APPRECIATION OF

MARINA CARR'S PLAYS

IN THE LIGHT OF POST-MODERN

THEORIES

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I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

Assist. Prof. Martin Cyr HICKS
Department Chair

This is to certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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AUTHOR DECLARATION

1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

2. The program of advanced study of which this thesis is part has been comprised of: courses in English Literature, including literary theory, English, American, and World Literature in genres that include drama, narrative literature, and thematic courses such as the history of Utopia and Dystopia.

i) Research Methods. The thesis incorporates research methods taught on both the undergraduate and, on the graduate level (by thesis advisor) during the course of the study. See ii below.

ii) Sources examined in this thesis include articles from scholarly journals, other articles such as drama reviews, essays, and interviews with the author in question; books on drama in general and Marina Carr in particular; and secondary sources including postcolonial theory and sources from other disciplines i.e., sociological, geographical, anthropological, and scientific sources; thesis style guides of Turkish universities and international universities as well as many relevant books published by university presses on this subject.

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ABSTRACT

BUKET AKTAŞ **JUNE, 2007**

APPRECIATION OF MARİNA CARR'S PLAYS IN THE LIGHT OF POST-MODERN THEORIES:

This thesis will analyze three plays by the contemporary Irish playwright Marina Carr. The plays presented here are *By the Bog of Cats, The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan*. Marina Carr uses landscape, language and legends to reflect the identity of her own nation, Ireland. She uses strong female characters and reflects her own culture through the mirror of these female heroines. History is another important theme in my thesis, since the future of a nation can be determined by its history. Like other Irish writers, Marina Carr uses the myths and legends to refer back to the history of Ireland. She also has a special focus on the rural landscape of the Irish Midlands in her plays, where the characters speak with strong Irish accent. Those characters are mostly the peasants, as peasantry is believed to represent the "real" Irish. Carr combines the female with the land, because in history of Ireland, the land has been represented as a woman. With all their problems, defects, and struggles, Carr's individual characters and families are an artistic reflection of "real" Irish society.

KISA ÖZET

BUKET AKTAŞ **HAZİRAN, 2007**

MARİNA CARR'IN OYUNLARININ POSTMODERN TEORİLER IŞIĞINDA DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ:

Bu tez çağdaş İrlandalı oyun yazarı Marina Carr' ın oyunlarını incelemeyi hedefler. Bu tezde incelenen oyunların isimleri şunlardır: *By the Bog of Cats, The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan*. Marina Carr kendi ulusunun kimliğini yatsıtmak amacıyla toprak, dil ve yerel efsaneleri tema olarak kullanmıştır. Carr aynı zamanda oyunlarında güçlü kadın karakterler kullanmış ve kendi kültürünü bu kahramanların aynasından yansıtmıştır. Bir ulusun gelecek kaderini belirleyen en önemli unsurlardan biri de "tarih" olduğundan, tezimde aynı zamanda " tarih" temasını işledim. Diğer milliyetçi İrlandalı yazarların yapmış olduğu gibi Marina Carr da yerel ve kültürel mit ve efsaneleri kullanarak İrlandalıların ortak tarihine göndermeler yapmıştır. Carr aynı zamanda karakterlerin İrlanda aksanı ile konuştuğu oyunlarında kırsal " Midlands" bölgesine özel olarak odaklanmıştır. " Gerçek İrlanda' yı" köylülerin temsil ettiği inancından dolayı, karakterin çoğu köylülerden seçilmiştir. Carr oyunlarında ayrıca "toprak" ile "kadın" arasında bir bağlantı kurar, çünkü sömürgecilik tarihinde "toprak" her zaman feminen sembollerle temsil edilmiştir. Tüm problemleri, kusurları ve mücadeleleri ile Carr' ın karakterleri ve aileleri "gerçek" İrlanda'nın sahnedeki yansımalarıdır.

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LANDSCAPE, LANGUAGE, AND LEGEND IN THE WORKS OF MARINA CARR

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I intend to analyze three plays by the contemporary Irish playwright Marina Carr. In the order presented here, these plays are: *By the Bog of Cats*, *The Mai*, and *Portia Coughlan.*[1] The focus of my thesis will be Carr's creation of identity through landscape, language, and legends.

Through the use of language and mythic elements in the Irish rural landscape, Carr constructs Irish cultural identity. She creates characters who are Irish peasants and travelers to represent "real" Irish experience on stage. As Victor Merriman defines the theatre is a "part of a broader cultural conversation about who we are, how we are in the world and who and how we would like to be."[2]

As an Irish playwright, Carr tries to follow the Irish tradition of using local legends, most of which are closely connected to topographic places such as lakes, rivers, and bogs. The name of a place bears the history that lies behind it. Therefore, it needs to be identified. Carr's characters describe the myths related to the original names of "Owl Lake" and "Belmont River."[3] Marina Carr focuses on the original

[1] *By the Bog of Cats*, first presented at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin on 7 October 1998; *The Mai*, first presented at the Peacock Theatre in Dublin on 5 October 1994; *Portia Coughlan*, first presented at the Peacock Theatre in Dublin on 27 March 1996. Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan, eds., *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, (Dublin: Carysfort, 2003), 236-237.
[2] Victor Merriman, "Poetry shite", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 149.
[3] The original Irish place-names have been changed by the British government, so Owl Lake is the English translation of a Gaelic name. In *The Mai*, Carr's character Millie uses the original Gaelic or Irish name for Owl Lake as *loch cailleach oíche*, and Portia explains that the name of Belmont River comes from a river god called Bel.

names of the places, since she treats each place as a character in her plays.

Marina Carr is not alone in representing identity through the use of language, legend, and landscape. In Brian Friel's "*Translations*" the importance of language as the bearer of identity is strongly emphasized: Owen says; "We name a thing and-bang! It leaps into existence."[4] In his play, Hugh, an old teacher, describes the role of language in shaping the society: "That is not the literal past, the facts of history, that shape us, but the images of the past embodied in language."[5]

In "*Translations*"(1980), Brian Friel tries to reflect the confusion of Irish society about its identity, during the process of standardization or modernization. Like W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge, and her contemporary Friel, Marina Carr tries to envision the social and political issues of Ireland in her plays.

As well as treating the political, cultural, nationalistic, and even the economic issues of her own country, Marina Carr also expresses the "unspoken"[6] realities of female world in her plays. While I do not intend to do a strictly feminist analysis, it is obvious that Marina Carr deals with Irish identity through the sufferings of her female protagonists. As spectators and readers, we are exposed to the inner worlds of three Irish women, each of whom struggles against her destiny. Through these tragic heroines, Carr opens up a window to reveal the unspoken realities and traumas of the Irish nation, especially in the last century.

[4] John P. Harrington, ed., *Modern Irish Drama*,(London: W.W. Norton Company, 1991), 353.
[5] Ibid., 373.
[6] Medb Ruane, "Shooting from the Lip," *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 84.

Ireland is represented by female metaphors in myth and in the poetry of Yeats. For example, in Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) the figure of Cathleen is a metaphor to represent Ireland. Therefore, Carr's using female characters to define the identity of Irish culture seems logical in this context. She defines the situation of troubled Irish women and their quest for identity using extreme examples. These include Hester, in *By the Bog of Cats,* Mai in *The Mai,* and Portia in *Portia Coughlan.* The reader is exposed to the world of the real Irish nation and culture through the experiences of these strong and challenging women. Like Ireland, Carr's female characters seek to define themselves. Through the identity of the characters in her plays, Carr reveals the identity and origin of the real Ireland. In *Contemporary Irish Drama and Cultural Identity,* Margaret Llewellyn-Jones comments that:

> The problematic identity of passionate women whose strong feelings do not fit their socio-economic context, already explored by Carr in *Portia Coughlan*, is further evident both in her earlier work The *Mai* (1994) and *Beside the Bog of Cats.* (1998) Carr's plays draw upon both the power of Irish landscape and myths of origin.[7]

In her plays, Carr uses the landscape and local myths to refer to the origins of each place. These cultural references establish a kind of bond with her national history. She uses history to refer to both the background of the characters in the plays and the background of Irish society.

History defines the identity of a person, a family and a country as well as shaping their future. We are aware of our own truth only if we have strong

[7] Margaret Llewellyn-Jones, *Contemporary Irish Drama and Cultural Identity,* (Oregon: Intellect, 2002), 87.

connections with our own past. Marina Carr's heroines are haunted by their own history. Frank McGuinness argues that:

> Tragedy is so often the consequence of a fatal lack of self-knowledge. Marina Carr rewrites the rule. Her characters die from a fatal excess of self-knowledge. Their truth kills them. And they have always known it would.[8]

Carr builds her stories in the frame of a family structure, which, in fact, symbolizes Irish culture itself. The memories stand for something larger than family: cultural or collective memory. Marina Carr's characters are obsessed with their past, and the truth about the past is what leads to their destruction. As Frank McGuinness comments, "Marina Carr is a writer haunted by memories she could not possibly possess, but they seem determined to possess her."[9]

For example, in *By the Bog of Cats*, a modern version of Euripides' *Medea*, the heroine Hester, is so obsessed with her own personal history that she doesn't want to leave her home by the Bog of Cats, because the place is the only connection to her past. She desperately waits for her mother, who left her at the age of seven and whom she thinks will show up one day at the very same place. Unlike Medea, who kills her children out of jealous revenge, Carr's heroine Hester does it in order to save her home, which symbolizes her history. When she understands that it will be impossible to live by the Bog of Cats as a living person, she prefers to roam there as a ghost. Her past traumas lead her to kill Josie, her daughter, too; because she didn't want Josie to share the same destiny with her.

[8] Frank McGuinness, "Masks: An Introduction to Portia Coughlan", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 79.
[9] Ibid.,78.

In Hester's past there are two events that destroy her present life - the fact that her mother left her and that she killed her brother with the help of her husband. She is subconsciously disturbed by these facts. We infer this fact from her frequent references to the past. Hester leads a life drifting between past and present. *By the Bog of Cats* is a modern version of Medea in the guise of an Irish traveler. In an interview, Carr comments that, "The plot is completely *Medea.* It was surprising how few people picked up on that initially. It was quite well disguised, but I was amazed that it took awhile before people realized."[10] Hester's confrontation with her past memories makes up the substructure of her present life. She is on a constant journey between past, present and future.

The Mai, which is a play about women from four generations, the same obsession about the past can be observed. Grandma Fraochlán, who is about a hundred years old, always talks about her past life and enriches her stories with local myths that symbolize Irish history. She herself is a living history, combining her own past with the history of the local land.

Mai is obsessed with the love of her husband Robert, who left her years ago. She builds a new life for herself and her children by Owl Lake, subconsciously wishing that her husband would come and share this home with them. Her instincts were right. Robert suddenly shows up again, but this never brings the happiness Mai has been seeking. Mai's sisters and aunts are less courageous, but they are also figures who struggle with their own individual pasts and truths.

[10] Interview with Marina Carr/ www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/SESLL/EngLit/ ugrad/hons/IrishLit/Carr/interview.rtf

Portia Coughlan is another female character who is haunted by her own history. She is married to a wealthy man and has three children; still, she is unable to live peacefully in her present life (in the play) because of her past traumas. She is haunted by the ghost of her twin brother Gabriel, who drowned in the Belmont River and she spends most of her time by the river thinking and listening to his ghostly singing voice. She refuses to behave like an ordinary living person, claiming that her other half went into the river with Gabriel. Carr's characters' motivations have their roots in their personal history.

Marina Carr uses ghost characters and ghostly images as a bridge between past and present of the characters. These ghosts represent the characters' bond with their personal history. M. K. Martinovich claims that: "Through ghostly images Carr suggests the complicated interweaving of the living and dead, the past and the present."[11] Carr's characters mourn the dead by refusing to live in the world of the living.

The use of ghosts is very common in Irish literary tradition. Martinovich explains this in the following quotation: "Ghosts and ghost stories have a long history in Irish folk culture, but they also have a presence in the Irish dramatic tradition, from W. B. Yeats' *Purgatory* to Conor McPherson's *The Weir*. Carr uses the theatrical convention of a ghost and a ghost fancier to tell her tragic story of a despairing, heartbroken and sorrowful individual."[12]

Ghosts play a very important role in both Greek and Irish drama as they form a kind of bridge between the two worlds, real and supernatural. Marina Carr was

[11] M.K. Martinovich, "The Mythical and the Macabre", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 122.
[12] Ibid.,126.

brought up in a social environment in which people believe in ghosts. In an interview with Mike Murphy, Carr says: "The culture believes in ghosts, certainly in the country."[13] She also adds that she herself is a great believer in the angels and afterlife. Bernadette Bourke comments that:

> Carr's doomed heroines tread the thin path that separates the worlds of the living and the dead, and continuity between these worlds is expressed through the ghosts 'stravaging' the shadows, who hover on the edges of both, blurring the distinctions between past, present and future.[14]

Carr also uses the cultural myths in a way to refer to Irish cultural history. Myths are abundant in Irish literary tradition. In her plays, the stage becomes the meeting site of natural and supernatural, mythical and real, the dead and the living. The use of myths in Irish drama is the reflection of the endeavor of contemporary writers to remain loyal to their history. Those who are against the modernization of culture and language cling to their traditional background. They choose to refer the nation's collective memory to create a special bond to unify the local people. In "Reflections Across Water," Melisa Sihra observes that:

> Irish playwrights tenaciously draw on a sense of the past to articulate the present. Pre-Christian systems of belief, the landscapes of ghosts and the dead, of myth and historical reference are repeatedly evoked in the narratives of McGuinness, Murphy, Kilroy, Friel, and Carr. Identity, national and individual, is ritually represented on the Irish stage as split, discordant and performative. The Irish theatrical tradition remains a literary one: there is a continual emphasis on

[13] Interview with Marina Carr/ www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/SESLL/EngLit/ ugrad/hons/IrishLit/Carr/interview.rtf.
[14] Bernadette Bourke, "Carr's cut-throats and gargiyles", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 133.

