

**'It gives me an edge over all of ye'es':
A Feminist Psychoanalytical Reading of Marina Carr's By the
Bog of Cats**

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Abstract

This research investigates the connections between Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) and Greek tragedies. It will be demonstrated that this modern adaptation draws on ancient Greek literature to project on critical contemporary issues. Many of the Greek tragedies "deal with universal experiences in ways that communicate immediately to us" (Daniel and Scully ix). It also examines the implications of the symbolism associated with the bog and the significance of Hester's Swane's name. On an even deeper level, the research uses Lacan's Mirror Stage, Freud's theories on Oedipus Complex and the Electra Complex, the nature of hysteria and Adrienne Rich's feminist theory on the relationship between mothers and daughters in relation to Carr's play. Finally, this research delves into Hester's act of revenge where she kills her 7-year-old daughter, which decodes beyond the literal.

Keywords

Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Hysteria, Oedipus Complex, Electra Complex, the Mirror Stage, Mother-Daughter Relationship

الملخص:

تركز الدراسة موضع البحث على ثلاث نقاط:
الأولى: دراسة العلاقة بين مسرحية "بجانب مستنقع القطط" لمارينا كار (١٩٦٤ -) وبعض التراجيديات الكلاسيكية الإغريقية وكيفية استعمال الكاتبة للمسرحية القديمة كمدخل لمعالجة الموضوعات الاجتماعية المعاصرة التي تشمل قضايا المرأة بوجه عام مثل العزلة والاضطهاد في المجتمع الذكوري. فعن طريق اضافة أبعاد جديدة وشخصيات جديدة الى المسرحية القديمة وكذلك التركيز على البعد النفسي للشخصيات استطاعت الكاتبة مخاطبة المشاهد الحديث ودعوته للتفكير.
أما النقطة الثانية في البحث تسلط الضوء على دراسة المسرحية في ضوء افكار جاك لاكان عن مرحلة المرآه وسيجموند فرويد عن عقدة اليكترا والهيستيريا وكذلك الكاتبة ادريان ريتش وافكارها النسوية عن العلاقة بين الام والابنة.
واخيرا يتناول البحث سبب انتقام البطلة وقتلها لابنتها في مشهد مأسوي يحمل في طياته الكثير من الرمزية.

الكلمات الدالة

نسائي - تحليل نفسي - هيستيريا - عقدة اليكترا - عقدة اوديب- مرحلة المرأة- العلاقة بين الأم والإبنة

Introduction

Wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born, with nowhere yet to rest my head, like these, on earth I wait forlorn. (Mathew Arnold, "The Grande Chartreuse")

Marina Carr's By the Bog of Cats:

Carr wrote over a dozen plays, including *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996), *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), *On Raftery's Hill* (2000), *Ariel* (2002), *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006), and *The Cordelia Dream* (2008). Also, in 2001, Carr received the E. M. Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters as well as, in 2004, the Irish American Fund Award. In addition, Carr was writer-in-residence at the Abbey Theatre and Trinity College Dublin. Carr's plays are witty, but her readers must find humor in tragedy as they would do to a play by Samuel Beckett.

By the Bog of Cats is part of a trio of plays Carr produced in the mid-1990s, along with *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan*. The play had its debut at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, during the Dublin festival in 1998. Critics were divided about it. The play returned to the National Theatre in 2015, with Susan Lynch playing ably the role of Hester Swane.

In this play, Carr combined her penchant for great tragedy (e.g. Sophocles and Euripides) with her own contemporary feminist Irish playwright voice. Part of the success of *By the Bog of Cats* is its ability to re-read and re-write the Greek textual past, thus, reinterpreting today's gender issues in a fresh dramatic light.

