When Dionysus lands on Erin: Greek tragedy on Irish grounds

Kentrotis Zinelis, D.

CHAPTER III

Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*: A Very Irish Play Written in Greek

The Curious Case of Hester Swane: An Irish Sister of Medea

Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* was first staged at the Abbey Theatre on 7 October 1998, as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival. It is Marina Carr's most well-known and frequently performed play to date. The play unfolds in the imaginary Bog of Cats, with a scenography that reflects the rural Midlands of Ireland.

Hester Swane, the play's protagonist, hails from Irish Traveller heritage. With no present father figure, Hester's only recollections are of her mother, Big Josie, who abandoned her as well, forcing Hester to come of age in solitude. Now in her forties and completely forsaken, Hester shares her life with Carthage Kilbride, her long-time partner of ten years. For most of this time, they lived in a caravan by the bog, embracing a Traveller lifestyle. However, recently, they relocated to a house that Carthage built for them, embarrassed as he was for not following the community's etiquettes. Yet, Hester has never felt comfortable within it, preferring an outdoor way of life to being confined indoors. Together they have a seven-year-old daughter, Josie. Even though they are raising a child together, the couple has chosen not to marry, a decision that ultimately leaves Hester vulnerable, as it allows Carthage the opportunity to leave her and marry another woman. In fact, from the outset of the play we learn about Carthage's plan to wed Caroline Cassidy, the daughter of Xavier Cassidy, who conveniently happens to be a rich farmer and prosperous landowner. This marriage would solidify Carthage as a respected member of the Midlands community, while Hester, as a Traveller, would continue to be viewed as an outsider by the local Irish society.[1] Yet, troubles for Hester do not halt at this point. On the eve of his wedding, Carthage approaches Hester and orders her to leave Bog of Cats, asserting that her presence poses a threat to the entire community. Carthage also declares that their daughter, Josie, will stay in his

[1] Hester is not really an Irish name. Phonetically it somewhat resembles the old French word 'estranger', which means 'to make strange' or 'to treat someone as stranger'. Hester is also the first name of the protagonist of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). Just like Hester Swane, Hester Prynne is a single mother raising her daughter alone, facing public humiliation and shame by the puritanical Boston society because of the unknown parentage of her child.

custody. He claims that now that he has a stable life, he can provide better parenting than her, accusing Hester of heavy drinking and night roaming around the bog.

Hester does not give in to these threats but instead decides to retaliate against her ostracization. She defends her position within the Bog of Cats, and essentially warns Carthage that if she gets expelled, both she and their daughter will face dire consequences. During their heated verbal exchange, it is also revealed that in the past, Hester and Carthage conspired in the death of Hester's brother, Joseph, a character that appears in the form of a ghost in the play. However, their motivations behind the murder were distinct. Carthage's primary interest lay in the money Joseph had inherited from his father, while Hester desired his death as a form of revenge for the favoritism Big Josie had shown toward him.

Joseph is one amongst the numerous grotesque and 'unrealistic' characters in *By the Bog of Cats*. These characters include the Catwoman, a blind pagan figure with sorcery and fortune-telling abilities bearing resemblance to the seer Teiresias in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*. Also, there is Father Willow, an eccentric priest with a fondness for women and drink, and Ghost Fancier, a Grim Reaper figure functioning as a metaphor for Hester's subconscious. As the play progresses, Hester is subjected to recurring verbal abuse from two key characters: Carthage's mother, Mrs. Kilbride, an egotistical and controlling figure, who constantly manipulates her son, and Xavier Cassidy, a greedy landowner, who displays an array of chauvinistic views throughout the play.

In a final attempt to reach a compromise, Hester pleads to be allowed to peacefully stay where she is, promising that she will not interfere with Carthage's wedding in any way. Gradually, one begins to understand the underlying reason why Hester is so stubborn to remain within the Bog of Cats: having never fully accepted her mother's abandonment, Hester still waits for Big Josie's return to the bog. When her plea is once again rejected, and everyone is at the wedding, Hester ignores the constant warnings of her earnest yet ineffectual neighbour Monica and seizes the opportunity to set fire to Carthage's house and livestock.[2] When everyone realizes that she initiated the calamity, Hester first kills Josie, and then takes her own life, cursing Carthage for all the harm he inflicted upon her.

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[2] The name Carthage Kilbride rings several bells: first, it recalls Virgil's *Aeneid* and Aeneas' calamitous affair with Dido, the queen of the city of Carthage. Dido commits suicide after Aeneas abandons her. It is therefore not so difficult to associate Dido's fate with that of Hester's, who also takes her life at the end of the play. Second, Carthage calls to mind Cato the Elder's famous *dictum* during the Third Punic War: *ceterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam*, i.e. 'Furthermore, I think that Carthage must be destroyed'; a wish, which also proves true for Carr's Carthage. Third, in Frank McGuinness' *Carthagians* (1988), The playwright subtly hints at the ancient conflict between Rome and Carthage to echo the strife between Britain and the Irish Nationalists in Northern Ireland. Carthage is Ireland, dominated and destroyed by the British Romans. Lastly, the surname 'Kilbride' works as a pun for 'kill the bride', recalling Glauce's death by Medea's poisonous gift of *peplos*.

Ostensibly a play about Travellers, the Irish land, and rural superstitions, there is a second layer to consider. *By the Bog of Cats* is not the sole Irish play during the latter part of the twentieth century that shares a thematic affinity to Euripides' *Medea*. Carr's play was preceded by Brendan Kennelly's *Euripides' Medea: A New Version* (1988), Desmond Egan's *Medea* (1991), and followed by Tom Paulin's *Euripides' Medea: In a New Version* (2010). Yet, *By the Bog of Cats* happens to be the one that deviates more drastically from the Euripidean source. Whereas Egan ends up with a straight interlingual translation of the ancient Greek text to English, and Kennelly as well as Paulin keep faithful in general terms to the setting, characters and plotline of Euripides' tragedy while limiting themselves to variations in the dialogue, Carr radically transfers the action of the play to a modern environment, that of the Irish Midlands. Notably, there is evidence that Carr managed to camouflage the indebtedness that her play owes to *Medea*. One just needs to consider Carr's genuine astonishment about the audience's *prima facie* reaction after the premiere of *By the Bog of Cats*: "The plot is completely *Medea*. It is surprising how few people picked up on that initially" (qtd. in Ni Anluain 2000: 51).

This unexpected reaction by the original audience of *By the Bog of Cats* begs the following questions: how did a play dealing with female ostracization and filicide, not manage to ring a bell about *Medea*? What is the factor at play obscuring the fact that the eponymous Euripidean tragedy is a subtext of *By the Bog of Cats*? And if the latter apparently retains many components of the ancient tragedy, why did it prove so hard to decipher its classical underpinnings? To examine and understand the extent and function of the classical Greek influence in Carr's play, the following central question arises: is *By the Bog of Cats* primarily an Irish adaptation of the Greek tragedy of *Medea* or, after closer inspection, can we argue that it is a distinct Irish play?[3]

In the following sections, we will thoroughly explore these queries. First, we will identify the thematic similarities between the two plays by examining the parallels between the characters of Medea and Hester. Once this has been established, our focus will shift to the elements within Carr's play that may have hindered the initial audience from recognizing that *By the Bog of Cats* is an adaptation of *Medea*. As it will be demonstrated, Carr's play is deeply immersed in a potent Irish sociocultural context, which effectively conceals the Medean subject matter. This results in an authentically Irish play that does not diminish its Greek tragedy origins in any way.

[3] Also minding that "at the time of the premiere the Abbey Theatre did not publicise the play as a Greek adaptation" (Sihra 2018: 119).

Marina and the Greeks: The Greek Germ in Carr's Dramaturgy

A commonplace in Carr's dramaturgic work is the transposition of what she herself has defined as "the Greek idea of destiny and fate and little escape" (Clarity 1994: 23) to an Irish setting. There is a certain Greek aura in most of Carr's plays, and *By the Bog of Cats* is not an exception to this. In Irish theatre studies, *By the Bog of Cats* is often discussed within Carr's 'Midlands trilogy', alongside *The Mai* (1994) and *Portia Coughlan* (1996). *The Mai* is loosely based on Sophocles' *Electra*, while the plotline of *Portia Coughlan* incorporates elements from the Egyptian tale of Isis and Osiris. Besides that, there is a handful of subsequent plays with strong classical references: Carr has written *Ariel* (2002), inspired by Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* and, more vaguely, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy. *Phaedra Backwards* (2011) is based on Euripides' *Hippolytus*, and *Hecuba* (2015) is an adaptation of the homonymous Euripidean tragedy.

To offer a glimpse of the Greek tragedy element present in Carr's plays, *Ariel* presents a modern reinterpretation of *Iphigenia at Aulis*. Centred on Agamemnon's obligation to offer his daughter as a sacrifice to appease Artemis, enabling the Greeks to embark on their voyage to Troy, Carr tells the story of Fermoy Fitzgerald, an aspiring politician who decides to sacrifice his daughter Ariel to his 'personal God', blinded by a prophecy that this will bring him success in his political career. In *Phaedra Backwards*, Carr does exactly what the title of her play indicates. Contrary to its Euripidean precursor, it is not Phaedra that falls madly in love with her stepson, but Hippolytus with his stepmother. However, it is not only the sexual desire that is reversed, but also the play's chronological structure: Carr's story begins from where the original tragedy ends, namely the death of Hippolytus, and then moves backward in time until just before Phaedra's death. *Hecuba*, on the other hand, remains faithful to the corresponding Greek text. Set in "the fragile Greek state circa 500 BC" (Carr 2015: x), Carr reanimates the Trojan queen's plight as a captive of the Achaeans. Carr depicts Hecuba as more humane than Euripides. In Carr's version, Hecuba does not blind her son-in-law Polymestor or murder her grandchildren, as she seeks revenge for the death of her youngest son Polydoros.

Considering the strong Greek influences in Carr's plays, Frank McGuinness's concluding verdict in the Abbey's program note to *By the Bog of Cats* seems quite appropriate: "I wonder what Marina Carr believes? I can't say for certain, but I am certain in this play she writes in Greek" (2003: 88). Such bold statement invites one to dig deeper. In fact, given the apparent general inability of the original audience to grasp the play's indebtedness to *Medea*, McGuinness's assertion is not self-evident. What does it mean for an Irish play to be 'written in Greek'?

A good starting point is to inquire the instrumental purposes behind Carr's choice to appropriate the story of a heroine that breaks the ultimate taboo: a mother killing her own child. Filicide, no matter how you examine it, remains inexplicable. Carr must be aware of the

incomprehensibility that filicide generates, regardless of the circumstances it is conducted. For a woman to kill her child, she must be mad, certainly deranged. Especially in Ireland, womanhood is synonymous with being a mother. As Melisa Sihra points out: "Carr's mature plays explore the deep-rooted association of woman and motherhood in Irish culture" (Sihra 2005: 118). This fusion of female experience with maternity has received institutional sanction through articles 41.1 and 41.2 of the 1937 Irish constitution, which reads as follows:

> 41.1: The State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.
>
> 41. 2: The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. (*Bunreacht na hÉireann - Constitution of Ireland*: p. 160)

This interchangeability between the roles of 'mother' and 'woman' – along with an imperative urge to overcome it – directly informs the contextual framework of *By the Bog of Cats*. Carr's dramaturgical effort is aimed at subverting the prevalent assimilation of 'woman' and 'mother' ingrained in Irish law, and thereby reflecting a notion deeply embedded in Irish consciousness.

To critique this stifling phenomenon for Irish women, filicide becomes a weapon: Carr draws inspiration from the murderous myth of Medea and creates a rebellious female character like Hester Swane, who decisively deviates "from [the] culturally circumscribed role which commands mothers to be caring and nurturing to others, even at the expense of themselves" (Hirsch 1989: 170). Hester Swane struggles to fulfil her maternal role due to her violent exile from her motherland. Carr creates a scenario where the sense of belonging to an Irish Midlands community is inextricably linked to the performance of maternal duties. Hence, *By the Bog of Cats* is a retelling of *Medea*, where the idea of Ireland as motherland becomes inseparable from the idea of motherhood. For Carr, being a mother necessitates having a motherland.

As one can observe, numerous analogies exist between the Euripidean tragedy and Carr's play: like Medea, Hester faces severe social exclusion, and due to a series of wrongs inflicted upon her, she has no choice but to kill her offspring. Hester, much like Medea, is abandoned by her child's father, who is selfishly marrying another woman for financial and social-climbing reasons. Again, similar to Medea, Hester is forced into exile by the community's authorities. Besides, both heroines are seen by others as possessors of sorcery and witchcraft powers. "You're my match in witchery, Hester, same as your mother was, it may even be ya surpass us both", are Catwoman's words to her (*BC*: 11). This statement can be interpreted as an allusion to Creon's expulsion of Medea from Corinth due to her magical abilities: "you are a clever woman, and skilled in many evil arts" (*σοφὴ πέφυκας καὶ κακῶν πολλῶν ἴδρις*) (*Med*. 285). As Hester follows the lead of her

mother in alchemy, so does Medea, who, according to Diodorus, has learned from her mother Hecate[4] and her sister Circe all the powers that drugs possess (*Bibl.* 4.45). According to the same source, when the Argonauts encountered Pelias, Medea volunteered to slay him using the powerful drugs she has brought with her aboard (*Ibid*. 4.50).

Medea and Hester are *pharmakon* (*φάρμακον*) connoisseurs. *Pharmakon* is a Greek word that refers to a potent substance used for either healing or causing harm.[5] Apollonius recounts that Medea equips Jason with a *pharmakon* to anoint himself before clashing with the earthborn men and the fire-breathing bulls, making him virtually invulnerable (*Argon*. 3.1045). In Euripides' tragedy, the exact opposite use of *pharmakon* transpires: Medea's nuptial gifts of golden crown and robe to Glauce are steeped with deadly poison, and when the bride puts them on, she faces a painful death (*Med*. 784-89). In fact, Medea has already declared that her most formidable and deadly skill against her enemies lies in her expertise with poisons (*κράτιστα τὴν εὐθεῖαν, ᾗ πεφύκαμεν σοφοὶ μάλιστα, φαρμάκοις αὐτοὺς ἐλεῖν*) (*Ibid*. 384-5).

Correspondingly, in *By the Bog of Cats*, the Catwoman, the mentor of Hester in hag things, reminds her that "There's ways round curses. Curses only have the power ya allow them" (*BC*: 13), and angrily remembers that once she gave "auld Xavier Cassidy herbs to cure his wife. What did he do? Pegged them down the toilet and took Olive Cassidy to see some swanky medicine man in a private hospital… she came back cured as a side of ham in an oak coffin with golden handles" (*Ibid*.). As Catwoman's pun about cured men and cured meat foregrounds, in Carr's Midlands, the word of the wise women of the bog is valued higher than authorized medicine. Both Catwoman and Hester abide to the so-called 'Hag-ocracy' lineage: the land of the bog is "governed by the Witch within – the Hag within. Like the wise women Biddy Early[6] and Augusta Gregory, Marina

[4] Opinions about Medea's mother differ: "Whereas, in the most recent tradition, Medea's mother is thought to be Hecate, the deity of magic and enchantment, in an older tradition, her mother is presumed to be Idya, an Oceanid. As the daughter of Idya ('the one who knows'), Medea is associated with a beneficent goddess and inherits her discernment and clear-sightedness. As Hecate's daughter, Medea is linked to the powers of darkness as an evil sorceress" (Lecossois 2012: 70).

[5] *Pharmakon* is a term that is still in circulation, especially in post-structuralism. In his essay 'Plato's Pharmacy', Jacques Derrida provides a reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*, focusing on the passage about Boreas' kidnapping of Orithya, while she was "playing with Pharmacia" (*Phdr*. 229d). Briefly, in *Phaedrus*, Plato describes *logos* (speech) as 'the Father' suggesting its epistemological superiority to writing. To strengthen his argument, Plato introduces the ambivalent word *pharmakon* – both cure and poison – as a metaphor for writing. Writing for Plato is a simulacrum of Truth that, at best, it provides a vehicle for true Ideas to be conveyed. Derrida deconstructs Plato's view suggesting that it is a fallacy to believe that true Ideas such as Beauty or Justice could exist separated from signification in language. For the actual source and a comprehensive analysis see: Derrida (1981) and Rinon (1992).

[6] Biddy Early was a traditional Irish herbalist, who was offering her services free of charge or in exchange of gifts. Until her death in 1874, her fame had spread throughout the island. Though the Catholic Church had condemned her, and trained doctors were disapproving of her unorthodox methods, she was revered for her healing powers. Like Medea, she had learned the art of herbal cures from her mother. It was believed that she could talk to the fairies, and she was always carrying around her neck a small bottle with an

Carr evokes these channels of 'Hag-ocracy' to release and resituate energies from women's perspectives" (Sihra 2018: 282).[7] Similarly, John Millington Synge records in his travel accounts that local women from Wicklow, on the east coast of Ireland, are thought to have "great witchery… [and] great knowledge of the fairies" (1980: 31).

Persisting on the similarities between the two heroines, flying in the skies is another supernatural aspect that binds them together. As it is exhibited by the *deus ex machina* device in Euripides' tragedy, Medea, after she commits filicide, she escapes in the skies with the assistance of her grandfather Helios and the dragon chariot he sends to her. (*Med.* 1321-3). Accordingly, Mrs Kilbride – in a rendition of a familiar stereotype of the witch – claims to have observed Hester "whooshin' by on her broom half an hour back" (*BC*: 8). She also calls Hester "the Jezebel witch" (*Ibid*. 17). Furthermore, the neighbour Monica shares her conviction that Hester is into "black-art things" (*Ibid*. 61). This kind of witch imagery permeates *By the Bog of Cats*, most conspicuously when the Creon-like character Xavier Cassidy, echoing witch-hunt practices commonly associated with the Middle Ages, execrates Hester by saying that "You're a dangerous witch, Swane… A hundred year ago we'd strap ya to a stake and roast ya till your guts exploded" (*Ibid*. 68).[8] Correspondingly, death is also what Creon promises to Medea if she tomorrow remains within the borders of Corinth (*προυννέπω δέ σοι, εἴ σ᾽ ἠ 'πιοῦσα λαμπὰς ὅψεται θεοῦ καὶ παῖδας ἐντὸς τῆσδε τερμόνων χθονός, θανῇ*) (*Med*. 351-4).