> storytelling and language, as a means not simply to communicate, but to investigate the intricate, mutually dependent processes of memory and identity.[15]

In Carr's works, especially *The Mai*, we observe the use of story-telling, and local myths to refer back to the individual and cultural history. Myths have a very important role in connecting the members of society under the umbrella of a shared memory. Using the power of the myths is an effective way of representing the original identity. In "Myth and the Fantastic," Csilla Bertha argues that:

> In the modern Western world the mythic view has been mostly lost and replaced by the dominance of reason, logic, and - in the mainstream of art - by realistic presentation of the visible world; by mimesis. The portrayal of the essential, of "what you know," gave way to that of the accidental, to "what you see." [16]

Marina Carr and her contemporaries started using myths and supernatural themes to challenge the logical perspectives of the Western world. They resisted the idea of explaining everything with reason and logic. Religious beliefs, local myths and the belief in the supernatural connect the members of a nation and create a bridge between the past and present of the society. As Bertha suggests, depending on "what they know" instead of "what they see" has a unifying function in the society. Carr's characters are living in a world of dreams and myths always interacting with supernatural beings. Surprisingly, they reveal realities far better than the ordinary people.

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[15] Melissa Sihra, "Reflections Across the Water", *The Theatre of Marina Carr,* 93-94.

[16] Csilla Bertha, "Myth and the Fantastic", *More Real Than Reality: The Fantastic in Irish Literature and the Arts,* Donald E. Morse, and Csilla Bertha, eds., (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 20, *Questia*, 18 May 2007. <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=26231539>.

In Carr's plays, there is also a special emphasis on the landscape and nature as well as on the supernatural beings. Carr uses topographic places such as a particular piece of land, bogs, riverbanks, and lakes to accommodate the real and supernatural characters. Those places become the symbol of the historical background and identity in Carr's drama. By the use of landscape, she also refers back to her own childhood, since she was grown up in the Midlands of Ireland. Melissa Sihra says: "Carr's landscape hovers between memory and imagination; between literary allusion and topographic realism."[17] Carr treats the landscape as another character in her plays, because it has its own history and memory. James S. Duncan Jr. says, "Social scientists have suggested that the landscape in which an individual lives is a major factor in his self-perception and in the image he presents to society."[18]

In the three plays, the women are attached to a place as it represents their own personal and cultural identity. Hester's bond with the Bog of Cats, Mai's bond with Owl Lake, and Portia's bond with Belmont River can be explained in terms of identity.

Marina Carr represents "real" Irish people in all her plays. She uses settings, language and themes to reflect "real" Irish experience. She reveals the problematic issues of her nation through the mouths of her characters. Marry Trotter explains this tendency of modern Irish dramatists in her article "Translating Women into Irish Theatre History," in the following quotation:

[17] Sihra, "Reflections Across the Water", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*,100.
[18] James S. Duncan Jr, "Landscape Taste as a Symbol of Group Identity, *Geographical Review*, Vol. 63, No.3 (Jul., 1973), 334.

> A century ago, one of the central goals of the Irish Literary Theatre, the Gaelic League, and other nationalist cultural organizations was to advance representations of Irish character, which would contest British stereotypes of the Irish people. The stage was the logical site for this challenge, and a century later many Irish playwrights still seek to dramatize realistic Irish experiences.[19]

In each of the following three chapters I will analyze a play by Marina Carr. I chose *By the Bog of Cats*, *The Mai*, and *Portia Coughlan*. In these plays there are many similarities. All of protagonists are women who are unconventionally strong and brave. They struggle against their destinies and reveal the most shocking realities about women and Irish nation to the reader and the audience through their speech. I will analyze each of these plays in terms of Marina Carr's perspective on female and national identity. I will also focus on Carr's use of language, landscape, and history in her plays to reveal her own cultural background. I intend to draw the readers' attention to how successfully she combines natural and supernatural, reality and myth, the living and the dead. Traveling beyond the limits of time and space, between past, present, and future, the plays have a deep impact on the consciousness of the readers and audience.

[19] Marry Trotter, "Translating Women into Irish Theatre History", *A Century of Irish Drama*, Stephen Watt, Eileen Morgan and Shakir Mustafa, eds. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 163.

CHAPTER 1

BY THE BOG OF CATS:

BLACK SWAN, WHITE DRESS, "MEDEA" WITH AN IRISH ACCENT

By The Bog of Cats is a modern adaptation of a classical Greek tragedy. Greek "Medea" has now been transformed into "Hester Swane" of the Irish Midlands with references to Irish identity and rural landscape. The play has been so transformed that at first some critics didn't realize that Carr was rewriting *Medea*. *By the Bog of Cats* is a metamorphosis of Medea to Hester Swane of Ireland. Hester has a "tinker" or "traveler" origin, which means she belongs to a group of people often referred to as Ireland's "national outsiders."[20]

Like Medea, Hester is an outsider; however, she was born on the Bog of Cats and is extremely attached to the place where she was born. She has strong ties with that place which is symbolized by the swan that is born on the same day with her. Her tragic flaw is her struggle to stay on the Bog of Cats, the place that represents her personal history and identity. Her mother leaves her there, by the Bog of Cats, at the age of seven. From then on, she dreams that her mother would show up one day at the very place that she abandons her. With this obsession she claims that she has the right to live by the bog more than anyone else in the village.

The play begins with a scene in which Hester drags a dead black swan after her, leaving a trail of blood on the snow. The black swan or the outcast of the swan

[20] Martinovich, "The Mythical and the Macabre", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 118.

world, functions as a traditional superstition that represents bad luck or black destiny in Irish culture. As well as functioning as a prophecy, the black swan represents Hester's destiny. (Swane - Hester's last name - means Swan in Irish). Until the end of the play, Hester clings to the hope that she can prevent herself from being driven out. On the day of her husband's wedding, which is the same day of her death, she wears her own white wedding dress. A corpse of a black swan on the snow and a black Swane in a white dress are metaphors to contrast her black destiny with her white hopes for the future. She is obsessed with the fact that her mother will come back to the Bog of Cats. Therefore, she should either wait there or die there.

She says: "I'm goin' nowhere. This here is my house and my garden and my stretch of the bog and no wan's runnin' me out of here."[21] (*BBC*, 1, 268) She begs her husband Carthage not to drive her away from the place. She says,

> I want to stay in me own house. Just let me stay in the house, Carthage. I won't bother anywan if yee'd just lave me alone. I was born on the Bog of Cats, same as all of yees, though ya'd never think it the way yees shun me. I know every barrow and rivulet and bog hole of its nine square mile. I know where the best bog rosemary grows and the sweetest wild bog rue. I could lead yees around the Bog of Cats in me sleep. (*BBC*, 2, 314)

The play takes place on the day of the wedding of Hester's husband Carthage to Caroline, the only daughter of a rich landowner in the neighborhood. Carthage, Hester's husband, will gain respectability and wealth out of this marriage. In this case, Carthage, like Jason in *Medea*, is concerned about building his own future. He

[21] The plays quoted in this thesis are from the following anthology: Marina Carr, *Marina Carr: Plays*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1999).Hereafter, I will refer to *By the Bog of Cats* as *BBC*; *The Mai* as *TM*; and *Portia Coughlan* as *PC.* As not all the plays are divided into scenes, so only the Act number and the page number will be used as follows: (*BBC*, Act #, page #)

tries to get rid of his bonds with his history and Hester, with whom he has shared a history. During the wedding, Caroline, new bride, stresses upon the importance of history in people's lives. As she spoke to Carthage, she says,

> You and Hester has a whole history together, strethin' back years that connects yees and that seems more important and real than anythin' we have. And I wonder have we done the wrong thing. (*BBC*, 2, 303)

Caroline expresses her feeling of guilt when she says to Carthage, "I feel like I'm walkin' on someone's grave." (*BBC*, 2, 303) Throughout the play, the characters are drifting back and forth between their history and future. Carthage wants to build a respectable future as a landowner by marrying the daughter of Xavier Cassidy, the bride's father who tries to drive Hester away from the Bog of Cats. Until the end of the play, Hester struggles against this powerful man. When she loses all hope she goes blind with rage. However, unlike Medea, she doesn't kill the bride, nor does she kill her father. After setting fire to her house, which is by the Bog of Cats, she kills herself and Josie (her seven year-old daughter). Hester's motive is not revenge but keeping her place. This translation of *Medea* has implications for Irish history, literature and theatre. In his book called *Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World*, Rush Rehm explains Hester's motive:

> Fearful of her future, Hester is also haunted by her past, particularly the murder of her brother, whose body she had disposed of secretly with Carthage's help…. In the play's climactic scene, however, she realizes that her suicide will leave her daughter, Josie abandoned, just

> as Hester was abandoned as a young girl by her own mother. Inflamed by the thought, Hester kills her daughter before killing herself.[22]

When Hester explains to Caroline, her rival, why she wants to stay at her place, she assures Caroline that it is not out of jealousy. Her refusal to leave there has a much deeper reason than jealousy. She says:

> I've been a long time wishin' over me mother too. For too long now I've imagined her comin' towards me across the Bog of Cats and she would find me here standin' strong. She would see me life was complete, that I had Carthage and Josie and me own house. I so much wanted her to see that I had flourished without her and maybe then I could forgive her. (*BBC*, 3, 336)

In Euripides' play, Medea kills her children out of the fear of mockery. She was afraid of being laughed at by her enemies; so she had to take action; she had to make her husband, Jason, pay for his betrayal at all costs. However, Hester kills her daughter, Josie, out of the fear of her future. When Hester announces to Josie that she is going away, leaving her behind. Josie begs her not to go, she says:

> Mam, I'd be watchin' for ya all the time 'long the Bog of Cats. I'd be hopin' and waitin' and prayin' for ya to return. (*BBC*, 3, 338)

Hester understands with terror that "history repeats itself." She wants to protect her own daughter from sharing her own black destiny. Hester's mother has left her by the Bog of Cats at the age of seven. When she decides to kill herself, Josie announces that she will wait for her return in the same place all her life. This is the reason why Hester kills her daughter. Rush Rehm goes on to comment:

[22] Rush Rehm, *Radical Theatre*, (London: Gerald Duckworth, 2003), 61.

> Deeper than her fears of rejection, of living without the man she loves, of having to leave her community, Hester is terrified that her daughter will live the same despondent life that she has known, always waiting in vain for her mother's return across the Bog of Cats. Beautifully written, intelligently adapted, and deeply rooted in Ireland and Irish folk memory. Carr's play nonetheless relies on a specific childhood trauma to produce the fear that motivates Hester to take the innocent life of her child.[23]

As I stated above unlike Greek Medea, who is blind with jealousy and revenge, Irish Hester is mainly concerned about her identity, which is tied up with the Bog of Cats. Marina Carr is an Irish playwright who is very loyal to the contemporary movement of Irish writers representing Irish culture and identity with a special focus on language, and landscape, which are the main elements of cultural identity. In the introduction to *The Theatre of Marina Carr* there is a quotation from Victor Merriman: "*By the Bog of Cats* is a play about land and travelers, and the new wealth in rural Ireland."[24] As a playwright who is haunted by history, Marina Carr gives primary emphasis to land, which has the major importance in a person's past as well as in a nation's past. Cultural identity is closely related to history, land, and language. In Leeney's introduction there is another quotation from Enrica Cerquoni, "*By the Bog of Cats* conjures unforgettable images of woman, home, landscape, family and nation."[25]

Marina Carr, as well as being loyal to the Greek history of drama, is also loyal to the history of Irish culture. There is a vast usage of cultural metaphors, and

[23] Rehm, *Radical Theatre*, 62.
[24] Leeney and McMullan, eds., *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, xxiii.
[25] Ibid., xxv.

myths in most of her plays. In Wallace's "Authentic Reproductions: Marina Carr and the Inevitable," Carr's concern with identity is emphasized:

> Carr continues to explore questions of identity and ontology through her use of stories within the plays. The tales of Owl Lake and Belmont River facilitate a metonymic shift where the protagonists are doubled in other "fictions." In contrast, *By the Bog of Cats* follows Hester's quest for the "story" of her mother, which is revealed only in fragments. She cannot wholly recall this narrative alone, but desperately needs it to define her own identity.[26]

Carr's loyalty to Irish myths is a common attitude of contemporary Irish playwrights. After the re-establishment of the Abbey Theatre in 1966 (which was initially established in 1904)[27], contemporary Irish dramatists started a movement to represent real Ireland in their plays. Carr is one of the loyal followers of this movement. According to Margaret Llewellyn-Jones, one of the aspects of the early Abbey program is the "tension between mythic and real."[28] She argues, "a key feature of Irish contemporary drama is both disruption of realist form and the re-working of mythic elements as a means of deconstructing ideologies of language, history and gender through performance."[29]

Marina Carr is a playwright who uses language as a tool both to express ideas and to represent cultural identity. In her plays, the characters' use of language reflects their origins and also their level of education. In *By the Bog of Cats*, which takes place in the countryside, the characters speak with a strong Midlands accent.

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[26] Clare Wallace, "Authentic Reproductions: Marina Carr and the Inevitable", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 62.
[27] See the chronology in John P. Harrington, ed., *Modern Irish Drama*, 571-574.
[28] Christina Hunt Mahony, *Contemporary Irish Literature*, (NewYork: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 7.
[29] Ibid.,8.

Marina Carr uses the countryside as setting, perhaps because she feels that the rural landscape and country people represent the "real" Irish. In "At the Heart of Irish Atavism: A Fatal Excess", Bruce Steward says, "*By the Bog of Cats* speaks out of the heartlands of an Ireland haunted by Irish atavism but speaks to the heart of the new Ireland…."[30] In "Marina Carr: Unmotherly Feelings," Charles McNulty quotes from Holly Hunter, who traveled to Ireland with Timothy Near to visit the bog land of Carr's upbringing. She says that:

> …She's always been drawn to characters alone in a vast landscape. Carr has embraced a character of Greek proportions with a protagonist who is a fighter filled with tragic longing. She was especially taken by the cadences of the playwright's harsh poetic language. Rhymically, Carr is a musician. The language is unadorned and guttural, reflecting the landscape in which it takes place-stark, bleak, endless, windy as hell, hot like a furnace or frigidly cold. If I couldn't understand English, this would be a play I'd want to go see. [31]

Although Marina Carr writes in English, her characters speak with a strong Irish accent. She uses the dialect of the Irish Midlands deliberately to reflect the cultural motifs and the identity of local people. She wants to keep her language alive and prevent it from being standardized, because the process of modernizing the language is a threat to Irish cultural identity. During an interview with Mike Murphy, Carr explains why she uses the language of Midlands:

> It's very specific to the place where I grew up and it's probably not even spoken there that much any more. I spoke like that as a child,

[30] Bruce Steward, "At the Heart of Irish Atavism: A Fatal Excess", *Irish University Review*, (Spring/Summer 1998), 190-197.
[31] Charles McNulty, "Marina Carr: Unmotherly Feelings", *American Theatre*, Vol. 18, Issue. 8, (October, 2001), 106.

