingly, it is the sea in *Riders to the Sea* that guards the knowledge concerning the identity of those who have perished there, one salient example being Maurya's utterance:

There does be a power of young men floating round in the sea, and what way would they know if it was Michael they had, or another man like him, for when a man is nine days in the sea, and the wind blowing, it's hard set his own mother would be to say what man was it (Synge, 1911, p. 40).

### 3. The necessity

For Fermoy, Necessity was his idiosyncratic vision of God (cf. Mesquita, 2010), determining his choice of actions and decision-making processes, resembling the existentialist dilemma of humans' freedom, and the sea itself in Synge's play has also been compared to God: Ajala makes reference to Robin Skelton's interpretation "that we can equate the sea with God" (Ajala, 1985, p. 316; cf. Chakraberty, 2013), which makes *Ariel* and *Riders to the Sea* similar in their symbolic treatment of divinity and the consideration of nature as part of it (cf. Elrahman, 2021). In this vein, Ajala comments that this symbolism in *Riders to the Sea*

supports the inference raised earlier by this writer [Skelton] about the sea being a god who "enjoys" the "sacrifices" being offered unwillingly by the islanders (Ajala, 1985, p. 317).

Such an analogy between the sea and the false idea of God requiring sacrifices is again a point of tangency between the sea in *Riders to the Sea* and Fermoy's concept of "god" in *Ariel*. Yet, only partly agreeing with Skelton's interpretation, I would contest this unwillingness on the part of all Irish men; for example, Bartley shows none of this.

In *Ariel*, in Act three, Elaine completes the cycle of murderous continuity. The daughter can be treated in terms of the evil destruction started by Fermoy's father and taken on by himself. It is Elaine who ends the deadly series and who believes to have established a special connection with her father. She tries to explain Fermoy's intentions to her brother:

He told me ... Well, I asked him about her waning time. Venice... And he told me the whole thing. Very emotional he was too. Ariel was the stroke of a destiny, he said, woven into him from the beginning. Ariel was Necessity itself, the thing that's decided outside of time (Carr, 2009, p. 130).

The passage offers one of variations on the concept of metaphysical motivations behind people's activities, with Necessity (capitalised in Carr's play) being the central idea responsible for human pathological behaviours, the inevitable burden upon freedom in existentialist terms (cf. Chakraberty, 2013). However, the assumption about there being some other reality beyond that of human existence, as suggested in the words recounted by Elaine, seems to question a Heideggerian existentialist reading in this respect (see Tatarkiewicz, 1981).

Fermoy has sacrificed Ariel because of his belief in unavoidable Necessity, his "god" that is the giver of his career but, at the same time, the taker of his beloved ones (cf. Mesquita, 2010). This god determines Fermoy's freedom and decision-making as to the possibility of letting his older daughter live and the necessity of killing her, both extremes created only in his own system of morality and law. Ariel, for Fermoy, has never belonged to the living, and he only returned her to the non-existence. When searching for the potential analogies with *Riders to the Sea*, we can compare the importance of the sea in Synge's play to the existential "Necessity," as made crucial in Carr's work, too. The sea is both the giver of sustenance and the taker of the beloveds' lives, seen from the perspective of Maurya (cf. Ajala, 1985, p. 316; Chakraberty, 2013; Mukherjee, 2023). If her family is to survive, they must be dependent on the sea (see Koneczeniak, 2011, p. 98) and, interpreted through existentialist necessity, such reliance narrows down their scope of possible choices, too (cf. Chakraberty, 2013; Onarinde, 1992). In a similar way, if Fermoy wants to succeed, he has had to rely on his Necessity and any escape from, or opposition to, it would have been futile. Thus, the murder committed by Frances in the previous act can be considered a symbolic act of opposition against Necessity in which her husband had believed, and the desperate act of aggression targeting this necessity for taking Charles, James, and Ariel away. Frances somehow brutally responds to Maurya's salient reconciliation after the loss of her last son, the acceptance of her sorrow. The suffering of Synge's heroine stems from both the impossibility to break the eternal circle of death in the sea and the necessity to depend on it (cf. Chakraberty, 2013; Onarinde, 1992).

In the final act of *Ariel*, we can observe lack of respect for the dead displayed by the family members, except for Frances and Boniface, as well as Sarah, to some extent. The scene in which the coffin with Ariel's body is already in the house comprises a significant element of the setting. Elaine

shows no regard for the body of her dead sister. Stephen treats Ariel's body more like an "interesting" phenomenon than the dead girl. When the brother sees the body, he says "Thought she'd be behher preserved, Cuura Lake bein a bog lake and all," to which Elaine replies: "She looked behher when they took her up first. Forensics scraped her down" (Carr, 2009, p. 129). The girl's body is treated like a forensic curiosity; yet, it can also be related to two plotline elements in *Riders to the Sea*. One can treat the remains of Ariel within the significance of the clothes left after Michael. The two daughters are first inspecting the stocking and shirt brought by the sea to the shore; then, when Maurya leaves, this bundle of clothes serves as the evidence of Michael's death and, paradoxically, the only thing left after his death: "And isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher, but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?" (Synge, 1911, pp. 32–33) – the question Nora asks can serve as a commentary on the transitory nature of human existence. This commentary and the initial exchange between Stephen and Elaine are transformations of invariance when one would ponder upon what is left behind a human being after they die – this implies the Heideggerian belief in the emptiness beyond existence: an individual already sentenced to death once they are born (see Tatarkiewicz, 1981).