Nonetheless, there exist significant differences between the two heroines. For instance, Medea is the mother of two boys, whereas Hester has only a daughter. Additionally, in contrast to Medea, Hester takes her own life following the act filicide. These departures from the classical myth are critical and will be assessed later in more detail. For now, it is more prompting to consider Marianne McDonald's following assertion:

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unspecified dark liquid that she was using for her potion making. Lady Augusta, in her book *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (1920: 35-69), dedicates a whole section to Biddy Early's life and times.

[7] Olwen Fouéré, the leading actress of Carr's play, when inquired about the powerful women of the bog, she answered: "The Catwoman I regarded very much as a 'real' or local character, who is the midwife or the local witch in the community. I don't know whether those people exist in communities in rural Ireland still. To a certain extent they must. As we know, midwives over the last few centuries were also the healers and the witches. Hester knows that Catwoman tells the truth… The truth in the deepest sense" (Fouéré 2003: 160-71).

[8] Xavier's witch purge rhetoric evokes a real story; the killing of Bridget Cleary by Michael Cleary in County Tipperary on 15 March 1895. Cleary was convinced that his wife had been taken off by fairies, with a changeling left at her place. As Sihra underscores: "A thread of the patriarchal demonisation of woman-as-witch pervades Carr's Midlands plays with references to the ritual humiliation, bodily abuse and murder of unconventional or free-thinking women" (2018: 136). "We'll burn ya out if we have to" (*BC*: 52), is the corresponding threat made to Hester, revealing the normative attitude of the settled community against the unyielding individuality of the Traveller woman.

> Medea knows how important children are to Creon, Aegeus and Jason, so they show her how this is the best way to destroy her husband. The sons are in the image and likeness of their father. When Medea looks at them, she sees Jason. One wonders if Medea would have killed daughters. (2002: 62)

McDonald posits that the principal factor driving the tragedy in Euripides' play is the sex of Medea's children. Both being male, they are primarily identified with their father, Jason. Their death at the hands Medea is orchestrated with this understanding, as it would inflict the biggest blow upon her former lover. Taking this into account, McDonald's contemplation regarding whether the whole Medea story might have unfolded differently had Medea been compelled to take the life of a daughter instead of two sons, appears reasonable. This gives rise to the question of how a Medea-like figure would react if she were to find herself confronted with a daughter 'in the image and likeness of the mother'? *By the Bog of Cats* provides an answer to this. Filicide in Carr's play becomes a mother-daughter thing: Hester has a daughter, Josie, whom she kills.[9] What remains is to determine whether the motives behind Hester's filicide are like those McDonald assigned to Medea, or if the switch in the sex of the murdered child induces a totally different theorizing of filicide in Carr's play.

To find an answer, one must look at the backstory of Carr's heroine: Hester Swane, being an Irish Traveller, belongs to a wandering community that lives in caravans across the Midlands of Ireland, choosing not to settle permanently in any one location. Hester "embodies autochthonous Irishness – mythic, marginalized, and explosive" (Stewart 1999: 1). In fact, Carr confesses that she "chose to make [Hester] a Traveller because Travellers are [Ireland's] national outsiders" (Battersby 2000: 15).[10] This derogatory attitude towards Irish Travellers is

[9] This female-oriented approach must be juxtaposed against a wider spectrum of familial relationships as customarily embodied in the Irish theatrical canon. To quote Maresh's view: "The most prevalent theme running through [Carr's] play is the importance of the bond between mother and daughter, which marks a significant change from Irish drama such as Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, where relationships between women are always circumvented by the playwright's focus on the father-son relationships, or the women's relationships to the men in their lives. The women in *By the Bog of Cats* are more concerned with either losing their children or having been abandoned by their mothers than they are about their husbands or fathers" (2016: 189-90). Such ground-breaking deviation from the Irish canon, founded upon Carr's straightforward foregrounding of the female experience, comes as a positive development to Marry Trotter's sombre remark that in Irish plays "Female characters provide the protagonists with emotional support, a source of conflict, or as sexual interest, but the real attention in the family memory drama centers on the patrilineal relationships" (2000: 165).

[10] In 2017, Travellers were officially recognized as a distinct ethnic group within the Irish State, signalling an end to their longstanding persecution. To quote the statement made by the former Taoiseach, Enda Kenny: "It is a historic day for our Travellers and a proud day for Ireland. Out Traveller community is an integral part of our society for over a millennium, with their own distinct identity – a people within our people. We recognise the inequalities and discrimination that the Traveller community faces" (O' Halloran & O'Regan: 2017).

substantiated by the repeated use of the term 'tinker'.[11] In short, Hester is being rejected by the settled Midlands community solely on the grounds of her 'gipsy status'. Mrs. Kilbride's statement that "I warned him about that wan, Hester Swane, that she'd get her claws in, and she did, the tinker" (*BC*: 17), comprises the anathema against Hester. Mrs. Kilbride also regards Travellers of inferior intelligence: "Thick and stubborn and dangerous wrong-headed and backwards to top it all" (*Ibid*. 15), only to be granted a fast quip: "It's not backwards, it's inside out" (*Ibid*. 17). Accordingly, Hester does not hesitate to embrace the tinker term: "Thinks yees all Hester Swane with her tinker blood is gettin' no more that she deserves" (*Ibid*. 6), a statement reflecting her raging about the apathy shown by the townsfolk when the news of her banishment from the community breaks out. Overall, "Hester as woman, Traveller-woman and Bog-woman is excluded triply" (Jordan 2002: 251). Yet, Hester does not back down; she firmly defies her triple liminal condition, since she apprehends gender and cultural differences not in terms of hierarchy but of complementarity. Rendered as Other by the settled community, she fights off such Otherness by promulgating an elucidation of it that does not abide to any hierarchical structures of 'above' and 'below', but proposes instead an interdependent model of 'inside' and 'outside'.[12]

Such discrimination between first and second category citizens reminds one of Jason's aggressive reprimand to Medea that she is now living among Greeks, and not in a land of barbarians (*πρῶτον μὲν Ἑλλάδ᾽ ἀντὶ βαρβάρου χθονὸς γαῖαν κατοικεῖς*) (*Med*. 536-7). And as for what mostly divides the two worlds – the Greek from the barbaric – is, according to Jason, the ability to comprehend justice and the rule of law, with no appeal to force (*καὶ δίκην ἐπίστασαι νόμοις τε χρῆσθαι μὴ πρὸς ἰσχύος χάριν*) (*Ibid*. 537-8). He also exclaims to Medea in respect of the murder of their children that "there is no Greek woman that would have dared this" (*οὐκ ἔστιν ἥτις τοῦτ᾽ ἂν Ἑλληνὶς γυνὴ*) (*Ibid*. 1339). In a somewhat reverse but complementary fashion, Hester distinguishes herself from her enemies by appealing to her 'tinker blood', which unmistakably references a distinct set of values that differentiate Irish Travellers from the cultural norms of mainstream society: "And as for me tinker blood, I'm proud of it. It gives me an edge over

[11] The word is derived from the old Irish *Tinceard* signifying 'tin craft'. Initially, a 'tinker' was a wandering craftsman earning his living by fixing small utensils. Nowadays, a tinker denotes somebody who lives an unsettled life. The fascination that Irish writers have had with the tinker lifestyle cannot be understated: as the title of his play suggests, Synge's *The Tinker's Wedding* deals with the wedding plans and subsequent mayhem of two Irish tinkers, whereas his protagonist in *The Playboy of the Western World*, Christy Mahon, also follows a wandering life. For more information on the impact of Synge's tinker plays to Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* see: Roche (2009b) and Russell (2006).

[12] Mary King suggests that the settled community's "driving objective is to exorcise [Hester], as tinker and bastard-producing Other, from their lives and from what they claim is now 'their' land. She is the liminal Stranger over against whom they define, and viciously defend, their difference from all that is unsettled and unsettling" (2003: 56).

all of yees around here, allows me see yees for the inbred, underbred, bog-brained shower yees are" (*BC*: 27).

Hester navigates cultural distinctions as a blend of insider and outsider; while she is not entirely foreign to the Midlands community like the non-Greek Medea is to Corinth, she still faces considerable marginalization, living on the outskirts of acceptance. Hence, another fundamental difference between the two heroines comes to light: Medea left Colchis and cut off her familial ties of her own accord, hoping to 'become' Greek. On the contrary, Hester does not strive for assimilation; instead, she insists that her identity as a Traveller be acknowledged. Overall, in Euripides you have two clear-cut civilizations and countries at play – the native Greek and the extraneous Colchian – whereas in *By the Bog of Cats* there is only one confined land and country, that of rural Ireland, that is contested by two local yet antagonizing native groups, namely the settled population and the Traveller people perceived as domestic outsiders.[13] Nonetheless, in both respective cases, the two female protagonists, Hester and Medea, are part of the 'weaker' group, be it endogenous gipsy or alien barbaric, and are accordingly portrayed as either possessing or lacking certain cultural signifiers, ghettoizing them from the established societal *status quo*, be it agrarian Irish or the *polis* of Corinth.

[13] As Lojek observes: "The name 'Traveller' itself is a reminder that one thing separating Travellers from the settled community is their relationship to space" (2011: 69-70).

Medea as *ἄπολις*: A non-Greek in Corinthian Land

From the outset of Euripides' *Medea*, the concept of 'Land' proves integral to Medea's identity. To be more precise, it is the profound absence of 'Land' that decisively informs Medea's idea of self. 'Landlessness' appears to be a pivotal aspect in the moulding of Medea's character, as corroborated in the famous address of Medea to the Chorus of Corinthian women (*Med. 214*-65), to whom she enumerates her misfortunes and explains her present exile, begging them for compassion in the name of their shared femininity: "Of all creatures that have breath and sensation, we women are the most unfortunate" (*πάντων δ΄ ὅσ΄ ἔστ΄ ἔμψυχα καὶ γνώμην ἔχει γυναῖκές ἐσμεν ἀθλιώτατον φυτόν*) (*Ibid*. 230).

Having first invoked the Corinthian Chorus in terms of a supposed innate affinity based upon a shared female experience, Medea proceeds to detail the various injustices that women conventionally endure at the hands of men: men become the despots of women's bodies (*δεσπότην τε σώματος*) (*Ibid*. 233), the happiness of a woman solely depends on whether the allotted man turns out to be of a good or a bad character (*ἢ κακὸν λαβεῖν ἢ χρηστόν*) (*Ibid*. 235-6), divorce or refusing a wedlock are not an option (*οὐ γὰρ εὐκλεεῖς ἀπαλλαγαὶ γυναιξὶν οὐδ΄ οἵόν τ΄ ἀνήνασθαι πόσιν*)(*Ibid*. 236-7), and women must get fast accustomed to the new customs and practices of their husbands' homes, otherwise death is preferable (*ἐς καινὰ δ΄ ἤθη καὶ νόμους ἀφιγμένην δεῖ μάντιν εἶναι. εἰ δὲ μή, θανεῖν χρεών*) (*Ibid*. 238-43).

The culmination of Medea's address to the Corinthian women entails the most fundamental biological difference between men and women: giving birth. Medea tries to win over the female Chorus by admitting that it is three times easier to stand in battle holding a shield, like men do, than for a woman giving birth once (*ὡς τρὶς ἂν παρ΄ ἀσπίδα στῆναι θέλοιμ΄ ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἅπαξ*) (*Ibid*. 250-1). Yet, Medea's universalizing speech about the common hardships of being a woman becomes interrupted by the confession that she does not share the same story as the female Chorus (*ἀλλ΄ οὐ γὰρ αὐτὸς πρὸς σὲ κἄμ΄ ἥκει λόγος*) (*Ibid*. 252). Medea protests that she was taken as booty from a foreign land and that she is alone, stateless, shamed by her own man, having no mother, no brother, no relative to shield her from such calamity (*ἐγὼ δ΄ ἔρημος ἄπολις οὖσ΄ ὑβρίζομαι πρὸς ἀνδρός, ἐκ γῆς βαρβάρου λελῃσμένη, οὐ μητέρ΄, οὐκ ἀδελφόν, οὐχὶ συγγενῆ μεθορμίσασθαι τῆσδ΄ ἔχουσα συμφορᾶς*) (*Ibid*. 255-58).

The key term to understand Medea's predicament is *ἄπολις* (*apolis*).[14] To be *ἄπολις* means to exist without a city, without lawfully belonging inside the dominion of an organized state. In

[14] The use of alpha privative to denote absence or negation is widely discussed by Edith Hall (1996) in her commentary of Aeschylus' *Persians*. Hall pinpoints the numerous occasions in the tragic text, where the barbarians talk about themselves using words starting with an alpha privative. This is a method introduced by Aeschylus to indirectly exhibit certain Greek attributes that are denied or absent from the Persian foe. Naturally, such strategy aims at highlighting the apparent superiority of Greek values and the deficiency of

essence, this term conveys a state of not having a specific land as a point of reference. Medea is *ἄπολις* because she has been seized from her barbarian motherland, as the phrase *ἑκ γῆς βαρβάρου λελῃσμένη* suggests. In this regard, Stephen Wilmer underscores the two primary aspects of Medea that should be considered in an effort to empathize with her: "The clue lies in Medea's oppressed status as an outsider and a victim" (2005:139). Medea garners our sympathy as a foreigner, making her an easy target. Even after committing the crime, the primary criticism directed at her revolves around Medea's savage origins. Jason's cursing radiates this: "I am in my mind now; but I was mad before, when I brought you from your house and your barbarous land into a Greek home" (*ἐγὼ δὲ νῦν φρονῶ, τότ᾽ οὐ φρονῶν, ὅτ᾽ ἐκ δόμων σε βαρβάρου τ᾽ ἀπὸ χθονὸς Ἕλλην᾽ ἐς οἶκον ἠγόμην*) (*Med*. 1329-31).

The misfit identity of Medea is encapsulated in the lines quoted above, which are the gist of Medea's current situation as a barbarian woman enmeshed in a strange, unwelcoming environment. This unfavourable scenario could simply be coined as the 'Medean condition'. The hardships that Medea experiences stem from her transition from a familiar to an unfamiliar place. It is the sense of belonging to a motherland and the deprivation of such feeling that acutely reflects Medea's condition and tortures her. Remarkably, Medea acknowledges the significance of belonging to a *πόλις* only when she brings her native land to memory. For Medea, the concepts of belonging to a city and having a motherland function simultaneously and interchangeably. With these two notions now separated, Medea realizes that, unlike the Corinthian women, the ground beneath her feet is not her native soil, and she fears the consequences of this disparity. Consequently, when Medea suggests to the female Chorus that, despite the many similarities between them, they have different stories, she primarily alludes to the differing standing they hold in relation to the land of Corinth. Corinth is not her *πόλις*, and this fact shapes her identity and sketches her self-image as an outsider. Medea feels powerless because she is landless.

A longstanding argument in classical scholarship regarding Medea's filicide is that all calamity stems from the moment Medea decides to become a 'bad woman' (Webster 1967: 13-14, 31-101), and frees herself from the 'feminine' domain of *οἶκος* to intrude the 'masculine' domain of *πόλις* (Shaw 1975: 255-6). In fact, when Medea appears in front of the Corinthian women, she proclaims that "I have come out of the house" (*ἐξῆλθον δόμων*) (*Med.* 214). Such statement "can be read symbolically as well as literally, as a movement from the private sphere of the house into the public one - normally associated with men - of the city" (Williamson 1990: 16). Medea's motion from 'inside' to 'outside' is central in the unfolding of the tragedy. As Easterling argues, "since men cannot dispense with women, they try to control their more dangerous aspects by

their enemies. The extended use of alpha privative when describing the barbarians and their customs does not primarily highlight what the Persians *lack*, but more importantly, what the Greeks *possess*.

secluding them inside the house, limiting their emergence into the wider public world in carefully defined ways" (1987: 15). For women, *οἶκος* represents a domain of external control and confinement.

Medea, though, is a character who comprehends and exploits this spatial division for her own advantage. One only needs to consider "Medea's frenzied, angry, and unhappy words offstage in *οἶκος* and her controlled, abstract, intellectualizing language outside the *οἶκος*, a form of speaking which ancient audiences and today's readers have difficulty separating from the speech of the Greek males in the play" (Lloyd 2006: 116). Medea not only understands the rules of the game, but also demonstrates sophistication in defying them and evading the consequences. In this context, Medea's filicide could be interpreted as a warning of the potentially disastrous consequences when the boundary between *οἶκος* and *πόλις* is breached. Medea severely violates this constrain imposed on her, and the act of killing of her two children must be viewed as a result of this unlawful transgression.[15]

Contrary to this theorization, Carr challenges the binary division between *οἶκος* and *πόλις* by creating a heroine who adopts a unique spatial perspective:

> Hester's association mainly with open or unfixed spaces seems to suggest a whole reconceptualization of the notion of home/homeland for female characters. This new idea moves on from a restrictive notion of indoors as a 'natural space' for women characters, and embraces placelessness and displacement not as the absence of place or as the wrong place, but as an alternative kind of 'placement'. (Cerquoni 2003: 182)

Hester, compared to Medea, enjoys a unique position as to what amounts as outward and inward, public and private, political and domestic, masculine and feminine. For Hester, home is not defined by a house but by a stretch of land beside the bog. The bog – as an 'outer realm' – and her Traveller identity – qualifying her as a legitimate proprietor of that external space – cause Hester to adopt a proactive stance towards decision-making, without this to be automatically considered a breach of somebody else's traditional sphere of influence, as is the case with Medea. Living in a caravan without a permanent home does not automatically imply that Hester does not belong anywhere or that she is unrooted like Medea. Crossing spatial and symbolic boundaries, Hester calls home all the land that she roams about and inhabits.

[15] One needs to consider the social role of the Great Dionysia, which involved the portrayal of startling events like Medea's tragic act of killing her sons. This was a significant aspect of Greek civic life, reflecting the democratic ideology of fifth-century Athens. For a concise exploration of the relationship between the festival of Dionysia and Athenian citizenship see: Cartledge (1997). For a revisionist account regarding the institutional framework of Great Dionysia as part of the *polis* ideology and Athenian identity see: Rhodes (2003).