> before I went into secondary school in town. When you are surrounded by town girls your English becomes more standardized, and then you come to Dublin and it becomes more standardized again, but if left to my own devices I'd still be talking like a midlander. It's a very rich language. It's a language of metaphor and a lot of story-telling. People think you're straining for effect sometimes when you're just reporting what you've heard. The best lines I've ever written are things I've heard and I've just written them down.[32]

She also uses the language in the most effective way to express the characters' deepest feelings about their past traumas, which are mostly kept hidden from society. Her characters speak so bravely that the words become the most effective tool for reflection of both their inner struggles and confrontation with their own past. In *By the Bog of Cats*, Hester also uses the language as a weapon to shoot her enemies. Her words are like arrows that stick into the hearts of people; for example, when she says to Xavier "I can tell the darkness in you, ya know how? Because it mirrors me own," (*BBC*, 3, 329) and when she says "I left Eden, Monica, at the age of seven...," (*BBC*, 3, 332) or when she blames Carthage for "rising in the world on the ashes of her brother." (*BBC*, 3, 334) In Marina Carr's plays the stage becomes the site of confrontation.

The French philosopher Luce Irigaray emphasizes that "woman must create a kind of mobile home for themselves within language, a second skin, where other

[32] Interview with Marina Carr/ www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/SESLL/EngLit/ ugrad/hons/IrishLit/Carr/interview.rtf.

bodies, selves and possibilities can be played out, as well as past traumas, hidden histories."[33] Carr is one of those playwrights who have created a second skin within the language, through which she voices unspoken realities.

About Carr's treatment of death in her plays, M. K Martinovich quotes from Frank McGuinness, in his article "The Mythical and the Macabre" that: "Carr knows what the Greek knows. Death is a big country. And hers is a big imagination, crossing the border always between the living and dead…I am certain in this play she writes in Greek."[34]

Marina Carr has certainly used Greek motifs in her play; however, I disagree with McGuinness in that "she writes in Greek." I wouldn't use this term, as she actually writes totally in Irish. She takes the idea from the Greek tragedy and embroiders it with the values of her own nation so successfully that it turns into a complete Irish play. She absorbs the themes of land, language and myths that represent local identity into the plays and it ends up being an authentic Irish play. When I read the summary of *By the Bog of Cats*, I thought at first that she transformed one of the Greek tragedies by making minor changes in it. After I read it; however, I found out that a reader can detect the flavor of "Irishness" and can feel a real sense of Irish identity in each line of the play. In these aspects, it is far from being just a translation of a Greek tragedy.

In *By the Bog of Cats*, Hester's connection with her land represents Carr's connection with her home, Ireland, which is represented by the "bog." The idea of

[33] Leeney and McMullan, eds., *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, xxvii. See also Luce Irigaray, An Ethics of Sexual Difference, trans. from the French by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill, (London: Pluto Press, 1993).
[34] Martinovich, "The Mythical and the Macabre", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 114.

"home" is a real concern of postcolonial Irish dramatists as it symbolizes the land, which is one of the main elements of identity.

In *By the Bog of Cats*, Hester has the origin of a tinker. Tinkers are known as travelers, people who live in caravans. They are mostly regarded as outsiders, as they do not have a land of their own. In rural areas of Ireland, having land is very important. A man without land is without identity; therefore, they do not deserve respect. As Griffin states in his article "The Religion and Social Organisation of Irish Travellers on a London Caravan Site,"

> Until recently, Ireland could fairly be described as a society of peasants and small farmers; a country where a man unable to "put his name on the land" (Harris 1988) was compelled to migrate to town, or go overseas. To be without land was to be without status. Even on the barren isles of Aran landless men ranked last on the social ladder (Messenger 1969: 85)…. Travellers for their part came to regard "country people" or buffers with the same contempt and reasoning that Gypsies elsewhere looked on gorgios or gaze, it is not surprising. For even though they were not the only spatially mobile, landless, stigmatised people, they were the least regarded.[35]

"Ranking last on the social ladder" is the main issue of a real Irish person. When Carthage started to live with a "tinker" woman, he had no place or land of his own. He was very young and inexperienced and he and Hester led a life without status. He helped Hester to kill her brother Joseph. After killing him, they took the money which was bequested to him by Hester's father. Only after getting Joseph's

[35] C.C.M. Griffin, "The Religion and Social Organisation of Irish Travellers on a London Caravan Site," *Nomadic Peoples* 6.1 (2002), *Questia*, 16 (Apr. 2007). <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5002520001>

money, Carthage could build a house along the Bog of Cats. They no longer lived in the old caravan. Having a house and being settled was the first step on that social ladder. However, Carthage was not content with his own place in the society. He wanted to climb up more quickly. He fixed his greedy eyes on the daughter of a rich landowner, Caroline. That was the easiest way of gaining respectability and high status without much effort. Hester protests against his greed with the following words. “You’re sellin’ me and Josie down the river for a few lumpy auld acres and notions of respectability….” (*BBC*, 1, 289) Hester goes so far as to accuse him of rising on her brother’s ashes.

> You rose in the world on his ashes! And that’s what haunts ya. You look at me and all you see is Joseph Swane slidin’ into Bergit’s Lake again. You think doin’ away with me will do away with that. It won’t Carthage. It won’t. You’ll remember me, when the dust settles, when you grow tired scourin’ acres and bank balances...(*BBC*, 3, 334)

Here, Carthage symbolizes a bourgeois man who rises on his brother’s ashes. As I stated earlier, Marina Carr does not just translate Greek tragedy but also reflects the issues of Irish nation in her plays. She is very concerned about the cultural and political history of her country. In Act 3, After Hester burns down the house and the cattle, Carthage came to terms with the results of his evildoing and confronts Xavier. He says to his father-in-law: “Keep your bloody farm, Cassidy. I have me own. I’m not your scrubber boy. There’s other things besides land.” (*BBC*, 3, 332)

In response to Carthage Xavier reflects the importance of land for the peasants: “There’s nothin’ besides land, boy, nothin’! And a real farmer would never think otherwise.” (*BBC*, 3, 332)

James S. Duncan Jr. points out that "Social scientists have suggested that the landscape in which an individual lives is a major factor in his self-perception and in the image he presents to society."[36]

Marina Carr tries to stress upon the importance of land for a person and for a nation in a wider scope. As her mother was a tinker, Hester used to live in a caravan. This is where her mother left her. Therefore, although she and Carthage built a house by the bog, she never feels at home there. For Hester the term "home" does not represent the house but a peace of land along the bog. This piece of land is her home where she is attached to and which she can die for. She expresses her feelings about the house to Ghost Fancier in the beginning of the play:

> Ghost Fancier: You live in that caravan over there?
>
> Hester: Used to; live up the lane now. In a house, though I've never felt at home in it. (*BBC*, 1, 266)

In another part of the play, Catwoman, a neighbor, mentions Hester's attachment to the caravan in which she used to live in. She says, "I knew ya when ya were chained like a rabied pup to this auld caravan." (*BBC*, 1, 273)

In "One Bog, Many Bogs", Enrica Cerquoni stresses upon "Hester's association with mainly open spaces such as the swan's lair, the caravan, the yard and the bog;"[37]and calls it "the reconceptualization of the notion of home."[38]In the past, the term 'home' was represented by indoors especially in the case of women. However, the idea of home has now been shifted towards open spaces rather than

[36] Duncan Jr, "Landscape Taste as a Symbol of Group Identity", 334.
[37] Enrica Cerquoni, "One Bog, Many Bogs", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan, eds., (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2003), 182.
[38] Ibid.,182.

covered places. It is in fact ironic that a traveler should cling to a specific place like that. Hester is attached to this land because her history lies there. She represents the Irish nation which is attached to their history and identity. "The Bog of Cats" symbolizes her personal history. Irish landscape has the same meaning to Irish people as the "Bog of Cats" has to Hester. In the following lines Hester explains why she has to stay there. She quotes from her mother:

> ... And she says, ' I'm goin' walkin' the bog, you are to stay here, Hetty.' And I says, ' No, I'd go along with her, and made to folly her. And she says, ' No , Hetty, you wait here, I'll be back in a while.' ... And I watched her walk away from me across the Bog of Cats. And across the Bog of Cats I'll watch her return. (*BBC*, 1, 297)

Melissa Sihra states, in her article "Reflections Across Water", that "Carr's landscape hovers between memory and imagination; between literary allusion and topographic realism."[39]For Carr, Hester's bog of Cats has a deeper meaning than just being a landscape. It means Hester's whole history and the place that accommodates her past memories.

In Marina Carr's plays, nature has a very important role. In the article "Carr's 'cut-throats and gargoyles"' Bernadette Bourke says; "Hester's bond with nature is symbolized in the opening moments by the lone figure dragging the dead swan, across the raw and corrugated landscape."[40]

In Marina Carr's works "nature and supernatural" are successfully interwoven. She again uses the cultural motifs while absorbing the two themes. She not only uses landscape to reflect her cultural tradition but also uses other natural

[39] Sihra, "Reflections Across Water", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 100.
[40] Bourke, "Carr's cut-throats and gargiyles", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 137.

metaphors, too. “Black swan” is both a natural and supernatural symbol in *By the Bog of Cats*. The play begins with Hester dragging the dead body of a black swan behind her. When the Ghost Fancier sees her, he asks “What’re you doin’ draggin’ the corpse of a swan behind ya like it was your shadow?” (*BBC*, 1, 265) The swan was actually her fate, following her like a shadow.

Black Swan is the keystone of the play, as it represents Hester’s black destiny. Its death also functions as a prophecy about her death. In Irish belief, black swans are regarded as “bad luck.” The Ghost Fancier warns Hester against this when he asks; “No one ever tell you it’s dangerous to interfere with swans, especially black wans?” (*BBC*, 1, 266)

In the beginning of the play Catwoman, who is a neighbor with supernatural powers, quotes Hester’s mother saying that “She will live as long as that black swan does.” And she also stresses upon the meaning of Hester’s last name “Swane” that represents “Swan”. In that respect, Hester has a close bond with this bird. Swan personifies Hester. “Swane means swan.” … “That child” says Josie Swane, “will live as long as this black swan, not a day more, not a day less.” (*BBC*, 1, 276)

Although Hester protests about the prophecy in the first place, she will not be able to escape her own destiny.

> Hester: Doesn’t seem to make much difference whether I stay or lave with a curse like that on me head.
>
> Catwoman: There’s way round curses. Curses only have the power ya allow them. (*BBC*, 1, 276)

In her article Authentic "Reproductions: Marina Carr and the Inevitable", Clare Wallace says that "citations and simulations have occurred in Carr's drama in a number of ways" she goes on to argue that "Her interest in the 'Greek idea of destiny and fate and little escape' has taken shape in her plays through an inter-textual process."[41]She also claims that:

> The notion of destiny, allusion to myth, folktale and a harsh version of midland speech permeate Carr's writing to such a degree that in many respects it hardly seems of the contemporary world.[42]

Marina Carr successfully transforms a natural element - a swan - into a supernatural metaphor. While doing so, she reflects her own cultural tradition and beliefs as well as using the main components of Greek tragedy. Swans have a very important place in the cultural history of Ireland. In the Celtic pagan religion there are many deities who are metamorphosed into swans. Considering this fact we can argue that Marina Carr remained loyal to her own cultural myths while rewriting a Greek tragedy. Anne Ross explains in her article "Chain Symbolism in Pagan Celtic Religion" that:

> ...in the religion of Celts, certain individual gods or god-types were especially associated with particular birds or animals… The bird-gods mostly were in the form of swans or other aquatic birds… of the early Irish texts. Here we have a great wealth of swan and duck symbolism, in connection with cult objects of many kind, and these birds played an important role in the religious practices with which they were associated.[43]

[41] Clare Wallace, "Authentic Reproductions" *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 58-59.
[42] Ibid., 43.
[43] Anne Ross, "Chain Symbolism in Pagan Celtic Religion", *Speculum*, Vol.34, No.1 (Jan, 1959), 41

In old Irish texts, there are many tales such as; “The dream of Angus”, “The story of Cu-Chulainn”, “The Story of the Death of Lugaid and Derbforgaill”, and “Tochmare Etaine.” According to Ross “bird metamorphosis is the most striking feature of those tales where human beings are metamorphosed into the form of a swan and vice versa.”[44]

> … In the four tales, in which the swan is specified, the bird shows characteristics which it retains consistently throughout the tradition. That is to say it is invariably associated with good rather with non-harmful people or deities. We do not find evil people take on swan form in the Celtic tradition.[45]

It is interesting to know that evil people do not metamorphose into swan form in Celtic myths. Considering Hester is identified with the swan, we can infer that Hester represents the good not evil in Carr’s perception. She is a victim of the society rather than an evil. Representing Hester with the swan is a way of purifying her in the eyes of the reader and audience.

In the light of those examples from Celtic religion, we can also conclude that Marina Carr has found a smooth passage between the Greek myth and the Celtic idea of the supernatural.

Marina Carr’s characters travel between reality and imagination, history and myth, the past and the present. In a way, she uses natural elements to reflect supernatural meanings. The ‘swan’, which is a natural element, is used as a symbol of the supernatural. Likewise, the landscape, a topographic reality, is used to accommodate the supernatural in *By the Bog of Cats*.

[44] Ibid., 42.
[45] Ibid., 50.

By the Bog of Cats takes place along the bog that has a special importance for the Irish, since "bog is one of the Ireland's most characteristic feature covering 1,200,000 hectares (1/6th) of the island."[46] In geographical terms, 'bog' is "a wetland with acidic substrate mainly composed of moss and peat and having a characteristic flora."[47] Bogs are also known for their role in preserving bodies and artifacts. It has a special substance called "sphagnan" (or sphagnum)[48], which prevents bodies and objects from decaying and preserves them for a very long time. "Muscle, tissue and wooden artifacts can only survive in the bogs because of the way sphagnan immobilizes destructive bacteria."[49]

Carr's topographic reality accommodates the unreal or supernatural images such as the ghost of Hester's brother and the dream of her mother. She uses the bog to represent her memories of her past life. The ghosts and memories haunt the bog. Hester is not only attached to the bog geographically but also spiritually. The apparition of the Ghost fancier and her brother's ghost turns a topographic area into a supernatural metaphor that functions as a bridge between living and the dead, past and present. Just as the 'bogs' scientifically preserve the material objects and the bodies, "The Bog of Cats" preserves the memories and the individual history of Hester.

