



A PSYCHOLOGICAL AUTOPSY OF HESTER SWANE IN MARINA CARR'S *BY THE BOG OF CATS...*¹

MARINA CARR'IN "BY THE BOG OF CATS..." ADLI OYUNUNDA HESTER SWANE'İN PSİKOLOJİK OTOPSİSİ

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Abstract

Marina Carr (1964-), a prominent contemporary Irish playwright, draws attention by pointing out the different experiences of women in her plays. Her Midlands trilogy, namely *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996) and *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998), is at the heart of her career since her unconventional mother portraits endowed with aggression and violence at different degrees in each play create a tremendous impression on the Irish reader/audience. The last play of Carr's Midlands trilogy, *By the Bog of Cats...*, is also of success as it reaches more audience, exceeding the borders of Ireland. While this play denies the myth of perfect motherhood in the portrait of Hester Swane, Carr puts forward the individual troubles and desires of her mother character and confounds her reader/audience with Hester's different shades of violence. This mother finds herself in trouble after her daughter's father leaves her and decides to marry another woman. Waiting for her own mother who left her when she was seven and promised her to return to the bog of the Midlands, Hester does not want to depart from her land and separate from her daughter. This leads her to violence in different degrees in that she even murders her daughter and commits suicide. This paper sets out to analyse what lurks behind Hester's violence and particularly her suicide and highlight the protagonist's self-destruction in the context of psychological autopsy which refers to the process of examining one's death in relation to the person's problems, feelings and thoughts before the death.

Öz

Günümüzde önemli bir İrlandalı oyun yazarı olan Marina Carr (1964), oyunlarında kadınların farklı deneyimlerini göstererek dikkat çeker. *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996) ve *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998) adlı oyunlardan oluşan Midlands üçlemesi, farklı derecelerde saldırganlık ve şiddetle donatılmış alışılmadık anne tasvirleriyle İrlandalı okuyucu/izleyici üzerinde büyük bir etki yarattığından yazarın kariyerinin merkezindedir. Midlands üçlemesinin son oyunu olan *By the Bog of Cats...* İrlanda sınırlarını aşarak daha çok izleyiciye ulaştığından daha da başarılıdır. Bu oyun Hester Swane tasvirinde mükemmel annelik mitini reddederken, Carr anne karakterinin kişisel sorunlarını ve isteklerini öne çıkarır ve okuyucu/izleyicisini Hester'in farklı türdeki şiddetiyle şaşırtır. Bu anne kızının babası onu terk edince ve başka bir kadınla evlenmeye karar verince zorda kalır. Yedi yaşındayken kendisini terk eden ve Midlands bataklığına geri döneceğine söz veren annesini bekleyen Hester toprağından ve kızından ayrılmak istemez. Bu onu farklı türde şiddete sürükler; öyle ki, kızını bile öldürür ve intihar eder. Bu çalışma, Hester'in şiddeti ve özellikle intiharı ardındakini incelemeyi ve başkarakterin intiharını bir kişinin ölümünü, ölmeden önceki sorunları, duyguları ve düşünceleri bağlamında inceleme süreci olan psikolojik otopsi bağlamında vurgulamayı amaçlar.

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Introduction

Marina Carr (1964-) is one of the most prolific and original contemporary Irish playwrights. In the 1990s, when the Irish theatre's revolt against traditional representations of the peasant culture, gender roles, political and social norms was at its peak (Trotter 154), her innovative voice was heard in her women-centred plays in which she projects various feelings and experiences of women. She creates an alternative world on the Irish stage with "her evocative mingling of the everyday with the other-worlds of myth, folk-tales, ghosts and fairies" (Sihra, "Introduction" 19).

¹ This article is prepared out of the last chapter of the writer's master thesis entitled "Violent Mothers in Marina Carr's Plays: The Mai, Portia Coughlan and By the Bog of Cats...".

Among the male dramatists of Irish theatre, Carr as a female playwright, Matt O'Brien suggests, "reveals herself to be an anti-romantic poet, recognizing the folly of hopes and 'happy endings' for those who lay victim to their own longings, and presenting audiences with a challenge to re-consider the 'ideal' characterizations of [women characters]" (214) within the frame of her plays. Thanks to the "fresh boldness in [her] pen" (Intrye 80), Carr writes dark stories of female figures and eradicates the stereotypical images of womanhood and motherhood associated with Irish nationalistic aspirations. The peculiarity of Carr's works – especially the Midlands trilogy, *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996) and *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998) – is that the playwright "go[es] against the grain of traditional Irish theatre" (McDonough 182). The "holy" icon of Mother Ireland represented in the mainstream of Irish theatre is subverted in Carr's plays not only with the presentation of intricacies of women's lives, but also, more remarkably, with the explicit use of violence in the portrayal of her "unmotherly" mother characters on the Irish stage.

Among the Midlands plays, *By the Bog of Cats...* is Marina Carr's first play staged in the mainstream theatre of Ireland that is the Abbey Theatre. Premiered on 7 October 1998 during the Dublin Theatre Festival, the last play of the Midlands trilogy was of success. Olwen Fouéré who played the protagonist Hester Swane was rewarded with the best actress award in the festival. The play later won the award of the best play in Irish Times/ESB Theatre Awards in 1999 (Sihra, "Cautionary" 257). The production of the play exceeded the borders of Ireland. It was performed in the United States, Netherlands and England (Sihra, "Greek" 117) enabling Carr, as a female Irish playwright, to reach increasingly more audience.