By the Bog of Cats (henceforth referred to as B.B.C.) narrates the story of a forty-year old, gypsy -Irish, woman named Hester Swane. Hester's mother abandoned her on the side of the bog when she was 7-years-old. Later in life, her younger husband, Carthage Kilbride, also abandoned her to marry twenty-year old daughter of Xavier Cassidy, a prominent local farmer. Hester then went to live with her seven year old

daughter ,Josie, in a caravan by the Bog of Cats, named after her mother. She named Josie after her mother's name. Carthage wanted Hester out of the land by the wedding date, claiming he could offer their daughter a better life. Hester refuses to leave the Bog of Cats, the land where she was born and because she promised her mother she would wait for her return.

Hester has tinker blood, and she believes in ghost stories and old curses. Proving her so-called wild streak, Hester threatens Carthage by telling him that he will never see their daughter again, if he goes through with his "sham" wedding. Also, Hester sets the newly-weds' house on fire. Influenced by the Bog, filled with dead matter, and her fondness for mythical songs and narratives, Hester takes her revenge. She stabs her own daughter with a knife and then kills herself. As Richard Christiansen explains, "to this basic plot of Euripides' Medea, Carr has added layers of Christian symbolism, Irish mythology, ghost stories and Freudian analysis." Sternlicht, argues that Carr's B.B.C. combined the "archetypal experience with radical modern feminism to engage women and men profoundly" (25).

The Bog as Setting

Ireland is known for the amount of bogs located in the middle of the country. Carr notes, "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" (Murphy 47). A bog is an area of wet, spongy land not entirely solid ground or water. In B.B.C., the bog is important as setting,

character, and archetype. For Carr, the bog is not only a place where landscape, history, and identity are tightly linked but also a place where the characters are deeply connected. The bog sustains the characters' lives and they all choose to die by its side. The Atlas of Irish Rural Landscape describes Ireland's bogs in this way,

Whilst boglands have strongly influenced rural economy and culture, settlement distribution and communications, they are themselves deeply humanized landscapes which have evolved, indeed sometimes originated, in close association with land use system. The bog has been etched as deeply as into the human physical record in Ireland, to an extent unrivalled elsewhere in Europe (106).

In B.B.C. the bog, a mud-covered soft and wet place, is not only Hester's "physical place but is the location where she belongs. Hester said of herself, "and as for me tinker blood, I'm proud of it. It gives me an edge over all of ye'es ... allows me to see inbred, underbred bogbrained shower ye'es are" (B.B.C. 313). It is a bleak, ghostly landscape. The bog is not only a haunted liminal space, but also a psychological space where layers of Hester's psyche can unfold. This place was the only thing Hester had, related to her mother's memory, for it was at the Bog of Cats that her mother left her. Hence, this bog can be a perfect place to walk for people who have been reduced to the condition of ghosts. Also, this setting represents a realm where the boundaries of the living and the dead, the human and the nonhuman, the real and the unreal merge into one another. It could even represent a father figure for Hester and "a source of spiritual fulfillment"

(Matinovich 121). In the words of Enrica Cerquoni the bog is “characterized by loss and longing, yet it also represents her (a) site of connection and survival” (183).

In this play, Carr moved between reality and the mythic realm. Carr partly based Hester on Euripides’ Medea, a strong woman who avenges her husband Jason's betrayal by killing their children. It is surprising how few people picked up on that initially” (Leeney & McMullan 5). As Carr mentioned, “the plot is completely Medea.” Rejection, vengeance, and infanticide are themes in Carr's B.B.C. as she revisits Greek tragedy to stitch together her tale of abandonment, disloyalty, and vengeance in a strikingly modern interpretation. In his Programmed Note of B.B.C., Frank McGuinness (1998) provided a useful introduction to Carr's conception of the relationship between classical sources and a haunting past (in which ghosts talk),

I wonder what Marina Carr believes? I think it might be the Greek gods- Zeus and Hera, Pallas Athene. She knows what the Greeks know. Death is a big country. And hers is a big imagination, crossing the border always between the living and the dead (87).