Although Ghosts seem to be related to the Greek tradition, they have already covered a large amount of place in the Irish texts. Irish people believe in the supernatural and ghosts in such a way that ghosts have become a part of their tradition. Bogs are also known as places that are haunted by ghosts more than dry land. "In Reflections Across the Water", Melissa Sihra quotes from Director Kay Martinovich, who made research trips to the Midlands and met with Irish travelers:

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[46] http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/geography/bogs.html.
[47] www.nps.gov/plants/restore/library/glossary.htm.
[48] Sphagnum moss, which over hundreds of years compacts down to form peat bogs, is an incredibly effective natural preservative.
Nicola Jones, *New Scientist*, (30, May, 2001) http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn807
[49] http://www.utexas.edu/courses/wilson/ant304/projects/projects97/dentep/bogs.htm.

> We heard stories from locals who lived in the Bog, and visited the villages of Carr's childhood landscape such as Pullagh, Mucklagh, Coolinarney, pallas Lake and so on. As well as reminiscences about the older ways of life and relationship between travelers and the settled community, we were told of ghostly presences and sightings. One elderly gentleman recounted a tale about a ghost of a woman he had seen in a house near the bog, repeatedly emphasizing that his friend had also been there, and had seen the apparition, by way of proof as to the veracity of this tale. This is the landscape from which Carr writes, where the ethereal cohabitates with the mundane, where the imagination is as vital and revered as the rational, and where the world of poetry and storytelling is a necessary part of the everyday.[50]

Hester's memories of the past lying deep inside the 'bog' made the place a link between the past and present. Apparition of the ghost of her brother symbolizing her past, and apparition of the Ghost Fancier functioning as a prophecy in order words representing her future makes Hester drift between past, present and future as well as drifting between the material and spiritual world. In the article "One Bog Many Bogs" Enrica Cerquoni quotes from Joe Vanek that "the haunted and haunting bog land was an impressive ' architectural void', a wasteland where, like in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* nobody ever arrives and nobody ever leaves."[51]

In "The Mythical and the Macabre," M. K. Martinovich suggests, "The purgatorial space of the bog suggests the transitional stage in which Hester finds herself lingering between this world and the next."[52] The bog functions as a "purgatorial space", where Hester is stuck between two worlds. Carr's use of

[50] Sihra, "Reflections Across Water", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 103.
[51] Cerquoni, "One Bog, Many Bogs", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 189.
[52] Martinovich, "The Mythical and the Macabre", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 116.

communication between the living and the dead suggests that there is no ending at all. At the end of worldly life a person goes on to live in a ghostly form. It is like moving from one country to another. And the 'bog' is the meeting place of the people from both worlds, like a kind of bridge. When Hester sees her brother, she asks whether he has seen her mother. Joseph's ghost replies with these words. "Death is a big country, Hester. She could be anywhere in it." (*BBC*, 3, 318) 'This is a big country' and represents a person's future. The ghosts appearing in the material world are the messengers of this future world. Martinovich suggests "Through Ghostly images Carr suggests the complicated interweaving of the living and the dead, the past and present."[53] In the following quotation Martinovich also explains how Carr combines modern Irish drama and Greek tragedy in a way to reflect the supernatural.

> Several images of "the vanished and the dead" linger in Marina Carr's haunting play *By the Bog of Cats*. Tormented memories and sorrowful spirits drift over the landscape of the mythological bog. Yet, more than simply hovering, the undead co-exist with the living in Carr's poetic yet realistic world. Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* re-sets Euripides' *Medea* in the Midlands of contemporary Ireland. Familiar traits of ancient Greek tragedy and modern Irish drama are uniquely combined through the playwrights ability to interweave elements of the supernatural and the mystical with the classic themes of prophecy and fate.[54]

At the end of the play By *the Bog of Cats*, Hester lies in the white dress with her heart cut out on top of her chest "like some dark feathered bird." (*BBC*, 3, 341)

[53] Martinovich, "The Mythical and the Macabre", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 122.
[54] Ibid., 114-115.

She dies for good reasons. As she could find no way to continue living materially by the 'bog', her spiritual presence will always haunt the Bog of Cats. Hester's death will not mark her end but a beginning in another form. In "Carr's 'cut-throats and gargoyles'" Bernadette Bourke comments that:

> Although Hester is dead, the ending suggests that her ghost will roam the bog as her brother does, and her presence will hang over the place like her mother's, as the past continues to exist in the present and future. The folk belief in regenerative power of nature, in the earth as both grave and womb is reworked here, as Hester is re-assimilated into timeless bog, thus embracing and defeating death simultaneously.[55]

It is sad that most of Marina Carr's plays end with a suicide. Why do these women choose to kill themselves? Carr's women have always been on a constant journey of following their own truth. The act of suicide, however, does not reflect their weakness but their bravery. They do not die to escape from but to reach their truth. Hester's death at the end cannot be interpreted as a defeat but a victory. She was in quest of her own truth and followed her own instincts to prove that she would not quit at all costs.

Helene P. Foley quotes from a *New York Times* article (September 29, 1998) that, "contemporary actresses and female playwrights favor Greek tragedy because of the extraordinary repertoire of powerful and subtle female roles."[56] She also quotes playwright and translator Timberlake Wertenbaker that, "the Greek poets didn't look down on women and didn't give them small, stupid roles. The great flaw

[55] Bourke, "Carr's cut-throats and gargiyles", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 144.
[56] Helene P. Foley, "Modern Performance and Adaptation of Greek Tragedy", *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974), Vol. 129 (1999), 4.

of modern plays is that they always try to make women nice. These women are terrible, and they have the courage of their horror."[57]

It is true that in Greek tragedy there is a great repertoire of female roles and that there is a tendency among contemporary female writers to rewrite Greek tragedy. However, I do not agree with the idea that the Greeks gave important roles to women because they valued them. In the ancient Greek culture women were practically absent figures in the society. They were driven inside their homes and did not take part in daily social life. The female protagonists in the Greek plays reflected the evil side of the women. They were brave and powerful but monstrous. The Greek playwrights tried to depict women instead of praising them in their plays. In the contrary, Marina Carr's female characters, however brave they are, represent the victimized women in the Irish society.

Helene P. Foley comments, "Contemporary playwrights also turn to Greek tragic plots to reflect on the relation between twentieth century reality and an irrecoverable past, on a failed aspiration to civilization."[58] Carr treats the realities of modern times in a classical Greek plot.

Just as Hester is a traveler who travels between past and present and will go on traveling in the future in a ghostly form, Marina Carr is also a traveler in history going beyond the limits of time and place. During her journey through history, she visits the Greeks, the Celts, the old Irish and the modern Irish collecting and interweaving the most important and striking elements belonging to the people of

[57] Ibid., 4.
[58] Ibid., 7.

those times to create a unique work of art. She uses Greek myths and Celtic myths, nature and the supernatural, real and surreal, Irish cultural, political and social issues and stitches them all together. There is no limit to her imagination. *By the Bog of Cats* is an important example of the power of her imagination. She takes the Greek ideas and rewrites the rules to reflect her own reality as well as the reality of a nation. She uses history, language, landscape, and supernatural and melts them in a bowl of endless imagination.

In this part of my thesis my aim was to reflect Marina Carr's amazing techniques of grasping the audience's (and the reader's) attention with the richness of her real and imaginative sources. Marina Carr is one of the contemporary Irish playwrights, whose works are appreciated worldwide as the issues she treated are universal as well as having the flavor of her own nationality.

CHAPTER 2

THE MAI:

MARRIAGE, MATRIARCHY, AND MYTH

The Mai is the story of women from four generations. Mai is the central character in the middle of the family tree. She lives in the house that she has built by Owl Lake. After her husband Robert leaves her, she tries to take care of the children by herself. The play begins when she is hosting the other female members of the family who visit her to see the new house. Millie, Mai's daughter, is on stage throughout the play narrating the story. Grandma Fraochlán is a 100 year-old woman, who smokes a pipe, drinks mulberry wine and tells local myths and stories of her past to her granddaughters. She represents the history of the family. She frequently talks about the nine-fingered fisherman, her beloved husband, who died in a fishing accident sixty years ago. Grandma Fraochlán accepts that she was a dysfunctional mother for her children as she has always been obsessed with the love of her husband. Julie, one of her daughters, blames her for spending all her energy for her husband and depriving her daughters of their mother's affection. Grandma Fraochlán says:

> I know he was a useless father, Julie, I know, and I was a useless mother. It's the way we were made! There's two types of people in this world from what I can gather, them as puts their children first and them as puts their lover first and for what it's worth, the nine-fingered fisherman and meself belongs ta the latter of these. I would gladly

> have hurled all seven of ye dawn the slopes off hell for one night more with the nine-fingered fisherman and may I rot eternally for such unmotherly feelin'. (*TM*, 2, 182)

Grandma is a nostalgic person who is very attached to her memories, which sometimes annoys the other characters in the play. She is haunted by the memories of her beloved husband and her daughter Ellen, who died while giving birth to Mai. She values those two people who passed away years ago more than the other people who are still alive. With the following words she acknowledges her preference for Ellen; "In me darkest hour I often wished that God had taken one of the others and left me Ellen. Isn't that an awful wish from the mouth of a mother?" (*TM*, 1, 117) Grandma Fraochlán uses the local myths and combines them with her past experiences to create her own stories. She lives in the world which she created for herself out of the memories and dreams. Mai expresses her feelings about the influence of Grandma Fraochlán's stories on her life:

> She filled us with hope; too much hope maybe, in things to come. And her stories made us long for something extraordinary to happen in our lives. I wanted my life to be huge and heroic and pure as in the days of yore. I wanted to march through the world up and up, my prince at my side, and together we'd leave our mark on it. (*TM*, 2, 163)

Mai's aunts Julie and Agnes form a kind of bridge between the past and present of the family. They are stuck between the two generations and confused by the transformation from the old to the modern Ireland. Julie and Agnes represent the religious and conservative Irish Catholics, who are against abortion and divorce. They show their disapproval of the irresponsible life of their niece Becky, who got

married in Australia without telling the family and then decided to get a divorce. They are always critical about the way of life of the others in the family circle. Although Grandma Fraochlán is the oldest of the women in the family, she has a more modern perspective compared to her daughters, Julie and Agnes. When Becky says, "It just didn't work out" (*TM*, 1, 141) as an excuse for getting divorce, Julie protests with these words "What's all this talk about working out. In my day you got married and whether it worked out or it didn't was by the way." (*TM*, 1, 141) Grandma Fraochlán shows her disapproval for Julie's perspective saying, "This is the age of freedom." (*TM*, 1, 141)

In *Contemporary Irish Drama and Cultural Identity* Margaret Llewellyn - Jones states that the "1980's were considered by feminists as a period of church and state retrenchment toward traditional values. Only in November 1995 was the constitutional ban on divorce finally removed by referendum."[59] Julie and Agnes belong to this so-called traditional period of Ireland. It is ironic that the two women are very concerned about money while they represent conservative, religious people. In fact, the term "religion" is connected with spirituality and should not have anything to do with materiality. Jones also states "the problems associated with the representation of women (in theatre) have considerable similarities which are related to socio-economic conditions."[60] The attitude of Julie and Agnes represents the situation of these people who are trapped between two periods during the process of transformation to modernity. In "Translating the Women into Irish Theatre History," Mary Trotter explains the situation:

[59] Llewellyn–Jones, *Contemporary Irish Drama and Cultural Identity*, 68.
[60] Ibid., 68.

> The second generation, Grandma Fraochlán's daughters Julie and Agnes, represents a more repressed period for women in Irish history, the deeply moralistic years of the Free State in the 1920s and 1930s…. The third generations, Mai and her sisters, Connie and Beck, however, is trapped between their desires for autonomy and fulfillment and the mores and expectations of the previous generations… Millie, the fourth generation in this line of what Beck called "proud, mad women," struggles to create meaning in her own life outside the weight of this matrilineal history…. Yet, the history of the women who came before her haunts Millie's current life and her actions echo those of her fore mothers. She protects her son by creating a romantic story about his father…. Millie has moved beyond her childhood at Owl Lake, although she remains haunted by it. But like Grandma Fraochlán, Millie has learned to create a narrative based on the past and the present, reality and myth, in order to create a sense of meaning, purpose and in order to continue the history of women from which she came…. Also Millie is the first woman of the four generations to be truly independent. The play presented before the audience is indeed Millie's narrative of her matrilineal heritage. This family memory play is now her family memory, and she is the controller of the narrative, the keeper of these women's history, a woman protagonist.[61]

In Marina Carr's plays the notion of family is used as a symbol to represent the whole society. The Irish society is compacted into the frame of Carr's families. In the article "Rising Out of the Miasmal Mists: Marina Carr's Ireland," Claudia W. Harris states that "Nearly every possible family permutation or dysfunction is played out in her work and she claims that Carr's unhappy and unholy family is a symbol

[61] Trotter, "Translating Women into Irish Theatre History", 171-172.

for larger cultural issues."[62] Marina Carr exposes the hidden realities of a culture within the family structure in her plays. Harris acknowledges that fact in the following words: "Carr brings to light what any culture might want to keep hidden, especially from the neighbors."[63] In *The Mai*, Carr represents this approach with an event where Robert and the Mai have a fight at the Lion's Ball in front of all the neighbors. After the Ball they continue their argument at home. Mai's main concern is Robert's treating her badly "in front of everyone." She is so concerned about being disgraced in front of the public that Robert reacts with these words, "Fuck the neighbors! Just look at you, my good wife. You are so fucking good, Mai, you even look good when we have a row in public." (*TM*, 2, 176) In contrast to Mai, who would like to hide the realities from the public, Marina Carr pours out all the hidden secrets and realities of the society. The Mai's concern about the neighbors in this part of the play resembles "Medea's fear of mockery" in Greek tragedy.

The Mai and her sisters Connie and Beck represent the present time. "Mai is the central figure in the drama, just as her age places her in the middle of the extended family tree. The other characters in the play call her "The Mai," adapting the Irish tradition of adding "the" before the last name of the (male) head of a clan."[64] As the most educated woman who could stand on her own feet after her husband left her, and who could keep the other women of the family in the circle, she deserves the title as the "head" of the family.

[62] Claudia W. Harris, "Rising Out of The Miasmal Mists", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 228.
[63] Ibid., 228.
[64] Trotter, "Translating Women into Irish Theatre History", 168.

