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1 Introduction – The Legacy of the Past in Plays by Marina Carr

People don't believe in things anymore. They go to the theatre and they want two episodes of a soap opera. They don't want to be told about a ghost. They don't want anything that isn't like a Kodak instamatic photograph, and that's one of the things that infuriates me about the theatre. The worst thing they can say about you is that it's not believable. But the yardstick is frighteningly limited, and to work within those parameters is impossible for any writer who is on a journey, or who is trying to figure out what we're here for.

Carr (*Interview with Murphy* 48)

Emotional and imaginative involvement in the dramatic illusion of Marina Carr's plays is probably inevitable as her work becomes part of our personal experience and, every now and then, can actually change us to some extent. If we allow a story to touch us emotionally and intellectually instead of remaining purely passive and indifferent, we get more out of the reading or the hours spent in the theatre than bare boredom. Admittedly, the "dark and boggy" (Gardner, *Glimpses*) tenor of her plays does not make for easy reading or light evening entertainment. Carr writes about lives and episodes off the beaten path of soap opera clichés. At times, it is quite a challenge to be confronted with the playwright's despairing, gruesome and twisted characters as she moves "the spectator behind and beyond the façade of social norms, mores, conventions and expectations, [...] delivering moments of pure savagery, while still creating convincing dramas that are replete with [...] unrealizable longing" (Jordan, *Unmasking* 243). While some of her plays are easier to digest, others are uncomfortably brutal.

Over the last two decades, Carr has become one of the most frequently and critically debated contemporary Irish playwrights. In a way this is not surprising, for her plays "grap us by the throat and won't let us go" (McDonald, *Fatal* 139). She made her breakthrough in the mid-1990s with *The Mai*, a story about a woman who feels caught in a trap not created "by the expectations a limiting society imposes on women but by what her own drive has created" (King). Reading Lika's line (one of Carr's latest characters) declaring, "So I'll die unhappy, unfulfilled, bitter, thwarted",¹ it is quite

¹ From an excerpt from *Chekhov* (as *16 Possible Glimpses* was first called) in *The Dreaming Body: Contemporary Irish Theatre* (28-41).

clear that Carr stayed true to her interest in the individual's relationship with his or her past, the unfulfilled longing for love and the stumbling blocks which are put in our way by others or ourselves.

Are we forced to repeat the same little bit of history? Do we have no choice but to make the same mistakes as our parents? If the orchestration is a different one, will the tune still be the same?² If everything is past and future, can we master to live in the present? These are the kinds of philosophical questions the playwright addresses, and everybody desiring to investigate his/her sense of self can relate to them. Reasons as to why the characters behave in certain ways are offered and, mostly, found in the years of their upbringing. The protagonist's childhood is always a further layer of time in the stories. The act of remembering and sharing stories with others provides a basis to make sense of the current experiences the characters are presented with. Melissa Sihra's statement that the "past is never far away in Marina Carr's plays, [that] its secrets weep and bleed into the present, like wounds refusing to heal" (Sihra, qtd. in Trench, *Bloody* 239), aptly sums up the dilemma the characters find themselves in. These injuries come "from their parents, a heritage that must be overcome or even erased, in order for them to reach a satisfactory life of their own" (Mesquita 290). Often the courage to act out of self-determination is the decisive difference between success and failure. Perhaps it is the flicker of hope which gently resonates between the lines of Carr's plays, hope that change is possible if we stop "sleepwalking through life as well as [start] asking whether giving up on your dreams is the worst crime" (Ruane, *Dreams of Desire*). This flicker of hope puts oil on troubled waters when the playwright touches on sore spots.