In effect, Carr is recognised with her insight into the female characters, particularly mothers, since the beginning of her career. Stressing the violent and antagonistic behaviours of maternal figures in her plays, Carr gives the Irish stage a new lease of motherly representation, obviously different from the stereotypical descriptions. This is demonstrably the same case in *By the Bog of Cats...* as the play centers on an unconventional, yet memorable, mother named Hester Swane and her tragic story. Tellingly, Hester is depicted as a desperate mother figure who is othered in her society out of her social position as an Irish traveller, her problematic relationship with her absent mother and her single motherhood. Hester has been desperately waiting for the return of her own mother Big Josie since the age of seven. Hester longing for her mother fixates on the idea of her mother's return as she promised her to do so and insists on staying in the bog until her coming.

However, the father of Hester's daughter, Carthage, decides to marry another woman, Caroline. Then, he forces Hester with his father-in-law, Xavier, to leave the bog and her daughter in order to prevent Hester's taking action against them. While Hester resists the idea of departure, she becomes more aggressive and destructive. Along with the threat to lose her daughter, Hester's anxious waiting stimulates her destructive impulses in a way that she not only kills her daughter Josie, but also ends her own life. This paper is framed to analyse Hester's suicide by carrying out a psychological autopsy which is "*a procedure for investigating a person's death by reconstructing what the person thought, felt, and did preceding his or her death*" ("Psychological Autopsy"). In other words, this study sets out to analyse what lurks behind Hester's violence and her suicide in particular and highlight this unusual mother protagonist's self-destruction in the context of psychological autopsy.

Hester Swane as an Irish Traveller

Although Ireland has been thought to be a classless society (Adshead and Tonga 143), the position of the travellers in the Irish community tells another story. This group of people has been exposed to racist discrimination and othered by the settled Irish throughout the history. In essence, the ancestral roots of this minority are not precisely specified. Nevertheless, it is claimed that they might have descended from the Irish who were removed from their lands by the requirements of the Penal Laws, which were enacted by the English rule against the Catholics in Britain and Ireland after the Restoration period, including a number of laws that forced the Catholics to give up their certain civil rights (Martinovich 223). They are also believed to be among the survivors of the Great Famine of 1845 who became landless in those years (Sihra, "Greek" 124). The tinkers, a marginalised group of people in Ireland who are named after their traditional work of tinsmithing (Burke 42), are among Irish travellers because of their itinerant life style. Irish tinkers are claimed to have descended from Roman Gypsies (Crawford and Gmelch 323). Their supposed genes or gypsy roots, their habit of living in tents, their frequent travelling, their use of a distinct language known as Gammin, Shelta or Cant (Gmelch and Gmelch 235) and their custom of intrafamilial marriages (Crawford and Gmelch 325) distinguish them from the rest of the Irish community. These travellers generally have short-term works such as seasonal farming, horse dealing, marketing of metals and smithing (Greenfields et al. 106). Moreover, when compared to settled people, their constant moving from one place to another and their not being accustomed to living permanently at a certain place are associated

with disorder. Therefore, they are categorised with pejorative stereotypical notions which leads to the development of a racist attitude against these travellers. Haodha depicts that “[t]ravellers in Ireland were accused of a wide range of vices including depravity, sexual immorality, dishonesty, primitivism, filth and violence. In short, they were constructed as the archetypal embodiments of deviance and antisocial behaviour” (63). That is to say, these people are subjected to “an anti-Traveller hatred” (Ó Haodha 5) and depressed and troubled by such antagonism.

In *By the Bog of Cats...*, Carr renders such a portrait of an othered traveller figure, Hester Swane. In effect, the initial reason increasingly leading Hester to violence in different types lies in her marginalised social position as an Irish traveller. Suffice it to say that her vulnerability and otherness firstly arise from the conflict related with her familial identity. Her mother Josie Swane – Big Josie – is a traveller while her father Jack Swane is a settled person. Hester’s community regards her as belonging to the travellers since she lived with her mother until the age of seven, whereas her father from Bergit’s Island has never been in her life. Hester is othered in the bog because of her social position, because their nomadic life style segregates Irish travellers from the settled people of the country. The daughter of a traveller woman, Hester, is, accordingly, feared and unwelcome in her community. She is exposed to racist discrimination because of her tinker blood. As a case in point, Mrs. Kilbride, Carthage’s mother, who does not accept Hester’s presence in their community shows her racist attitude saying to Hester: *“I’ve had the measure of you this long time, the lazy shiftless blood in ya, that savage tinker eye ya turn on people to frighten them”* (2.49). Although Hester has an established life in the bog for long years, her settling in the bog is not originally for the purpose of becoming one of the settled people. It is Carthage that forced her to have an established way of life in the bog as can be clearly understood from Hester’s words to him: *“Ya promised me things! Ya built that house for me. Ya wanted me to see how normal people lived. And I went along with ya again’ me better judgement. All I ever wanted was to be by the Bog of Cats. A modest want when compared with the wants of others. Just let me stay here in the caravan”* (3.69). Hester adapts herself to the life of the community surrounding her by means of her relationship with Carthage. Later on, she even deems herself one of those around her. Referring to her father, she tells Xavier that *“Jack Swane of Bergit’s Island, I never knew him – but I had a father. I’m as settled as any of yees –”*(1.6.32-33). In another case, however, Hester defines herself as a tinker and tells Carthage that *“as for me tinker blood, I’m proud of it. I gives me an edge over all of yees around here, allows me see yees for the*

inbred, underbred, bog-brained shower yeas are" (1.6.27). As can be understood from her statements, Hester's familial background adds up to an inbetween state in terms of her cultural identity. In this sense, Trench argues that "*Hester [has] a liminal position between the two cultures, [...] [and] she does not fully belong to either, yet she is part of both (due to her mixed parentage)*" (24). Hester's straddling between two social groups, consequently, troubles her and makes her feel unsafe in the Irish Midlands. This sense of insecurity makes her aggressive whenever she is questioned about her roots.

To recapitulate, Hester's distress as an unwelcome figure in her community irritates her in that this pressure causes to grow aggression and violence. As she cannot find a proper solution to avoid this othering process, she is bound to suffer throughout the play, heading her to a place of no return. Therefore, her experience as an Irish traveller in the settled community can be claimed to be one of the reasons leading her to violence and suicide.