Beck, Mai's sister, is another dissatisfied woman who fails in her relationships with the men. Ashamed of her unsuccessful educational life and dismal academic record she tries to cover her failure by always being attracted to educated men. However, she does not match the expectations of her lovers. She tells lies about her age, her education and career to the husband to whom she is married in Australia and gets a divorce soon after her husband finds out about her real status. Beck admires Mai and expresses her jealousy about Mai's social status with the following words:

> Mai, you don't know what it is like out there when you're nothing, because you've always shone, always, you've always been somebody's favorite or somebody's star pupil or somebody's wife, or somebody's mother or somebody's teacher. Imagine a place where you are none of these things. (*TM*, 1, 132)

Beck's words reflect the importance of belonging to society and being part of something. She represents women who are driven out of social life and shows the unsatisfactory feeling about not being able to contribute to society. She cries out; "I'm thirty-seven years of age, Mai, and what I've got to show for it? Nothing. Absolutely nothing!" (*TM*, 1, 133) The importance of education and social status is frequently emphasized in the play. We understand that Mai's mother Ellen was also a very successful student studying Medicine in Dublin University. While praising her for always being way ahead of her time, Grandma Fraochlán expresses her disappointment with Ellen for getting pregnant halfway through her college degree and having to marry Mai's father. Mai also acknowledges the fact that her preference for Robert always degraded her. She regrets having given up her future dreams in favor of her husband. She blames Robert, she says, "When you met me I was a cellist

in the college orchestra! I had a B.A. under my belt and I was halfway through my masters! You lower me, all the time you lower me." (*TM*, 2, 155) During another argument when Mai attempts to accuse Robert about the same issue again, Robert reacts with these words, "Degrees, degrees, you collect them like weapons!" (*TM*, 2, 177)

Marina Carr's female characters are so loyal to their lovers that they completely sacrifice their lives for the love of a man, even though he is not worthy. Millie says that; "The swans do keen their mates."(*TM*, 2, 157) She compares her mother to the swans as she circles her husband all the time. The play both starts and ends with the sound of swans taking flight. Mai has a special bond with the swans as they have long been known as the symbol of fidelity. Millie might have referred to this fact. In her interview with Mike Murphy, Carr explains:

> The swan is huge in Irish mythology, from the Children of Lir, through to Yeats. I'm drawing on that motif in the Irish canon. I grew up by a lake from ten years of age on, so I had a good seven years looking out and watching swans. They say the swan is the soul bird - I saw a swan shot once and I saw the mate keening the swan. She went around him. He was lying with the head down, the neck drooped, the beautiful necks they have. It went up a little and then down because he was dead. [65]

However, a recent study shows that disloyalty is widespread especially among the black swans. "Swans have long been renowned as symbols of lifelong fidelity and devotion, but our recent work has shown that infidelity is rife among

[65] Interview with Marina Carr/ www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/SESLL/EngLit/ ugrad/hons/IrishLit/Carr/interview.rtf.

black swans,"[66] says Dr Raoul Mulder from the University of Melbourne's Department of Zoology. Marina Carr might not have any idea about the latest development about the swan world, and Millie thinks that swans keen their mates and personify her mother with the swans because she is obsessed with the love of her husband.

Marina Carr's plays are full of women who preferred their husbands and lovers to everybody else, although they end up regretting that. However, those men are offstage, invisible or dysfunctional in this play.

Millie, Mai's daughter, is present on stage all through the play and she is the narrator. Her narration drifts between the past and the future when she is thirty and the mother of a five-year-old son. She narrates the play fourteen years after the action. Anthony Roche explains in his article "Woman on the Threshold" that "Millie is of the present and the future, like Marina Carr herself, expressing uncertainty and openness in the telling of a story and the making of a play."[67] Marina Carr's characters always travel through a time tunnel. Roche adds that:

> The magic thread stitching the women's lives together is the act of shared memory which is the play itself, the thread of affiliation which binds Grandma Fraochlán, the Mai, and Millie together across time, space and the absence of death.[68]

In the beginning of the play Mai is just moving to the new house that she has built by Owl Lake. After her husband Robert, a cello player, leaves her and his children five years earlier without an explanation, Mai tries hard to build a future for

[66] "Secret Sex Lives Of Swans Under Scrunity In New Study" http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2006/06/060607170545.htm.
[67] Anthony Roche, "Women on the Threshold", The *Theatre of Marina Carr*, 41-42.
[68] Ibid., 41.

her children and keep the matrilineal family together. Just as she moves to the new house by her favorite lake, her husband suddenly shows up carrying his cello under his arm. She accepts him with a warm welcome since she has never given up the hope that he would return one day. She even builds the house with the expectation that she will live there together with Robert. This part reminds us of Hester's waiting for her mother. In contrast with Hester, The Mai's dreams come true, although they will not last very long. Millie draws attention to Mai's subconscious motive for building the house: "What was certain was nothing was going to stop that house being built for Robert..." (*TM*, 2, 152) Just like her Grandma, Mai is also a mother who is more concerned about the love of her husband than the welfare of her children. As Eilis Ni Dhuibhne states in her article "Playing the Story: Narrative Techniques in the Mai," this was "a family of women who love men to excess and do not love their children enough."[69]

At last, Mai realizes her dream of living in the new house with Robert; however, it does not last very long as her husband starts to betray her a few months after his arrival. On the day of Robert's return, Grandma Fraochlán, who foresees the future, approaches him with suspicion. She says: "I think you only came back because you couldn't find anythin' better elsewhere and you'll be gone as soon as ya think you've found somethin' better." (*TM*, 1, 122) Robert explains: "People change." Grandma Fraochlán's reaction to this explanation is meaningful, she says: "People don't change Robert, they don't change at all!" She uses the following expression to prove her words. "The orchestration might be different but the tune is always the same." (*TM*, 1,123) It is worth mentioning here that Robert's father has

[69] Eilis Ni Dhuibne, "Playing the Story", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 71.

also left his wife and children to go to America in the past. Robert explains that he had to get to work after the war and came back after a while. It is evident in this play that “history repeats itself.”

Although marriage is a central idea in *The Mai*, men are absent in the play. Robert, who is a dysfunctional husband and father, is the only male character in *The Mai*. Grandma Fraochlán and Aunt Julie are widows. Aunt Agnes is a spinster; Beck is divorced and Connie’s husband is offstage during the play. Millie narrates that she has a son who never knows his father. Millie makes up stories about his father because she does not want to tell him that his father is actually a married man with two sons, who never acknowledged his paternity of Millie’s child.

Marina Carr tries to reflect the situation of Ireland in the early 1900s when women were forced to stay home and take care of the children while the men were away seeking jobs or trying to construct a new life. Women were the main elements in the society who were supposed to stitch the family together. In “Women in Northern Ireland: Cultural Studies and Material Conditions,” Megan Sullivan explains the legal situation:

> Irish Republic's 1922 and 1937 constitutions. The latter, permanent, constitution encoded women's domestic status in state policy and ensured that a woman's role as domestic being and mother could prohibit her from securing and maintaining employment. As noted earlier in this chapter, in the 1937 constitution women are referred to in the context of the family. Article 41.2 states that "in particular the state recognises that by her life within the home woman gives to the state the support without which the common good cannot be achieved. . . . the state shall therefore endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not

> be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home" (quoted in Commission on the Status of Women, *Report to the Second Council*, 23). This article, and the ideology that informs it, has allowed men to use women's role as mothers and homemakers to discourage them from employment; additionally, this ideology has allowed men to discourage women from agitating for equality if they work outside the home. As the article suggests, women are supposed to care more about home than work. [70]

In *The Mai*, women in a matriarchal family have learnt to survive without men. Grandma Fraochlán stresses that men are unnecessary while criticising Mai for letting Robert into her life again. “Ya survived this long without him, why are ya bringin’ all this on yourself again?” (*TM*, 1, 114) But, it is apparent that Mai built the house for Robert. She is obsessed with the love of her husband and tries in vain to integrate him into her new life. However, Robert lives in the house just like a visitor with a tendency to disappear at any time. He never feels that he belongs to this matriarchal family circle. When Robert calls Grandma Fraochlán “visitor”, Mai reminds him that he is actually the visitor in that house. In the article, “Translating the Women into Irish Theatre History,” Mary Trotter comments that:

> Traditionally, the husband prepares a house for his bride, who enters into his home and becomes a member of the patriarchal family line. Carr turns the tables in “The Mai”, however, translating the tradition of the bride crossing her husband’s threshold into a situation in which

[70] Megan Sullivan, *Women in Northern Ireland: Cultural Studies and Material Conditions*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1999), 147-148 *Questia*, 6 May 2007. <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=22825460>.

> Robert enters the house built by Mai. Because he enters Mai's home Robert must accept the dominance of her family line, represented by the Matriarch, Grandma Fraochlán.[71]

Trotter also explains, "by focusing on the matrilineal relationships in the play, *The Mai* points out how historical and cultural developments in the Republic of Ireland over the last century have shaped Irishwomen's experience."[72]

Carr represents the political and economic situation of Ireland through the lens of her matriarchal family. She uses the cultural metaphors to reflect the past and recent status of her country. Representation of national identity has been the key concept in Carr's works. She not only aims to reflect the situation of women but also the situation of her country as a whole. In its history, Ireland has been described by the colonizer in female metaphors to draw attention to its subordinate status. In "The Myth of Sovereignty," Joseph Valente describes this in the following lines:

> The sexual infection of socio-economic dominance was unusually explicit in the case of Ireland. First of all, its hybrid status as a metropolitan colony left Ireland especially susceptible to familial metaphors. Long nicknamed as 'sister isle,' Ireland was increasingly imaged in wifely terms as the century wore on, the implied connubial connection with England serving to naturalize that long-standing bone of contention, the Union.[73]

In his book *Outsiders Inside: Whiteness, Place, and Irish Women*, Bronwen Walter comments that:

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[71] Trotter, "Translating Women into Irish Theatre History", *A Century of Irish Drama*, 169.
[72] Ibid., 170.
[73] Joseph Valente, "The Myth of Sovereignty: Gender in the Literature of Irish Nationalism", *English Language History*, Vol.61, No.1. (Spring, 1994), 189-190.

> A major influence has been the contested colonial relationship with Britain, which has placed Ireland in a position of feminised dependence. The fixing of women in the central, but disempowered role of Mary, was mirrored in images of the Irish nation. Britain represented Ireland as Erin, a young, beautiful but weak woman who needed 'marriage' to her strong masculinised neighbour for control and protection. The feminine position of dependence was popularised in the second half of the nineteenth century by Matthew Arnold, who published theories about Irish 'Celticism'. Celts were constructed as a feminised 'race', characterised as artistic and charming, but impractical and unreliable (Cairns and Richards 1988)... Feminised representations of Ireland were particularly resisted by Irish men, who responded with hypermasculine self-representations. Thus the increasingly organised and well-supported challenge to British rule was accompanied by aggressively masculine 'Gaelicisation' in Ireland involving an emphasis on athletic male physical prowess (Nash 1996). It could be seen as evidence of repudiation of dependency but also of identification with the aggressor in the colonial culture (Nandy 1983). The post-independence era in Ireland was thus even more exclusive of women in the public sphere, as the 1937 Constitution confirmed, in ways that continued to resonate with the colonial past. The icon of the family, apparently representing interdependence and unity, has remained dominant in Irish society. All nations represent themselves as families, interconnected and united, but the trope is particularly resonant in Ireland. Ironically it is headed by the figure of 'Mother Ireland', although power clearly resides with father-farmers. [74]

As well as using feminine metaphors to reflect the national and cultural identity, Marina Carr also uses water and myths related to bodies of water such as;

[74] Bronwen Walter, *Outsiders Inside: Whiteness, Place, and Irish Women*, (New York: Routledge, 2000) 18-19, *Questia*, 6 May 2007 <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=108158904>.

bogs, rivers, and lakes, which have feminine associations. Land and water are two metaphors that represent female identity. The Mai builds a house by Owl Lake to which she has an emotional attachment just like Hester's attachment to the Bog of Cats. In the ancient Irish myths there is a close connection of the bodies of water with female bodies. Marina Carr frequently uses the land and water as metaphors to symbolize female identity. Even the origin of Grandma Fraochlán's name comes from the island where she was born.

> The name (Fraochlán) alone evokes a thousand memories in me. She was known as the Spanish beauty though she was born and bred on Inish Fraochlán, north of Boefin. She was the result of a brief tryst between an ageing island spinster and a Spanish or Moroccan sailor- no one is quite sure- who was never heard or seen since the night of her conception. There were many stories about him as there are about those who appear briefly in our lives and change them forever. (*TM*, 1, 115)

Clare Wallace says, "In each of the plays it is evident that origins are supposed to determine destiny and yet in each play the problematic nature of origin is stressed."[75] As I have stated before, in *The Mai*, along with the references of the characters' individual background there are also many references to the old stories and local myths. In "Translating Women into Irish Theatre History," Marry Trotter states; "There is even an aspect of magical realism in this drama, as the young women make sense of their lives through inventing mythic stories about their experiences or by finding parallels in Irish myth and folklore." [76]

[75] Clare Wallace, "Authentic Reproductions", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 63.
[76] Trotter, "Translating Women into Irish Theatre History", *A Century of Irish Drama*, 168.

In most of the Celtic tales there is a connection of a goddess, or a fairy, or a female supernatural being with a body of water. In the old Celtic texts water represented women with supernatural powers who are generally very beautiful. The Mai is a beautiful and educated woman who is strong enough to build up a future for her own children while taking care of the other female members in her family three even without the support of a man. The Mai, as the head of the family, symbolically uses a “magic thread” to stitch the family together, like a fairy living by the lake and using her spell to help people. While trying to listen to the other women’s problems and give advice and console them she has to supress her own misery and dissatisfaction. Her tears run down secretly and find a way into her heart. She does not have a lake of tears in reality; however, the Owl Lake represents the invisible tears that she sheds. Owl Lake symbolizes The Mai’s secret tears. Below, Millie, Mai’s daughter, explains the origin of the Owl Lake:

> Owl Lake comes from the Irish, loch cailleach oíche, Lake of the Night Hag or Pool of the Dark Witch. The legend goes that Coíllte, daughter of the mountain god, Bloom, fell in love with Blath, Lord of all the flowers. So away she bounded like a young deer, accross her father’s mountain, down through Croc’s Valley of Stone, over the dark witch’s bog lands till she came to Blath’s domain. There he lay, under an oak tree, playing his pipes, a crown of forget-me-nots in his ebony hair. And so, they lived freely through the spring and summer, sleeping on beds of leaves and grass, drinking soups of nettle and rosehip, dressing in acorn and poppy. One evening approaching autumn Blath told Coíllte that soon he must go and live with the dark witch of the bog and that he would return in the spring, and the next morning he was gone. Coíllte followed him and found him ensconced in the dark witch’s lair. He would not speak to her, look at her, touch

> her, and heartbroken Coíllte lay down outside the dark witch's lair and cried a lake of tears that stretched for miles around. One night, seizing a long awaited opportunity, the dark witch pushed Coíllte into her lake of tears.... (*TM*, 1, 147)

Millie recalls the legend and now after Mai's suicide she realizes with terror that although all the family members knew the story very well, they never related it to The Mai's situation. She says they always knew the story and adds, "But we were unaffected by it and in our blindness moved along with it like sleepwalkers along a precipice and all around gods and mortals called out for us to change our course, and not listening, we walked on and on." (*TM*, 1, 148) The Mai frequently sits by the window looking outside because although she builds a new house she does not think that she belongs there, she always looks outside and watches the lake, since she fells that her destiny lies there. Owl Lake was her real "home" just as the Bog was Hester's. The bond of women with the water is frequently emphasized in the old Celtic texts. Marina Carr remains loyal to her culture's literary background in *The Mai* as well.