Carr's stories gain their power from the past, experiences made in the past are the plot-propelling agents; it is theatre where "the present is arrested and it seems the future will never appear" (Sihra, *House of Woman* 203). As it is the goal of this thesis to give an insight into Carr's theatre, where many characters stubbornly adhere to their fantasies, false memories, failures and traumas of the past, questions of origin, of cross-generational conflicts and of the difficulty of developing a confident separate self will be tackled both theoretically and practically. The theoretical concepts are then applied to *By the Bog of Cats...*, *On Raftery's Hill*, *Ariel*, *Woman and Scarecrow* and *The Cordelia Dream*. These five, rather differently successful, plays by Carr will be

² This is a reference to Grandma Fraochlán in *The Mai* who says, "[w]e repeat and we repeat. The orchestration may be different, but the tune is always the same" (123).

examined through the lens of attachment theory with frequent Freudian perspectives, but also compared with each other, including audience reception and critical reviews.

Contrary to what may be expected from the fact that female characters dominate in Carr's plays, the purpose of this paper is not to present a feminist approach, especially as the playwright herself points out in an interview, "I don't think it matters a damn if the voice is male or female; it's what the voice is saying" (qtd. in Kilroy). Perhaps it would also be tempting to consider Carr's personal biography, as I do not agree with Frank McGuinness, who describes her as a "writer haunted by memories she could not possibly possess" (ix). Despite the fact that violence, physical or verbal, is a destructive force in all other plays, one of the most prominent features is after all the notion of loss as all female protagonists suffer from the pain connected to the loss of their mother. Carr lost her mother as a teenager, and although she "creates a world of phantasy [sic] which [she] takes very seriously – that is, which [she] invests with large amounts of emotion – while separating it sharply from reality" (Freud, *Writers and Day-Dreaming* 144), the characters and the playwright share this experience of losing a loved one. Nevertheless, I agree with Carr pointing out that the "autobiographical argument in art [...] is so boring – looking for the dysfunction in the writer to explain the work" (qtd. in Kilroy), especially as her character compositions have so much more to offer. And although her characters, main or minor, are "intricate, maimed, destructive [and] wayward" (Jordan, *Unmasking* 243), they become the source of pleasure for readers and audiences, for they are not real.³

³ Cf. Freud: "The unreality of the writer's imaginative world, however, has very important consequences for the technique of his art; for many things which, if they were real, could give no enjoyment, can do so in the play of phantasy, and many excitements which, in themselves, are actually distressing, can become a source of pleasure for the hearers and spectators at the performance of a writer's work" (*Writers and Day-Dreaming* 144).

2 A Psychological Approach to Human Character Development

There is huge fascination with the genetic versus environmental question. How much of our lives are we actually responsible for, or have we any control over? Do we just, as seems an overriding theme in Marina's work, keep repeating the appalling patterns of human behaviour despite our attempts to the contrary?

Scaife (13)

The plays by Marina Carr frequently throw the audience back into their own lives and call for introspection. The characters and their inability to act allow or even raise questions like the ones asked by Sarahjane Scaife in relation to Carr's early play *Low in the Dark*, or, of course, questions in relation to one's own inability to act and patterns handed down from one generation to another: how the past might unconsciously influence the present, how parents unintentionally form the emotional lives of their children, and what else might have an impact on the development of a human character, what might influence its personality. The extent to which certain behavioural systems and emotional flaws might be internalized during one's personal development is quite extraordinary. Some might be a greater challenge or obstacle than others, some are easier to conquer and overcome, and others might even not be realized as stumbling blocks in one's personal growth. In the following the focus will be put on a small selection of psychoanalytical aspects, in particular those taken up by Carr in designing her characters: the relationship between parent(s) and children, the role of a mother and father, the effect of the loss of a beloved person, unconscious transference and unopposed incest.

2.1 Attachment Theory – The Safe Home Port

Marina Carr's principal theme in all her plays so far has been that the problems of parents impinge, permanently, on the lives of their offspring. The point of view which recurs in her plays is that of the wronged child.