Hester Swane as an Abandoned Daughter

Besides the problematic situation in terms of her communal stance, Hester as a daughter is vulnerable because of the disappearance of parental figures from her life. She did not grow up in the warmth of a family as her father was absent from the beginning, and she was later abandoned by her mother at a very young age. While she has never yearned for a father image, she still hopes for the return of her mother who, Hester claims, promised to come back. Granted that her mother was the only attachment figure in her life, Hester's yearning for the mother is inevitable, albeit her age. Her separation from the mother immensely traumatises Hester considering that her whole life is wasted owing to her obsession to reunite with the absent mother. Thus, her position as an abandoned daughter becomes one of the causes driving her to different degrees of violence in the case of murder and self-destruction.

As a matter of fact, Hester feels incomplete and therefore persistently waits for Big Josie in the bog. The only thing that remains to Hester after the abandonment is her shattered memories while her mother's problematic status in this community deepens Hester's trouble throughout her life. In one particular respect, Hester in her childhood was disturbed by people's attitudes against her mother's identity as a traveller as she reveals it to Monica:

[T]hey never axed us to stay, these people, to sit down and ate with them, just lapped up her songs, gave her a bag of food and a half a crown and walked us off the premises, for fear we'd steal somethin', I suppose. I don't think it bothered her, it did me – and still rankles after all these years. But not Josie Swane, she'd be off to the shop to buy cigars and beer and sweets for me. (3.60-61).

In Hester's above depiction, it is obvious that the traveller mother was not considered to be part of the community as a result of the stereotypical perception of her social status. Unlike Hester, Big Josie did not pay attention to discriminatory manners. Furthermore, she seems to have had the habit of smoking and drinking which does not fit into the Irish ideals of motherhood. At another instance, Hester recalls her mother's unusual habit of waiting and at the same time smoking. Hester describes her mother to Catwoman:

'G'wan to bed, you,' she'd say, 'I'll just be here pausin'.' And I'd watch her from the window. (*Indicates window of caravan.*) Times she'd smoke a cigar which she had her own particular way of doin'. She'd hould it stretched away from her and, instead of takin' the cigar to her mouth, she'd bring her mouth to the cigar. And her all the time pausin'. What was she waitin' for, Catwoman? (1.2.13).

Big Josie's pausing and waiting – which recalls the characters in Samuel Beckett's (1906-1989) *Waiting for Godot* (1949) – is still vivid in Hester's memory, together with her smoking. On the other hand, Hester does not narrate any specific moment between them. In other words, she does not talk about Big Josie's maternal identity, while the other characters in the play comment on it. For example, Xavier, who implies that he had a sexual relationship with Hester's mother, asserts that Big Josie was not a good mother. For him, she lacked the sense of maternal responsibility. Although Hester rejects his words, Xavier recounts the old days as follows:

Ya [Hester] say ya remember lots of things, then maybe ya remember that that food and money I used lave was left so ya wouldn't starve. Times I'd walk by that caravan and there'd be ne'er a sign of this mother of yours. She'd go off for days with anywan who'd buy her a drink. She'd be off in the bars of Pullagh and Mucklagh gettin' into fights. Wance she bit the nose off a woman who dared to look at her man, bit the nose clean off her face. And you, you'd be chained to the door of the caravan with maybe a dirty nappy on ya if ya were lucky. [...] Often times I brung ya home and gave ya over to me mother to

put some clothes on ya and feed ya. More times than I can remember it'd be from our house your mother would collect ya, the brazen walk of her, and not a thank you or a flicker of guilt in her eye and her reekin' of drink. Times she wouldn't even bother to collect ya and meself or me mother would have to bring ya down to her and she'd hardly notice that we'd come and gone or that you'd returned. (1.6.32).

Xavier's memories offer the portrait of an absent bad mother, a drunk and violent woman. This depiction has obviously nothing to do with the idealistic notions of motherhood in Ireland as Big Josie neglected Hester's needs, pursued her own desires and had an immoral life. Likewise, Catwoman hints at Big Josie's indifferent attitude towards Hester and recommends the protagonist to give up waiting for the mother, saying: *"I wouldn't long for Josie Swane if I was you"* (1.3.13). To further argue, Martinovich comments that *"Big Josie, as a woman uninterested in the role of mother, not only embodies the monstrous image of mother but also defies Irish society's patriarchal values. The relationship between mother and daughter was fraught with mistreatment [...] and abuse"* (235). In line with this statement, it can be contended that Hester's mother is an antithesis of Irish motherhood symbolised in the images of Mother Ireland or Cathleen ni Houlihan. Thus, Sihra articulates that

[t]he mother-figure in Irish theatre has traditionally been viewed as a personification of the nation. Carr presents the myth of Big Josie Swane as an alternative to the romanticised literary Mother Ireland figure. [...] The nation as female is now depicted as an overweight, erotic, foul-mouthed transgressive energy. ("Cautionary" 260).

Big Josie's refusal of maternity is not limited to her nonconformist life style, as is especially revealed when she abandons her little daughter on her own in the bog. Although the reason for her departure is unknown, this event, more than her portrait as a bad mother, becomes a source of trauma for Hester. This is to say that she cannot overcome the effect of that day though more than thirty years passed since then. When she sees her seven-year-old daughter in her Communion dress, Hester goes back to the time when she lost the main figure of attachment in her life:

I'm talkin' about when I was your age. Ya weren't born then. Josie – Ya know the last time I seen me mother I was wearin' me Communion dress too, down by the caravan, a beautiful summer's night and the bog like a furnace. I wouldn't go to bed though she

kept tellin' me to. I don't know why I wouldn't, I always done what she tould me. I think now – maybe I knew. And she says, 'I'm goin' walkin' the bog, you're 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 again I made to folly her and again she stopped me. And I watched her walk away from me across the Bog of Cats. And across the Bog of Cats I'll watch her return. (1.6.34).