Peete Cross discusses in "The Celtic Elements in the Lays of the 'Lanval' and 'Graelent'" that "the association of supernatural women with fountains and other bodies of water is not the result of the courtly poet's desire for picturesque decoration."[77] He explains that: "the important place held by female water divinities and feminine river-names have been strongly emphasized among the early Celts,"[78] and "the appearance of female other-world beings to chosen mortals at fountains or

[77] Tom Peete Cross, "The Celtic Elements in the Lays of 'Lanval' and 'Graelent'", *Modern Philology*, Vol. 12, No.10 (April, 1915), 600.
[78] Ibid.

larger bodies of water is common enough in the early Irish Literature."[79] He adds, "The popular fancy of the early Celts connecting beings of other-worldly aspects with the bodies of water near which they might appear may be inferred in the old legends of Celts." [80] According to Cross:

> …the fountains were not the only approaches to the Celtic fairy-land under the water. Beneath certain of the lochs and rivers of Erin were magnificent other-world duns, from which strangely beautiful women sometimes emerged appear on the banks or at the fords where the ancient highways crossed the streams and where they would be most likely to encounter the mortals upon when they had deigned to cast the eye of love.[81]

When we look at Marina Carr's works we realize that *By the Bog of Cats*, *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan* take place around a body of water. The water represents both female and national identity in her plays. The women in those plays have closer bond with the water than their home. The idea of home is represented by the water bodies for those female protagonists. From a wider scope we can equate the idea of home for the characters with Ireland for the Irish nation. In Marina Carr's works the issues of the nation are compacted to fit in a family, each member representing a part of the society. She reflects the real world through the mirror of identity inside the frame of a mythical setting. In the article "Playing the Story: Narrative Techniques in The Mai," Eilis Ni Dhuibhne says:

> In all her plays, she employs images and places which have a mythic resonance—the settings of the plays are similar to those which occur

[79] Ibid., 600.
[80] Ibid., 602.
[81] Ibid., 603-604.

> in fairytales: lakes, bogs, forests, hills. Even The Mai's house is a sort of fairytale places on the side of Owl Lake… The names which Marina Carr gives her characters also reflect those used in fairytales…. Names, which are seldom encountered in everyday life, are frequent in Marina Carr's work. [82]

There is a big emphasis on names in Carr's works. Names of the people and the names of the places that carry secret symbols are carefully chosen. Those names either refer to the origin of the characters or function as a prophecy. Grandma Fraochlán's name refers to her origin; The Mai (as 'the' at the beginning represents the head of a clan) refers to the function of the character. However, In *By the Bog of Cats*, Hester's last name "Swane", which means "swan," is used as a prophecy to infer that she has the same destiny with the black swan. In most cases, the names that Carr uses either represent the history or the future of the characters, Clare Wallace comments that:

> Carr's use of names becomes increasingly deliberate and meaningful from *The Ma*i to *By the Bog of Cats*…. As in the folkloric narrative traditions, names indicate character and bear multiple significances as stigma or stigmata. Characters then inhabit the role invoked by their names. For instance, Grandma Fraochlán's name emerges as a cipher to a whole family's intricate and unfortunate history of (self) deception (…) the name also facilitates a symbolic contraction rendering grandmother and island synonymous, both sides of origin, mapping the fertility of the woman onto the land. This name with its various resonances encodes a history that mars the future generations of women in the play while men continue to be absent.[83]

[82] Dhuibhne, "Playing the Story", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 70.
[83] Wallace, "Authentic Reproductions", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 61.

Carr also uses the place names to indicate the characters' history, destiny and identity. The name "Owl Lake" both refers to a supernatural woman in a local myth, and draws a parallel with the destiny of "Mai." In this respect, it refers to both history and future. Names of Irish origin are of great importance for Irish identity. The British government tried to change many Irish place names into English names over the past centuries. Irish names were systematically replaced by the English originated place names. This was a serious threat for Irish nationality as the language and landscape are the main elements of a nation's identity. Therefore, revival writers like Marina Carr tried to stick to their roots and history using the original Irish place names in their works. That movement was a determination to resist to the modernization of the culture. Catherine Nash explains the situation in her article "Irish Placenames: Post-Colonial Locations" that:

> Over the last two centuries, government bodies have systematically named and renamed places in Ireland. The most notorious episode in this long history of toponymic change in Ireland was the mid-nineteen century Ordnance Survey project to map Ireland and officially validate versions of Irish place names that had been modified to various degrees to suit English speech and orthography.[84] The understandings of history, culture and identity condensed in the discourses surrounding past and present place name changes are inseparable from broader question of Irish history and identity.[85]

Apart from the legends and myths, dreams also play very important role in *The Mai*. Marina Carr's characters live in a dream world where past, present, and future are intricate. Robert confesses to Mai that what brought him back home was a

[84] Catherine Nash, "Irish Placenames: Post-Colonial Locations", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, Vol. 24, No.4, 457.
[85] Ibid., 458.

dream in which he sees Mai dead, and his cello case as her coffin in a carriage drawn by two black swans. He says he followed them running over water, trees and mountains until he lost sight of the carriage and immediately packed his bags and came home. Robert's dream is a kind of prophecy giving the signs of Mai's suicide. Mai reacts to his dream by saying; "So you have come to burry me," (*TM*, 1, 125) which came out to be true at the end. In Robert's dream we see the black swans used as black destiny just as in *By the Bog of Cats*, Marina Carr always uses the black swans as the sign of a curse or dead in her plays.

In return Mai tells Robert about a dream that she sees the night before they get married. She dreams herself as a child walking up a river. Suddenly she sees Robert coming towards her; however, he disappears and Mai walks into a black cavern that leads to nowhere with the aim of finding him there. In both dreams water is the important element as it represents female according to the Celtic myths.

In another part of the play Millie tells us about her own dreams:

> I dream of water all the time. I'm floundering off the shore, or bursting towards the surface for air, or wrestling with a 'black swan' trying to drag me under. I have not yet emerged triumphant from those lakes of the night. Sometimes I think I wear Owl Lake like a caul around my chest to protect me from all that is good and hopeful and worth pursuing. And on a confident day when I am considering a first shaky step towards something within my grasp, the caul constricts and I am back at Owl Lake again. Images rush past me from that childhood landscape. (*TM*, 2, 184)

Again water and black swan are the key metaphors in Millie's dream too. Millie's dream represents her fear of sharing the same destiny with the other women

in her family. (She tries to explain that Owl Lake prevents her from all that is good and hopeful and that is worth pursuing). She is the only woman in the family who can escape far away from Owl Lake. She goes to America in order not to share the same black destiny around the cursed Owl Lake. However, she ends up making up stories to tell her son about his father just as the way Grandma Fraochlán does. She says his father was an El Salvadorian drummer who swept her off her feet when she was lost in New York. She escapes from the Owl Lake but she cannot help repeating the same tradition of telling stories that she took after her Grandma. "History always repeats itself" as a sort of curse upon the heads of the characters in Marina Carr's plays.

Marina Carr, as a contemporary Irish playwright, is primarily concerned about reflecting a sense of "Irishness" in her plays rather than representing only the women. She uses the women as heroes and tries to treat the cultural, political, traditional issues of Ireland through the eyes of those women. Although the writers from Yeats to Friel have used female characters in their plays there was still a need to reveal the experience of Irish women through the eyes of a women writer. Marina Carr is one of the pioneers of this tradition. As Marry Trotter claims; "She translated the women into Irish theatre history."[86] A society is a whole and it should be represented with all its components. Marina Carr tried to fill the gap of a large component of society that consists of women who have been absent in Irish theatre history for a very long time. In that perspective, she can be called a revolutionary. She treats the issues of national and cultural identity through the eyes of women. Trotter explains this process:

[86] Trotter, "Translating Women into Irish Theatre History", *A Century of Irish Drama*, 163.

> And from Yeats and Gregory's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*(1902) to McDonagh's virgin/whore "Girleen" in the *Lonesome West*(1997) Irish female characters have embodied the nation, the land, the desires or responsibilities of male characters, but rarely have they been authentic, complex, autonomous women. To write woman into Irish theatre history, women playwrights write *outside* of Irish theatre history, finding new subjects (real Irish women) and alternative forms (street performance, cross-gender casting, contiguous narratives) to break out of male-centered traditions of Irish drama and to develop Ireland's increasingly heterogeneous theatre scene… Rejecting a version of history is an effective way to advance a new tradition, and these writers are certainly enriching Ireland's theatrical future by rejecting elements of its mainstream theatrical past.[87]

Trotter categorizes *The Mai* as a "family memory play." In family memory plays usually a man narrates the story, recalling his childhood. He gives anecdotes about his childhood with the connections to family, history and land. Trotter points out that in those plays, "female characters provide the protagonist with emotional support, a source of conflict, or a sexual interest, but the real attention in the family memory drama centers on the patrilineal relationship."[88] She gives Yeats' *Purgatory* and Beckett's *Endgame* as examples of this type.

Marina Carr applies this traditional form of drama to create a "matrilineal narrative, revealing a great deal about women's experience in Ireland…"[89] In her plays, women do not function as the compliments of a male-centered play but an authentic representation of Irish female identity. In *Outsiders Inside: Whiteness, Place and Irish Women,* Bronwen Walter argues that; "Irishness in Ireland is deeply

[87] Ibid., 164.
[88] Ibid., 166.
[89] Ibid., 166.

gendered, while appearing to encompass all members of the nation in a common image." He claims that "common features of Irishness are shared by Irish women and men but their Irish identities are experienced differently."[90]

In *The Mai*, Marina Carr has treated many issues all at once. In the frame of a matriarchal family, she casts light on marriage, familial relationships, women's social status, personal and political past traumas, landscape history, cultural identity and female identity. She has an endless source of energy and imagination to combine all those issues embroider them by using the local, and personal and cultural myths.

[90] Walter, *Outsiders Inside: Whiteness, Place, and Irish Women*, 21.

CHAPTER 3

PORTIA COUGHLAN BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL, FANTASY AND REALITY

Portia Coughlan is another recent play by Marina Carr. Because of the similarities between the three plays, we can even call *Portia Coughlan*, *The Mai* and *By the Bog of Cats* a trilogy. The fierce attachment of female protagonists to a body of water is the common element in all plays. Hester's Bog of Cats, Mai's Owl Lake and Portia's Belmont River serves the same purpose in this trilogy. Most of the Irish myths take place around water and it is not surprising that all these waters have a special connection with a supernatural being such as; a goddess, a, fairy or a witch. The use of myths is abundant in Irish National Theatre as they are an important means of representing the collective memory in Irish culture. In, " Myth and the Fantastic," Csilla Bertha observes that:

> Mythic figures and events were believed to be real because they arose out of the collective experience of a community (whereas fantastic beings are a product of an individual imagination); hence myth, while being universal, is also closely related to the life of a community where it has the function of uniting its members. "Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that married them to rock and hill?" — asks Yeats in his *Autobiographies* (194). Fighting against the inhuman powers, the heroes of myth usually symbolize mankind, and, more concretely, the heroes' tribes or their people. In such archaic communities, "life is communal and members achieve their fulfillment not by individuating themselves but by identifying with

> the traditions of their culture" (Hume32). The heroes are heroes inasmuch as they are able to follow the mythic pattern of behavior and so embody the physical, moral, and spiritual ideals of the community.[91]

In *Portia Coughlan*, the female character has developed a special bond with Belmont River. Like most of the water bodies used in Carr's plays Belmont River is also based on a local myth. The name 'Belmont' comes from a river god called Bel and a witch girl who is impaled on a stake and left to die. Bel hears her cries and comes down the Belmont Valley and takes her away from there and the river is born. Portia explains the origin of Belmont River and says, "The place must surely be the dungeon of the fallen world." (*PC*, 1, 219)

The play takes place on the thirtieth birthday of Portia, whose twin brother drowned in Belmont River at the age of fifteen. Portia is married to a rich local man and has three sons. However, she does not take care of her house and children and spends much of her time at the bank of river listening to the ghost of her brother Gabriel singing. She thinks she doesn't belong anywhere or to anybody in this world, including her family. Portia has an affair with Damus, with whom she sometimes meets by the river. However, she does not belong to him, either. She stresses this fact when she says to Damus, "I'm not yours or anyone else's, Damus Hallion." (*PC*, 1, 202) Damus asks, "What keeps you coming here so?" (*PC*, 1, 203) She answers; "I come here because I've always come here and I reckon I'll be coming here long after

[91] Csilla Bertha, " Myth and the Fantastic", *More Real Than Reality: The Fantastic in Irish Literature and the Arts*, Donald E. Morse and Csilla Bertha eds. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 18. *Questia*. 18 May 2007 <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=26231539>.

I'm gone. I'll lie here when I am a ghost and smoke ghost cigarettes and watch ye earthlin's goin' about yeer pointless days." (*PC,* 1, 203)

Portia lives in a world of her own that she has created with the memories of her brother. Her world extends beyond the limits of the material world including the afterworld. Portia refuses the limits of this world, and just like Hester in *By the Bog of Cats*, Portia's ghost will roam the place even after her death, as well.