Ní Dhuibhne (68)

Not only does the aspect of passing on certain behavioural patterns or burdens add unmistakable uniqueness to the characters in *The Mai*, it is also an angle applicable to the analysis of numerous other figures in Carr's plays. First and foremost, however,

this particular form of inheritance, this idea of emotional heritage undoubtedly shapes a human personality and has been engrossing a multitude of psychoanalysts and psychotherapists ever since Sigmund Freud.

The trigger for an inexplicable and long-lived anger, anxiety, or depression can frequently be detected in childhood or in early attachment experiences. The relationship with parents or comparable substitutes presents a firm foundation for a child to develop, to become a small adventurer exploring the world in the assured knowledge of being able to return any time to a secure home port. If a child lacks such a base and stability, this can affect later relationships, close bonds or behaviour in particularly critical situations in life. This aspect of personal development has variously been discussed by a number of researchers and theorists, the following elaboration, however, will focus on one author who was one of the pioneers in the field of attachment theory. The work of John Bowlby, psychologist, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, with great interest in child development, is regarded as a cornerstone of the study of human attachment organization.⁴

The basic concepts described by Bowlby mainly refer to early childhood but do not rule out adolescence or adulthood. He continuously points out that attachment behaviour, "irrespective of the age of the individual concerned," can be retraced to "the kinds of experience [s/]he has in his[/her] family of origin, or, if [s/]he is unlucky, out of it" (*Secure Base* 4). The discussion, therefore, necessarily starts with the experience made during childhood. Bowlby stresses in this context the importance of providing a secure haven, "a secure base", for a child to come home to after venturing outside to gain new impulses. Parenting in his view therefore means to guarantee that a child is cared for emotionally and physically, "comforted if distressed, reassured if frightened" (*Secure Base* 11). It is essential for a child that a caregiver is present, is available and "ready to respond when called upon to encourage and perhaps assist, but to intervene actively only when clearly necessary" (*Secure Base* 11). The relationship with the primary caregiver(s) is to a certain degree reflected in the individual's confidence, emotional equilibrium and courage when separated from the secure basis. "For it is only when the officer commanding the expeditionary force is confident his base is secure that he dare press forward and take risks" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 11).

⁴ Bowlby's concepts have been effectively applied to empirical research by Mary Ainsworth and Mary Main.

Such attachment behaviour can be observed rather distinctly in the interaction between children and their parents. The behavioural pattern of a child (the individual attached) when separated from the attachment figure (the secure base) has been the focal point of various studies.⁵ "[T]here is now abundant evidence that the particular pattern in which attachment behaviour becomes organized during development is much influenced by how it is responded to by a child's principal caregivers, in the huge majority of cases his mother and father" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 82). In addition it should be mentioned that the roles of mother and father are considered to be different due to prevalent cultural and social conventions: evidently, in most instances it is still the mother who is the primary caregiver to a child. This is not to say that a father does not become an attachment figure at all, however, "these attachments may develop more slowly, if only because of the limitations on the amount of time that infants and fathers share together" (Goldberg, *Development* 85).⁶ This suggests, on the other hand, that if a mother is, for whatever reason, absent or inaccessible for most of the time and a father has to assume this role, he will shape the attachment relationship and the child's behavioural system that results from it (Goldberg, *Development* 85).

Irrespective of who takes over the part of the primary caregiver,⁷ attachment behaviour can be summarized as "a characteristic of human nature throughout our lives – from the cradle to the grave[...] an urgent desire for love and care[...] natural enough when a person is anxious or distressed" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 82). There are certain close long-term relationships a person can have, primarily with one's children, parents or life partner: personal attachments whose functioning is directly connected to an individual's well-being. While long-standing bonds continue to be of importance, new attachments might be added, and the careseeking role and caregiving part often become more and more interchangeable. The nature of these shared relationships, however, affects the emotional life/state of a human being in various ways: while these emotional bonds are enduring and stable, contentedness will be predominant; when they run the risk to fail or break, the sense of security and satisfaction usually makes way for anxiety and despair (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 81). Generally, this applies to the person "less able to cope, maintaining proximity to, and/or communication with, another individual, seen as better able to cope" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 81-2). Bowlby

⁵ Bowlby draws on studies by Lamb, Parke, Clarke-Stewart, and Mackey.