Carr is also a very creative and courageous playwright. Her plays address the economic, social, and moral questions Irish society faces. She represents women in the same way the modern Ireland perceives them. For example, Hester not only represented a motherly figure, but a figure liberated from the patriarchal constraints and the clutches of the past. Shannon (1997), said that Carr might have made Hester a central

character in the play to impersonate “a new, more complex and authentic image of Cathleen Ní Houlihan, an image being shaped and defined this time by Irish women themselves and one which promises to secure respect and dignity for all the citizens of the nation, including the Irish travelers” (272).

The Bog as Character

In the opening of the play, it was difficult to see the white bog, a “bleak white landscape of ice and snow,” since the play was at the “dawn on the Bog of Cats” (B.B.C. 265). On this bog there was a black Swan that stands for bad luck. Hester’s destiny was to fail and suffer. Also, Hester had a tragic flaw that was her pride and her stubbornness. She failed as a heroic figure, since she could not understand that she was fighting something bigger than her abilities.

Hester had the bog attached to her, as it stood for her as a life- giver and life- taker. She said of the bog, “I know every barrow and rivulet and bog hole of its square mind” and she “was born in the Bog of Cats, same as all of yeess, although you'd never think it the way yeess shun me.” Hester also said,

I was born on the Bog of Cats and on the Bog of Cats I'll end me days. I've as much right to this place as any of yeess, more, for it holds me to it in ways it has never held yeess. As for any tinker blood, I'm proud of it. It gives me an edge over all of yeess around here. (B.B.C. 323)

This description of the bog exemplifies what Carr attempted to show, the submerged world of Hester’s unconscious self. Also, it tried to assert

how strongly the setting reflected Hester's mindset. As a member of the Irish Traveler Community, Hester felt isolated and excluded from the society she lived in. For Hester, the bog was the mother, the woman, and the womb she longed to return.

The bog was located in a deadly land, one filled with decaying matter that slowly disappeared in the northern parts of Ireland. Bogs are a rare type of land in Ireland, mostly found in the West and far North of the country. Usually the bogs are infertile, filled with acidic soil, and the remains of decaying plants. Bogs are popular setting for Irish plays and stories because they have taken on a supernatural aura over time. Derek Gladwin (2011) notices that "bogs have externally existed on the margins of Irish society and have been home to many disposed peoples, discourses, spirits and histories" (387). Just like the bog, Hester's destiny is to die. Due to an old curse or prophecy, the destiny that most Greek characters share is death. The old curse in *B.B.C.* stated that if Hester were to abandon the bog she would die. This curse is related to the promise Hester made to her mother when she reassured her that she would stay in the bog until the former returned. The Bog of Cats was a whimsical place that leads Carr's readers to believe that anything is possible within the bog. The setting of the bog was like in the classic Greek tragedies, in which a curse will bring in the Delphic oracle, Tiresias.

Hester Swane refused to leave the bog because she connected with everything there. O'Reilly asserts, that the bog operated "on a soul level, promising the possibility of access to a state of original innocence or

wholeness” (160). However, there were some mythical characters in the play who encouraged her to overcome the curse and leave the Bog. Otherwise, Hester would have never left the bog and would have eventually died in it.

Carr might have created the character of Catwoman, to make the reader aware of the bewildering gap between Irish societal rules, codes of behavior, and individual dilemmas of love and death. In *B.B.C.*, Carr linked the gap by using this estranged character from society. The Catwoman tried to lead Hester to some realization that opened her a world of possibility and change.

Reading B.B.C. as Partly Reflective of Lacan's Mirror-Stage

There is a psychological side to Carr’s *B.B.C.* In 1949, a French psychologist, named Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), wrote about what he called the mirror state, in his unpublished paper, “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience.” Lacan was the first to deal with the idea of the mirror stage, which was his most famous and significant contribution to the field of psychoanalysis. His article on the mirror stage was short in length, but dense and essential for anyone interested in his prevalent mirror stage's concepts. Lacan comments

In the mirror stage we are confronted with the “mirror image” that the world gives back to us. But that image just like the image that we see in an actual manner, is a distortion that leads

to “misrecognition.” Still, that misrecognition is the basis for what we see as our identity. For Lacan, we need the response and recognition of others and of the other to arrive at what we experience as our identity... We become ourselves by way of other perspectives and other views of who we are ... Our identity is constituted in interaction with what is inside. (cited in Bertens 160)

In this article, Lacan wrote that when a child recognizes itself in a mirror for the first time the image,

Immediately rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates- the child's own body, and the persons and things, around him (503).