Evidently, the concept of 'Land' plays a significant role in both plays. The distinct (non)relationship that Medea and Hester maintain with their respective lands of Corinth and Ireland is the catalyst for their estrangement from the local population, and ultimately leads to the acts of violence they perpetrate. Medea, being viewed as a foreigner in Corinth, lacks any substantial ties to the land. This forces her to rely on her wit and cunning to navigate the challenges she faces. In contrast, Hester, originally from the Irish Midlands, lives a nomadic life, constantly moving from place to place and lacking a stable home. Her resistance to confinement sets her apart from the settled inhabitants of the Bog of Cats. As a result, a significant similarity between Medea and Hester becomes apparent in their mutual experience of alienation from the traditional societal norms linked to the respective lands they set foot in:

> Just as Medea will always be a foreigner in Corinth, Carr reveals how her central female protagonist will always be excluded from the dominant fabric of Irish society: as a marginalized indigenous people whose language and traditions can be traced as far back as the twelfth century, Irish Travellers are commonly associated with bigoted stereotypes of ignorance, violence and lack of cleanliness, perpetuating essentialist notions of innate impurity. (Sihra 2005: 128)

Medea and Hester both share the experience of being outcasts, betrayed by their male partners, and bereft of family support. Despite the undeniable similarities in their stories, it is puzzling that few people in the audience at the premiere of *By the Bog of Cats* recognized the connection. While it is now clear why the themes of Medea are integral to a serious analysis of Carr's play, it also appears that this understanding was not essential for the play to be effective.

To grasp this phenomenon, further investigation is required. *By the Bog of Cats* must encompass a complex network of meanings and associations that effectively obscured its strong link to the tragic tale of Medea. In essence, there must be a compelling element within Carr's play that eclipsed its status as an adaptation of a Greek tragedy. As we will see next, this is none other than the quintessentially Irish bogland setting of the play.

A No-man's Land *Par Excellence*: Female Agency and the Inconspicuous Lure of the Bog Landscape

As previously mentioned, *By the Bog of Cats* is typically discussed as part of Carr's 'Midlands trilogy', along with *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan*. These plays feature strong-willed female protagonists who all share an unquenchable yearning for 'a lost other', leading to a common tragic destiny. To be specific, Hester, The Mai,[16] and Portia[17] are haunted by the absence of a mother, a husband, and a brother, respectively.

For Hester, the trauma of being abandoned at a young age by her mother drastically influences her decision-making and solidifies her headstrong disposition, ultimately leading to her self-inflicted death. The Mai, for her part, is a woman abandoned by her husband, Robert, who left her and their four children because of his futile desire for fame and recognition. To regain his love, she has built a gorgeous house overlooking Owl Lake, where she spends her time waiting for Robert to return. When he eventually reappears, The Mai bitterly realizes that emotionally he is still absent and that he cheats on her. Realizing that all her efforts to reconcile and live happily together have been in vain, The Mai calmly goes to meet her end in Owl Lake. Finally, for Portia, it is the absence of her twin brother Gabriel that torments her. Although she is married to Raphael, and together they have three sons and they seem to lead an enviable life, her mind is set on the memory of her dead brother. Fifteen years ago, Gabriel and Portia had agreed to a suicide pact that did not go as planned, resulting in Gabriel drowning alone in Belmont River. No matter what efforts made, Portia's grief for her twin brother is insurmountable, leading her to commit suicide by jumping into the river, in an attempt to reunite and become one again with Gabriel.

Overall, it would be overly simplistic to interpret the suicides of these three women as mere acts of surrender. None of these heroines yields to adversity, nor passively accepts the *status quo*. Instead, they tenaciously fight with all available means until their last breath. When suicide happens to be the only viable choice, they choose it with a sense of autonomy and determination. Indeed, this self-empowering stance that Carr bestows upon her female protagonists diverges from the conventional portrayals of women on Irish stage:

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[16] The classical references associated with *The Mai* extend beyond Sophocles' *Electra*: "The Mai's name evokes the Greek Goddess Maia, one of the seven daughters of Atlas. References to her can be found in *The Homeric Hymns*, specifically in the 'Homeric Hymn to Hermes', where she is identified with a nymph and thus attached to water, and also related to darkness and isolation through her depiction as living in a cave apart from the rest of gods and goddesses" (González Chacón 2015: 61). As for the peculiar presence of the definite article 'the', Rhona Trench clarifies that "the name 'The Mai' indicates strength and authority; her name readapts the Irish tradition of adding 'the' before the last name of the (male) head of a clan" (2010: 115).

[17] Carr has borrowed Portia's name from the protagonist of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

> In Irish dramatic tradition… the woman has always been idealized by male playwrights either as a religious figure like Virgin Mary or as sacrificing, pure and faithful beloved/wife and mother… Carr weakens the traditional female roles as the mother and wife as well as the definition of femininity on the Irish stage, through her attempts to enable her female character to reach a subject position… built on the female desire. (Chelab 2014: 8)

Maternal figures in Carr's 'Midland's trilogy' deviate significantly from the conventional image of mothers as nurturers and comforters. None of the three plays include examples of traditional, ultra-compassionate mothers, who unquestionably sacrifice themselves for the well-being of their children. Even when they are overflowing with maternal love, like Hester for Josie, they do not adhere to the typical path to demonstrate this affection. Instead, they rely on their own moral compass. As for the general rule, Grandma Fraochlán, the grandmother of The Mai, sets the tone: upon confessing her lifelong love for the nine-fingered fisherman to her daughters, she advises them that

> There's two types of people in this world from what I can gather, them as puts their children first and them as puts their lover first and for what it's worth, the nine-fingered fisherman and meself belongs ta the latter of these. I would gladly have hurled all seven of ye down the slopes of hell for one night more with the nine-fingered fisherman and may I rot eternally for such unmotherly feelin. (Carr 1999: 182)

Grandma Fraochlán's words may sound dreadful yet are indicative of the boundless prioritization of personal agency that Carr bequeaths to her female characters. The focalization of female desire encompasses various subject positions, including the desire to be a 'lover' before 'mother' as well as the empowerment through suicide that Hester opts for.

Additionally, Carr exposes the pain that one woman can inflict to another. In Hester's case, it is the absence of her mother that haunts her throughout the play. When Hester was seven years old, the same age as her daughter now, she was left by her mother, Big Josie. Big Josie was a larger-than-life character who would "go off for days with anywan who'd buy her a drink. She'd be off in the bars of Pullagh and Mucklagh getting' into fights [and] wance she bit the nose off a woman who dared to look at her man" (*BC*: 32). Since then, Hester hopelessly anticipates her mother's return to the Bog of Cats, hoping to reunite with her. "Ah, how can I lave the Bog of Cats, everythin' I'm connected to is here. I'd rather die" (*Ibid*. 11), Hester confesses to Catwoman when the latter warns her about an ominous dream she had and urges Hester to leave the bog immediately. Although not explicitly stated until later in the play, the root cause of Hester's resistance when pressured to leave the place is her trauma of maternal abandonment. Hester has been unable

overcome the maternal neglect she experienced as a child, and her persistent hope for Big Josie's return is a defence mechanism.

Therefore, Carr explores the mother-daughter bond on two levels: through Hester's relationship with her daughter and her non-relationship with her mother. In this framework, Hester is depicted both as a mother of a five-year-old daughter and as a middle-aged daughter of an absent mother:

> Carr's play challenges the social construction of identity with a powerful account of a mother-daughter bond. Carr shifts the focus of the original myth from stereotypical feminine sexual jealousy and female wickedness… to the deeper layers of the feminine unconscious as well as construction of feminine subjectivity and identity, symbiotically connected with a lost m/other. In other words, Carr rewrites the myth of Medea from a woman's perspective this time. (Sayin 2008: 77-78)

Carr extends the notions of female agency and motherhood to a new dimension, suggesting an inherent connection between Hester's filicide and her unrelenting fear of the lost 'Mother-Land' that she experiences throughout the play. Carr intertwines these two ideas, presenting a theorisation of motherhood that links Hester's experience of abandonment by her own mother to her unwavering resolve to remain in Bog of Cats – her motherland – at any cost. "I can't lave – Ya see me mother said she'd come back here" (*BC*: 52), are Hester's words underscoring the interchangeability that occurs in her mind between mother figure and motherland. Hester's feelings for her mother, her daughter, and her homeland are intertwined. When she painfully acknowledges that all three have been threatened, Hester arms herself and defends them fiercely, using whatever resources she has left.

All in all, for nonconforming characters like Hester, Portia, or The Mai, to effectively adopt a radical self-determining stance, Carr must contrast these deviant heroines against a newly conceived *mise-en-scène* that accommodates their perceived uniqueness. Focusing on *By the Bog of Cats*, a detailed examination of the role of the bog landscape has the potential to provide insights into the dynamics of this interplay between subversive female protagonist and landform theorisation. As Shonagh Hill notes:

> The bog accommodates shifting identities, the supernatural and the mythic realm. In all three of the Midlands plays, the central character has a private mythology which connects the landscape with the lost other. This creates a tension in the female mythmaking of Carr's plays: it can reinforce a restrictive model of family and female genealogy but it also offers the women an alternative space and attempts to house a female symbolic. Hester's private mythology intertwines fate and genealogy in a potentially stifling manner but the mythmaking in the play also opens up 'pluralising

> futures' through Hester's rewriting of both limiting models of femininity and her tragic ending, and through cultivating the possibilities of the bog. (2019: 19)

To gain a deeper understanding of how this interdependence works, one must focus on the setting of Carr's play. As mentioned previously, the Bog of Cats is situated in the heart of Ireland. As evident from the quotes from the play, Carr takes special care to capture the idiosyncrasies of the Irish dialect in order to reproduce the distinct rural Midlands atmosphere.[18] Specifically, Carr employs the local idiom to convey the feeling that it is not the Dublin Metropolis but Ireland's geographic peripheries and its people therein that her plays are predominantly concerned about:

> The midlands plays *are* steeped in Irish culture, and the flat, guttural accent of the characters serve as a geographical marker of this identity... Carr's characters inhabit primarily rural communities, and are characterized by their isolation and inwardness: they depict an Ireland that the Celtic Tiger would seem to have left far behind. (Murphy 2006: 390)

The term 'Celtic Tiger' refers to the economic expansion driven by foreign investment capital that occurred in the Republic of Ireland starting in the mid-1990s. Carr's 'Midlands trilogy', though composed during the same period, brings forward a sort of primordial ethos animatedly resisting Ireland's new-fangled liberal agenda and economic boom.[19] "Carr's characters vacillate between the old pagan world, honouring mystical deities and the supernatural, and the new free-market world of consumerism and upward social movement" (Gladwin 2011: 391).[20] Within this ambivalence, the dramatic landscape of Carr's Midlands plays almost takes the form of an experiential never-never land hanging in-between what is real and imagined:

> As contemporary Ireland rapidly evolves into an ethnically diverse, technologically advanced, economically viable member of the European Union… Irish playwrights tenaciously draw on a

[18] For an extensive exploration of the unique Hiberno-English idiom that permeates Carr's plays, carrying on a tradition established by O'Casey, Synge, and Yeats, see: Lynch (2006).

[19] As Declan Kiberd states: "In strictly linguistic terms, the Celtic Tiger was born in 1994, when David McWilliams, a young Irish dealer at the Banque Nationale de Paris, used the phrase in a report on the Irish economy. He correctly predicted that the availability of cash at low rates of interest in the following years of the decade would unleash the creativity and initiative of a people who had made shrewd use of European Union subsidies and had in their labour relations achieved a remarkable degree of social consensus" (2005: 271). For the repercussions of the Celtic Tiger phenomenon see: Maher & O'Brien (2014).

[20] Emily Kader argues that Hester symbolizes the agonies generated by Ireland's rapid modernization: "[Hester's] connections to the mythological, supernatural, and pagan elements of the play reveal yet another way that Hester is subversively traditional. As she resists the normalcy of modern Irish Catholicism, she represents the pre-modern Irish Christianity that was steeped in the pagan elements of Irish myth" (2005: 176).

> sense of the past to articulate the present. Pre-Christian systems of belief, the landscapes of ghosts and the dead, of myth and historical reference are repeatedly evoked. (Sihra 2003: 93-4)

From a historical standpoint, Carr's plays can be viewed as a response to the anxiety brought about by the complex economic and sociocultural transformations that Ireland has experienced since the latter part of the twentieth century.[21] To this effect, the topography of Carr's plays takes up a metaphorical dimension: "as a no-man's land, a claustrophobic zone of entrapment, a state of mind, and ultimately as a dystopia" (Wallace 2011: 438). In essence, Carr's plays serve as a poignant reflection of the evolving Irish identity in response to these profound shifts, turning the Midlands landscape into a metaphorical canvas that encapsulates a spectrum of emotions and societal transformations.

As hinted earlier, it seems that a notable factor is obscuring the inherent connection between *By the Bog of* Cats and *Medea*. This element is the scenery in which Carr's play unfolds, namely the land and landscape of the Irish Midlands. In *By the Bog of Cats*, the bogscape is not a mere background reference. On the contrary, it has a breathing presence; it is a living organism, almost like an autonomous character in the play.[22] It expresses "a fecund doubleness that is at once mundane and metaphysical" (Sihra 2018: 13). Accordingly, Carr's characters do not exist in a vacuum, independently of their surroundings. The bog engulfs and absorbs them. It possesses an unrestrained force that is incessantly experienced but cannot be tamed. Like a no-man's land *par excellence*, the ground of the bog remains an unconquerable place, "a rich symbolic terrain… [and] a potent receptacle of cultural memory" (*Ibid*. 123). It is a *locus* where people live, but they cannot own.

In fact, Carr is not the first to contemplate on the nature of the bog. Rather, there is a pre-existing archetypical understanding of it that she makes use of:

> Embodying the sublime qualities of terror and awe, the bog of the Midlands occupies a significant place in the Irish cultural psyche and is known for its qualities of preservation, incorporating a haunting well of associations with mythic, 'bottomless' depth and subterranean rivers. Bleak and unquantifiable, the black landscape of the Midlands has long been considered a marginal, ungovernable space of subversive possibility and dissent and has been linked to insurrection, concealment and colonial resistance. (Sihra 2005: 121)

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[21] Merely by examining the title of Ivana Bacik's book, *Kicking and Screaming: Dragging Ireland into the 21st Century* (2005), it becomes evident that Ireland's journey toward modernization was far from effortless. The same phrase is echoed in Carr's play *Ariel*, where the ruthless Agamemnon-like politician Fermoy Fitzgerald justifies his possession of political power by saying: "I brough ud kickin and screamin inta the twinty-first century" (2009: 103).

[22] In an interview Carr admits that "I've always thought that landscape was another character in the work, and if you get that right it will resonate and enrich the overall piece" (Ni Anluain 2000: 47).

A mystical environment as described above is the backdrop of *By the Bog of Cats*. In the stage directions, Carr imagines her setting as "*a bleak white landscape of ice and snow*". This is the typical landscape that one encounters when traveling around the bogland area of the Irish Midlands during the months of winter. Thus, compared to the Euripidean precursor, it is evident that the setting where the action unfolds has been significantly altered: a desolate icy bog in place of a lavish palace in Corinth. Naturally, this change raises certain questions: what are the implications of this shift in background "from the Euripidean source in a more Irish, feminine, and psychological territory" (Trotter 2008: 188)? How profound is the impact of this landscape change?

Evidently, the landscape of the Irish Midlands functions as a catalyst in *By the Bog of Cats*. It actively contributes to the development of Hester Swane, Carr' Medea-like character, endowing her with a unique demeanour. Consequently, the play's landscape must be conjectured as a verb, not a noun: "not an object to be seen or a text to be read, but a process by which social and subjective identities are formed" (Mitchell 1994: 1). With this notion in mind, the instances in Carr's play where the connection between identity formation and landscape signification surfaces, will be a focal point of this study.

The Bog of Cats Precedents: The Astounding Literariness of the Irish Bog

While there may not be a direct equivalent of the Bog of Cats on the Irish map, its landscape and structural features resemble those of an actual Midlands bog. In the seventeenth century, groups of unregenerate Irish rebels sought refuge within these bogs to evade the Crown's authorities. Later, these bogs were systematically exploited for their natural resources in fuel. Today, these so-called 'wastelands' have been reimagined as places of extraordinary beauty deserving protection from commercial exploitation. Indeed, the Bog of Cats might very well be reminiscent of the numerous bogs in county Offaly, the region where Marina Carr spent her childhood. To provide now a consise overview of the etymology and morphology of a typical bog:

> The word 'bog' comes from the Irish *bogach*, meaning soft or marshy ground. The surface of a bog consists of a thin upper layer of living vegetation, mostly sphagnum mosses, along with other plants such as heather and bog cotton. Underlying it is a much thicker layer of peat made up of compacted plant (and sometimes animal) remains accumulated over hundreds or thousands of years… Despite its surface appearance, a bog can consist of between 85 and 98 % water. (Mclean 2007: 61)

The first noteworthy aspect of a bog is its semi-solid composition. Fluctuating between solid and liquid states, a bog challenges rigid classifications of landform. A bog's landscape conveys a certain uncertainty, as if there is something indefinite lurking between the upper and lower of its layers. To quote Murphy: "The landscape of the midlands plays reflects Carr's dramatic worlds, which is quite literally 'mid' or in between, wedged in the interstices of realism and fantasy, ancient and modern, local and global" (2006: 393). Hence, a correspondence can be discerned between Carr's dramaturgy and the physical traits of the Irish bogland.

A bog's location is both a familiar and unfamiliar place, home and not home, empirical and mysterious, present and absent. Another aspect that sets a Midlands bog apart lies in its relationship with time, particularly in its ability to host the simultaneous existence of both the past and present.[23] Remarkably, it takes thousands of years for a bog to form. Given its mussy and semi-solid constancy, its apparent stagnant appearance contrasts with the coexistence of interleaving layers of ancient earth in dynamic interaction with one another. "The bog serves as a memorial to that which in reality is lost but is kept simultaneously alive in memory: a boundless

[23] Mary Trotter connects Carr's utilization of the Midlands landscape to Lady Gregory's oeuvre: "Like Lady Gregory's writing that acknowledges the relationship between Irish and Anglo-Irish, ancient and modern, Celtic and Catholic, in the communities of which she wrote, Carr's plays imagine the Irish countryside as a hybrid landscape, where tradition and innovation, belief and reason, the abject and the oppressive, cohabitate" (2008: 189).

repository of historical, cultural, and personal trauma" (Kentrotis Zinelis 2022: 12).[24] In other words, a bog is a transhistorical space that keeps the past and present in continuous communication with one another. Part of a bog's magnetism is its appeal to the unknown. As Melissa Sihra rightly argues:

> [A bog is together] a place and a non-place hovering somewhere between the actual and the imaginary… Carr's *mise en scene* has the best of both worlds. While on the one hands it is recognizably Irish, it belongs as much in the domain of Greek tragedy, Gothic horror, Absurdism and Grotesque surrealism. The play possesses the mythic dimensions of timelessness. (2008: 263-4)

Defying precise categorization is the surest claim one can make about the landscape of the bog: "This auld bog, always shiftin' and changin' and coddin' the eye" (*BC*: 5), are the words of Hester's neighbour, Monica, describing her everyday interaction with the bogland. The Bog of Cats stands as a site of mobility and paranormal activity transcending empirical judgment. Hence, transformation, indeterminacy, and trickery are a bog's three main attributes. Also minding that the Irish politician and critic Daniel Corkery, in his renowned study of Synge and Anglo-Irish literature, has introduced a soft bogland to describe Irishness at large: "Everywhere in the mentality of Irish people are flux and uncertainty. Our national consciousness may be described, in a native phrase, as a quaking sod. It gives no footing" (1965: 14). The connections between Irish land and Irish psyche are too many to ignore.