What is particularly striking in this scene is that Hester, an adult now, still feels the pain of loss. Big Josie's leaving her little child traumatises Hester since she loses the central parental figure in her life. In point of fact, a child, as of its birth, usually attaches itself to the mother who meets its needs. The child, usually until the age of three, depends on the mother as the main caregiver (Bowlby, *Attachment* 205). Although it becomes more independent in the later years, the possibility of the loss of the mother causes anxiety, anger, sorrow and pain in the child. That is to say, the mother-child attachment determines the development of the child's behaviour. John Bowlby (1907-1990), an English psychoanalyst, claims that the sense of attachment to the maternal figure in infancy is so powerful that it even shapes one's future conduct in romantic and parental relationships (*Attachment* 179). Likewise, Mendell states in regard to the mother-daughter relations that “[t]he mother-daughter tie is the most archaic, difficult, and in some ways the most important and lasting relationship in a woman's psychic life. Its influence permeates all dealings with subsequent objects” (227). In Carr's play, accordingly, Hester's bond with her mother governs her living. As an abandoned girl, she was sent to the Industrial School established in the nineteenth century in Ireland for orphans and children in poverty where the presence of the Church was highly felt (Pembroke 55). Yet this educational institution started to be associated with corruption *after* “the most recent revelations of physical, emotional and sexual abuse in industrialschools” (Molino 34). It is probably her experiences during school years that make Hester decisive about waiting for her absent mother. Once she expresses that “I made a promise, Monica, a promise to meself a long while back. All them years I was in the Industrial School I swore to meself that wan day I'm comin' back to the Bog of Cats to wait for her there and I'm never lavin' again” (3.61). Thus, her insistent settling in the bog is directly linked with her mother. Kenny and Binchy explain that “[i]n definitions of community, 'place' is usually mentioned: people are linked by virtue of geographical location. However, for Travellers the community location is the family

network, not place" (121). In this regard, the bog symbolises Hester's bond with her mother because Big Josie left her there. Although Hester's waiting for the day of reunion is most probably a vain dream, she keeps her hope alive as the bog with its

preservative qualities [...] – known as a place to store butter and eggs, as well as to effectively embalm a corpse so that its features remain identifiable for thousands of years – also assuage[s] Hester on the emotional level. She has memorialised her mother by creating an alternative reality of what if rather than what is. (Gladwin 393).

Moreover, the bog can also be regarded as a symbol of the Irish mindset because the soil structure of the bog makes the land barren and infertile by consuming and destroying all life (Keenan 171). On the other hand, the bog, because of its acidic quality, is known to preserve all biological life (Brown and Brown 106). In the play, this quality of the bog can be related to Hester's keeping her mother's memory alive which makes her wait for her mother's return. However, Hester's futile waiting in the bog reflects her delicate psychology, and it consumes her life. Although more than three decades has passed after the abandonment, Hester, like the bog, preserves her belief in the mother's coming back as if it was just yesterday: *"It's still like she only walked away yesterday"* (3.61). This conviction makes her wait constantly in that *"[t]he urge to regain the person lost [...] is so powerful and often persists long after reason has deemed it useless"* (Bowlby, *Sadness* 27). This waiting turns into an obsession considering the fact that Hester persistently wanders around the bog. Hester's fixation also has a totemic aspect because she believes that her waiting as the performed act will end with the mother's coming which is the expected result. Freud explains this attitude in *Totem* (1913) arguing that *"the importance attached to wishes and to the will has been extended from them on to all those physical acts which are subject to the will"* (85). That is to say, Hester's wish to reunite with the lost mother is related to the act of waiting by Hester herself. As long as she waits, she anticipates that Big Josie will come. Thereby, this passive act of waiting can be regarded as Hester's denial of loss in her own way. Bowlby clarifies this point with the statement that *"a bereaved person usually does not believe that the loss can really be permanent; he therefore continues to act as though it were still possible not only to find and recover the lost person but to reproach him for his actions"* (*Anxiety* 247). The psychoanalyst refers to the acceptance of loss as a temporal state as "denial" (*Sadness* 16).

As with the idea of denial, it should be noted that Hester's rejection to accept the truth makes it harder for herself to cope with the reality. Hence, this can be counted as one of the causes for her violence and suicide. The separation actually leads the person to anxiety and anger as Zulueta articulates: "[P]leasure is the outcome of attachment, [but] separation produces distress, irritability and aggression" (66). This sense of aggression, following separation in Carr's play, has destructive consequences in different forms. As a case in point, Hester displays hostility and inward aggression when she is threatened to leave the bog by Xavier. He tries to make Hester give up waiting and abandon the bog by defaming Big Josie as follows: "We often breathed the same air, me and Josie Swane, she was a loose wan, loose and lazy and aisy, a five-shillin' hoor" (3.66). Along with her stress because of separation and loss, Hester does not want to lose the image of her mother in her mind, which is why she appears to be courageous enough to attack Xavier. When he attempts to rape Hester and puts a gun to her throat (3.67), she becomes more outrageous and violent: "Ya think I'm afraid of you and your auld gun. (Puts her mouth over the barrel.) G'wan shoot! Blow me away! Save me the bother meself. (Goes for the trigger.) Ya want me to do it for ya?" (3.67). She is fractious; at this stage, she directs her destructive impulses to herself and attempts to harm herself which hints that Hester's violence has no limits. In another case, Hester's rage of abandonment manifests itself reaching its peak in the meeting with her brother Joseph who just came to share their father's money with Hester. However, the fact that Big Josie left her daughter and lived with her son drove Hester to commit murderous action because of extreme envy which is a form of violent conduct (Klein 192). When Joseph's ghost visits Hester, she firstly discloses that she envied his relationship with their mother:

If ya hadn't been such an arrogant git I may have left ya alone but ya just wouldn't shut up talkin' about her as if she wasn't my mother at all. The big smug neck of ya! It was axin' to be cut. And she even called ya after her. And calls me Hester. What sourt of a name is Hester? Hester's after no wan. And she saves her own name for you – Didn't she ever tell ya about me? (3.56)

Then, Hester confesses the real reason for murdering her brother:

HESTER Ya think I slit your throat for the few auld pound me father left me?