In *Ecrits*, Lacan explains the mirror stage as the point in time when a child can “recognize his own image in a mirror” (1). In other words, the mirror stage for Lacan is “an identification” within a child of the “specular image” of the self. This self is separate from the parent/caretaker and gives the child a sense of agency/individuality. The child visualizes an imaginary self that reflects a perfect, unified, and totalized image. At the end of the mirror stage, the child’s apparent wholeness begins to dissolve. The sense of unity crumbles because the imaginary wholeness of the child as integrated with its environment becomes interrupted by the outside forces of culture and society. These social forces move the child from a perceived perfect image of itself to a

person who is lacking. As a result, the social structure will produce a new divided self that will continuously seek the unified self or the imaginary sense of the wholeness developed during the mirror stage.

Steve Jones (2001) explains that “while Lacan's mirror stage is centered around the development of infants, the principle of self-recognition out of a world of forgiveness into a world of self-recognition can be seen as a second birth requiring a second mirror stage” (13). This means that after becoming grown up, this child will need recognition from others to feel like a legitimate grown person in his or her society.

At the beginning of the B.B.C., Carr introduced the dead swan, called Black Wing, to the ghost Fancier, a mysterious character who appears at the beginning and at end of the play who could represent Hester's mirror image.

GHOST FANCIER. I've trailed you a while, what're you doin' draggin' the corpse of a swan behind ya like it was your shadow?

HESTER. This auld Black Wing. I've known her the longest time... found her frozen in a bog hole last night, had to rip her from the ice, left half her underbelly behind. (B.B.C. 266)

The swan came after Hester was born. Newborns do not have a concept of the self or the other. The notion of the self and the other emerge after a person can identify its reflection in a mirror. For Hester, the bog is her mirror and the black swan is her reflection (her name is Hester Swane). Catwoman said of Hester, “that child, called Josie Swan, will live as long as this black swan, not a day more nor a day less.” The

black swan was her ill-fated alter ego, which could have also predicted her tragedy.

If the Black Swan was Hester Swane's "reflection" or "other" when there is no reflection, there is no Hester Swane.

CATWOMAN. I wouldn't long for Josie Swane if I was you... Sure the night ya were born she took ya over to the black swan's lair, auld Black Wing ya've just buried there, and laid ya in the nest alongside her. And when I axed her why she'd do a thing like that with snow and ice everywhere, ya know what she says, 'Swane means swan.' 'That may be so,' says I, 'but the child'll die of pneumonia.' 'That child,' says Josie Swane, 'will live as long as this black swan, not a day more, not a day less. (B.B.C 280)

The black color, of the Black Wing, meant that Hester has a dark side to her nature. Hester killed her brother, Joseph Swane, a poor lost ghost, out of jealousy and possessiveness. She confessed feeling jealous of him,

HESTER:' 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 smuck neck of ya. (B.B.C. 319)

Reading B.B.C. in synchronicity with Lacan's idea of the formation of the self in the mirror stage throws up several insights into Hester Swane's name and her character. Who her mirror may be, and her other is, and how her nature is multihued with a dark side, is looked at. The inevitability of the tragedy of her ending is also foreshadowed. The formation of the self, its mutability and dissolution are all studied in this relationship with Lacan's theories, albeit fleetingly.