The incontestable malleability of the 'quaking sod' also calls to mind Yeats's *dictum* during the Irish Revival about "the sudden certainty that Ireland was to be like soft wax for years to come" (qtd. in McDonald 2014: 53). Reminiscing the analogy of the wax tablet that Socrates introduces in *Theaetetus* (191a–196c) to explain how memories are engraved in the human mind, Yeats hopes that the same will apply with the inscription of a rigid national consciousness on the Irish soul, post-Celtic Revival. Therefore, whether a 'quaking sod' or a 'soft wax', both metaphors are suggestive of an ongoing association of Irishness with attributes of endless possibility and

[24] 'Trauma' is a term with multiple definitions. Depending on the context, different perceptions of 'trauma' transpire. There is even a branch of studies called 'Trauma Studies' that combines psychoanalytic, sociological, linguistic, semiotic, and neurobiological methodologies to investigate the discourse of trauma in literary studies, and its cultural significance. About the Irish bogland, the way I embrace 'trauma' is quite rudimentary, closer to a metaphor of the physical attributes of the bog. In the same way that an extreme traumatic experience creates a rupture with signification testing the limits of language, and thus can only find means of exposition in memory in non-direct linguistic representation and fragmented form, accordingly the morphology of the bog simulates such condition by exhibiting a medley of degenerate elements and heterogeneous spatiotemporal incidences that are transfused with meaning only when attested retrospectively and collectively. The amorphous bog, like trauma, bypasses linear narrative representation, and likewise calls for a reflective reordering of its constituents to start 'making sense'. For a succinct report of the genealogies of 'Trauma Studies' see: Balaev (2018).

indeterminacy.[25] Accordingly, the Bog of Cats that Carr imagines, abides to the same rules of precarious subjectivity and non-specificity.

Literary attention to the bogs of Ireland, however, did not commence with Carr. The use of the bog as a trope and literary theme predates her work, with Seamus Heaney's so-called 'Bog poems' serving as prominent contemporary examples. In his essay 'Feeling into Words', Heaney confesses his early bewitchment with the Irish bogscape, and how this impulse gave rise to the creation of a set of poems conflating the bog's unique morphology with notions of memory, preservation, and eventually national consciousness:

> I had been vaguely wishing to write a poem about bogland, chiefly because it is a landscape that has a strange assuaging effect on me, one with associations reaching back into early childhood. We used to hear about bog-butter, butter kept fresh for a great number of years under the peat. Then when I was at school the skeleton of an elk had been taken out of a bog nearby and a few of our neighbours had got their photographs in the paper, peering out across its antlers. So I began to get an idea of bog as the memory of the landscape, or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in and to it. In fact, if you go round the National Museum in Dublin, you will realize that a great proportion of the most cherished material heritage of Ireland was 'found in a bog'. Moreover, since memory was the faculty that supplied me with the first quickening of my own poetry, I had a tentative unrealized need to make a congruence between memory and bogland and, for the want of a better word, our national consciousness. And it all released itself after 'We have no prairies . . .'—but we have bogs. (1980: 54-5)

Spanning over his first four poetry collections, the image/notion of the bog can be found in the opening poem of *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), 'Digging', in the last poem from *Door in the Dark* (1969), 'Bogland', in 'The Tollund Man' from *Wintering Out* (1972), and especially in the five consecutive poems from *North* (1975), 'Bog Queen', 'The Grabualle Man', 'Punishment', 'Strangefruit', and 'Kinship'. All these poems pinpoint the bog as an infinite archive of natural happenings, much in the way Carr in her plays confronts this conspicuously Irish land feature. In 'Digging', his manifesto poem, Heaney "heralds his poetics as an act of digging symbolic of poetic search for adequate expressions" (Islam 2019: 18). Just like his father and grandfather used to cut turf and dig for potatoes in Toner's bog, Heaney proclaims that in his poetic career he will follow in their footsteps by using his pen instead of a spade. This denotes Heaney's postulation that he will remain close to the land of the bog and his ancestral roots, but from the mental standpoint of the writer instead of the hands-on activity of the farmer.

[25] The only unequivocal statement about a bog appears to be its untameable nature. The Victorian historian Thomas Carlyle, in a tirade against Irish bogs, expresses his frustration: "Abominable bog, thou salt cease to be abominable and become subject to man!" (qtd. in Bareham 1991: 92).

Discussing his creative process, Heaney remarks that he has "always listened for poems, they come sometimes like bodies come out of a bog, almost complete, seeming to have been laid down a long time ago, surfacing with a touch of mystery" (1980: 34). Although the above statement is metaphoric for his whole poetics, in the specific poems under scrutiny, Heaney literally digs the bog in hunt of archaeological finds: the majority of Heaney's 'Bog poems' make mention of actual discoveries that have been unearthed from the depths of bogs across Europe. In 'Bogland', Heaney refers to the skeleton of a now extinct animal, the Great Elk, whereas in 'The Tollund Man' and 'The Grabualle Man', he observes the perfectly intact remains of two Iron Age bodies discovered in the Jutland bogs of Denmark. Both bodies are believed to be part of annual sacrificial offers to the native goddess of the land, Nerthus, to ensure the fertility of next season's crop. In 'Bog Queen', Heaney gives voice to a woman, whose body was extracted in 1781 from a bog near Moira, a small village south of Belfast. Unlike the rest of 'Bog Poems', here it is the actual body that speaks. The subject of 'Punishment' is again a bog body, named 'Windeby Girl' due to its discovery in the German municipality of Windeby.[26] Her head was found half-shaved, and a blindfold covered her eyes, though there were no visible signs of injury. The victim was probably drowned as punishment for adultery. In 'Strangefruit', the speaker's gaze is cast on a beheaded girl retrieved in bad conditions from Himmerland, a peninsula in northeastern Jutland. The decapitated head was discovered in 1942, a picture of which Heaney again encountered in the pages of Glob's book. Finally, in 'Kinship', for the sake of concluding the sequence of bog poems, Heaney brings forth a distilled grasp of his ancestral land:

> Quagmire, swampland, morass:
> the slime kingdoms,
> domains of the cold-blooded,
> of mud pads and dirtied eggs.
>
> But bog
> meaning soft
> the fall of windless rain.
> pupil of amber.

[26] The story of the 'Windeby Girl' as well as that of 'Tollund Man' and 'Grauballe Man' became known to Heaney after he read P. V. Glob's *The Bog People* (1965). The Danish archaeologist's research on the preserved bodies of men and women found in the bog area of Jutland and overseas, and whose death was commonly associated with pagan rituals of blood sacrifice, intrigued Heaney, who accordingly realized the poetic potential of the protagonists of Glob's book, especially as a metaphor for the then undergoing political instability and sectarian division in Northern Ireland. For an elaborate discussion on how Heaney's 'Bog poems' addressed the violent politics of Northern Ireland during The Troubles see: Hufstader (1996) and Foley (2009).

The above two stanzas wonderfully encapsulate Heaney's aestheticization of the Irish bog. In this context, T.P. Flanagan, the landscape artist to whom Heaney dedicates 'Bogland', brings up the poet's and painter's shared conviction "to the fundamentals of Irish landscape… [the] love of the moistness, the softness of the bog, its fecundity, its femininity, its connectedness with a pre-Christian, primeval past" (qtd. in Parker 1993: 87).

Heaney pioneers in conceptualizing the bog as a living entity and a transhistorical space, in which there is more than meets the eye: such swampy areas are responsible for conserving an infinite pool of odd fragments of the Irish past. Declan Kiberd quite aptly suggests that "the bog in Heaney's *mythos* preserves not just bodies but consciousness. Every layer, 'camped on before', tells its own history in the form of geography" (1995: 593). Upon contemplating the bog, one cannot evade the fusion between old and present time, the oblique memory of its landscape, resulting in the elevation of the bog "as 'an answering Irish myth'; as a defining symbol of what [Heaney] terms the 'national consciousness' of the Irish Catholics; and as a repository of 'Irish cultural history'" (Foley 2009: 62-3). Just as most bogs are located in the middle of Ireland, so bogs are central to the articulation of an Irish identity.

Yet, Heaney's 'Bog poems' must also be read against the contextual framework of The Troubles. As Heaney admits, from the summer of 1969 that the battle of the Bogside took place in Derry and more riots followed in Belfast, "from that moment the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament" (Heaney 1980: 56). Heaney perceived the landscape and characteristics of the bog as a fitting symbol for addressing the escalating turmoil and challenges in Northern Ireland. The familiar Irish image of the bog, along with the fragmented remnants of past lives and violent histories skulking within its layers, provided Heaney with a powerful metaphor during a period of national identity crisis:

> By risking descent into this pagan bog and submitting to a primitive process, one which is both sacred and violent, the poet does not seek any kind of redemption, in either a pagan sense (free from compulsion) or a Christian one (free from guilt). Instead, he attempts to see for himself, to encounter the original ritual of violence, to experience it without succumbing to it, and thus to emerge with a new understanding of himself both as a part and as no longer a part of this process. (Hufstader 1996: 67)

Taking cues from the above findings and applying them to Carr's universe, it is not far-fetched to suggest that Hester and the Bog of Cats both provoke a parallel social reaction:

> They both create a binary of fear and need within the community. Hester's uncompromising roots in the landscape compel her to insist that she couldn't leave even to save herself and Josie… As such

> an extension of the landscape, Hester asserts her position. Instead of a preserved body dug from the bog, she represents a living body connected to the land on which she was born and on which she will die. (Gladwin 2011: 391)

Hester is an immovable feature within the breathing organism that is the bog. Following Joseph Hillis Miller's theorisation of landscape according to which there is always "a figure in every landscape having an impact on it, walking it, claiming it, resisting it" (1995: 4), Hester is this persona. Her strong connection with nature is linked to the age-old concept of earth as both tomb and womb: "Carr is re-working folk traditions by suggesting that her characters die, but are re-assimilated into nature, the Belmont River for the eponymous Portia Coughlan, and the bog for Hester Swane" (Bourke 2003: 133). Additionally, following the paradigm of Heaney's 'Bog poems', the dead body of Ariel, the Iphigenia-like character in Carr's eponymous play, is hidden, and thereafter retrieved, in a bog lake. Therefore, like the blood sacrifices to Nerthus that Heaney alludes to in *North*, in *Ariel*, Fermoy Fitzegerald, whose name reminisces the 80s Irish politician Garret FitzGerald, sacrifices his daughter to his 'personal God' in exchange for a prosperous career in politics. The lake of the bog is yet again the place where the body as sacrificial offering is being kept, waiting to be unearthed.

Refocusing back to *By the Bog of Cats*, Carr's personal experience with the bog scenery bears some resemblance to Hester's disposition throughout the play. When asked about the reasons for her fascination with the Midlands bogs, Carr mentions "the open spaces, the quicksand, the biting wind rosemary" (qtd. in Harris 2003: 217). Words and phrases like 'quicksand' and 'biting wind' equally underscore the constant flow of the bog landscape. In complete agreement with her character Monica, Carr admits that nothing within the territory of an Irish bog remains unaltered or unaffected over the course of time. For Carr, being at the Midlands is almost like a mental state:

> [I am often drawn in] nightly forays back to that landscape… I find myself constantly there at night: lights off, head on the pillow and once again I'm in the Midlands. I'm wrestling, talking, laughing, reeling at the nocturnal traffic that place throws up. Now I think it's no accident it's called the Midlands. For me at least it has become a metaphor for the crossroads between the worlds. (*Ibid*.)

Evidently, Carr gives the same credence to the otherworld and the everyday. By the same token, her Midlands stand literally in-between "the gritty Dublin urbanscape and the green West of peasant Ireland" (Lojek 2011: 68). It is a purgatory place, geographically central but culturally remote, with an ambiguous interior landscape incorporating signifiers of this world, and unfathomable aspects from the world under. Characteristically, Carr has confessed that in her

childhood “the banshee was as real as the farmer walking up the field or the chair you’re sitting on. There were no distinctions” (qtd. in Sihra 2018: 120).

All Carr’s statements combined underscore the formation of a rural space that sharply contrasts with traditional bucolic depictions of the Irish countryside, as an idyllic place. To draw a meaningful analogy, the gloomy landscape of the bog stands in stark opposition to the vision of an ideal Ireland that the former Taoiseach Éamon de Valera articulated in his radio broadcast on St. Patrick’s Day in 1943, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Gaelic League. Often titled as the ‘The Ireland That We Dreamed of’ speech, Valera makes reference to

> a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age.

The Ireland that Carr is dreaming of is certainly not made from the same material. The Bog of Cats diverges significantly from de Valera’s romantic bucolia.[27] It is a grotesque world haunted by ghosts and rules of its own. It is an intimidating and hazardous place, not welcoming and joyful:

> Carr's characteristic representation of the Midlands of Ireland renegotiates the 'stability' of dominant of a romantic, green Irish landscape. This mid-lands, or between-lands, displays an ambivalent poetics of Irish topography in its negative relation to the popular, romantically constructed landscapes of East and West. (Sihra 2003: 95)

Carr capitalizes on the liminal yet omnipresent identity of the bog. The bog is a sort of metaspace, which “questions boundaries, both geographical and epistemological” (Graham 2001: 24). Serving as a tangible metaphor of the subconscious and the uncanny, this in-between, supernatural, eerie space provides the perfect backdrop for her reimagining of the Medea story.

Overall, in *By the Bog of Cats*, the unbreakable connection between ‘landscape, identity, and memory’ becomes glaringly apparent. What will follow in the next section is a deeper investigation of the characterization of Hester Swane, looking at how Carr links her Medea-like protagonist to both Greek and Irish mythology.

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[27] As Michael Böss mentions: “From his accession to power in 1932… Eamon de Valera had been engaged in a political process of severing the last constitutional links between Britain and the Irish Free State. The process culminated in ‘his’ Constitution of 1937. The Constitution laid down the structure for a future Irish Republic once the remaining obstacle, partition, had been removed. The state thus created was new in so far as the Constitution reflected a distinct conception of Ireland as a Gaelic and Catholic nation-state” (2010: 21).

Swane Means Swan: The Amalgamation of Irish and Greek Myth

Hester's relationship with the land of the bog is mystical and representative of the continuing rural superstitions about nature in Irish culture. Hester's life cannot remain untouched by this association. Completely entwined within the Midlands bogscape, Hester naturally forms connections with the animal creatures that share her living space. So, it is not exclusively the land of the bog with which Hester is entangled in a deeper sense, but also with the living beings inhabiting its surface, particularly the swan. Understanding the symbolism of the swan in the play, especially its semantic significance showcasing a range of Hiberno-Greek nuances, becomes pivotal for Hester's identity development. The swan, an integral feature of the bogscape throughout the play, embraces Hester both semantically and symbiotically. Consequently, by focusing on the image of the swan, the play's most prominent Greek and Irish elements are symbolically represented.

In the opening of the play, Hester is seen dragging "*the corpse of a black swan after her, leaving a trail of blood in the snow*" (*BC*: 1). The swan's name is Black Wing. When Ghost Fancier, the Grim Reaper figure of the play that acts as Hester's subconscious, and who is invisible to the rest of the characters, warns Hester that it is risky to meddle with swans, particularly if they are black, she responds that this is "only an auld superstition to keep people afraid" (*Ibid*: 4). Believing or not in superstitions, Hester comes from an environment where they comprise a big part of popular belief and conventional wisdom. Indeed, given Hester's surname, "Swane means swan" (*Ibid*. 13), one cannot help but acknowledge the symbolism. A few moments later in the play, we learn that when Hester's mother gave birth to her, she placed her in the lair of the Black Wing due to a prophecy that Hester "will live as long as this black swan, not a day more, not a day less" (*Ibid*.).[28] There is little doubt then that the swan serves as Hester's spirit animal. When Ghost Fancier asks her "What're you doin' draggin' the corpse of a swan behind ya like it was your shadow" (*Ibid*. 3), his words take on a more literal significance than one might initially assume.

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[28] Emily Kader underlines a resemblance between Hester's curse and a story derived from the Fenian Cycle: "[the swan] curse interestingly connects Hester to Diarmuid, another figure of Irish myth who refused to flee his fate. In Mary Heaney's translation, Finn tells Diarmuid to run from the boar that is killing scores of men in their hunting troop. The text reads:

> Diarmuid didn't move. 'I'll face the boar! He won't drive *me* away!' he cried. 'You can't do that, Diarmuid', warned Finn. 'Remember there is a *geis* on you never hunt a pig.

Like Hester, Diarmuid refuses to flee and avoid his clearly predicted fate. In Carr's drama, the Catwoman even plays the part of Finn when she tells Hester, 'There's way round curses. Curses only have the power ya allow them. I'm tellin' ya, Hester, ya have to go'. Like Diarmuid, Hester is equally fixed in her position" (2005: 178-9).

Indeed, the prophecy comes to pass, and Hester dies on the very day her alter ego is found frozen in a bog hole.[29]

The swan is an animal with unique symbolism in Celtic mythology, and a special place in Irish history. For instance, 'The Dream of Aengus' is a mythical tale that narrates how the Irish love-god Aengus saw in his dreams the princess Caer Ibormeith, and eventually fell in love with her. However, every time that Angus was trying to reach her in his dreams, the girl would disappear. After having his dream interpreted and embarking on a long quest, Angus discovers that Caer is fated to spend the majority of her life as a swan, turning to human form every alternate Samhain, and then reverting into being a swan. For Aengus to marry her, he must first recognize Caer in her swan form among a group of hundred and fifty identical birds, and subsequently, he must agree to undergo transformation into a swan as well. Aengus eventually succeeds in his mission, and joins Caer in the long-awaited embrace with their swan necks entwined. The tale concludes with the two birds singing a lullaby making all of Ireland to slumber for three consecutive days and nights.