JOSEPH Then why?

HESTER Should've been with her for always and would have only for you. (3.58).

Hester's motivation for this violent action is the absent mother. She vents her anger because of the void left by Big Josie on the brother in a violent way, because he is *"thought to have played a part in the loss or in some way to be obstructing reunion"* (Bowlby, *Anxiety* 248). This becomes Hester's first murderous action that is prompted by her obsessive relationship with the mother. As she cannot compensate for her loss of her mother, Hester prefers to transform the pain she is in into violence and expresses her suffering in a radical way.

As can be observed, the lack of an attachment figure makes Hester live in a void that cannot be redeemed. Her obsession to unite with the absent mother increasingly aggravates her. Accordingly, she attempts to keep the image of an ideal mother in her mind and tries hard to avoid the narrations of others about Big Josie. More significantly, she still denies her abandonment in a way that she cannot tolerate her brother's presence in her mother's life. The truth that she cannot confront induces Hester to outpour her violent impulses in the case of fratricide. Her inability to get over the trauma of abandonment later plays an important role in her decision to end her own life.

Hester Swane as a Traumatized Single Mother

Another reason for Hester's outrageous violence is her problematic identity as a troubled single mother in the Irish community. Her family background and social identity already afflict Hester. Yet this marginalisation is doubled through her problematic state as a single mother. She is not married to Carthage, but she has a daughter. Undoubtedly, her sexual activity out of a marital bond is not tolerable in the Irish community. More importantly, her motherhood is questioned when the father of her daughter decides to marry another woman. On this stage, Hester is not appreciated as a benevolent and ideal mother by others. On the contrary, she is enforced to leave her own daughter and the bog. However, Hester is no longer able to live another trauma of abandonment. Her relationship with Josie thoroughly drives the desperate mother to the ultimate end of violence.

In the first place, Hester's maternity as an unmarried woman is unwelcome on the social and moral levels as motherhood out of wedlock is intolerable in Ireland. In the past, the Irish even used to keep unmarried mothers away from the public in the Magdalen asylums, commonly known as laundries, which were originally established by the Catholic Church in 1766 in Dublin to reform prostitutes; these laundries continued to exist until the end of the 1900s (Luddy 736). These institutions later began to host single mothers as Luddy explains:

The function of Magdalen asylums was to change significantly in the twentieth century when they became homes for unmarried mothers and ‘wayward’ daughters, rather than for prostitutes. These institutions became increasingly used by the public to shield their families from the shame it was believed non-conformist daughters or female relatives were likely to inflict on them. Both the Catholic public and the religious communities colluded in removing these ‘shameful objects’ from public view. (737).

In a country with such a history, Carr centralises this play on a woman who does not feel secure in marriage. In this way, the playwright touches upon the problems of another marginal group in Ireland, that is single mothers, considering the fact that the number of children out of legal marital bonds is on the increase in Ireland since the 1970s (Hyde 71). In effect, the position of unmarried mothers was secured by the law with the “Unmarried Mothers Allowance” of 1973, and the discrimination against illegitimate children was legally forbidden in “the Status of Children Act 1987” (Fahey58). However, the Irish society, conditioned in the holiness of marriage by the Irish State and Church, still cannot give up animosity against illegitimate children and their mothers. Therefore, Hester the mother is unacceptable in her own society. She is forced to move from the bog and leave her daughter to the father who hopes to secure Josie’s social and financial rights by means of his new marriage. Mrs. Kilbride, who already marginalises Hester because of her identity as a tinker, discredits her maternity with such judgemental words as “[u]seless, that’s what she [Hester] is, livin’ off of handouts from my son that she flitters away on whiskey and cigars, the Jezebel witch” (1.4.17) and offers Josie to live with them by rejecting that Hester is her mother.

The reason for Hester’s non-marital status can be related to the absence of her own mother and her subsequent violence, too. Although she had lived with Carthage for long years, and he even proposed to Hester a few years ago (2.49), the change in the protagonist after Joseph’s visit alienates the couple. The appearance of Joseph drives Hester mad. She realises that her mother had a life of her own while Hester was waiting for her return. She tells Carthage that “[s]omethin’ evil move in on me blood – and the fishin’ knife was there in the bottom of the boat – and Bergit’s Lake was wide – and I looked across the lake to me father’s house and it went through me like a spear that she had a whole other life there – How could she have and I a part of her?” (3.70). This recognition causes Hester to kill her brother, but her suffering after the violent act ruins her life. Witnessing Hester’s violence,

Carthage seems to get away from her, and Hester starts drinking and wandering around the bog more. Hester tells Carthage that *"[i]f I had somewan to talk to I wouldn't have drunk so hard, somewan to roam the bog with me, somewan to take away a tiny piece of this guilt I carry with me, but ya never would"* (3.71). Here it becomes clear that Carthage leaves Hester by herself. After his decision to marry Caroline, he uses Hester's habits against her. He disregards Hester's motherhood and threatens her with separating Josie from her. When Hester refuses to leave the bog, Carthage declares that *"[i]f I have to mow ya down or have ya declared an unfit mother to see Josie I will, so for your own sake don't cause any trouble in that department"* (1.6.27). Then, he openly accuses Hester of being a bad mother: *"Ya'll not separate me and Josie or I'll have her taken off of ya. I only have to mention your drinkin' or your roamin' or the way ya sleep in that dirty auld caravan and lave Josie alone in the house"* (1.6.27). After Hester burns Carthage's house and livestock, he makes the final decision that *"I'm takin' Josie. I'm takin' her off of ya"* (3.71). However, Hester, who is very sensitive about the mother-daughter relationship, would not allow anybody to take Josie from her even though it costs them their lives. Carthage's threats, to put it differently, aggravate Hester's destructive impulses.