Adrienne Rich's idea of Motherhood

Knowledge of Freud's ideas on hysteria and the Electra Complex, and Adrienne Rich's theories of motherhood are necessary to understand Hester's character. The character of a Mother usually disappears from the main trajectory in modern literary narratives. Also, mothers tend to have distorted roles. The character of an absent mother is a common characteristic of Irish literature (e.g., mentally absent, physically dead, or strategically unimportant). In her groundbreaking feminist and psychological book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Rich said, "we know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than the nature and meaning of motherhood" (11). Rich continues explaining that,

The loss of the daughter to the mother, and the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy. We acknowledge Lear (father-daughter split), Hamlet (son and mother), and Oedipus (son and mother) as great embodiments of human tragedy; but there is no presently enduring recognition of mother-daughter passion and rapture (237).

The Electra Complex is etymologically a psychoanalytic term, the female equivalent of the Oedipus Complex. This Complex refers to "the phenomenon of the little girl's attraction to her father and hostility to her mother, whom she now sees as her rival" (Jill 8). The little girl sees her mother as an adversary for her father's consideration. Unlike Freud's Electra Complex, according to Rich, mothers and daughters usually have a close social, psychological, or emotional identification. Daughters form their identity by their relationship and identification with their mothers.

Thus, the relationship between mothers and daughters could be more intense and personal than any other type of relationship. Rich states that the mother-daughter bond,

This catheist between mother and daughter- essential, distorted, misused- is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one which has labored to give birth to the other (71).

B.B.C. is a story about mothers and daughters. Anne O'Reilly argues, "the mother-daughter relationship is a vital key to interpreting the play" (152). Hester's affections and emotions went to her mother. Maureen Hawkins argues that Carr's B.B.C. was an example in which "mothers and daughters are portrayed as inseparable beings." (3) Rich's ideas differ from Freud, who said daughters and mothers are rivals for the affection of the husband, lover, or the father figure. For Rich, there is no bonding greater than the relationship of a mother and daughter, not even the relationship between husband, wife, lover, or father-daughter.

Even the reason for killing her own daughter, shows the bonding of mother-daughter, when Hester confessed that "Alright, alright! Shhh! It's alright, I'll take ya with me, I won't have ya as I was, waitin' a lifetime for some way to return" (B.B.C. 339). Not even after her mother abandoned her at the age of seven, Hester did not lose the hope of seeing her again. Hester still waited for Big Josie to return, like the child's trauma that never seemed to heal. Hester had no father and a bad mother.

The bog can be seen as her father and mother. When Xavier Cassidy, the greedy farmer, told Hester to leave the bog, Hester replied,

I had a father too. Ya'd swear I was dropped from the sky the way ya go on. John Swane of Bergit's Island, I never knew him- but I had a father. I'm as settled as any of yeess.

XAVIER. Well, he wasn't much of a father, never claimin' ya when your mother ran off. (B.B.C. 295)

The bog became Hester's father and mother when her mother Big Josie, went away. Hester always longed for her mother, even after the mother went away or died. There are many scenes in the play in which Hester shows her feelings towards her lost mother. For example, Hester, protective of Josie, told ghost Fancier that she could not die because she had a daughter. On another occasion, Cassidy asked Hester to leave the wedding, for what she replied, "your takin' me husband, your takin' me house. You're takin' me daughter. Over my dead body" (B.B.C. 283) and "there is a longin' in me for her that won't quell the whole time" (B.B.C. 275). Gladwin (2011) argued "Big Josie Swane promises her return to the bog of her origins without ever actually doing so in physical form. In this respect, Hester continually walks the bog in the evenings while anticipating her mother's return" (392).

In one of her conversations with her daughter, Hester asked Josie what was she doing in her communion dress,

JOSIE. For Daddy's weddin'. I'm grown out of all me other dresses.

HESTER. I don't think ya are.

JOSIE. I am. I can go, can't I, mam?

HESTER. You have her eyes.

JOSIE. Whose eyes, mam?