Another story starring swans comes from the Children of Lir legend (*Oidheadh chloinne Lir*). After the death of his wife Aoibh, Lir remarries a woman named Aoife. However, Aoife is jealous of the four children that Lir had with his deceased wife, and she plots to get rid of them. Aoife uses magic powers to transform them into swans. The spells do work, and the four children, Fionnuala together with her three brothers, Fiachra, Conn, and Aodh, are cursed to spend the next nine hundred years in a swan form. What is more curious, however, is that this mythical tale relates to a historical episode involving swans. As Fiona Macintosh notes:

> In 1924, after the foundation of the Free State, Oliver St John Gogarty – the surgeon who had also received a classical training at Trinity under Mahaffy – launched two swans into the River Liffey and wrote a poem to commemorate the occasion in which the myths of Leda and Fionnula are united. Greece and Ireland were now one. (1994: 15)

A year before writing the poem, Gogarty was held captive by IRA militants. Gogarty managed to escape from his captors by leaping into the Liffey and swimming towards his freedom. As an act of gratitude, Gogarty released the two swans into the river, while composing a fitting poem for the occasion. The poem's title is 'To the Liffey with the Swans' from the collection *An Offering of Swans and Other Poems* (1924), and makes mention of "a King's | Transformed, beloved and buoyant daughter", which is Fionnuala turned into a swan from the Lir legend.

Interestingly, in the same poem, there is also a Greek mythic element involving swans. Gogarty makes mention of

[29] Curiously, in 'The Grabualle Man', Heaney compares the bog body found in there to a "swan's foot".

that doubled Bird,
By love of Leda so besotten
That she was all with wonder stirred,
And the Twin Sportsmen were begotten!

This "doubled Bird" is Zeus, who, according to the Greek myth, overcome by passion for Leda, takes the form of a swan and rapes her. The same day Leda also lays in bed with her husband Tyndareus, King of Sparta. Leda produces two eggs from the double consummation, from which hatched Helen, Clytemnestra, and the Dioscuri Castor and Pollux, to whom Gogarty refers as "Twin Sportsmen". Castor and Pollux, despite being twins, had different paternal origins: Castor was born mortal, the son of Tyndareus, while Pollux was divine, being the son of Zeus.

Overall, Gogarty's intermingling of Greek and Celtic mythology using the symbol of the swan as a focal point is not that separate from Carr's application of the Medea story to the mythologies of the Irish land. In both cases, we observe an osmosis of two mythological traditions: Gogarty makes mention of two swans, the first Irish – the second Greek, whereas Carr's Hester Swane is an Irish woman inspired by a Greek heroine living in an 'Irishly' mythologized environment as is the bog.

Persisting on the Hiberno-Greek overtones of the swan imagery, W. B. Yeats refers to the same mythical episode in his 'Leda and the Swan' poem. In the first stanza, Yeats vividly describes the erotic attack of a disguised Zeus to his female target:

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast. (1996*:* 216)

Yeats does not stop at the description of the violent erotic scene, but also foreshadows the result of this consummation:

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead. (*Ibid*.)

Here, Yeats refers to the aftermath of the Trojan war and Clytemnestra's assassination of Agamemnon, when the later finally returns to Argos after assisting his brother Menelaus to bring Helen, Zeus' and Leda's offspring, back to Sparta. The inclusion of the bloodbath at Mycenae as

well as the allusion to the Trojan war are not accidental. According to Yeats, such deadly episodes are the consequence of the violence and terror that the union of god and human brings about.

To elaborate further, the symbol of the Swan, together with that of the Dove, are central to the Yeatsian epistemology. In his philosophical treatise *A Vision* (1925), Yeats expounds his view on History proposing a model of overlapping historical eras that displace each other every approximately two thousand years. This pattern of alternating historical cycles is illustrated by the images of 'Dove' and 'Swan'. The symbol of the Dove refers to the annunciation of Virgin Mary, and the traditional depiction of the Holy Ghost in the form of a descending dove. In 'The Mother of God', Yeats describes the episode of Mary's gestation as 'The Threefold terror of love", and "The terror of all terrors that I bore | The Heavens in my womb" (1996: 253). Of course, the result of this horrific union between mortal and divine is Jesus Christ, whose birth signals for Yeats the end of the pagan civilization, and the beginning of a new Christian era.

To use Yeats's own words, the Christian annunciation symbolized by the Dove inaugurates a "*primary* dispensation looking beyond itself towards a transcendent power, [and which] is dogmatic, levelling, unifying, feminine, humane, peace its means and end" (*AVB 263*). As for the preceding Classical annunciation symbolized by the Swan, it inaugurates "an *antithetical* dispensation, [which] obeys immanent power, is expressive, hierarchical, multiple, masculine, harsh, surgical" (*Ibid*.).[30] This cyclical understanding of Yeats's conceptualization of History implies that there will be another *antithetical* annunciation soon, not Christ this time, but His *antithetical* opposite, a "rough beast", as Yeats hints in 'The Second Coming'.[31]

Going back to *By the Bog of Cats*, Hester has a visceral connection with the black swan in the play. Black Wing is more than a *memento mori* for Hester; it is a token of death. When the swan dies, Swane is doomed as well. The link between swan and death has several classical underpinnings. For instance, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra describes the death of Cassandra, who, like a swan, has sung her funeral song (*ἡ δέ τοι κύκνου δίκην τὸν ὕστατον μέλψασα θανάσιμον γόον*) (*Ag.* 1444-5). Also, in Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates remarks that swans, when they feel that they are dying, sing louder and more beautiful than any previous time, rejoicing in the knowledge that they will reunite with the gods (*Phd*. *84e*-85a). Finally, in the *Hymn to Apollo*, Callimachus celebrates the singing skills of the white-feathered bird as follows: "the Delian palm gently swayed in a sudden, pleasant nod, and the sweet song of the swan filled the air" (*ἐπένευσεν ὀ Δήλιος ἠδύ τι φοῖνιξ ἑξαπίνης, ὀ δὲ κύκνος ἐν ἠέρι καλὸν ἀείδει*) (*Hymn*. 2.4-5). Correspondingly,

[30] The fact that Leda gets raped by the Swan, whereas Mary remains pure after her contact with the Dove, basically encapsulates the opposite yet complementary attributes of the two *antithetical* eras.

[31] For a comprehensive exploration of the intricate and esoteric system of ideas presented in *A Vision* see: Mann, Gibson, and Nally (2012).

at the play's finale, when Hester is about to commit suicide, she might not sing, but together with Ghost Fancier "*They go into a death dance*" (*BC*: 77); a crowning ritualistic expression of death – "at once terrifying and jubilant" (Bourke 2003: 139) – validating the swan prophecy.[32] Appropriately, the final lines are given to Monica, Hester's only ally, noting that "Hester – She's gone – Hester – She's cut her heart out – it's lying there on top of her chest like some dark feathered bird" (2004: 77). The transformation of Hester into a black swan is now complete. Hester's death signals her assimilation with Black Wing, whose lifeless body she was dragging out of the bog when the curtain first rose. Indeed, the 'swan song' (*κύκνειον ᾄσμα*) is a proverbial phrase used since antiquity to denote a person's final gesture before death. Arguably, Hester Swane's *κύκνειον ᾄσμα*, the culmination before collapse, is the killing of her daughter. A surely harmonious match in word and deed.[33]

Returning to the opening of the play, it becomes evident that the Bog of Cats operates under a unique set of rules compared to most places. It is a mythical place, where rational thinking is overcome by intuition and clairvoyance**.** Supernatural phenomena are not *a priori* rejected with disbelief but are accepted as possible scenarios. When Hester is asked by Ghost Fancier if she has ever seen a ghost, she says no but does not deny the possibility of their existence:

> Ghost Fancier: You never seen ghosts?
> Hester: Not exactly, felt what I thought were things from some other world betimes, but nothin' I could grab on to and say, 'That is a ghost.' (*BC*: 3)[34]

Besides the evident irony that she is having the above conversation with a ghost-like figure, Hester's casual depiction of the bog as a place that interacts with entities from other worlds reveals its otherworldly characteristics. The bog is porous and permeable; a space open to supernatural influences, where the dead live among the living. Above, it has already been

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[32] Ghost Fancier stabs Hester with "the fishing knife" (*BC*: 77), the same knife Hester has used moments before to cut the throat of her daughter. In a comparable episode, at the end of Yeats's *Purgatory* (1938), a peculiar play inspired by the Japanese Noh theatre, and the title of which evokes a certain cosmic in-betweenness similar to the aura of *By Bog of Cats*, the Old Man kills his son Boy with a jack-knife, believing that by murdering him, the spell of parricide cast against his family will once for all be broken.

[33] In an interview with Mike Murphy, Marina Carr admits that "The swan is huge in Irish mythology... I'm drawing on that motif in the Irish canon. I grew up by a lake from ten years of age on, so I had a good seven years looking out and watching swans. They say the swan is the soul bird" (Ni Anluain 2000: 50). In the same conversation, Carr also asserts that swans are very territorial, and that when her mother died, the swans of the lake gathered outside her family home. "She always loved swans, so I think they came to say goodbye" (*Ibid*.), she concludes.

[34] Hester's response about the existence of ghosts echoes Carr's opinion on the matter. "I think they're probably around all of us" (Ni Anluain 2000: 49). When asked if she knows who they are, Carr hesitates: "Sometimes, and sometimes I don't have a clue" (*Ibid*.).

underscored how, due to a bog's peculiar morphology, past and present happen to co-exist. Additionally, there is another aspect about the conceptualization of time in Carr's play that deserves one's attention, namely its apparent non-linearity. Ghost Fancier, incapable of comprehending the flow of time, mistakes dawn for dusk:[35]

> Ghost Fancier: Is it sunrise or sunset?
> Hester: Why do ya want to know?
> Ghost Fancier: Just tell me.
> Hester: It's that hour when it could be aither dawn or dusk, the light bein' so similar. But it's dawn, see there's the sun comin' up.
> Ghost Fancier: Then I'm too previous. I mistook this hour for dusk. A thousand apologies. (*Ibid*. 4)

The hour that Hester refers to, that can be either dawn or dusk, is the so-called golden hour, the time during which, according to Irish folklore, the worlds of the living and the dead interlock, permitting the druids to perform their rituals. Besides, this twilight hour in which the encounter between Hester and Ghost Fancier takes place, calls to mind W. B. Yeats's *Celtic Twilight* (1893), a collection of old Irish folktales covering a world haunted by faeries, ghosts, and spirits. By making this temporal allusion to the *Twilight* anthology, Carr sets one foot in this magic realm, and, arguably, embeds the events narrated in *By the Bog of Cats* within the oral tradition of Irish folklore.[36] Moreover, Ghost Fancier's anticipation of Hester's death alongside his miscalculation regarding the time this will happen, generates a carnivalesque image of the Irish Banshee: the legend of the fairy woman with the red eyes that heralds the death of a person to his loved ones by shrieking and wailing.

Thus, poised between Greek myth and Irish folklore, between places that are never purely real or wholly fictional, with the dramatic time being on a cusp as well, it is the very contested landscape of the bog that equips the play with its hybrid undertone, one that while abiding to the plotline of *Medea*, also brands it distinctly Irish. As a result, the bog, apart from the material bodies and other objects preserved in there, must be conjectured as a sort of living memory-bank that, in a Heaney-like fashion, stores in its layers the immaterial tradition of Irish folktale, be it the

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[35] Again, in an interview, Carr discloses how her views are not that disparate from the circumstances of her characters: "I have never believed that time is linear. If you don't believe that time is linear, then it is all up for grabs really, isn't it?" (Chambers, FitzGibbon, and Jordan 2001: 59).

[36] As Mclean notes: "The pale lights often seen flickering over bogs and other marshy places (and sometimes attributed to the spontaneous combustion of gases emanating from peat) have been identified in folklore with malevolent spirits, such as the 'Huldre' (Denmark) or the 'Water Sheerie' or 'Bog Sprite' (Ireland), seeking to entice unwary travelers to a watery death" (2007: 63).

Children of Lir saga or the Diarmuid Ua Duibhne segment from the Fenian Cycle, as well as the Greek mythology megatext, part of which is the deadly story of Medea.[37]

Yet, contrary to Medea, Hester's destiny is foretold. By mistaking dawn for dusk and arriving too early, Ghost Fancier foreshadows the death of Hester, and his shadowy involvement in it.[38] Hester's demise begins unravelling well before she physically dies in the play, since the viewer knows from the outset that, unlike Euripides' heroine, Hester is not going to escape death after she has killed Josie. Such device reminds one what Fiona Macintosh maintains about death rituals in ancient Greece and Ireland, namely that "death in tragedy is a culmination not an ending" (1994: 91-92), in the same way that according to Irish folk belief "the dead person is not considered to be completely 'dead' for a whole month after the moment of death, but continues to exist in a state of flux somewhere between the world of the living and the world of the dead" (*Ibid*. 21). In both respective cases, the point of death does not necessarily coincide with the climax of death.

While it is clear from the beginning that Hester is destined to die, what remains unforeseeable is the climactic progression leading to that end. On that note, she even confesses out loud that "for a long time now I been thinkin' I'm already a ghost" (*BC*: 58).[39] Hester has a gut feeling that her death is near, and such premonition is indubitably a by-product of the outlandish environment she inhabits. As Gladwin argues:

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[37] Hélène Lecossois makes an interesting observation concerning Hester's partaking of Greek and Irish myth: "Through her twofold mythological heritage, Hester is also irremediably linked to water: Idyia [Medea's mother, in some traditions] is an Oceanid, Lir the Ocean god. The bog symbolically encompasses the mixture of earth and water and may be seen as an objective parallel to (or extension of) Hester" (2012: 72).

[38] Carr's choice of personifying death is part of an ongoing tradition in Irish theatre: "modern Irish drama is often conditioned by the reality or idea of death, and many great Irish dramatists in the twentieth century explore death or funereal situations in memorable scenes in their plays. Death was a constant source of spiritual fascination in Yeats's life and plays; Christy Mahon's father is a revenant of sorts; Dan Burke shams death in *In the Shadow of the Glen*; the repetition of the 'riddled with bullets' speech in *Juno and the Paycock* redoubles its tragic effect, and the Christian notion of death's lack of 'sting' is satirised in *The Hostage*, when the dead Leslie is resurrected to perform a song and dance act. These classic instances involve strong physical as well as spiritual manifestations of death. Today's Irish dramatists carry on this tradition of dramatic death in their own distinctive and updated versions" (Dantanus 2010: 272-3).

[39] Also Portia, in the eponymous play, self-styles as ghost: "Ah'm dead Maggie May, dead an' whah ya seen this long time gone be a ghost who chan't fin' her restin' place, is all" (qtd. in McGuiness 1996: 293). As a result, both Hester and Portia consider themselves perished well before their biological end, and they accordingly introduce the image of the ghost to illustrate this kind of hanging experience. Such outlook necessitates "that the dying character meets his or her death not once but many times; often, as the intensity of their suffering escalates, they are seen to occupy a liminal zone in which it is difficult to determine whether they are living or dead" (Roche 1998: 279-80).

> The supernatural dimension is central to Carr's use of the bog as both *trope* and *setting*. As much as the bog exists as an indescribable place, floating between worlds, Hester too lives between death and life. Although the Ghost Fancier *mistakes* the time of her death, there is a clear sense that Hester is already *dead*. (2011: 391)

Hester, before Ghost Fancier exits the stage, shouts after him: "Come back! – I can't die – I have a daughter" (*BC*: 5). Hovering between two worlds, Hester's instinctive reaction is to think of her daughter's well-being, dreading at the idea of what her apparent death would entail for Josie. The same, however, cannot be maintained for Medea, as in opening of the tragedy, the Nurse introducing the story underlines that "She abhors the children and takes no joy in looking at them" (*στυγεῖ δὲ παῖδας οὐδ᾽ ὀρῶσ᾽ εὐφραίνεται*) (*Med.* 36). Medea hates her children because she sees the likeness of Jason in them. Hester does not recognize this kind of intricate connection between Carthage and Josie, whom she wants to protect up until the end.[40]

For instance, at the start of Act Three, Hester is confronted by yet another ghost, the spectre of her deceased brother, Joseph, whom she had murdered blinded by jealousy because their mother, Big Josie, was displaying greater affection toward him.[41] Once again, the corresponding Greek mythic episode is contrasting: Medea kills her brother Absyrtus, dismembers him, and throws his pieces into the sea in order that her father Aeëtes, who in the meantime chases her and Jason, will lose time collecting the limbs of his son. This way, Medea paves the way for the Argonauts to flee Colchis with the Golden Fleece.[42] In this context, the death of Absyrtus serves as a means to an end, a grim necessity in the pursuit of escape. Medea's passion for Jason, and her willingness to aid him succeed in his mission, overpowers any love sentiments she has for Absyrtus.[43] Hester's murder of Joseph, in contrast, is not purely instrumental; instead,

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[40] As Riana O'Dwyer accurately observes when comparing Hester to the other maternal role models portrayed in Carr's 'Midlands trilogy': "Hester and Josie are devoted to each other; they play games and have fun. There is no sense of neglect, as in *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan*, but of deep love and affection" (2008: 245).

[41] Carr stresses the power and significance that names bear. Big Josie's clear preference of Joseph over Hester is illustrated in christening terms: "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" (*BC*: 56).

[42] A classical source of the above episode is Ovid's *Tristia* (3.9.1.). Yet, Ovid's most famous account of the Medea story can be found in *Metamorphoses* (7.1-424). Ovid is furthermore connected to Medea because he also had to face exile. He was banished by Augustus to Tomis, on the Black Sea. The origin of the name of the city of Tomis is disputed. It either comes from the Scythian queen Tomyris or is again connected to Medea and the murder of Absyrtus. In Greek *τέμνειν* means to 'cut off' or 'divide into pieces'. Such verb not only encapsulates the manner of Absyrtus' death, but also points to the impact that Tomis' landscape has for Ovid, as he has been cut off and excluded from the Roman *urbanitas* and civilization.