It seems likely that Hester's maternal identity can be a reason for destruction in an ambiguous way. This emanates from the fact that Hester's maternal experience with Josie indeed cannot be dissociated from her connection with absent Big Josie, because *"[b]ecoming a mother provokes mothers to remember their archaic past, [...] spent with their own mothers"* (Stone 128). Thus, Hester who suffers from her mother's absence is very careful of her bond with Josie, and she does not think of leaving Josie. Her opposition to the Ghost Fancier in the first scene of the play proves that Hester acts responsibly towards Josie. She asserts that *"I can't die – I have a daughter"* (1.1.5). O'Dwyer, accordingly, claims that Hester *"does better as a mother [...]. Hester and Josie are devoted to each other; they play games and have fun. There is no sense of neglect, [...] but of deep love and affection"* (245). In the scene where their relationship is firstly introduced to the reader/audience, it is observed that Hester is an affectionate mother who is aware of her maternal responsibilities. The mother and daughter entertain themselves with Josie's mockery of Mrs. Kilbride (1.6.23). Hester's warnings of Josie not to eat too much sugar and to brush her teeth (1.6.24), also, present Carr's protagonist as a typical caring mother. Yet the conditions Hester is burdened with affect their relationship negatively in that the mother cannot be very responsive to Josie's demands. For

instance, after Hester disputes with Carthage, she tends to lose her temper against the little girl who just wants some candy:

JOSIE

What's wrong of ya, Mum?

HESTER

Ah go 'way, would ya, and lave me alone.

JOSIE

Can I go down to Daly's and buy sweets?

HESTER

No, ya can't. Go on off and play, you're far too demandin'.

JOSIE

Yeah, well, just because you're in a bad humour it's not my fault. I'm fed up playin' on me own.

HESTER

You'll get a clatter if you're not careful. I played on me own when I was your age, I never bothered me mother, you're spoilt rotten, that's what ya are. (*in a gentler tone*) G'wan and play with your dolls, give them a bath, cut their hair. (1.6.28-29).

As can be observed, the little girl resists her mother's negative attitude, and Hester, albeit her bad mood, tries to control herself as long as she is with Josie. In another case, Josie wants to go with Carthage and Caroline on their honeymoon. The little girl is excited to see the sea for the first time in her life. Upon recognising her daughter's willingness to go away, Hester becomes anxious about losing Josie and begins denigrating Carthage. However, Josie again protests her mother, "*cover[ing] her ears with her hands*" (3.63) and tells Hester that "*I said I'm not listenin'!*" (3.63). In order to ensure Josie's stay with her, Hester, then, frightens the child by making up a curse:

HESTER (*pulls Josie's hands from her ears*) You'll listen to me, Josie Swane, and you listen well. Another that had your name walked away from me. Your perfect daddy walked away from me. And you'll walk from me too. All me life people have walked away without a word of explanation. Well, I want to tell ya somethin', Josie, if you lave me, ya'll die.

JOSIE I will not.

HESTER Ya will! Ya will! It's a sourt of curse was put on ya be the Catwoman and the black swan. Remember the black swan?

JOSIE (*frightened*) Aye.

HESTER So ya have to stay with me, d'ya see, and if your daddy or anywan else axes ya who ya'd prefer to live with, ya have to say me. (3.63-64).

In Hester's outrage, her fear of being left can be remarked on as it reflects the trauma of her separation from her own mother. Hester is nervous about experiencing the same agonising event once again with her daughter who is named after Hester's mother and who, Hester believes, has her mother's eyes (1.6.33-34). Her fabrication of the curse echoes what Catwoman told her about Big Josie's prophecy on Hester's life. Hester, using the curse herself, attempts to reflect her image onto her own daughter by frightening the girl with a similar curse, as well. It is the first moment that Hester perceives Josie as her own mirror as Schanoes highlights: *"Mothering a daughter [...] is a way of living the past in the present and extending the effect of the past to the future, as each mother extends the effect of her own mother's care to her daughter while at the same time revis(it)ing her own childhood"* (35). As Hester lacked maternal care in her childhood, she uses the curse once voiced by Big Josie and projects it to Josie, Hester's mirror image. Nevertheless, she cannot allow her daughter to feel troubled at first. Noticing Josie's fear, Hester immediately apologises to her: *"Oh, I'm sorry, Josie, I'm sorry, sweetheart. It's not true what I said about a curse bein' put on ya, it's not true at all. If I'm let go tonight I swear I'll make it up to ya for them awful things I'm after sayin'"* (3.64). Then, mother and daughter dance and sing the song "By the Bog of Cats..." together (3.64).

In the advent of the play, Hester longs for her mother's return. For this reason, she opposes leaving the bog which is clear in her speech at the wedding: *"I can't go till me mother comes. I'd hoped she'd have come before now"* (2.52). Her motivation for waiting for Big Josie is, however, revealed only towards the end of the play when Hester confesses Caroline her true feelings: *"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"* (3.73). Although mother-daughter relationships are of importance in the development of a complete identity, Hester wants to prove herself to Big Josie, showing her that she is complete without her. Yet her dream does not come true. In real life, Hester burnt Carthage's house; Carthage married another woman and is threatening to take Josie from her; and Hester's mother is still absent. Hester manages to face all these truths and realises that she is on the verge

of more separations. Her traumatic past repeats itself in a different way. As she is again about to lose the intimate figure in her life, the death instinct dominates Hester.