⁶ For a detailed overall view of attachment behaviour within in the closed system of a family, see Goldberg (*Development* 81-96).

⁷ For the sake of uniformity this paper is aimed at a neutral approach as to which parent is the actual caregiver.

expands on this and additionally points out that "careseeking is shown by a weaker and less experienced individual towards someone regarded as stronger and/or wiser. A child or older person in the careseeking role keeps within range of the caregiver, the degree of closeness or of ready accessibility depending on circumstances [...]" (*Secure Base* 121). Thus he emphasizes once more that within the concept of attachment a safe basis is crucial and the question of age irrelevant.

Feeling loved and safe enhances and supports the development of self-reliance. Being self-reliant and developing a healthy amount of self-confidence without a doubt reduces insecurity and dependence on others and gives liberty and courage to confront life and the world fearlessly. Susan Goldberg emphasizes the concept of self and others in relation to attachment behaviour by pointing out that parental negligence might "create vulnerabilities to the development of the self" (*Attachment Theory* 455). Thus, when a secure attachment forms a healthy view of the self that socially interacts with others and confidently builds new relationships, an anxious attachment impinges on future social experiences. There is no doubt that "[s]elf and social development are inextricably bound together, and dysfunction in the self domain would inevitably have its counterpart in the social domain" (Cole and Putnam 176). As might be expected, there are various disturbing events which may influence the secure base and thus attachment behaviour and concept of self (Goldberg, *Development* 172).

2.2 Sources of Irritation

[M]others just cannot seem to provide any real sustenance for their offspring: it seems to be part of the human condition that they are unable to help alleviate the suffering of the children that they have been instrumental in creating.

Scaife (11)⁸

In this subsection, priority is given to the question of what might unsettle a secure base, a safe attachment relationship. The answer ranges from minor hitches in an otherwise steady bond to more drastic and traumatic disruptions of the trustful relationship between caregiver and careseeker. Parents (or substitute parent figures) may not always be available when called upon or respond helpfully and willingly, or,

⁸ Scaife specifically refers to the characters of Binder and Bender in *Low in the Dark* and in general to Carr's later work as well.

even more alarming for a child, may actively ignore their child's need for proximity and care. As mentioned previously an impairment or damage of the basic attachment and security has great impact on the personal development and on present and future attachment behaviour. If the principal function of feeling loved and protected is not fulfilled, the base is not secure, a child is likely to become, according to Bowlby, less self-assured and in consequence less "sympathetic and helpful to others in distress" (*Secure Base* 82). In this respect, he names two other major behaviour patterns alongside secure attachment. Children with an "anxious resistant attachment" pattern, for instance, live in the uncertainty of their parents' support and are inclined to cling to a parent due to separation anxiety which, in turn, arrests their enquiring mind. An "anxious avoidant attachment" may result from constantly expected abandonment, which might lead to rejection of affection in the search of autarchy (*Secure Base* 124).⁹ Such patterns are often internalized in the process of a child's personal development and shape future relationships (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 124). Returning to Carr's work, one is able to detect a great number of characters with a lack of emotional support or sustenance, which is frequently passed on from the parents to their children and might create a kind of emotional paralysis where change or escape seems impossible.