[43] Compared to other instances of the Medea myth, the killing of Absyrtus has been largely overlooked by classical scholarship. Jan Bremmer is a vivid exception arguing that the most troubling aspect of the bloodstained sibling relationship is the different sex between the perpetrator and the victim: "Brother and sister were imagined to be especially close, as Antigone's words attest, but their closeness arose in part

it instills a particular psychic disposition. After overcoming the initial shock of Joseph's reappearance, Hester confronts her brother by bringing up the same old traumatic events of her neglect, and contrasting her role as mother to Big Josie's: "Was it somethin' I done on her? I was seven, same as me daughter Josie, seven, and there isn't anythin' in this wide world Josie could do that'd make me walk away from her" (*BC*: 56).

Evidently, Hester does not share the same deadly instincts as Medea towards her offspring, nor is Carthage proven to be as much important to her as Jason is to Medea. Hester's predicament is all about her mother, not her lover. As for Joseph, his murder is accordingly informed by such contrast. Joseph is just one of the many obstacles along the way separating Hester from Big Josie's love and acceptance, and thus he had to be eliminated. As for Hester's complicated relationship with her mother and how this triggered her to adopt a radical perspective on motherhood, they will be addressed in more detail in the following sections.

from the fact that the brother was *responsible* for the sister, and she was *dependent* upon him… By killing her brother, Medea not only committed the heinous act of spilling familial blood, she also permanently severed all ties to her natural home and the role that it would normally play in her adult life. Through Absyrtus' murder, she simultaneously declared her independence from her family and forfeited her right to any protection from it" (1997: 99-100).

All About my Mother: Unorthodox Motherhood and Hester's Killer Instinct

Arguably, the most significant departure of *By the Bog of Cats* from Euripides' *Medea* lies in Hester's suicide following her act of filicide. The natural question to consider here is why Carr chooses not to adhere to the Euripidean precedent of escape, and what implications arise from this departure from the ancient source. Hester dies, while Medea flees. Why does Carr not offer her heroine a similar escape but instead opts for her downfall? Does this particular choice make Hester a weaker, less effective counterpart to Medea, or is there an underlying strategy behind why Hester takes her last breath while kneeling on her ancestral land?

To illuminate the contrast between the two plays, one must commence by examining the core element they share, namely the portrayal of filicide. As mentioned earlier, Medea's crime is enacted in the knowledge that her sons are in the image and likeness of Jason, and hence irreplaceable to him. This almost biblical rendition of the father-son relationship, along with a grasp of the disastrous repercussions following its disruption, constitute the paramount motive for Medea's filicide. In Medea's address to her soon-to-be dead children, Medea acknowledges her anguish, while also indirectly outlining her anticipation of Jason's forthcoming reaction as the motivating factor behind her crime:

> Give, my children, your right hand to be kissed by your mother. O so dear to me hands and lips, o noble face and expression of my children, I wish happiness to you but over there. What is here has been deprived of you from your father. O sweet touch, o tender skin and fragrant breath of my children. Go away, go away: I can no longer bear looking at you, I am conquered by this evil that possesses me. And I understand very well the wickedness that I am about to commit, but my wrath proves stronger than my sober resolution, that kind of wrath that brings to mortal men the gravest pains.

δότ', ὦ τέκνα,
δότ' ἀσπάσασθαι μητρὶ δεξιὰν χέρα.
ὦ φιλτάτη χείρ, φίλτατον δέ μοι στόμα
καὶ σχῆμα καὶ πρόσωπον εὐγενὲς τέκνων,
εὐδαιμονοῖτον, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖ: τὰ δ' ἐνθάδε
πατὴρ ἀφείλετ'. ὦ γλυκεῖα προσβολή,
ὦ μαλθακὸς χρὼς πνεῦμά θ' ἥδιστον τέκνων.
χωρεῖτε χωρεῖτ': οὐκέτ' εἰμὶ προσβλέπειν
οἵα τε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἀλλὰ νικῶμαι κακοῖς.
καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἷα τολμήσω κακά,
θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων,
ὅσπερ μεγίστων αἴτιος κακῶν βροτοῖς. (*Med*. 1069-80)

As this passage makes clear, Medea's motherly feelings are overcome by her thirst for revenge. Medea bemoans the wasted youth of her sons, their hands, lips, and faces, but their prosperity becomes secondary when contrasted to her inner urge to annihilate Jason. In total agreement with the Nurse's introductory speech, Medea declares out loud that she can no longer stare at her kids. Therefore, although it would be wrong to assume that there is no emotional cost to Medea when she prepares to kill her sons, the prospect of the children being separated from their paternal counterpart reins in any doubts she may have.

Medea's resolution becomes even more palpable in her final appeal to the Chorus of Corinthian women. She grimly declares that her decision is unwavering; she is about to kill her children and depart from this land (*φίλαι, δέδοκται τοὔργον ὡς τάχιστά μοι παῖδας κτανούσῃ τῆσδ᾽ ἀφορμᾶσθαι χθονός*) (*Med*. 1236-7). More cold-blooded, however, is the justification behind Medea's steadfastness: the children must die at all costs. And since they must die, she, who brought them to life, must be the designated executioner (*πάντως σφ᾽ ἀνάγκη κατθανεῖν: ἐπεὶ δὲ χρή, ἡμεῖς κτενοῦμεν οἵπερ ἐξεφύσαμεν*) (*Med*. 1240-1). The last two excerpts give some insight behind Medea's murderous act. However, the thought process underlying Medea's attempt to justify the crime has its gaps. Does Medea truly suggest that only a mother possesses a kind of natural right to reclaim the lives she brought into the world?

Perhaps, a more candid reformulation of Medea's reasoning might be that, as she prioritized causing Jason the utmost anguish as her ultimate objective, killing their children is the sole means to achieve it. In fact, a few lines later, Medea shares this truth to Jason:

> Jason: O children, most dear.
> Medea: To their mother, not to you.
> Jason: And so, you slayed them?
> Medea: Only to plunge you into ruin.
>
> Ἰάσων: ὦ τέκνα φίλτατα.
> Μήδεια: μητρί γε, σοὶ δ᾽ οὔ.
> Ἰάσων: κἄπειτ᾽ ἔκανες;
> Μήδεια: σέ γε πημαίνουσ᾽. (*Med*. 1397-8)

Therefore, it is not exactly because she has brought them to life that Medea is justified to kill the children, but mostly because, being herself a mother to these children, she knows the exact pain she could inflict to Jason by removing their life and then flying away, leaving Jason to cope with the catastrophe alone. In a way, Medea has stopped being a mother the moment her rage prevails over her maternal instincts, driving her to turn against her own children. In fact, Medea's following

words vividly disclose the transformation from 'mother' to 'child murderer': "Common, my heart, put on your armor. Why do I delay doing the most terrible deed that must be done?" (*ἀλλ᾽ εἶ᾽ ὀπλίζου, καρδία: τί μέλλομεν τὰ δεινὰ κάναγκαῖα μὴ πράσσειν κακά;*) (*Med*. 1242-3). Therefore, it is more accurate to argue that Medea becomes the appointed executioner of her two sons not solely because she gave them life, but because overpowering feelings of vengeance have seized complete control over her.

In comparing these Euripidean extracts to the corresponding passage in *By the Bog of Cats*, one is struck by the totally different approach that Hester adopts in her final words to Josie before taking her life:

> 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 they closed tight?
> Josie: Yeah.
> *Hester Cuts Josie's throat in one savage moment*.
> (*softly*) Mam – Mam – (*And Josie dies in Hester's arms*.) (*BC*: 75)

Surely, Hester's phrase "I'll take ya with me" stands out. By proclaiming that she will bring Josie with her, Hester not only exposes that she is aware that her own death is imminent, but also that killing Josie was not part of her initial plot of revenge against Carthage, which basically consisted of burning his house and livestock. Until now, the potential significance of her daughter's death seems to have never crossed Hester's mind. Only gradually does Hester discover that taking Josie with her to the other world is for Josie's own benefit. Deep down, Hester dreads leaving Josie vulnerable among the settled community, from whom both have relentlessly suffered. But foremostly, Hester does not want her daughter to experience the same anguish of waiting for an absent parent, as she did with Big Josie throughout her life. Fearing that the pattern of maternal abandonment may be repeated if she dies alone in the presence of her seven-year-old daughter, Hester instinctively believes that 'the motherliest thing to do' is for both of them to die, rather than be violently separated.

Compared to the Euripidean tragedy, Carr redefines the grounds on which the killing of a child by its mother takes place. In contrast to the Jason-obsessed Medea, and even though it may seem paradoxical, Hester places the well-being of her daughter as her top priority when she chooses to take her along. As Karen O'Brien argues:

> Hester's purpose for killing her daughter, Josie, is multifaceted. It is not simply an act of revenge or resistance. Hester's slaying of Josie is motivated, moreover, by her indistinctive need to protect Josie in the future from the self-interested Carthages and child molesting Xaviers of the world… As a result, Hester kills Josie in a desperate attempt to hold on to something of her own. Hester's killing of Josie overall emphasizes the mother-daughter bond, whereas Medea's murder of her two sons is a subversive act to destroy the father-son bond and relegate Jason to the broken emotional state of the perceived stereotype of woman. (2012: 167-8)

From an odd yet quite tenable perspective, the murder of Josie can be understood as an act of 'ultimate love'.[44] Hester fully comprehends her own sense of abandonment only when she comes to the realization that Josie's life is predetermined to follow a similar path: "Hester slays the daughter and it is a curiously protective device. Hester knows her own pain and can articulate her mother's absence as the principal source of it" (Jordan 2002: 249). Hester can predict the pain that would grow in Josie's heart if she were to be unassisted all her remaining life, and hence decides to kill.

What sets Hester apart is her belief that despite killing Josie, their connection remains unbreakable, as though they will remain united forever, and that their shared death is the sole gateway to such liberation. Correspondingly, one final vindication as to why Hester's crime must be regarded otherwise than Medea's is located in Hester's last words, which happen to be identical to what Josie muttered before her: "Mam – Mam –" (*BC*: 77). "The (dis)connection Hester has had all her life with her mother, along with the immediate motherly action she must take to safeguard her daughter against the very same destiny, render filicide a shocking yet somehow valid aspect of motherhood" (Kentrotis Zinelis 2022: 14). The daughter who was once abandoned by her mother, now a mother herself, vehemently rejects subjecting her own daughter to a similar fate.

As for Hester's suicide, Carr leaves no room for one to think of it as anticlimactic or as retaining an element of weakness when compared to the Medean precursor. Hester kills herself because she considers her death as the only getaway to remain unbroken with her daughter. Faced with the ongoing threats from Carthage and his gang, who threaten to abduct Josie and expel Hester from the community, their mutual death becomes the only recourse they have, if they want to preserve their bond. After all, Hester's stance towards filicide is informed by a vocabulary of unification, not separation. When Hester goes to bid goodbye, Josie's wish resonates crystal-clear:

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[44] Trying to establish a causal link between the emerging theatrical interest in adapting *Medea* and the given Irish social realities at the time, John McDonagh highlights that "In Ireland in the year 2000 six children died at the hands of a suicidal parent and the average murder rate for children (classed as under eighteen years old) in the state over the past four years stands at six. The taking of children by a suicidal parent is an occurrence that brings the often bizarre nature of parental love into sharp focus and can, in certain circumstances, be regarded as an act of ultimate love" (2002: 218).

"Ah Mam, I want to be where you'll be… Just take me with ya, Mam… No, Mam, stop! I'm goin' with ya!" (*Ibid*. 74-5). Cutting her throat, Hester finally fulfils Josie's demand that she accompanies her wherever she goes.

In direct contrast, during the single verbal exchange Medea's children have with each other, they display their anguish to steer clear of their mother:

> First Child: Alas! What shall I do? How can I evade my mother's hand?
> Second Child: I do not know, dearest brother. We are set to die.
>
> Παῖς α: οἴμοι, τί δράσω; ποῖ φύγω μητρὸς χέρας;
> Παῖς β: οὐκ οἶδ', ἄδελφε φίλτατ': ὀλλύμεσθα γάρ. (*Med*. 1271-2)

The disparity between the two parallel episodes is striking: Josie pleads to be held by her mother's hand, while Medea's children, fearful of Medea's lethal hand, grieve their entrapment beneath her control. The distinctly contrasting emotional responses that the respective victims exhibit adds up to the contrasting exposition of filicide between source text and Irish re-envision.

A final point of interest is that Medea kills her children only when she secures an escape plan. She has an agreement with Aegeus, the Athenian king, who promises to protect her in exchange of her assistance in ending his childlessness. It is only after she has this exit strategy in place that Medea decides to put her plan into action:

> O Zeus and Zeus's Justice, o Sun's light, now, my friends, I will pass victorious over my enemies. I am walking on the right path. Now I confidently expect that my enemies will pay the injury. Because this man [Aegeus], the very moment I was ready to sink, has appeared like a harbour for my plans. From him I will lash my ship's cable, once I go to the city of Pallas Athena. Now I will tell you all the things I have planned.
>
> ὦ Ζεῦ Δίκη τε Ζηνὸς Ἡλίου τε φῶς, νῦν καλλίνικοι τῶν ἐμῶν ἐχθρῶν, φίλαι, γενησόμεσθα κείς ὁδὸν βεβήκαμεν, νῦν ἐλπὶς ἐχθροὺς τοὺς ἐμοὺς τείσειν δίκην. οὗτος γὰρ ἀνὴρ ᾗ μάλιστ' ἐκάμνομεν λιμὴν πέφανται τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων: ἐκ τοῦδ' ἀναψόμεσθα πρυμνήτην κάλων, μολόντες ἄστυ καὶ πόλισμα Παλλάδος. ἤδη δὲ πάντα τἀμά σοι βουλεύματα λέξω (*Med*. 764-73).

Medea commits filicide with the knowledge that there is a safe haven for her afterward. Medea does not take up arms, until she is certain that she will escape and be left unpunished for her crime. Medea proves ultra-cautious about not spreading the details of her payback against Jason, withholding her ire until she finds the proper escape hatch.

Hester's finale, for its part, could also be understood as an escape story, though from an alternative perspective. Hester kills Josie, and seconds after, drops dead in the same spot. Contrary then to Euripides, Carr does not separate death and escape as distinct, sequential events; instead, she presents them as two facets of the same coin. "It's because ya wanted to come, Josie" (*BC*: 76), Hester whispers to Josie when she dies in her arms. Immediately after, Hester commits suicide. "You're late, ya came too late… Take me away, take me away from here" (*Ibid*. 77), Hester reprimands Ghost Fancier, when he arrives to assist in her suicide. The moments between her daughter's death and her own are excruciating, as Hester impatiently yearns to reunite with Josie in their shared escape through death.

Escape in *By the Bog of Cats* is rendered symbolic rather than literal, subterranean rather than manifest, shared instead of personal. Death is evaluated as an extreme form of escapism that both the mother and daughter are compelled to pursue if they wish to remain together. Consequently, when compared to Medea's soaring through the skies on a dragon chariot, Hester's suicide can also be seen as a credible form of triumphant escape, albeit *in union*, not *by separation*.

To Whom This Land Belongs: Masculine *vs.* Feminine Land Perspectives

In this section, we will delve into how the central themes of 'Land' and 'Landscape' are developed in *By the Bog of Cats*. It will be argued that these two notions promote a reading of Carr's play that is intimately Irish, bringing into the surface tangible concerns about the clashing relationship that polarizing groups of the Midlands population have with their native environment. The outcome of this investigation aims to reveal the integration of Carr's play into a strongly Irish setting, pretty much responsible for concealing from the original audience the affinity that *By the Bog of Cats* has with *Medea*. From the early image of Hester dragging the dead black swan, all the way to the succeeding deaths of Hester and Josie, the notions of 'Land' and 'Landscape' have resurfaced consistently. We have particularly delved into the land and bogscape of the Irish Midlands, considering a multitude of diverse aspects, including the geographical location and morphological features of the bog, its symbolic significance, the superstitions associated with it, the creatures that inhabit it, and its role in Irish mythology, history, and literature.

Hester's experience of maternal abandonment is deeply etched into the terrain and scenery of the bog. When stripped off all defence mechanisms, Hester confesses the bitter truth to her enemies: "I can't go till me mother comes. I'd hope she'd have come before now and it wouldn't come to this. Don't make me lave or somethin' terrible'll happen." (*BC*: 52). Presumably, all the calamity in Carr's play originates from Hester's violent expulsion from her motherland. Hester has sworn that she will never move away from the territory of the bog, unless her mother comes back: "I watched her walk away from me across the Bog of Cats. And across the Bog of Cats I'll watch her return" (*Ibid*. 34). This traumatic experience of watching a loved one's departure, together with the endless waiting that this departure presupposes, are two characteristic acts binding the female lineage of the Swane family together. First, it is Big Josie, who sentences Hester to a continuous state of watching and waiting. Then, it is Josie's turn to tell Hester that "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" (BC: 75). When Hester hears from Josie's mouth the same futile oaths that she had once taken regarding the absent matriarch of the family, she can no longer ignore the regrettable resemblance and takes action.

For Hester, the terrain of the bog is a constant reminder of her mother's absence. Hester has internalized the trauma of lacking a mother figure by assigning 'motherly' sentiments and meaning to her surroundings. The bogland has truly become Hester's motherland: Hester has created an idealized scenario in her mind that the bog's landscape somehow preserves her mother's memory. As Gladwin notes: "Hester depends upon the bog to reincarnate the memory of her remote past, in the hope that her mother will indeed come back to her… She has memorialised her mother by creating an alternative reality of *what if* rather than *what is*" (2011: 393). Perceived

from this angle, the Midlands bogscape is no longer a sheer sum of its physical realities but a terrain imbued with Hester's subconscious; a transcendental panorama of unresolved and unattained desires.

Within this scheme, the bog site serves as a significant marker intimately tied to the individual who neglected to raise and nurture Hester. "It's still like she only walked away yesterday" (*BC*: 61), she confesses to Monica. "Clearly, the Bog has acquired mythological properties for Hester: in lieu of Big Josie's physical reappearance, the Bog has been transformed into a symbolic imprint of her anticipated return" (Kentrotis Zinelis 2022: 12). "I so much wanted her to see that I had flourished without her and maybe then I could forgive her" (*BC*. 73), comprises Hester's fondest wish that regrettably never materializes. Hester falsely believes that she can still trail Big Josie's footsteps within the bog. This explains her persistent wandering and her unwavering determination to remain within the bog's boundaries. Placing Hester in a constant search for Big Josie's trace, "Carr captures her confusion about her mother, her capacity to idolize the individual who has wounded her the most, the need to seek reinforcement and encouragement against that sense of let-down she once was scared by" (Jordan 2002: 259). This incessant trailing for her mother informs Hester's sense of self. "The Bog of Cats is for Hester a protracted yet indispensable feature of her identity; it is simultaneously a safehouse and a place of self-formation" (Kentrotis Zinelis 2022: 7), an excruciating place to behold and a site of self-formation.