The influence of modern Irish writers using natural and supernatural forces together is clearly visible in Marina Carr's works too. The use of ghosts plays an important role in Irish plays as they establish a kind of bridge between the two worlds. This emphasizes the fact that death is not the ending but a continuation of life in another form. In " Ghosts in Irish Drama," Anthony Roche observes that:

> What is true for modern European literature in general applies to Irish literature, that not only the lives of the characters represented but also the very space they occupy is haunted by the dead, who bring their dimension of being to bear interrogatively on those lives.[92]

Frank McGuinness says, "Marina Carr is a writer haunted by memories she could not possibly possess, but they seem determined to possess her."[93] Just like Hester, Mai and Grandma Fraochlán (Mai's grandmother) Portia Coughlan is haunted by the memories of the absent figures in their lives. The attachment of the characters to the dead or lost ones is treated intensely in Carr's works. They create an imaginary world of memories where the dead and living, the past and present are

[92] Anthony Roche, "Ghosts in Irish Drama", *More Real Than Reality: The Fantastic in Irish Literature and the Arts*, 41
[93] McGuinness, "Masks: An Introduction to Portia Coughlan", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 78.

intricately interwoven. As Guinness claims, “Death is a big country and hers is a big imagination, crossing the border always between the living and the dead.” [94]

Carr uses natural landscape powerfully to accommodate her natural and supernatural characters. Her attachment to the natural landscape has its roots back in her early childhood. She explains this in an interview with Mike Murphy:

> I grew up in the midlands seven miles outside Tullamore in a place called Gortnamona, which means 'Field of the Bog'. We lived in the school residence there. My mother was principal schoolteacher of the local national school. After about ten years we moved to Pallas Lake. My first seven or eight summers were spent running around the fields, eating grass, chasing tractors, picking mushrooms, blackberries, all that stuff. It was quite idyllic for a child. It's a beautiful part of the country and still not very well known.[95]

Carr admits that her childhood memories are extensively reflected in her plays. She says to Mike Murphy; “Where I grew up was quite beautiful, and has filtered into the writing. Apart from that, I've always thought that landscape was another character in the work, and if you can get it right it'll resonate and enrich the overall piece.”[96] Carr gets the landscape to evoke her characters’ past.

Like the other female characters in Carr’s plays, Portia has close bonds with a topographic place. Hester’s bond with the Bog of Cats resembles Portia’s attachment to the Belmont River. Both characters relate those places to a person who is dead. The bog and river are natural forces that are intensely related to a supernatural being. Carr is very adept at connecting the supernatural with the natural. When Stacia

[94] McGuinness, “Writing in Greek: By the Bog of Cats”, *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 87.
[95] Interview with Marina Carr.
www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/SESLL/EngLit/ugrad/hons/IrishLit/Carr/interview.rtf
[96] Ibid.

(Portia's friend) suggests Portia going on a holiday, which means going away from the river, Portia says; "don't think I'd survive a night away from the Belmont Valley." (PC, 1, 207) In *By the Bog of Cats* Hester explains her bond with the bog with the following words; "I know every barrow and rivulet and bog hole of its nine square mile. I know where the best bog rosemary grows and the sweetest wild bog rue. I could lead yees around the Bog of Cats in me sleep." (*BBC,* 2, 314) Portia has exactly the same feelings about Belmont River; she explains why she cannot go away from there even for a short holiday:

> Oh I'm sure I'd live through what other folks calls holidays, but me mind'd be turning on the Belmont River. Be wonderin' was it flowin' rough or smooth, was the bank mucky nor dry, was the salmon beginnin' their rowin' for the sea, was the frogs spawnin' the waterlilies, had the heron returned, be wonderin' all of these and a thosand other wonderin's that riverwashes over me. (*PC*, 1, 207-208)

The natural elements such as water, flowers, fish and frogs are used to describe the characters' fierce attachment to a topographic place. Natural forces are the means accommodating supernatural beings in Carr's plays. Below, Portia explains her closeness to her dead twin brother, which gives us an idea about the connection between Gabriel and the river. "Came out of the womb holdin' hands - When God was handin' out souls he must've got mine and Gabriel's mixed up, aither that or he gave us just the one between us and it went into the Belmont River with him." (*PC*, 1, 211) Portia fells like a half person after the death of her brother and she will never be complete until she meets Gabriel in the river Belmont. Carr is a great believer in afterlife; in her interview she shares her ideas about afterlife:

> I believe there was one before and one after and possibly one again. There are those who believe you are only sent here to get it right, and that they'll keep sending you back until you get it right, and that's quite daunting. We cling to this world, and you'd think from the other side we'd be screaming not to be sent back, but that's another argument.... People don't believe in things anymore. They go to the theatre and they want two episodes of a soap opera. They don't want to be told about a ghost. 'I'hey don't want anything that isn't like a Kodak instamatic photograph, and that's one of the things that infuriates me about the theatre. The worst thing they can say about you is that it's not believable.[97]

Marina Carr's use of ghosts are both the reflection of her own spiritual beliefs and the general attitude of Irish dramatists representing cultural beliefs on stage. The Irish stage becomes the display of the natural and supernatural, living and dead, the past, and the present all at the same time. Antony Roche suggests," I have been arguing that Irish drama forces its way into full carnal presence and in so doing transforms the stage into a space where the living and the dead interact on equal terms."[98] Roche also claims that:

> Ghosts are a strong and recurrent feature of Irish drama. It is less a case of Ireland being in thrall to its past (though that specter is raised and confronted in all of the plays discussed) as one in which the past is always living as a potential to be resurrected in the endless present of theater. The lives of those who have died are keenly felt and registered in Irish drama's insistence on treating ghosts as nothing more (or less) than full corporeal presences and the stage itself, as a necessary meeting ground to mediate between the claims of the living

[97] Interview with Marina Carr/ www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/SESLL/EngLit/ ugrad/hons/IrishLit/Carr/interview.rtf

[98] Roche, " Ghosts in Irish Drama", *More Real Than Reality: The Fantastic in Irish Literature and the Arts*, 45.

and the dead.[99]

Just like Yeats Marina Carr brings the supernatural onto the stage where they share the same space with the living. Irish playwrights travel between the limits of time and place in their plays where reality and fantasy are mixed. Carr is following Yeats' tradition of mixing the two worlds. Anthony Roche explains Yeats' method, "He stages directly the encounter between the living and the dead which Synge had kept (just) off-stage and had conveyed primarily through oral storytelling. "[100] In Carr's plays the ghosts are on stage such as the Ghost Fancier, the ghost of Joseph Swane and the ghost of Gabriel. These supernatural characters share the same stage with the living.

The combination of natural and supernatural has its origins back in the myths. Because in myths nature always accomodates the supernatural. The material world and other world are always treated together in the mythical tales. As a follower of the tradition of using myths to recall collective memory, Carr uses the method of combining real and supernatural to make indirect reference to the past memory of the culture. As well as referring to her characters' past memories, Carr tries to recall the past memories of her nation, too. In " Myth and the Fantastic", Csillia Bertha argues that:

> In prelogical thinking - which included all spheres of knowledge about the world in a synthesis - the distinction between reality and fantasy did not exist. As Levy-Bruhl asserts: "In primitive thinking the mystical feature was not added to things and phenomena but was identical with them; the supernatural was part of nature, so what we

[99] Ibid., 63.
[100] Ibid., 50.

> call miracles, were natural to them" (quoted Bak65-66). Thus one of the most important features of myth is its synthetic view, which naturally and unquestionably holds the four-dimensional universe, the visible and invisible worlds together in a unity. In myth everything is conceived as real, the supernatural figures are personifications of the great, unknown forces of nature or the cosmos, while the heroes embody human forms of behavior in their struggle with these powers. That the two spheres meet comes as no surprise, for human beings are considered to be part of the universe, living among and participating in the interrelations of these forces. [101]

The influence of supernatural can even be observed in Carr's naming the characters. Her use of names is not accidental; in contrast she names the characters with references to their functions, origins, destinies or the supernatural forces that they represent. Portia's brother Gabriel and husband Raphael are both named after archangels. Portia is very concerned about the meaning of names, she even confesses to Raphael at the end of the play that it was because of his name that she married him. "I thought how can anyone with a name like that be so real, and I says to meself, If Raphael Coughlan notices me I will have a chance to enter the world and stay in it, which has always been the battle for me." (*PC*, 3, 255) In another part of the play she makes the similar confession to her mother; "The only reason I got married Raphael was because of his name, an angel's name, same as Gabriel's and I thought be osmosis or just pure wishin' that one'd take on the qualities of other. But Raphael is not Gabriel and never will be." (*PC*, 1, 210)

Portia is confused about her own identity; she can never be a part of the

[101] Bertha, " Myth and the Fantastic", *More Real Than Reality: The Fantastic in Irish Literature and the Arts*,17.

material world as her other half has drowned in the river with Gabriel. She says, “I know that somewhere he lives and that’s the place I want to be.” (*PC*, 3, 240) She mentions the afterworld as if it exists somewhere in this world. She does not want to accept the distinction of the two realms. Portia explains her confusion about her own identity in the following statement:

> Don’t know if anyone knows what it is like to be a twin. Everything is swapped and mixed up and you are aither two people or you are no one. He used call me Gabriel and I used call him Portia. Times we got so confused we couldn’t tell who was who and we’d have to wait for someone else to identify us and put us back into ourselves. (*PC*, 3, 241)

As I stated before there are many similarities between Portia, Hester and Mai. Portia’s words about her beloved one resembles the other two women’s romantic attachment to the person they lost. Even though Mai’s and Hester’s husbands are alive and not supernatural they are absent figures, just like Gabriel, and impossible to reach. The Mai says; “No one will ever understand how completely and utterly Robert is mine and I am his, no one - People think I’ve no pride, no dignity to stay in a situation like this, but I can’t think of one reason for going without him.”(*TM*, 2, 185) In *By the Bog of Cats*, Hester cries out with almost the same tone as Portia. She says; “Love is for fools and children. Our bond is harder, like two rocks we are, grindin’ off of wan another and maybe all the closer for that.” (*BBC*, 1, 269)

In *Contemporary Irish Literature*, Christina Hunt Mahony observes the similarities between The Mai and Portia Coughlan:

> In two of her recent plays, The Mai (1994) and Portia Coughlan (1996), similarities abound. Each of the title characters is a twin. Both

> have nearly supernatural affinities with the worlds of the afterlife or with those who are distant. Both plays are also obsessively fixed near the water- the first overlooking Owl Lake, the second on the banks of the Belmont River... Each is surrounded, however, by constant familial reminders of her humble origins.[102]

Marina Carr carries the problems of modern Irish women onto the stage. In *The Mai, By the Bog of Cats,* and *Portia Coughlan*, we are introduced to the women who reject the status as traditional housewives and mothers. Like Mai, and Mai's mother Ellen, Portia is also a woman who sacrificed her educational future for a man, choosing marriage and therefore being forced to play the role as a wife and mother. In the background of her rejection of the domestic role lies this unsatisfactory educational record. She blames Raphael for her failure; "And I was going to college, had me place and all, but Daddy says no, marry Raphael." (*PC*, 1, 199) All three main characters in *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan and By the Bog of Cats* are fiercely strong, passionate women in quest for their own female identities, which Carr treats as a sub element in the frame of national identity. Carr so bravely pours out the disturbing facts about the people's realities that have a shocking effect on the reader. She wants to confront the reader or audience with the harsh realities of everyday life, showing the worst sides of individuals, which should normally be hidden from the society. She breaks the taboos. Medb Ruane claims that, "Portia Coughlan is all about speaking the unspoken…. As spoken by Carr's characters, words are weapons

[102] Mahony, *Contemporary Irish Literature,* 190-191.

designed to inflict hurt and cruelty - nothing is saved for the pillow."[103] In "Reflections Across Water," Melissa Sihra observes:

> The interaction between place, character and narrative in Carr's plays, where the poetically charged topography becomes the site of infanticide, incest, domestic violence, rape, prostitution, infidelity, violation and suicide, offers depictions of Ireland less concerned with filtering the past through a fractured golden lens, than reflecting contemporary social images of turbulence and anomie.[104]

Portia Coughlan is a woman who is always blamed by the other members of family for not being a proper housewife and mother for her children. All through the play, her husband criticizes her about neglecting the house and children. Portia says:

> I never wanted sons nor daughters and I never pretended otherwise to ya; told ya from the start. But ya thought ya could woo me into motherhood. Well, it hasn't worked out, has it? You've your three sons now, so ya better mind them because I can't love them Raphael. I'm just not able. (*PC*, 1, 221)

Portia, like Carr's other female protagonists, denies her domestic role as she is more focused on the memories about her brother Gabriel. She is one of Carr's obsessive women who are struggling with society's standards. Her words have always shocking affect on the others. She voices the disturbing facts, which the society cannot stand hearing. In another fight with her husband she confesses that she is not a good mother and gives the explanation to that:

> You think I don't wish I could be a natural mother, mindin' me children, playin' with them, doin' all the things a mother is supposed

[103] Ruane, "Shooting from the Lip", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 84.
[104] Sihra, "Reflections Across Water", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 94.

> to do! When I look at my sons, Raphael I see knives and accidents and terrible mutilations. Their toys is weapons for me to hurt them with, givin' them a bath is a place where I could drown them. And I have to run from them and lock myself away for fear I cause these terrible to happen. Quintin is safest when I'm nowhere near him, so teach him to stop whingin' for me for fear I dash his head against a wall or fling him through a window. (*PC*, 2, 233)

These words are so important as they reveal Portia's psychological condition. She has a subconscious guilt about the death of her brother and she accuses herself of his drowning. This is the reason why she refuses to take responsibility for the children. She also accuses her mother of neglecting Gabriel, which prepares his death. Portia can never get over the past traumas in her life until she commits suicide and meets with Gabriel in the depths of Belmont River.

Marianne, Portia's mother, calls her a "bloody disgrace" (*PC*, 1, 209) because of her dysfunctional motherhood. She says; "Your home is a mess, your children is motherless." (*PC*, 3, 248) She warns her that if she keeps on neglecting the children they may end up drowning in the Belmont River one day. Portia argues with her mother and blames her mother for causing the death of her brother. She claims that Marianne neglected her son; therefore, she tries to justify her own neglect by accusing Portia of the same tendency. Her speech is very harsh, direct and bitter. She says:

> You'd like that wouldn't ya, weepin' at the grave of one of your darlin' grandsons. Be history repeatin' itself, wouldn't it now, be burryin' Gabriel all over again. I know how your bitter mind works, you think that if one of my sons was drowned that maybe ya could

> explain away how me twin was lost. Well, mother, nothin'll ever explain that, nothin'. (*PC,* 1, 210)

In another part of the play she is criticized by her father for not fitting in the society's expectations and being a disgrace to the family. Sly, her father, says; "Don't you know everyone's watchin', been watchin' us for years. Where is your ethics girl, your morality and your ethics that me and your mother tried to learn you?" (*PC,* 1, 214)

In Marina Carr's plays there is an abundance of family quarrels. Through the words of the characters we realize their feelings about the family problems and cultural issues. Carr voices the social issues through the mouths of the characters.