First and foremost it is self-evident that the way parents themselves have been raised influences their own way of raising children. This is not to say that a particular pattern is continuously repeated, but rather adapted or transferred to a certain extent from one generation to another. Bowlby emphasizes that there is "firm evidence that women whose childhood has been disturbed tend to engage in less interaction with their infants than do mothers with happier childhoods [...]" (*Secure Base* 16). Keeping a distance from a child, intentionally or unconsciously, is only one of many possible parental behaviour patterns that might drive a wedge in a close relationship and injure the child's (and, as a result later on, the adult's) psychic equilibrium and sense of stability. A feeling of rejection or a change in the nature of the attachment relationship can clearly be experienced through various internal or external events: certainly most commonly the birth of a second baby. Naturally, attention and child-rearing resources will be shared by the siblings (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 88). The parents will adjust to the new situation, and for well-functioning families this new challenge does not pose a threat to the attachment system between members. It is not infrequent, on the other hand, that such a demanding change within the closed emotional organization of a

⁹ In accordance with studies by Ainsworth, Main, Sroufe, et al.

family causes instability of the secure base. When a mother is no longer accessible and not fulfilling her caring function for the firstborn, it will, in all probability, give rise to intense emotions. The child might feel rejected and see the need to fight for maternal attention, which once was given naturally.

For Goldberg "[a]ny attachment relationship is a 'goal-corrected' biobehavioural system featuring mutual regulation of two partners in order to fulfil a specific function (protection of one member by another)" (*Development* 93). When the caregiver fails to provide such security and shelter, separation anxiety and anger might be the result. An event even more traumatic than having to share attention with a brother or sister is undoubtedly depression or even the threat of suicide by a parent. A severe illness in itself has worrying effects of course, whereas in the case of depression the threat is inherently somewhat diffuse and intangible. The impact and implications of physical diseases are surely easier to explain for an adult and for a child to understand, than those of mental illness. If a parent is suffering from depression and as a result is unable to attend to the child, it will relate the parent's neglect to itself and its behaviour. Even for adults it is difficult to deal with this challenge and to react in an appropriate way, for a child, however, it is utterly impossible to comprehend such a situation. The threat of abandonment is omnipresent and thus anxiety and, in a great number of cases, anger towards the attachment figure who is blamed for the situation. In this context the implications of the actual loss of a caring person are similar and require a more detailed elaboration in the following chapter, because "[l]oss of a loved person is one of the most intensely painful experiences any human being can suffer" (Bowlby, *Loss* 7) and sets off an avalanche of emotions.

Especially tragic are cases in which the secure base is injured or not existent due to violence within a family. The estimated number of children and women (and sometimes men) who are victims of domestic violence is very high, and the actual number of instances is still largely unknown and hidden within the otherwise safe walls of many homes. Too many children face verbal or physical abuse. A common picture includes families where a tradition of violence is passed on from one generation to another. Women, for instance, who have grown up in such broken and dysfunctional families, "regard physical violence as part of the natural order, and [...] expect little or nothing in the way of love or support from any quarter" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 17).¹⁰

¹⁰ Bowlby draws on a study by DeLozier, *Attachment Theory and Child Abuse*.

Still children thus wronged are also merely individuals in need for a secure base, and rather frequently they maintain a favourable picture of the perpetrator and stay with her/him. This behaviour is particularly noticeable in cases of incest, which will be discussed later.

2.2.1 Disturbance Caused by Loss

HE first deceased; she for a little tried
To live without him, liked it not, and died.
Wotton (*Upon the Death of Sir Albert Morton's Wife*)

Separation and loss evoke quite different intense emotions and psychic strains. Attachment theory studies immediate as well as long-term consequences and effects of loss during childhood and adulthood: an important figure to whom one was once closely attached is no longer available, for instance through the parting of a spouse or the death of a child. Bowlby repeatedly emphasizes "the long duration of grief, [...] the difficulties of recovering from its effects, and [...] the adverse consequences for personality functioning that loss so often brings" (*Loss* 8). The process of grieving and mourning after the loss of a loved person is agreed to be one of the most painful experiences to be made. The cause of loss might be death or desertion; and even though the circumstances vary from case to case, the process of healthy mourning ends in the same way: in "a withdrawal of emotional investment in the lost person and [a preparation] for making a relationship with a new one" (Bowlby, *Loss* 25).