HESTER. Josie Swane's me mother. (B.B.C. 297)

Hester told her brother about her affections towards her mother and how much this affected her,

HESTER. No, she's alive. I can smell her. She's comin' towards me. I know it. Why doesn't she come and be done with it? If ya see her tell her I won't be hard on her, will ya? (B.B.C. 318)

Hester even blamed herself for the loss of her mother

HESTER. Was it somethin' I done to her? I was seven, same as my daughter Josie, seven, and there isn't anythin' in this wide world Josie could do that'd make me walk away from her. (B.B.C. 319)

Another symbol of the inseparable bond between mother and daughter is the presence of mythical songs, in the voice of Hester's mother, despite her physical absence. The fragmented memories Hester and other characters have in the play may serve to build a description of Hester's mother. The following is a fragment of Hester mother's song,

By the Bog of Cats, I dreamt a dream of wooing. I heard your clear voice to me a calling that I must go though it be my undoing. By the Bog of Cats, I'll stay no more a rueing- to the Bog of Cats I one day will return, in mortal form or in ghostly form, And I will find you there with you sojourn, Forever by the Bog of Cats, my darling one. (B.B.C. 320)

According to Noirin Ni Riani's essay, "The Female Song in the Irish Tradition", "the largest body of songs by women for women are songs of

desire" (76). Hester's mother song was a sorrowful love song of abandonment and loss, but Hester believed her mother wrote it especially for her. Hence, this song reinforced the idea that Hester should never leave the Bog of Cats. In Sihra's words, Hester loves her mother to the extent that she "has failed to become a fully subjectivized individual as she has never a sufficient substitute for the loss of her mother" (257). Hester was never able to complete the process of mourning, continuously awaiting the return of her lost mother.

HESTER. I'm all the time wonderin' whatever happened to her.

MONICA. You're still waitin' for her, aren't ya?

HESTER. I'm still like she only walked away yesterday.

(B.B.C. 324)

The act of Hester killing her brother was not to help her lover, but to save her mother for herself, is another illustration of the mother-daughter bond. In addition, the act of killing her little daughter was not to revenge her husband for marrying a beautiful, arrogant, wealthy bride but to spare her daughter from a painful life. Hester killed her daughter to save her from having to wait for her mother (Hester), the same way Hester waited for her.

The Black Swan was a figure that played the mother's role in B.B.C. Hester's mother placed her in the Swan's nest as a newborn and the Black Wing nursed her. Both characters die on the same day, which showed the mother-daughter bond. Hawkins claimed that, "The death of Black Wing then, fits into Carr's tragedy where both mother and daughter die on the

same day. So, Hester follows Black Wing in death as well as Josie, which again portrays mothers and daughters as inseparable beings" (88).

In B.B.C., several women perform the role of a mother. The following are examples of matriarchal associations in the play. First, we have the loving and affectionate relationship between Hester and Josie, secondly, the over enthusiastic Mrs. Kilbride, as a clinging mother, towards her son Carthage, thirdly, the ineffectual, yet well-meaning neighbor, Monica Murray, as a surrogate mother to Hester, and finally, the mythical Catwoman as an alternative confidant who appealed to Hester's dark side.

In Euripides' *Medea*, *Medea* had two sons, while Hester in B.B.C. had one daughter. Carr changed in the play the focus of the infanticide to the daughter. In *Medea*, the two kids represented the continuity of Jason's line, the masculine desire. In contrast, Carr moved the attention to the daughter, a feminine perspective. In the play, Carr does not care about a central masculine desire, instead, she celebrates the feminine aspects, presenting a modern understanding of the bond between a mother and daughter.

Freud's View of Hysteria and Hester's Murders in Carr's B.B.C.

Freud's definition of hysteria makes Hester look like a mad woman. Is Hester a hysterical character? Does she commit suicide and kill of both her brother and her daughter out of hysteria? Freud said that, compared with men, women are more prone to hysteria, madness, and unhappiness.

Historically, men believed that hysteria was a female disease, because they claimed its source was located within the female sexual and reproductive organs. The ancient Greeks proposed that hysteria is the product of a “wandering womb” (Catonne 23). This connection between female physiology and hysteria continued throughout the nineteenth century. Cushman states that, “the uterus was the cause of hysteria not because it was diseased, but because the culture in which the uterus was embedded mistrusted, restricted, and in some ways hated those who possessed it” (106).