There is another family argument that is worth mentioning at this point. Marianne and her mother-in-law Blaize argue. Blaize blames Sly, her son, for bringing bad blood into the family by marrying Marianne, who has tinker origins. Blaize says to Marianne:

> Came into this area three generations ago with nothin' goin' for yees barrin' flamin' red hair and fat arses. And the County Council buildin' yees houses from our hard-earnt monies. We don't know where ya came from, the histories of yeer blood." (*PC,* 1, 215)

With those words Blaize voices the opinions of the local Irish people and reflects their contempt for the outsiders. C.C.M Griffin explains that:

> All that can safely be said is that for at least two centuries Tinkers or Travellers occupied the bottom rang of Irish society. Synge (1992/09), describing them as `dirty and in their life disreputable' sought to distinguish them from `tramps' living on the `edge' of society, by saying that they (the Tinkers) lived `outside' society, and in conflict

> with it –'outlawed' and as 'outcasts'. However close to the mark this may be, such views admit no symbiosis. The problem here is that while the Tinker was not the 'full-fledged member' of society that Simmel's Stranger was, he was for all that just a 'special case' of a `wanderer', a member of the `outcast lowest class' (Arensberg and Kimball 1968: 272).[105]

Just like *By the Bog of Cats*, *Portia Coughlan* also treats the issue of being an outsider and uses tinkers as a symbol of outsiders. As I stated before, Sihra observes that the stage becomes the site of infanticide, incest, domestic violence, rape, prostitution, infidelity, violation and suicide in Marina Carr's plays. Carr uses all those extreme examples of dysfunction in her plays to show the unspoken realities and defects of society. She treats the problems of incest, prostitution, infidelity, inbreeding and suicide - which are also universal issues- within the frame of the play, *Portia Coughlan*. There is a suggestion of romantic incest of Portia's love for her twin. We learn through the arguments of the characters when they are depicting each other that Sly and Marianne (Portia's mother and father) are also brothers and sisters- same father, different mothers. When Marianne argues with Blaize- her mother-in-law- she reveals more shocking realities about the secret history of the family. She says to Blaize, "What were you before you were married? One of the inbred, ingrown, scurvied McGoverns. They say your father was your brother!" (*PC*, 1, 215) Maggie May - Portia's aunt - comments, "Young Gabriel Scully was insane from too much inbreeding." (*PC*, 3, 245) All the dirty secrets of family are poured out in

[105] C.C.M. Griffin, "The Religion and Social Organisation of Irish Travellers on a London Caravan Site," *Nomadic Peoples* 6.1 (2002), *Questia*, 10 Apr, 2007. <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5002520001>.

Portia Coughlan. The play becomes the site of confrontations and confessions, in other words while treating the supernatural and unreal Carr treats the real in the same play. She reveals the personal secrets and realities in front of the eyes of audience and reader.

There are examples of sibling incest in the eighteenth-century novel and poetry of the Romantic Period. In eighteenth-century novels such as; *Moll Flanders* and Mr. Macartney's tale of *Evelina* "the incestuous brother and sister are separate from the birth and never meet until they begin their amorous intrigues, nor do they discover their blood relationship until after their involvement begins."[106] In "The Dangers of Sympathy," Alan Richardson says:

> Like many features of eighteenth-century novel, this pattern evokes the romance tradition; with its emphasis on nature over nurture, birth over experience; the couple is drawn together not by shared memories but….by the intuitive attraction of a blood tie.[107]

Richardson also contrasts the sibling relationships in the eighteenth-century novel to the Romantic Poets:

> For the Romantic poets, however, the emphasis is on a shared childhood, on experience that unites the couple through countless mutual associations built up during the most idyllic stage of life…. The new importance during this period of brother-sister alliance in general is based on shared memories, and is closely related to Romantic valorization of childhood.[108]

Richardson claims that even when the siblings are separated and reunited, the

[106] Alan Richardson, "The Dangers of Sympathy: Sibling Incest in English Romantic Poetry", *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900. Vol. 25. No.4, Nineteenth Century (Autumn, 1985), 739.
[107] Ibid., 739.
[108] Ibid., 739.

reunion is based upon the power of early childhood memories. Richardson gives "Coleridge's *Osorio*, Southey's *Thaloba*, Byron's *Bride of Abydos* and Wordsworth's *White Doe of Rlystone*"[109] as examples to this type.

Portia's relationship with her twin brother is an example of both types as the twins are combined by both blood and shared childhood experience. Her strong emotional bond with the childhood memories of her brother makes her present life unbearable. The reflection of her past corrupts her present life. Marina Carr's frequent use of history, which affects the present situation of the characters, is evident in *Portia Coughlan*, too.

Marina Carr's female characters always struggle against their fate; however, at the end they are overcome by it. They are stuck in the cycle of destiny although they try hard to challenge it with all their might. The notion of destiny and inevitable is adapted from Greek tragedy. Marina Carr's female characters are all strong yet confused about personal and divine realities. Carr displays the struggle of these strong women to voice the feelings of both Irish women and women in general. Portia Coughlan reflects her confusion about destiny in her dialogue with Maggie May (her aunt);

> Portia: What ya think it meant, Maggie May? Is our lives followin' a minute and careful plan designed on high or are we just flittin' from chance to chance?
>
> Maggie: Personally I prefer to believe that everythin' I've done is planned be someone else down to the last detail. I'm a fat auld hoor with bad legs, Portia, and I'd hate to have to lay the blame of everythin' on myself. (*PC*, 3, 239)

[109] Ibid., 740.

Maggie finds an easy escape from the responsibility of free will while Portia tries to blame her family, her husband, and even her dead twin brother for her recent sufferings. She refuses to submit to her fate until she dies. While Portia comments on the upstream journey of the salmon, she shows her envy about their submission to their instincts. She says about the salmon; "They never made that journey before, just born knowin' the route they'll travel." (*PC,* 1, 219) Portia always chooses to follow her own instincts just like the salmon do. It seems that she always knew the route she would travel, and never accepting the intervention of external forces even the force of her own destiny. However, like Carr's other female characters she cannot escape the inevitable, which has been the basic of ancient Greek tragedy. The Mai, Hester, and Portia are three strong women who attempt to become disentangled from their fate but eventually defeated. Still, they express their feelings and make people understand them. They spoke, spoke and spoke… They kept on speaking even after their death. In an interview Carr said: "I think that people have never been more open since possibly the Greek world."[110] Portia speaks the unspoken traumas. Even her death speaks. In another interview Carr says: "Death is just a moment, like two seconds (…) The fact that we are dying is probably the only significant thing about us. And how we live and how we die (…) I love biography because I like to read how people die. I think it says everything about how they have lived."[111]

In her plays *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan,* Marina Carr puts the deaths of the characters in the middle in order to shift the focus of the readers. In *By the Bog of Cats,* Hester dies at the end; however, there are signs that suggest her death from the

[110] Interview with Melissa Sihra, *Theatre Talk,* 57.
[111] Melissa Sihra, "Reflections Across the Water", *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, 112.

very beginning. Marina Carr wants the reader to focus on "how she lives" rather than "how she dies." She says: "So you're watching her living, knowing she's dead. Everything you see is with that knowledge. It does shift the focus."[112]

In the three plays that I discussed in my thesis, the settings are the rural parts of Irish Midlands. These are specific rural landscapes and the language is specific to the country people. In *By the Bog of Cats*, there is an emphasis on the land, since the land is the most important possession for them. Sly, Portia's father, is a landowner and that piecee of land is the most important thing for him. He says to Portia; "I've worked long and hard for you to be where ya are today, built Belmont Farm up from twenty acre of bog and scrub to one of the finest farms in the county.." (*PC*, 1, 214) he adds; "And do ya think Raphael Coughlan would have looked at you twice if there wasn't land and money goin' with you?"[113] Because Sly thinks the land is the most important value of a person, he looks at the marrige of Raphael and Portia from the point of a landowner.

Marina Carr's characters are mostly peasants, farmers, and landowners, and thus they represent "real" Irish people. The nationalist writers believed that the people living in the cities are modernized and became aliented from the real Irishness. Carr's characters who are mostly peasants, reveal the culture and tradition much better and much more powerfully than city people. In "The Imaginary Irish Peasant," Edward Hirsch comments that:

> The revival writers believed that cities, especially English cities like London, represented modernity and commercialism, whereas rural

[112] Interview with Marina Carr/ www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/SESLL/EngLit/ ugrad/hons/IrishLit/Carr/interview.rtf
[113] Ibid., 214.

> areas, especially the landscape of western Ireland, were free from commerce and materialism. That is, life in the countryside was "natural" and therefore exempt from the material concerns of "culture." Similarly, "individuals" lived in the cities, but the "folk" lived in the country… country life was characterized by its orality, organicism and closeness to nature… It was a characteristic late nineteenth century argument that, to escape from solipsism and abstraction individual artists should substantiate their work in the communal stories and mythology of the illiterate folk.[114]

In *The Mai, By the Bog of Cats and Portia Coughlan* the reader observes the deliberate use of rural landscape and characters as peasants with strong Irish midlands accents. These are some of the national motifs, and marks of identity that contemporary Irish writers use in their works. The reason why these playwrights turned to their roots is because they would like to keep their history and identity alive. They critique the total modernization of culture as a threat to their real Irish identity. Marina Carr used the representations of real Irish peasants to reflect her cultural background. She also enriches her works with the use of local and religious myths in a way to reveal the collective memory of Ireland that at times was in danger of extinction from outside forces (Great Britain) and now is equally endangered by the globalizing forces of the Celtic Tiger Economy.

Portia Coughlan, like Marina Carr, speaks for both her own culture and the female world. With her plays Marina Carr tries to show the world that "women can speak and write." In response to Mike Murphy's question; "what do you wish people who read or watch your work in the year 2100 to receive from it?" , she says, "I'd

[114] Edward Hirsch, "The Imaginary Irish Peasant", *PMLA*, Vol. 106, No.5 (Oct, 1991), 1122.

like them to say, 'That woman could write.'"[115] And Marina Carr proves that she can write and speak on behalf of both Irish women and the Irish nation in general.

[115] Interview with Marina Carr/ www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/SESLL/EngLit/ ugrad/hons/IrishLit/Carr/interview.rtf

CONCLUSION

Marina Carr is haunted by the past, just as the way her characters are haunted by their own memories and truths. She is well aware of the fact that a nation without a history cannot have a future. Carr is not alone on this path. She belongs to the movement of national dramatists who try to represent "Real Ireland" through the experiences of the "real" Irish in their plays.

Those contemporary Irish writers, including Carr, reflect cultural and social realities through the mirror of drama, always referring back to the background of the nation. In Twentieth -Century Irish Drama, Christopher Murray explains this approach:

> The relationship between actuality and possibility becomes a two-sided mirror, with the dream on the other side… Thus, in Irish drama the mirror does not give back the real; it gives back the images of a perceived reality. The play as mirror up to nation, rather than to nature in Hamlet's sense, results in a dynamic in process: you have to stop it in freeze-frame to distinguish what happened (history) from what might happen (politics)… Drama helps society find its bearings; it both ritualizes and interrogates national identity. The task of criticism is to map this process descriptively and, in the present case, historically.[116]

Marina Carr, like other modern Irish writers reflects cultural background through the use of language, landscape, and myths, which are specific to Ireland. They choose the rural areas and villages as their setting and their characters use the

[116] Christopher Murray, *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 8.

local language as characters. At the turn of the century, the "PQ (peasant quality)"[117] determined the identification of Real Ireland; because, according to the revival writers real Irish society can only be represented by the peasants, who are not corrupted by modernity and civilization. Christina Hunt Mahony gives the theatre of Yeats as an example:

> Ireland, as constructed and reconstructed in Yeats' imagination, became a place untouched by the corruption of modernity, a country in touch with the magical and supernatural world, a place of heightened spirituality and harmony with nature. The ancient, the heroic, and the timeless were emphasized - the progressive, the bourgeois, and timely were rejected as being symptomatic of the negative traits of the modern age.[118]

In *Modern Irish Drama*, John P. Herrington says, "The idea of a national drama, which is not at all specific to Ireland, is to represent the theatre's audience on its stage (to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland) and at the same time to elevate that audience."[119] Herrington defines the function of national drama as both representing and elevating the audience by creating cultural awareness.

Carr and her contemporaries refer back to the ancient history of the nation to communicate their ideas of cultural identity to the real audience. They frequently used the legends and myths to refer back to the collective memory of society. They use the supernatural and mythic metaphors to reveal the realities of the present

[117] Harrington, ed., *Modern Irish Drama*, ix.
[118] Mahony, Contemporary Irish Literature, 2.
[119] Harrington, ed., *Modern Irish Drama*, iix.

situation. In Irish drama, real and supernatural always go hand in hand within an unlimited time frame. The characters always find themselves drifting between past, present and future. The stage becomes the site of unlimited and timeless experience of the characters, both real and supernatural. As John Eglinton argues; "The ancient legends of Ireland undoubtedly contain situations and characters as well situated for drama as most of those used in the Greek tragedies which have come down to us."[120] Legends and myths are an important means to remain loyal to the history. Eglinton comments:

> In short, we need to realize in Ireland that a national drama or literature must spring from a native interest in life and its problems and a strong capacity for life among people. If these do not, or cannot exist, there cannot exits a national drama or literature.[121]

In another research, I would like to widen the frame of my research to cover works of other nationalist Irish dramatists' such as; Yeats, Synge, Friel, Lady Gregory to compare and contrast their use of national identity. I intend to analyze the Celtic myths and legends and their reflections on the modern Irish drama in general.

I would also like to study the works of women dramatists such as Marina Carr, Christina Reid and Lady Gregory to compare their female characters to those of male dramatists, since revealing female experience through the eyes of female writers opens up a new window to the world of Irish drama. Through that window, we can observe the sufferings and problems of "real" Irish woman more accurately.

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[120] John Eglinton, "What Should Be the Subjects of National Drama?", *Modern Irish Drama*, John P. Harrington, ed., (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 387.

[121] Ibid., 387.

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