Every human being suffers from the crushing nature of loss in the course of his/her life and has to face a difficult period of mourning. This time is marked by different emotional responses to the loss. The painful feeling following the dramatic event of losing a loved person seems self-explanatory; accounting for it in academic terms, however, it arises, according to Bowlby, with reference to Freud's theory of the lost object, due to "the persistent and insatiable nature of the yearning for the lost figure," and as a "result of a sense of guilt and a fear of retaliation" (*Loss* 26). Numerous studies focusing on affectional bonds and with special reference to their implication on behaviour have tried to discern a typical pattern when an attachment relationship is endangered or even irretrievably lost. Bowlby points out that a bereaved might travel back and forth between different emotional states during the period of mourning (*Loss*

27). Generally, however, it is agreed that a sequence of four phases can be determined, four “psychological tasks necessary to adequate mourning”:¹¹

1. The full realization and acceptance of the object loss, the experiencing of the painful affects associated with it, and the ultimate abandonment of unrealistic strivings to regain the lost object.
2. Resolution of anger and any irrational guilts which sprang from the object loss.
3. Loosening of emotional bonds, and significant withdrawal of emotional investment from the lost object.
4. A redirection of interest toward and readjustment to living in the bereaved’s new environment with new objects. (Cain and Cain 452)

All these phases play a major role within the process of healing and deserve further attention. Nevertheless, particularly interesting with regard to the following analysis of Carr’s plays, and hence worth closer attention, are different varieties of disorder, cases of unhealthy or so-called pathological mourning. In this context, of course, the consequences for the bereaved and the people close to her/him should not be disregarded.

Anger, as mentioned earlier, is one of the possible reactions, consciously or unconsciously expressed, that accompany the excruciating experience when an attachment figure is, for whatever reason, not accessible for the person in need. On the one hand, there is anger towards the lost figure who leaves behind an attached individual. In a great number of cases, on the other hand, and as a means of defensive exclusion, anger is redirected from the person arousing it in the first place towards another (referred to as displacement) or “[n]ot infrequently [...] aimed instead at the self”, giving rise to adverse self-reproaches (Bowlby, *Loss* 68). This is a phenomenon familiar to everyone with even a little self-awareness; the effect, however, it has on the perception of the self and others is not to be underestimated and so is the next variety of disorder.

At times the person in grief lingers unusually long in one of these emotional states and does not find a way out and is not even aware of her/his unhealthy behaviour of clinging to the lost one. The person who is left behind often believes that the departed will return. This impulse is rather powerful and often the “urge to search may therefore continue to possess the bereaved [...]” (Bowlby, *Loss* 138) and hence obviates a

¹¹ Cain and Cain’s formulation of these phases seem most appropriate for this paper; amongst others they refer to Bowlby and Freud.

complete closure of the mourning process, which is so essential to resume one's life. In this context, Carr delivers a good example, when Portia, one of her main characters, follows her twin brother into the dark, drowns herself in Belmont River, the desire to rejoin with her attachment figure being stronger than her will to live.¹² Pain and sadness felt over the loss of a loved person might haunt the bereaved and hope to regain the lost figure often wins over acceptance that their absence is permanent.