Freud pointed out that this somatic or physical cause was a result of a childhood sexual trauma. At first, he believed that trauma was a product of a physical assault suffered by the child; the trauma had been repressed from conscious thought, and it manifested in the symptoms of hysteria (e.g. inability to walk, blindness, muteness, among others). However, Freud later stated that trauma may be associated with the failure to resolve childhood sexual conflicts, and not just the physical traumatic act. Freud eventually compares those conflicts to the story of Oedipus, later called the "Oedipus Complex". Therefore, some research considers Freud's analysis of hysteria as the heart of the psychoanalysis, because the research relies on the assumption of childhood sexuality, its repression into the unconscious, and its persistence disguised as symptoms (e.g., dreams, fantasies, and various other forms of psychological disturbance). Hester's name suggested the idea of Hysteria; Carr's intended meaning of Hester's name, could have been something different from hysteria.

Hester killed her brother, out of jealousy, anger, and sibling rivalry. These acts are some features of the hysteria disease. Within the family system, sibling jealousy is a common and prevalent behavior. With the birth of a new sibling, a firstborn may feel threatened and engage in jealous behaviors to win the parents' attention. These behaviors include expressions of anger for being “neglected” by their parents. Also, firstborn children begin perceiving their parents' behavior as an act of betrayal (Volling 581). Hence, “the neglected child reacted negatively to this unfair treatment” (Volling 584). In B.B.C., Hester Swane killed her brother for the only reason that her mother was singing a song to him.

HESTER. You've a nerve singin' that song. That song is mine. She made it for me and only me. Can't yees lave me with anythin'.

JOSEPH. I didn't know it was yours. She used to sing it to me all the time. (B.B.C. 321)

Hester told Joseph that her abandonment by her mother was the reason is that her mother even saved “her own name for you- Didn't she ever tell ya about me?” She continued in a jealousy tone, “You're still goin' on as if she was yours and you only an auld ghost. You're still talkin' as if I never existed” (B.B.C. 320). Hester killed her younger brother without justification, except for the abandonment by her mother and giving Joseph her name's masculine version. Hence, Hester's behavior showed that she had hysteria or that she was not a stable person.

The words hysteria, lunatic, or mad, appear several times in the play. For example, Xavier said that Hester is “as mad as your mother and she was lunatic” (B.B.C. 329). Another example of the use of the word

hysteria in the play is when Monica tells Hester "Are ya gone mad?" after she burnt the house (B.B.C. 321). A third example is when Carthage tells Hester she was mad, "...the cattle. The calves. Ya burnt them all, A'ya gone mad altogether?" (331). Hester refused to move from her land and threatened a revenge if he proceeded with the marriage. The first act of revenge was the burning of the house and cattle.

In his description of the hysteric, Wittels focuses on early infantile fixation and elaborates on the childlike quality of the hysteric with diffuse boundaries between fantasy and reality.

The hysteric character never frees itself from its fixation at the infantile level. Hence, it cannot attain its actuality as a grown-up human being. The hysteric plays the part of the child, and also of the woman. The hysteric person has no actuality, she (or he) confuses fantasy and reality, that is to say, allows the law of the 'Id' to enter into the ego (187).

Wittels' hysteric is suspended in time, imprisoned by infantile conflict, and unable to leave childhood behind to move forward into adulthood. Wittels continues

The hysterical type [of neurosis] has been called protean because, like Proteus, it appears in a hundred different forms. Psychoanalysis has established that the hysteric is fixed upon her [or his] father and cannot free herself [or himself] from the Oedipus complex. (188)

For the play, hysteria appeared in a different shape, because it was Hester who could not remove her mother's memories. Hester cannot free herself from her mother.