Hester has developed an unconventional way of understanding and associating with her surroundings. This implies her significantly distinct perception of the land and landscape of the Bog of Cats compared to the other characters in the play, particularly her male antagonists, Carthage and Xavier Cassidy. For them, the bogland represents ownership rights, contractual agreements, and profitability per acre. For Hester, in contrast, land ownership is not founded on a feudal-like system of accumulating wealth and paperwork. Instead, it is determined by one's innate understanding of the land, encompassing its terrain, fauna, and specific environmental traits. As will be argued, Hester displays a primordial cognizance of land, deviating from conventional notions of ownership by embracing *tír*, the old Irish word for 'land' and 'country', as a trope.[45]

[45] In Irish mythology, *Tír na nÓg* ('the land of youth') is the name for the Celtic Otherworld. It is a place of abundance, happiness, and eternal youth. The most famous mythic account of *Tír na nÓg* is the tale of the mortal hero Oisin, who falls in love with Niamh, the red-headed daughter of the king of *Tír na nÓg*, and decides to follow her there. W. B. Yeats's 'The Wanderings of Oisin', the introductory poem of his first poetry collection *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems* (1889), imagines the dialogue that an aged Oisin has with St. Patrick, the missionary traditionally considered responsible for converting pagan Ireland to Christianity. In there, Oisin, after he has come back from his three-hundred-year sojourn to *Tír na nÓg*, shares with St. Patrick his experiences about the Otherworld realm. The allegory of an emblematic Celtic hero in discussion with the Patron Saint of Ireland highlights Ireland's double posture as a place that apart from the Christian Kingdom of God, there is also a magical realm sustained by myth, part of which is *Tír na*

Upon witnessing the play, one quickly realizes that in the Bog of Cats universe, the inhabitants have two mutually exclusive ways of relating to the land:

> To show how land possession serves as an instrument of patriarchal oppression, Carr propels two mutually-exclusive theories regarding the interaction that the Irish locals have with the land of the Bog. One could label these conflicting perspectives in traditional, gendered terms. The 'masculine' perspective would be the dominant members of the settled community such as Xavier Cassidy, Carthage's aspiration and the motivation for his marriage, and even women such as Mrs Kilbride, who, for the sake of their personal interests, have sided with these dominant men. For those sharing this perspective, ownership of land follows capitalist conventions: a hereditary system of lordship over the land and a contract-based scheme of exchange where land translates directly into currency. The 'feminine' viewpoint, on the other hand, is principally shared by unsettled inhabitants of the Bog such as Hester Swane, the quasi-deranged Catwoman, and men from the settled community who fail to sustain their prescribed role. One such man is Father Willow, an erratic priest with a soft spot for women and booze, who, when asked to say the grace in Carthage's wedding, outrageously retorts: 'The grace, yes, how does it go again?' (*BC*. 48). These outsiders share the belief that land ownership is essentially measured according to the amount of freedom of movement which one has within its premises, and the extent of familiarity one has with the land, its flora, and its fauna.[46] (Kentrotis Zinelis 2022: 8-9)

Men work the land in daylight, while women walk the bog at night. Hester's words are indicative: "I wasn't in the caravan last night. I was walkin' the bog" (*BC*. 27). The freedom that the unsettled female characters claim for themselves, namely the right to be unrestricted but still perceived as an indisputable component of the Bog of Cats ecosystem, is documented by the right of unconstrained movement. Working the land, on the other hand, has the opposite effect; it limits personal freedoms, since physical labour is seen by the adherents of the 'masculine' view as confining people to the land, for the sake of those who own the land. As Xavier threatens Hester

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nÓg. In *By the Bog of Cats*, Carr also promotes the idea of the simultaneous existence of pagan and Christian beliefs in today's Ireland, exemplified by the close association of Catwoman with Father Willow. The two characters, the one possessing pagan traits and the other a Catholic priest, are quite fond of each other with an erotic tension permeating the atmosphere: "Catwoman: We should go on a holiday, you and me, Father Willow… Father Willow: Well, where do ya want to go and I'll book the tickets in the mornin'?" (*BC*: 43). Based on all this, it is not too far-fetched to claim that when Hester decides to take Josie with her "somewhere ya can never return from" (*Ibid*. 74), this could very well be *Tír na nÓg*, a place where Hester and Josie would finally find joy.

[46] Hélène Lecossois correspondingly argues: "The land Hester belongs to is wild, untamed and is no-one's property; the land Xavier is interested in is tilled farmland. An opposition between two conflicting sets of values is thus uncovered and points to one of the play's major tensions. Archaic values embodied by Hester and Catwoman, whose name highlights the strong tie that unites her to the Bog of Cats, stand in sharp contrast to more recent, mercantile values in which Xavier, and Carthage for that matter, believe" (2012: 75).

about what the future might hold for Josie and her yet unborn grandchildren: "And who's to say but maybe your little bastard and her offspring won' be farmin' my land in years to come" (*IbId*. 65). So, the first thing to note is the radically different prioritization concerning what one is expected to do with land: the 'feminine' side thrusts one to walk it to get familiarized with it, whereas the 'masculine' party only understands land in terms of sweat and toil. Given the two understandings, interaction with land can be either a source of empowerment or a means of control.

Reading *By the Bog of Cats*, one discovers several instances where the conflicting characters show awareness of what the land means to the opposing side. For instance, when Hester has a brief private discussion with Caroline, Carthage's soon-to-be wife, Hester rages about the suffered injustice of having lost her partner to Caroline mentioning that "It was me who tould him he could do better. It was my money that bought his first fine acres" (*Ibid*. 21).[47] By offering money to Carthage to buy a piece of land to build his house, Hester momentarily renounces her Traveller status, falsely hoping that such capitulation would ensure Carthage's pledge of supporting his family. Instead, what Hester accomplishes is to accelerate Carthage's breakout and his absorption by the settled community, as he fully embraces the 'masculine' view on land. Bizarrely, by sponsoring Carthage to become a proprietor of confined land, Hester finds herself excluded from all Bog of Cats.

Moreover, Caroline, unaware that, being the subject of transaction between the Cassidys and the Killbrides, she is also a victim of the 'masculine' inheritance system, is willing to bribe Hester for her to withdraw: "Look, I'll give ya more money if ya'll only go. Here's me bank book, there's nearly nineteen thousand pounds in it, me inheritance from me mother. Daddy gave it to me this mornin'. Ya can have it, only please go" (*Ibid*. 21). Hester is not attracted by this offer. She has bitterly realized that supporting Carthage with money was the beginning of her downfall. When she finally unmasks Carthage, the damage is already done: "You're sellin' me and Josie down the river for a few lumpy auld acres and notions of respectability" (*Ibid*. 26), comprises Hester's cynical verdict. In fact, after having secured his future, Carthage makes the petty gesture of trying to return Hester's money back: "There's your blood money. It's all there down to the last penny" (*Ibid*. 28). Hester, however, does not succumb, later showing in Carthage's wedding with an envelope: "There's your auld blood money back. Ya think you're gettin' away that aisy! Money

[47] Hester cannot forgive Carthage for his ingratitude. "He'd be nothin' today if it wasn't for me" (*BC*: 6), she professes about him. She then moves on enumerating how by offering him her body and money, she converted Carthage from "a slavish pup" (*Ibid*. 21) to a "land-hungry mongrel" (*Ibid*. 27). The pattern of registering one by one all the benevolences done to a disloyal husband is also encountered in Euripides' tragedy, where Medea gives a speech to Jason telling him how she saved his life by protecting him from the fire-breathing bulls, how she killed the dragon that was keeping guard of the Golden Fleece, how she left her father and home to follow Jason in Iolcus, and how she murdered Pelias there (*Med*. 475-89).

won't take that guilt away, Carthage, we'll go to our grave with it" (*Ibid*. 52). With this powerful image, Carr offers a scathing critique of the dominant 'masculine' view where land is seen as currency, with money possession and land control being inextricably linked.

Compared to *Medea*, where Jason marries for security, in *By the Bog of Cats* Carthage marries for land: "Carthage is not just marring another woman; he's entering this land-grabbing, gombeen society. So that Hester's rage is also a cultural rage, of a colonized culture which is being driven out, not allowed to exist" (Fouéré 2003: 169-70). This assertion requires further contemplation. For instance, one remembers Hester's bold avowal in the play that "The truth is you want to eradicate me, make out I never existed" (*BC*: 51). On a larger scale, Hester's dire proclamation calls to mind the resounding voice of a colonized people standing up to of the colonizer. As Kader proposes:

> Hester's and Xavier's dispute recalls the greater dispute that arose between the native Irish (as well as many other cultures) and the British forces in the era of colonization. In pre-colonial Ireland, ownership was not determined by legal paperwork but by familial connection to a piece of land. Such a family and tradition-based claim in the face of laws, deeds, and governmental paperwork is flimsy. Unfortunately for Hester, as it was for the native landowners, such claims simply do not hold up in the modern world. (2005: 183)

What Kader highlights about the contrasting views of land between the native Irish and the British colonizers, as well as the resulting conflicts, is clearly reflected in the play:

> Hester: This is my property and I've right to sit in me own yard without bein' ogled by the likes of you.
> Xavier. This is no longer your property and well ya know it, ya signed it over six months ago, for a fine hefty sum, have the papers here.
> Hester: I wasn't thinkin' right then, was bein' coerced and bullied from all sides, but I have regained me pride and it tells me I'm stayin'. Ya'll get your money back. (*BC*: 30-31).

Although Xavier Cassidy is not British, he belongs to the ruling class, as he has effectively assimilated the doctrine of contractual ownership of land and exercises his power accordingly.[48]

[48] Cassidy is a common Irish surname, basically the anglicized spelling of the original Gaelic O'Caiside, with the 'O' prefix meaning 'male descendant' and 'Caiside' being a nickname form for 'cas' signifying 'curly hair'. The fact that only the anglicized version of the name is in circulation, indicates the all-round impact that the British occupation has had in Irish life, especially in the domain of nomenclature. Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980), a play that observes the systematic turning of Irish names for local towns, rivers, and other place names into made-up anglicized equivalents by the British cartographers of the Ordnance Survey during the first half of the 19th century, is an obvious example of the vast sway that British cultural imperialism has had in Ireland, and how this becomes manifested in the sphere of language.

For the class he represents, once a transaction is complete, there is no point of return. Hester's crying out that "I'm going nowhere. This here is my house and my garden and my stretch of the bog" (*Ibid*. 6), sounds whimsical and hollow to him. According to his sombre understanding of human interactions, a signature cannot be toppled by any sentiments of regret.

Diametrically opposed, Hester dismisses all formal agreements, claiming instead an inherent right to the land she occupies: "Bits of paper, writin', means nothin', can as aisy be unsinged" (*Ibid*. 20), she speaks of land contracts questioning their real value. Hester cannot accept that administrative processes and an unjust real estate system have eroded people's pristine connection to their motherland. Hester believes that she has an inherent right to remain in the Bog of Cats, and rather than possessing a specific plot of land, she feels a deep connection to the entire bogland: "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 yees, more, for it holds me to it in ways it has never held yees" (*Ibid*. 27). The last sentence captures Hester's unshakable conviction that she retains an intrinsic claim to ownership superseding any legal appeals. It is the bog that holds Hester, and not herself who controls this relationship.

Overall, the two conflicting views on land spawn an unbridgeable dissonance: "Hester's words are a discourse about life and death, past and future tragedies, mysterious forces and magnetic attraction. Conversely the Cassidy family is only concerned with money; the land as a place valued solely for its monetary worth only generates relentless bestiality and greed" (Dumay 2001: 207). Under this system, for Xavier, signing a document to acquire some land is the sole path to legitimacy: "There's nothin' besides land, boy, nothin'! A real farmer would never think otherwise" (*BC*: 69). Self-absorbed and arrogant as he is, Xavier believes that everyone thinks like him: "He loves the land and like me he'd rather die than part with it wance he gets his greedy hands on it" (*Ibid*. 65), he predicts of Carthage. Finally, Xavier causally connects land ownership to the idea of having a voice and making decisions. His ghastly statement about Hester that "if she was mine I'd cut that tinker tongue from her mouth" (*Ibid*. 68), concedes the whole truth about how asymmetrically the 'masculine' land model perceives interpersonal relationships with anyone that stands in opposition. Xavier misogynistically announces that just like the land, women can belong to him. He also expresses his desire to silence Hester, as if her perceived landlessness precludes her from voicing her opinions. Xavier believes land ownership and the freedom of speech are interwoven; two inseparable components essential for maintaining the *status quo*.

Moving on, the premises of 'feminine' land proprietorship come from an entirely distinct and unconventional tie with land. Opposite to the 'masculine' model, the bond with land does not translate to a contract, nor paying money is a precondition for possession. This time, the prerequisite of belonging to Bog of Cats flouts any materialistic conceptualization of land, since

the proposed model is built upon an epistemological nexus involving the interrelated notions of movement, memory, and knowledge. In a nutshell, the motto of the 'feminine' relationship with land could be that 'to know is to own'. Catwoman's words set the tone: "I know everythin' that happens on this bog. I'm the Keeper of the Bog of Cats in case ya forgotten. I own this bog" (*Ibid*. 9). This way, Catwoman fashions herself as a caretaker of the bog; as the all-seeing guardian of the bogland territory, rather than simply the owner of a particular piece of its land. By being "the Keeper of the Bog of Cats", Catwoman acts as the conservator of the memory and history that lies beneath the bog's surface.

Curiously, it is not only the past that Catwoman knows and safeguards but, through her unique connection with the land, she also can foresee the future. For example, on one occasion, Catwoman instructs Hester: "Lave this place now or ya never will… Sure I know that too. Seen it writ in a bog hole" (*Ibid*. 14). In addition to serving as a repository of past histories, the bog can reveal the future to those with the necessary expertise. Catwoman possesses memories of the past and insights into the future, while her land ownership is not exclusive to others. According to the 'feminine' landview, land tenure does not revolve around the individual but is shared among the people of the tribe. Possession equals knowledge, and knowledge is inherently communal.

To elaborate this further, the manifestation of the 'feminine' attitude towards land ownership is further expounded in Hester's peculiar attempt to justify her sense of belonging to the Bog of Cats. Hester decidedly circumvents any legal binding, asserting that the right to belong in the Bog of Cats is determined by one's knowledge of the area's landscape and plant life:

> I was born on the Bog of Cats, same as all of yees, though ya'd never think in the way yees shun me. I know every barrow and rivulet and bog hole of its nine square mile. I know where the best bog rosemary grows and the sweetest wild bog rue. I could lead yees around the Bog of Cats in me sleep. (*Ibid*. 50-1).

The way that Hester defends herself when faced with the peril of ostracization is remarkable. Hester makes a heretical appeal to her knowledge of the bog's landscape. Like Catwoman, she puts forward an epistemological argument fortifying her sense of belonging: the acquaintance with the smell and taste of herbs, knowing all bog's pathways by heart, its actual size as well as its hidden corners and geological abnormalities, altogether contribute to the elevation of Hester as a rightful dweller of the bog. In fact, within this epistemic model that interlinks notions of movement, memory, and knowledge, one could reasonably argue that Hester is the quintessential inhabitant of the Bog of Cats: her outstanding familiarity with the bog's terrain, her innate ability to navigate its grounds, and her profound memory of the bog's plant life, all promote Hester as s a vigorous participant in the natural processes supervening the area.

In fact, there are instances in the play where Hester appears to speak on behalf of the bog. After setting fire to Carthage's property, she declares: "Let the bog have it back. Never liked that house anyway" (*Ibid*. 59). Her demeanour suggests that she is acting in accordance with the bog's impending desires, as if the bog itself has determined that Carthage's house and livestock should be destroyed, and Hester is merely the obedient agent carrying out this task. In a broader sense, the house, cattle, and crops embody a man's connection to the land – his possession and a parallel for patriarchal structure. The unexploited bog, on the other hand, is sketched as a feminine zone of freedom. Accordingly, the image of the bog absorbing the house is a powerful indicator of where Carr places her sympathies: here the 'masculine' symbol of the house becomes immersed within the 'feminine' symbol of the bog as simultaneously a tomb and womb.

Hester proclaims that she abides to a set of rules that is more ancient, and hence more valid than contract-based engagement with land. This special bond that Hester has with her motherland, a land epistemology that is apparently way older than the 'masculine' dealings, could be associated with a particular body of Irish texts. As Helen Lojek first argued: "her relationship to the bog illustrates the ancient Irish tradition of *dinnseanchas*, the lore of places that 'knows' them not just by name and location but by history and proximity" (2011: 71). To explain further, *dinnseanchas* (or *dindsenchas*) is the name of a body of texts from early Irish literature collected together during the 12th century, detailing the onomastic origins of place-names, and also including stories about the traditions, events, and characters connected with the transcribed locations.[49] The *Dinnseanchas* depends heavily on a formulaic language, with a large portion of them sharing the same introductory line of asking where this name-place comes from, and then immediately comes the reply that this is easy to answer. For instance: *Dubad, whence the name? Not hard to say* or *Slaine, whence the name? Not hard to say*. Originally a product of oral tradition, with the majority of them being written in verse, *dinnseanchas* used to be recited by bards as a compendium for cultural cohesion and a form of entertainment.

Similarly, in *By the Bog of Cats*, Catwoman reminisces about Big Josie: "Ya'd often hear her voice comin' over the bog at night. She was the greatest song stitcher ever to have passed through this place and we've had plenty pass through but none like Josie Swane" (*BC*: 13). Just like the Gaelic bards travelling around Ireland reciting the *dinnseanchas*, Big Josie could equally be imagined as celebrating in her songs the lore of Bog of Cats, its topography, legends, and mythic characters, by stitching and singing verses on the spot. A possessor of great knowledge regarding the history and genealogy of Bog of Cats, Hester's mother could be rightfully considered as the matriarch of the 'feminine' theorizing of land. A sense of land that is archaic and mystical, and to which one does more justice when embracing it using the Gaelic word *tír*, than when associating

[49] The best translated account of *dinnseanchas* in English is E. J. Gwynn's five volume *The Metrical Dindsenchas*, printed between 1903 and 1935.

it with a capitalist terminology based on proprietary, financial, and contractual arrangements. Big Josie, like Catwoman and Hester, serve as custodians of an intangible cultural heritage, as is the lore of the Midlands bogland.