2.2.1.1 Loss during Childhood

A safe and intact emotional bond secures enjoyment, stability and well-being for an individual, while separation or loss always creates instability and intense emotions like anger, abysmal grief and pain and an unsatisfiable desire to regain closeness to the lost person. In this context it is also of importance, especially with regard to loss during childhood, to consider an aspect which was briefly touched upon earlier: a sense of loss and burden for the child due to the attachment figure being in a state of depression. It is a situation that more children than might be expected have to face. Compared with the actual loss of a parent, these instances are discussed more infrequently than they should be. It is still a sensitive subject and often remains hidden and unresolved. Regardless of what the reason or trigger for depression might be, it can clearly disturb the peace of an otherwise intact family. A hitherto caregiving person is now in need of intensive love and care as well. Generally a parent suffering from depression does not have the energy to indulge another human being, rather seeking aid and support from others. Doubtlessly, this has an enormous impact on a child deprived of her/his secure base and confronted with emotional neglect and sorrow. What is of special relevance here is that a normal parent-child relationship is disturbed and often reversed as the child (careseeker) is required to function as a caregiver instead (Hirsch 129). As a consequence every little amount of attention and love is gratefully welcomed by the child: a child, who "in conformity with [the parent]'s wishes, [...] admits to consciousness only feelings of love and gratitude [...] and shuts away every feeling of anger [s/]he may have against [the parent] for expecting [her/]him to care for her[/him] and preventing [the child] from making [her/]his own friends and living [her/]his own life" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 107-8). Children finding themselves in such situations are not only deprived of their right to a secure

¹² Portia's only attachment figure in the play *Portia Coughlan* appears to be her dead twin brother Gabriel, as she does not share an intimate emotional relationship with her husband, mother or even her children.

attachment relationship to support the development of their own identity, they are not entitled to their own feelings either. Frequently, "[a]s a result [...] children are required always to appear happy and to avoid any expression of sorrow, loneliness, or anger" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 108).

André Green, a highly renowned French psychoanalyst and Freudian, is frequently quoted in the discussion about depression and loss. He describes a depressed mother as a "dead mother": a caregiver who is no longer accessible. In the eyes of a child, according to Green, "a living object, which was a source of vitality for the child, [transforms into] a distant figure, toneless, practically inanimate" (142). The once nurturing attachment figure is lost. "[T]he mother's[/parent's] sorrow and lessening interest in [the] infant are in the foreground" (149) and the needs of the child are eclipsed. Needless to say this withdrawal of affection is not comprehensible for children. First the child tries to regain the lost love, the lost mother. Eventually, different defence mechanisms can be detected, one of them being the primary identification with the 'dead mother', seen as the only possible reconnection (Green 150). A detailed discussion of the various unconscious strategies adopted to maintain maternal love would exceed the purpose of this paper. In conclusion, however, it is of importance to be aware of the implications for personal growth these instances might have. Sense of guilt or fear to behave in an inappropriate way, even only to have a different opinion, makes a disengagement very difficult, a disengagement so necessary for the formation of a separate identity (Hirsch 130).

The consequences of having a depressed parent, a dysfunctional secure base, are sufficiently dramatic. However, the impact of the actual death of a caregiver is, naturally, even more severely disturbing for a child and not infrequently leaves its marks on the psychic map of its personality. The loss itself is difficult enough to overcome, however, the event becomes even more disturbing when a child is deprived, one way or the other, of its own feelings of grief. In some cases this might be implicitly induced when surviving parents do not show emotions openly, "afraid to express their own distress, [they] in effect encourage their children to shut away all the feeling they are having about their loss" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 106-7). Parents thus exemplify to the child how to repress one's emotions instead of releasing them. In other situations grieving children are explicitly provided "with inadequate or misleading information" about a parent's death and they often imply that being sorrowful would be

inappropriate (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 106).¹³ A consequence here might be, as pointed out earlier, that if parting is not fully accepted and the mourning resolved, one is unconsciously stuck in the emotional state of mourning and longing for the lost object.¹⁴

2.2.1.2 The Replacement Child

I might have thought that you were really sleeping,
So quiet lay your eyelids to the sky,
So still your hair, but surely you were peeping;
And so I did not cry.

God knows, and in His proper time disposes,
And so I smiled and gently called your name,
Added my rose to your sweet heap of roses,
And left you to your game.