Regarding the mythical element in *B.B.C.*, Mary Trotter commented that Carr's dramas lie somewhere between the opposite poles of "late twentieth century realism and Yeatsian fascination with the transcendent, liminality, spirituality, myth, and the occult" (168). Carr is not the only dramatist who has appropriated some of the Greek classics; many others have adopted the Greek classics in contemporary literature. Eamonn Jordan interprets this recent tendency as "an attempt to interrogate the present by appropriation" (318). Marianne McDonald states that classics came "to further the cause of imperialism (or) to provide a literature of provost" (16). Also, she stated that "the Irish are now redefining themselves in the terms provide(d) by the Greek dramatist" (McDonalds 16). Another mythical element in *B.B.C.*, besides *Medea*, was the Greek myth of *Leda and Zeus*. In this myth, Zeus, in the form of a swan, seduces *Leda*.

According to later Greek mythology, *Leda* bore *Helen* and *Polydeces*, children of *Zeus*. So, *Helen* was half a swan and half a woman. She hatched from an egg, the first mark of her unusual, non-human status. *Helen* is one of the most controversial female characters in literature, a symbol of beauty and illicit love. From a literary and mystical perspective, she was the most beautiful woman in Greece, best known for being trigger for the Trojan War. *Helen* represents seductive female beauty and destructive male strength. Also, she was beautiful in some absolute way that defied description, an irresolvable signifier that by excess threatens manhood. *Blondell* neatly puts it in her book, *Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, and Devastation*, "a beauty that is in the eye of the

beholder may launch a ship or two, but only a beauty of which all beholders agree can bind a generation of heroic males under oath and generate an enterprise as cataclysmic as the Trojan war" (19).

Helen was known as the victim of gods and of the men who wanted her. But, as Blondell insists, "her complicity is essential to her story" (22). Helen was abducted and was never simply passive. Helen's abduction was the cause of the war. The efforts of her friends to get her back resulted in the epic Trojan War that involved even the gods in retribution, death, and repudiation. In *B.B.C.*, Hester is reminiscent of Helen, as the former half swan and half human. In this sense, Hester was a mythical or archetypal figure. She was like Helen in the sense that she brought tragedy to her entire family including her brother, daughter, husband, and other characters. Her end was cataclysmic to all.

HESTER. Well, Carthage, ya think them were only idle threats I made? The house-- I burnt the bed and the whole place went up in flames. I'd burn down the world if I'd enough diesel--Will somewan not come and save me from meself. (*B.B.C.* 319)

Hester warned Caroline, by telling her,

Listen to me now, Caroline, there's two Hester Swanes, one that is decent and very fond of ya despite your callow treatment of me. And the other Hester, well, she could slide a knife down your face, carve ya up and not bat an eyelid. You think you can take him from me? Wrong. All wrong. Now get out of me sight. (*B.B.C.* 285)

Another reference that shows Hester's dark side and aggression is when Xavier visits her to tell her to leave the place,

XAVIER. So, when are ya lavin', Swane? When?

HESTER. Ya think I'm afraid of you and your auld gun.

(Hester 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?

XAVIER. You're dangerous witch, swane. (B.B.C. 331)

Hester was a victim and a cannibal who consumed her own brother. Carr developed Hester's character in terms of a human being and an animal, just like Helen.

Conclusion

Carr's B.B.C. reinvents the tradition of tragedy. She subverted the tragic tradition by concatenating her women to be the central characters of the play and by making Hester a tragic and heroic figure. Carr developed this encouraging message to make the readers contemplate the shortcomings of the rural Ireland, the past travelling customs, and Ireland's current social, economic, political, and cultural status. This showed her concern to make the reader respond to existing strictures. Carr experimented with the dramatic genre, while preserving the traditional Irish literary folklore, fantasy, and culture. Like Beckett and Joyce, Carr looked to the future of modern nomadism, where exile seems necessary to get away from the bog, even as her character was unable to do so. The bog is an ecocritical setting that shows the tragedy of the

waning power of nature on today's local man. Finally, Carr is against the grain of Freudian psychoanalysis, proving that she is a radical feminist by making her characters strive hard to achieve, have, and hold on to their own identities, at all costs even in murder, within a male dominated society.

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