Also, at the end of *Riders to the Sea*, the dead body of Bartley is brought to the cottage. It is Nora who is to herald this event, as she first notices something strange happening outside, "Did you hear that, Cathleen? Did you hear a noise in the north-east?" (Synge, 1911, p. 38), and continues that "[t]hey're carrying a thing among them and there's water dripping out of it and leaving a track by the big stones" (Synge, 1911, p. 38). When the two daughters confirm that Michael is dead, "men carry in the body of Bartley, laid on a plank, with a bit of a sail over it, and lay it on the table" (Synge, 1911, p. 41). This act makes *Riders to the Sea* and *Ariel* comparable in the invariance of the proximity of life and death, now united under the one roof in both plays. What varies is the treatment of such display of death. In Synge's play, the dead body of Michael is sprinkled with holy water and treated with due solemnity. In Carr's play, the characters comment on its appearance and then Elaine commits an act of sacrilege by taking Ariel's skull in her hands (see Carr, 2009, p. 143). Thus, can speak more of the Kierkegaardian version of existentialism in Synge's play (cf. Chakrabarty, 2013), wherein the belief in the afterlife is implied, and more of the Heideggerian version in Carr's play, in which there seems to be only a vacuum after death.

In the final act of *Ariel* one can experience even further correspondences with Synge's play. Stephen breaks away from Frances's influences and gives up the leadership of the family cement plant. This has quite

unanimously interpreted as a passage to freedom (see Mesquita, 2010). However, I would argue that one more dimension of this liberation can be explored when juxtaposing Carr's play with *Riders to the Sea*. Stephen's escape into his career can symbolically be treated as the drowning in the sea. The new life can offer him fresh opportunities and prospects; yet, it is also the world of the unknown, unexpected, and volatile. The new life can bring Stephen happiness, but can also give sadness or downfall, as there is no way back to regain the cement factory. Once he has decided to step down, he also loses the protection from his mother, rejected by him, and killed by Elaine. Thus, he is about to enter the symbolic realm of Synge's sea as the space of sustenance and the unknown, of chance and of downfall (cf. Koneczeniak, 2011, p. 98; Chakraberty, 2013; Mukherjee, 2023). If Michael and Bartley have been defeated there, we do not know what is going to befall Stephen.

Frances seeks to keep her son and not let him go, and she believes that Boniface will help her, as Maurya and her daughters believed the priest will stop Bartley from going (cf. Koneczeniak, 2011, p. 102; Chakraberty, 2013). But when Boniface wants to convince Stephen's mother that she should let him live his own life, the mother cannot accept it. This aspect is perhaps yet another one which brings *Riders to the Sea* and *Ariel* close to each other. The young priest in Synge's play has no authority over the possibility of changing the tragic series of events – "It's little the like of him knows of the sea" (Synge, 1911, p. 38; cf. Chakraberty, 2013) – and saving Maurya's only remaining son (see Koneczeniak 2011, p. 102). This is signalled even at the beginning of the play, when Nora relates to her sister that she asked the clergyman to prevent Bartley from leaving: "'I won't stop him,' says he, 'but let you not be afraid. Herself does be saying prayers half through the night, and the Almighty God won't leave her destitute,' says he, 'with no son living'" (Synge, 1911, p. 19; see Koneczeniak, 2011, p. 101; cf. Chakraberty, 2013). In both plays, the characters display too much reliance on the priest's authority and persuasion, as they do on the worldly possessions, too. When it is confirmed by the discovery of the body of Bartley that there is no living son in the family, Maurya already experiences a symbolic death awaiting her own demise. In *Ariel*, when Frances has lost her two sons, the death she faces is both symbolic and real, as Elaine stabs her.

#### 4. Conclusion: invariance and its transformations

This analysis has shown that, as in the case of other plays by Carr compared to Synge's works, specifically her *Blood Wedding* juxtaposed to *Riders to the Sea*, there is a significant degree of invariance as regards the

significance of necessity, reliance on the worldly and a generational cycle of tragedy. In this invariance, one can also discern certain transformations. This essay has also sought to demonstrate that Carr's work enters into a thematic dialogue with Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, which adds one more example in the thread of considering Carr's works within the scope of Synge's influence and inspiration. Primarily, Necessity is the underlying reasons for Fermoy's decisions and motivations in Carr's play and can broadly be linked to the existentialist use of this concept; yet, this Necessity is, in fact, responsible for all the tragic murders and deaths in this work. Necessity is also the reason behind Michael's, Bartley's and all Maurya's folk men decisions to travel across the sea to reach Connemara and Galway. Necessity can thus be defined as the invariance that propels the plots of both plays, along with other, equally important, similar elements found there. Fermoy's decisions are determined by his idea of god, which for him acts like existentialist necessity, but it is not always so. He also assumes the Kierkegaardian aesthetic role, believing in the transitoriness and vanity of his singular existence. Maurya shows the tragic existential despair, the impossibility to fight against the eternal struggle of man with the sea, which occurs beyond the singularity of her own experience of tragedy.

The main argument has consisted in interpreting *Ariel* within invariants and transformations; yet, crucial questions are still open to discussion. Some of them relate to other invariants; for example, Frank McGuinness states that the notion of family in Carr's plays, also in *Ariel*, "is the only constant in this universe, and it is in the process of tearing itself to pieces" (as cited in González-Chacón, 2007, p. 195). Others consist in considering Synge's and Carr's texts as two extreme points of transformation, which is as valid as treating *Riders to the Sea* and *Ariel* as points on a larger scale of invariance. Still another one is connected to the possibility of interpreting *Ariel* in terms of not only transformation, but also evolution, counter-reaction or opposition to the dramaturgy defined by Synge.

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