Now, when one contrasts Big Josie's departure from the Bog of Cats with her role as guardian of the bog's cultural memory, it is impossible to ignore the emerging symbolism. Indeed, one begins to consider whether Big Josie was forcibly expelled from the bog rather than leaving voluntarily. As argued before, men want to *possess* the land. In contrast, for women like Hester, Catwoman, and Big Josie, *to know* the land is what they long for. This profound connection with the bog's natural environment finds room for expression on a level of language that is unknown to the supporters of the 'masculine' landview, and, for this reason, is perceived as a threat. In her songs, Big Josie speaks an eternal vocabulary of attachment and unity that is incompatible with Xavier's commitment to land partition, stirred, as it were, by vulgar sentiments of personal interest. Xavier's memory of Big Josie "croonin' towards Orion in a language I never heard before or since. We'd peace when she left" (*Ibid*. 31), captures the 'masculine' inability to grasp the 'feminine' view of the land, as well as bringing to the fore the mandate for its elimination. To communicate in a way that others do not comprehend, to sing when others only respond to the sterile prose of money deals and contracts, is reason enough for conflict.

Taken as an allegory then, Big Josie's vanishment from the Bog of Cats initiates the gradual erosion of the 'feminine' values associated with the land. The *dinnseanchas* of the Bog of Cats has been deliberately erased by the settled residents, whose interest lies in making people forget their ancestral roots and the communal feelings associated with a primordial connection to the Irish landscape. Besides, one is inclined to extrapolate Hester's mourning for her absent mother, not simply as the mishap of an orphaned girl, but as representative of a collective loss, namely that of Irish natives for their motherland, of the non-conforming to the free-market folkways attached to the land that have been trampled down by a stateless machinery gauging the earth, inch by inch, fueled by a voracious yearning for profit and power.

Catwoman, Big Josie, and Hester, suffer by inhabiting a hostile environment where there is no correspondence between their idea of self and the actual experience of living. By recognizing the suffering endured by these female characters, Big Josie is no longer solely seen as a heartless mother, whereas Hester's subsequent acts of filicide and suicide take on a new perspective. Hester kills Josie and takes her own life to escape the hegemony of the 'masculine' ideals that dominate the Bog of Cats, saving both from the prospects of a literally unnatural life. By choosing death, Hester inaugurates a portal of escape from the male-dominated bogland, a feat quite comparable to Big Josie's self-exile. "What I wanted was somewan to look me in the eye and know I was understood and not judged" (*Ibid*. 74), bitterly exclaims Hester, a sentiment probably espoused by all female characters of the play.

As for Hester's last angry words before meeting death, they are directed at Carthage, seen as the traitor of the 'feminine' land ideals and inheritor of Xavier's position within the settled community:

> 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' wind through your hair or a soft breath be your ear or a rustle behind ya. That'll be me and Josie ghostin' ya. (*Ibid*. 77)

Hester does not reproach Carthage with a medley of swear words and brutal gestures, but instead curses him to *remember*. Memory, which according to the 'feminine' landview is a synonym for knowledge and is also linked to the kind of land possession Hester believes in, becomes a weapon in Hester's hands to end Carthage. A perpetual state of remembering is the price that Carthage must pay for betraying Hester. Carthage, hoping that by achieving Hester's exile, he would be done with her once and for all, is caught unprepared. Although Hester and Josie will soon cease to be physically present in the bog, their omnipresent aura will endure; a possibility that Carthage had not fully considered. Hester condemns Carthage to assume the 'feminine' role of wandering the Bog of Cats territory, and, wherever he goes, to sense the presence of his betrayed partner and their child.

Violating Hester's wishes and scorning the 'feminine' perspective of land ownership, Carthage's punishment is to *know* his fault, as he *remembers* those he let down, while he *walks* the bog. As a result, the three interrelated notions of movement, memory, and knowledge encapsulating the 'feminine' rule of land are now cast upon Carthage as a retribution for his crimes. Soon, Hester and Josie will become ghosts, haunting Carthage, and imparting a bitter lesson for his "bull-headed pride and economy and painful advancement" (*Ibid*. 71). Soaked in earth, dispersed in the wind, hidden inside bog holes, in-between the crops of barley, the spirits of Hester and Josie will keep a vigilant watch over Carthage. With their phantasmagoric presence, Hester and Josie will preside over the landscape of the Bog of Cats. As a result, Carr's play concludes with mother and daughter undergoing a transformation into something ethereal yet strangely tangible, merging seamlessly as integral components of the bog's universe.

Hester as a Female Irish Icon: The Maternal Landscape of *By the Bog of Cats*

Reaching the end of this chapter, one may notice that the deeper one gets into the analysis of *By the Bog of Cats*, the less transparent its thematic affinity to the Medean precursor becomes. While the primary focus of this chapter was to establish an unmistakable connection between Greek tragedy and Irish adaptation, as the analysis of *By the Bog of Cats* progressed, one might notice a reduced number of references to Euripides, whereas a close reading of Carr's play reveals a profound sense of being deeply rooted in Ireland. For instance, the play's emphasis on the prevalence of *tír* as the conceptual foundation where all action unfolds, along with the mention of *dinnseanchas* as a unique Irish folk tradition to which the female protagonists of the play are spiritually attached, are two compelling indicators suggesting the embeddedness of Carr's play in Irish culture. Moreover, the contrasting yet all-encompassing ties that bind all play's characters to the bogland, the magnetism of the peculiar Midlands bogscape subduing everyone under its clout, and the demonstrated futility of envisioning a life beyond the limits of Bog of Cats, collectively paint *By the Bog of Cats* as an undeniably Irish play.

In fact, it is the introduction of Medean themes into an Irish domain, that is, into a gendered landscape or, more accurately, into a feminized space of ritual sacrifice, that contributes to the emergence of *By the Bog of Cats* as a quintessentially Irish play. Curiously, there is a Greek explanation behind this. Discussing borderland spaces in classical Athens, Jeremy McInerney mentions that "Marginal territory is gendered female through a series of associations with female gods and cults directed at women, thereby reinforcing the gendering of civic space as male. Accordingly, wild terrain and wild woman are categories that reinforce each other" (2006: 33). This contention could also be applied to Carr's play, where the development of disruptive female characters like Hester, Catwoman, and Big Josie profoundly 'feminizes' the bog landscape, absorbing the 'masculine' civic space of the settled community. Following this line of thought, the untamed female population's wilderness is intertwined with the marginal landscape of the bogland.

Having thus uncovered the numerous Irish elements within Carr's play, one could reasonably describe *By the Bog of* Cats as a distinctly Irish endeavour. It stands as a theatrical work firmly rooted in the ongoing literary tradition of Ireland and fully integrated into the native historical and cultural framework. To illustrate this point further, in this section we will contrast Hester Swane with an iconic Irish theatrical heroine, Kathleen ni Houlihan, from the eponymous 1902 play by W.B Yeats and Lady Gregory. In the Irish collective imagination, Kathleen ni Houlihan is a heroine who serves as a symbolic representation of Mother Ireland and the Irish nation. As we explore the relationship between the two heroines, I will demonstrate how Hester Swane emerges as a new archetype of the Irish woman.

To start, the notions of 'Irish Land' and 'Irish Mother' are inextricably linked to each other. As Richard Kearny notes:

> The mythological motherland serve[s] as a goddess of sovereignty who, at least at the imaginary level, might restore a lost national identity by summoning her sons to the sacred rite of renewal through sacrifice. So doing, the Irish people might re-enter the sacred time which transcends historical time, thereby undoing the wrongs of history. Where reality indicated division and dispossession, myth provided an answering poetics of unity and sovereignty. (1997: 91)

This sacred imaginary place, so dear to the Irish, of which Kearney speaks, is also depicted in *By the Bog Cats*. Throughout the play, there is a song that Josie repeatedly sings. The words of the last stanza are as follows:

> 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 you sojourn,
> Forever by the Bog of Cats, my darling one. (*BC*: 8)

Josie croons about a longed-for comeback journey to the realm of the bog, as if it were a maternal womb she desires to return to. Despite the Bog of Cats being mentioned twice, there is an intriguing sense of vagueness in the song's verses, presenting it as something more than just a geographical location, almost like a mythical place. In fact, Josie's admittance of a certain instinct propelling her, even in spectral form if needed, to sojourn to a magical place unrestricted by space and time, is intricately linked to the interdependent notions of 'Irish Land' and 'Irish Mother'. Josie's song evokes this association, whereas her death in the end of the play stresses the need for renewal through sacrifice. However, in Carr's play, instead of sons, Hester and Josie are Ireland's daughters; the women of the bog as sacrificial offering, establishing a matrilineal tradition of martyrdom. Arguably then, the sketching of the landscape of Bog of Cats as a maternal domain draws from the longstanding connection between 'Irish Land' and 'Irish Mother'. As we will see, however, Carr does not merely replicate this relationship, but approaches it subversively, challenging traditional depictions of womanhood as the mirror image of the Irish nation.

W. B Yeats's and Lady Gregory's *Kathleen ni Houlihan* is a well-known example where motherhood, motherland, and personal sacrifice are entangled with each other.[50] The story of the

[50] As Melissa Sihra underlines: "Since Augusta Gregory's and W. B. Yeats's 1902 drama *Kathleen ni Houlihan* it is important to interrogate the signification of 'woman' as idealized trope of nation and to look at the ways in which the work of later Irish dramatists either contests or perpetuates this legacy. The social and cultural position of women has historically been one of symbolic centrality and subjective disavowal as both colonial and nationalist ideology movements promoted feminized concepts of the nation, while subordinating women in everyday life" (2007: 1).

play is as follows: Kathleen, referred to in the play as Old Woman, arrives at the cottage of Peter Gillane's family on the eve of the 1798 Irish Rebellion. This coincides with the day that Peter's son Michael is about to get married. After being received, Kathleen is asked the reason for her prevailing grief, to which she replies: "My land that was taken from me… My four beautiful green fields" (Finneran 2002: 160). Obviously, Kathleen is Ireland personified, mourning for the four provinces that make up the island (Ulster, Leinster, Munster, and Connaught), which were abducted by the British. Kathleen informs her companions that "many a man has died for love of me… [and] if anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all" (*Ibid*. 161-2). Eventually Michael, moved by her plea, rejects all material goods and the love of his fiancée Delia, to sacrifice himself for the nation. Mesmerized by Kathleen's song that those who follow her "They shall be speaking for ever, | The people shall hear them for ever" (*Ibid*. 165), he breaks away from Delia and follows Kathleen to a journey of martyrdom. When his father Peter asks around if they saw "an old woman going down the path" (*Ibid*.), Patrick, Michael's younger brother, swears that "I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen" (*Ibid*.). Thus, having mustered her sons to shed blood for her, Mother Ireland rejoices and symbolically transforms to a young aristocratic maiden.[51]

The tendency of personifying Mother Ireland cannot be overlooked, as this tendency transcends the theatrical stage and its originating mythopoetic origins, manifesting itself in historical events as well. For example, in the first lines of the Easter Proclamation of 1916, which declared Ireland's independence from the United Kingdom, the Republican revolutionary Padraic Pearse states: "In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom" (qtd. in Frost 2017: 79). While not directly referencing Kathleen ni Houlihan, one can nonetheless discern Kathleen's presence between the lines of the proclamation. What can be inferred from this is that, according to the Irish imagination, when history calls for it, the land of Ireland can assume the form of a Mother figure, demanding absolute devotion from her sons to the cause at hand.

Naturally, there is a practical rationale underpinning the enduring choice of personifying Ireland in times of necessity. Once more, as Richard Kearny points out:

[51] The transformation of Kathleen ni Houlihan from an old woman to a beautiful girl is taken from the *aisling* (dream poem) tradition: "In the *Aisling* poems of the eighteenth century, the 'hidden' Ireland was thus personified as a visionary daughter or *spéirbhean* threatened by the alien marauder (or inversely, following the same logic, as a shameless hag—*meirdreach*—who lifted her skirts for the invader's pleasure)" (Kearney 1997: 96).

> Yeats offered the myth of Mother Ireland as spiritual or symbolic compensation for the colonial calamities of historical reality. The mythological Mother would restore the lost national identity by calling her sons to sacred rite of blood-sacrifice… since reality told a story of division and dispossession, Yeats replied with answering symbols of unity and self-possession. (1984: 13-14)

By the Bog of Cats must be read against the backdrop of this nationalist tradition. The oneness of 'Motherhood' and 'Motherland', as this solidifies in Hester's mind, is indicative of an irrefutable Yeatsian trait. Indeed, inducing a gendered narrative of female representation as land, is what both playwrights seek to do. In *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, it is Ireland herself who emerges and calls for Michael's allegiance through sacrifice, whereas, in *By the Bog of Cats*, Hester willingly sacrifices herself in order to be united with the maternal domain of the bog.

Carr, however, does not merely replicate the Yeatsian concept of Irish 'Mother-Land'; instead, she strategically appropriates this familiar theme intending to subvert its meaning. Carr is aware that the elevation of woman to the mythic status of a national symbol does not come without its real-life limitations. Regarding this, Shonagh Hill recognizes the restraints placed on Irish women by the imposition of restrictive models of iconicity:

> The enduring trope of Mother Ireland has defined women's bodies as the terrain over which power has been contested, while concurrently erasing the reality of their corporeal experiences… The connection between 'woman' and nation underlines the passive feminine role as beautiful object to-be-looked-at and as stimulus to male action and martyrdom. The importance of blood sacrifice within nationalist mythology in the early twentieth century delineates Kathleen ni Houlihan as the idealized Mother Ireland and Virgin Mother who inspires the sacrifice of the male, thus rendering her without agency. Furthermore, the focus is on the mother–son relationship which supports the contract between nation and men, at the expense of all others. (2019: 4, 44)

In *By the Bog of Cats*, Carr liberates herself from the constraining limitations of the well-known Yeatsian notion of loyalty to Mother Ireland by offering a modern reinterpretation of it. One could argue that Carr effectively adapts the enduring trope of Irish 'Mother-Land' to better address the needs of women. Given the suffocating representation of women in Irish mythology and the aestheticization of death and sacrifice inherent in such imbalanced depictions, Carr, through the substitution of Kathleen ni Houlihan with Hester Swane, initiates a paradigm shift that rectifies the negative impact of pre-established national narratives on women's reality.

Through the portrayal of Hester as a Mother figure, who, instead of demanding her sons to sacrifice themselves for her sake, opts for herself and her daughter to jointly assume the role of sacrificial victims, Carr turns the tables on gender representation. This way, she challenges the hollow idealization of women as untouchable, de-sexualized entities that the Irish collective

imagination may perceive as unassailable, but, in reality, they are powerless and overlooked. As Wanda Bolzano correspondingly argues:

> The nation as woman, the woman as nation. And so the female population of Ireland has increasingly merged with the passive projection of Irishness: purely ornamental, a rhetorical element rather than an existing reality… The reification of such an abstract concept has been the main cause of the 'invisibility' of Irish women: women rendered invisible, like personal and national colonies… To this absence of a real image corresponds the absence of a voice. (1996: 92-3)

The idea of a virgin maiden, adored by all but untouched by anyone, is prevalent in the Yeatsian text: "With all the lovers that brought me their love I never set out the bed for any" (Finneran 2002: 162), Kathleen pronounces in the play. A state of virginal womanhood that transpires as imperative for the Irish collective but proves disastrous and devastating for real women.

Hester Swane is far from fitting this description. Laden with personal passions, susceptible to carnal desires, sexually betrayed, and consistently met with rejection, she is the complete opposite of Kathleen. Therefore, Hester could be considered the unidealized Irish mother *par excellence*. A genuine, unparalleled anti-Mother figure for all Ireland. An anti-heroine, who resists the ingrained interchangeability between the roles of 'mother' and 'woman'. If the idealized figure of Kathleen ni Houlihan obstructs the emergence of realistic and honest narratives about the female experience, ultimately silencing and misrepresenting Irish women, Hester Swane appears as the essential antidote for individual female expression. Hester paves the way for a radically candid and down-to-earth portrayal of womanhood, with her suicide serving as a symbolic halt to the unfortunate idealization of women as unattainable, celestial beings.

Through her suicide, Hester is elevated as an anti-Kathleen icon, a counter-image of Mother Ireland, introduced by Carr to usher in a new era of female agency representation in Irish theatrical history. As Hill argues, "in Carr's [dramaturgy] we see her creation of new *mythopoeias* and 'other possible worlds' which converge on the landscape as a space of female expression" (2019: 19). In *By the Bog of Cats*, one observes the creation of this kind of world, a feminized space, a liminal environment, a bogscape with a sedative maternal touch, amidst the strands of which Hester's corresponding acts of filicide and suicide assume the most radical form of female volition. Both transgressive deeds constitute a dramatic plea for autonomy and self-determination, namely Hester's right to breathe as a woman, Traveller-woman, and Irish woman; the right to breathe as a mother.

In conclusion, it is striking to see how an examination of a contemporary Irish play deeply influenced by Euripides' *Medea* leads to a thought-provoking dialogue with one of Ireland's canonical texts, as is *Kathleen ni Houlihan*. Equally remarkable is how Hester Swane forges a

compelling connection with a foundational figure of the Irish psyche and cultural memory, as is Kathleen; the Mother Ireland personified. To arrive at these findings, I employed the recurring themes of 'Land' and 'Landscape' as two consistent elements that highlighted the predominant Irishness of *By the Bog of Cats*. By employing this method, I systematically revealed the unequivocally Irish aspects within the play. These encompassed a range of elements, from the social position of the Traveller community in Ireland and Seamus Heaney's 'Bog poems' to the symbolism of the Swan in Irish mythology and the oral tradition of *dinnseanchas*. Additionally, I explored the amalgamation of womanhood and motherhood in Irish society, as well as the mystical beliefs surrounding witchcraft. This, in turn, showed that *By the Bog of Cats* consists of a rich tapestry of Irish influences.

As a result of this analysis, it can be safely argued that Carr's play is not just an Irish adaptation of *Medea*. In truth, *By the Bog of Cats* is firmly rooted within the core of the Irish literary tradition.

CONCLUSION