Following her failure to carry out her wishes, Hester decides to kill herself and takes a knife from her caravan. At that moment, Josie enters the scene to inform Hester that she will go with her father on his honeymoon. Then, the play leads to a terrific point when Hester tells Josie that she will also go to a place from which she will never return.

JOSIE Well, can I go with ya?

HESTER No ya can't.

JOSIE Ah, Mam, I want to be where you'll be.

HESTER Well, ya can't, because wance ya go there ya can never come back.

JOSIE I wouldn't want to if you're not here, Mam.

HESTER You're just bein' contrary now. Don't ya want to be with your daddy and grow up big and lovely and full of advantages I have not the power to give ya?

JOSIE 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. (3.74-75).

Josie's future plan to wait for Hester's return terrifies her mother who has dedicated her whole life to waiting for her own mother. At this point in the play Hester realises that history will repeat itself if she makes Josie bound to wait after her death. Although Hester tries to push Josie away from her, the desperate girl insists on going away with the mother. Her despair forces Hester to take radical action which shocks the reader/audience:

JOSIE(*struggling to stay in contact with Hester*) No, Mam, stop! I'm goin' with ya!

HESTER Would ya let go!

JOSIE(*frantic*) No, Mam. Please!

HESTER Alright, alright! Shhh! (*Picks her up.*) It's alright, I'll take ya with me, I won't have ya as I was, waitin' a lifetime for somewan to return, because they don't, Josie, they don't. It's alright. Close your eyes.

Josie closes her eyes.

Are you closed tight?

JOSIE Yeah.

Hester cuts Josie's throat in one savage moment.

(softly)

Mam – Mam – *(And Josie dies in Hester's arms.)* (3.75).

The above scene depicts how Hester kills her own daughter. As in Joseph's murder, Hester takes immediate action, but this pure act of violence, infanticide, is problematic as her perception of violence as a solution complicates the protagonist's maternal identity. On the one hand, she is a caring mother who is concerned with the well-being of Josie. On the other hand, Hester is of a destructive nature. She killed her own brother without hesitation. She intimidates the people around her with violent threats. She finally murders Josie although her being Josie's mother does not give her the right to end the little girl's life.

Crudely speaking, this representation of an Irish mother with her good and evil sides challenges the stereotypical maternal stage figures in the Irish dramatic tradition. Hester, like her mother, *"deffies] romantic and idealised versions of Irish womanhood and contest[s] the iconic nationalist stereotype of the woman-mother through [her] ostensibly wayward behaviour"* (Sihra, "Greek" 121). Although this murder is used to deconstruct the concept of Irish motherhood, it is claimed that Hester's murder of Josie is an act of love, not a vengeful act against Carthage's betrayal (Fouéré 166; Pine 222; Roche 254; Russell 161). This interpretation resonates Jeremiah's idea that mothering is a complicated process. According to the critic, maternal love may be individually shaped in different contexts in which the "sacrifice" of a child can be considered the compassionate act of a desperate mother (Jeremiah 63-65). However, Hester's explanation that *"she's [Josie's] mine and I wouldn't have her waste her life dreamin' about me and yees thwartin' her with black stories against me"* (3.77) suggests that her violence is actually a consequence of Hester's calamitous relationship with her absent mother Big Josie. Harrower mentions that

Hester kills Josie because Hester is unable to separate Josie's feelings from her own feelings toward the mother that abandoned her decades earlier. [...] [S]he immediately couples Josie's fears with her own sense of longing for mother. Hester kills Josie to save the girl from the torment Hester assumes her daughter will face in the future. The act of killing, in Hester's damaged mind, is merciful because the unfulfilled longing for inadequate mothering is worse than death. (149).

As stated by Harrower, Hester identifies herself with Josie who mirrors Hester's seven-year-old image, wearing the same dress when the protagonist was left by her own mother. This coincidence can be scrutinised in a metaphorical way in that Josie, killed by her own mother at the age of seven, symbolically stands for Hester who was killed emotionally when Big Josie abandoned her. Hester, therefore, tells Joseph that "*for a long time now I been thinkin' I'm already a ghost*" (3.58). Finn makes the comment that "*[t]he day Big Josie left everything stopped for Hester and she could not move forward. Despite the fact that she fell in love and bore a child of her own, a significant part of her soul is perpetually frozen in time at the age of seven. She is metaphorically frozen in time, frozen in the past, frozen in memory*" (95). The frozen and snowy atmosphere of the play, accordingly, may be a representation of Hester's deadly state. Moreover, the parallel deaths of Hester and Josie who both whisper the words of "Mam – Mam" (3.75, 77) at the moment of death strengthen the argument that Josie's annihilation mirrors Hester's emotional death.

To further argue, Josie's death is the result of Hester's excess of empathy and identification with her own daughter. When she decides to commit suicide, Josie's innocent despair looks familiar to Hester who was once pained in a similar way. That is why she decides to terminate the repetitious waiting and longing for an absent mother by killing Josie although the ellipsis in title of the play, *By the Bog of Cats...*, suggests continuity. In fact, it is clear that Hester is afraid of turning into her absent mother and Josie's turning into herself and repeating the same fate at the final moments of the play. Her violent act comes out of this fear which can be named "matrophobia." Matrophobia, firstly termed by Lynn Sukenick in 1973 (519), refers to "the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one's mother*" (Rich 235). In Carr's play, Hester, obsessed with the mother image, demonstrates a possessive nature in her connection with Josie, thereby trying to compensate for the mother-daughter relationship that she herself once lacked. She tries to play the role of her ideal version of Big Josie to her daughter, while little Josie substitutes for Hester the daughter. In this sense, it can be argued that "*Hester and Josie are a composite unit, in their case an amalgam of mother and daughter*" (Cousin 52). From this vantage point, Hester cannot tolerate the idea of leaving Josie by committing suicide. She fears that Josie, like herself, will be bound to wait and embark on the cycle of Sisyphus since she will take the place of the absent mother in her daughter's life. In this regard, Hester's violence can be attributed to matrophobia, the fear of becoming her own mother, rather than love or

mercy. While matrophobia motivates Hester to terminate the cycle of the traumatic mother-daughter relationship, the presence of this maternal tie will not disappear from the bog even after their death. The ellipsis in the title of the play, therefore, draws forth a sense of continuity again. The sorrow, pain and trauma of Hester's maternal relationships appear to be preseeded in the bog as Hester makes it clear in her words to Carthage:

Ya won't forget me now, Carthage, and when all of this is over or half remembered and you think you've almost forgotten me again, take a walk along the Bog of Cats and wait for a purlin' winds through your hair or a soft breath be your ear or a rustle behind ya. That'll be me and Josie ghostin' ya. (3.77).

Her promise to return to the bog by haunting Carthage evokes the lines of another song sung by Big Josie which also gives the play its title, "By the Bog of Cats...": *"To the Bog of Cats I one day will return/In mortal form or in ghostly form,/And I will find you there and there with sojourn,/Forever by the Bog of Cats, my darling one"* (1.2.8). The song itself promises the act of coming back and conveys a sense of continuity. Since nobody has returned yet, the hauntings are unfinished, and the oath is incomplete.

Taken together, Hester's maternity is problematised throughout the play. The protagonist's being a single mother becomes a burden for herself in that her motherhood out of marriage is disputed among the Irish community. Moreover, the denial of Hester's motherhood by others can be related to her social marginalisation as a traveller. Although her community demands her to leave the bog, she cannot tolerate the idea of abandoning her daughter. When Hester also hears Josie's promise to wait for her, she does not allow the little girl to live her own faith. Her unsettled relationship with Big Josie, consequently, leads Hester to reach the radical end, killing her daughter and later herself.

Hester Swane's Suicide

After such violent deeds, Hester gets very close to her own end. In fact, her death is already foreshadowed by the coming of the Ghost Fancier in the first scene and Catwoman's visions. However, there is little doubt that there is no way for Hester to continue her life after killing her daughter. The action of the play culminates in the ultimate degree of violence, suicide, considering that Hester's traumatised and marginalised situation leaves no choice to her.

In the course of the play, Hester's self-violence, or her decision to take her own life, makes her a rebellious character because she does not submit to her fate, but she dies of her own volition. From this perspective, she does not want to be a victim of destiny and perpetrates violence herself in an outrageous way. As she takes Josie with her, too, the death is not a defeat, but a victory in Hester's case. Hester challenges death embodied in the figure of the Ghost Fancier, scolding him: "*You're late, ya came too late*" (3.77). Then, she embraces her coming death by dancing with the Ghost Fancier: "*They [Hester and Ghost Fancier] go into a death dance with the fishing knife, which ends plunged into Hester's heart. She falls to the ground*" (3.77). This dance puts forward the perception of death as a celebration and recalls the medieval imagery of *danse macabre*. Translated as "dance of death" in English, this idea is claimed to have emerged during the time of the Black Death in the fourteenth century when a French thinker, Jean Gerson (1363-1429), wrote the poem *Danse Macabre des Hommes* and painted the walls of a big cemetery in Paris with images from the work (Harrison 7-8). As the plague caused the deaths of masses, death became part of people's lives. The dance of death presented the ultimate end with images of skeletons coming to take people's lives while dancing and suggesting the inevitability of death. This representation is also functionally used to demonstrate that death is the best equaliser as all the people, whether rich or poor, are doomed to die ("Death"). While the didactic message is given, the personification of death as a dancing skeleton soothes its victims. It can also be regarded as a grotesque image regarding Johnson-Medland's description of this presentation as a "*powerful and almost erotic teasing of life to be passed on*" (28). *This kind of "teasing" can be associated with Hester's rebuke of the Ghost Fancier for his bad time management, and their dance proposes that Hester welcomes death. The last words uttered by Monica that "Hester – She's gone – Hester – She's cut her heart out –"* (3.77) depict Hester's unforgettable violence, her stabbing a knife into her heart.

It is interesting to speculate that the protagonist's self-murder is "a self creating act" for Martinovich (239-40), while Dedevas claims that this exposition of violence "*lead[s] to the creation of a model of new woman, who chooses a different and violent way to be taken seriously. Hester clearly underscores that her acts of murder and suicide not only rescue her from a traditional, patriarchal society but will also make people remember her*" (264). Even though Hester cannot fulfil her dream to unite with the lost mother, she declares herself as the master of her own destiny by committing suicide in a remarkable way. The net effect of her marginal position

as a traveller and single mother, along with her obsession with the absent mother, can be observed in her growing violence, heading her to suicide.

Conclusion

It is apparent from Hester Swane's psychological autopsy that her fixation on the absent mother induces Carr's protagonist to verbal violence with threats of destruction, physical damage in the form of putting a house on fire, homicide, that is the murders of Joseph and Josie, and finally self-murder. While her roots as a tinker and her position as an unmarried mother trouble her, the trauma caused by the separation from the maternal figure at a young age shatters Hester's whole life. She feels obliged to compensate for the loss and waits for the time of Big Josie's return, as she desperately desires to prove herself to the missing mother. When she realises that her obsessive waiting is in vain and that she is on the brink of separation from her own daughter, Hester cannot allow herself to make Josie suffer from the same trauma and to turn into Big Josie. Finally, she kills the little girl and immediately after that leaves the bog by taking her own life. Taken together, Hester's psychological autopsy indicates that her violence gradually reaches the ultimate point in the case of her suicide as a result of her otherness as a tinker and a single mother, her traumatised relationship with her absent mother and her complicated feelings enmeshed with matrophobia for her own daughter.

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