Middleton (*On a Dead Child* 9-16)

Without a doubt losing a child is by far the most serious and tragic experience for parents. It seems impossible to take leave of the deceased and to readapt. Such cases of bereavement are supposed to end after an adequate period of mourning in readjusting to the new situation, resumption of interest in life and in existing relationships as well as forming new bonds: in other words, a healthy or normal process. Naturally it is quite difficult to overcome such overwhelming grief, and it therefore appears rather comprehensible that the bereaved, consciously or unconsciously, frequently take another path out of the painful maze of mourning. Albert C. Cain and Barbara S. Cain published a study on parents who were deliberately replacing a dead child (lost object) with a new one. In contrast to a healthy completion of grieving these parents sought a different solution, a "*pseudo resolution* of mourning" (Cain and Cain 452).¹⁵ As the yearning for the lost child is not vanquished, the new child is only a substitute for the departed, which frequently leads "to a distorted and pathogenic relationship between the parent and the new baby" (Bowlby, *Loss* 122). The danger to disturb the personal development of a later child arises from the combination of the parents' lingering idealization of the lost one, their unfulfilled wish for reunion, and a young child's unfinished identity and need to secure an intact relationship with the attachment figure.

¹³ Bowlby refers to Alice Miller's *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (1979).

¹⁴ For a case study of unresolved mourning and its consequences, see Mitchell (183-92).

¹⁵ Cain and Cain explicitly point out that various other cases where "replacement of a dead child via adoption [or replacement] with one of his surviving younger siblings" (452) showed similar results.

The impact on a child serving as replacement obviously seems to be leading to a severe problem and it does not, as intended, "ease the parents' burden of chronic mourning" (Bowlby, *Loss* 163). The source for injurious implications for a substitute child lies in the relocation of the lost child's identity to the new one, as its own identity is not yet fully established (Bowlby, *Loss* 161). Through the deeply dramatic event of losing a close and loved person the bereaved is often prone to draw and glorify an idealizing picture of the departed. As a result of the inability to let go of the dead child an ideal solution evidently presents itself: creating a replacement. It is, however, an inauspicious start into life, being born as a substitute "into a world of mourning, of apathetic, withdrawn parents, a world focused on the past and literally worshipping the image of the dead" (Cain and Cain 445). Hence, the new child does not symbolize a new chance for the future, a new beginning, it can rather be interpreted as the inheritor of a burdensome legacy of the past. The successor has to fight repeatedly for his/her own identity and during the process of personal development meets various obstacles placed within the secure environment of her/his own family. First of all, with reference to the findings by Cain and Cain, there is a danger that the "parents grossly impos[e] the identity of the dead child upon [her/]his substitute and unconsciously identif[y] the two" (446). The consequences for the new child might be particularly perspicuous: s/he is forced to compete "[w]ith the distorted [hyperidealized] images of [the dead child] who never did and never could exist in reality" (Cain and Cain 447). It is an unrealistic image of the departed child the newborn will never be able to live up to and as a result "in their parent's eyes [the newborn children are] merely inadequate replicas of their dead sibling" (Bowlby, *Loss* 164).

The omnipresent fear to lose a child once more might be the cause for another possible obstacle in the course of the personal development of the newborn. In order to avoid such a devastating situation from ever happening again, the parents, anxious to lose another child, tend to act restrictively and overprotectively (Cain and Cain 448). Within healthy normal relationships between parents and children which allow careseeking individuals to explore the world and themselves freely (referring back to Bowlby's definition of a secure base and hence secure attachment behaviour), disturbed behaviour might stem from disproportionate protective parenting. The study by Cain and Cain supports the notion that the style of raising children influences the child's personal development. The constant closeness and fearfulness of the parents who have already lost one child and a restrained environment prevent the careseeking children from growth: they might be "infantile, immature, home-bound children, with

strong passive-dependent elements and widespread ego restrictions" (449), children living in the present, influenced by the past and afraid of the future due to exaggerated parental care.

2.2.2 The Destructiveness of Incest

So far minor and major injuries caused by an insecure or inaccessible secure base have been discussed. This chapter is dedicated to the most devastating violation of a child's physical and psychic boundaries perpetrated by a family member: incest. "Attachment theory can be used to explain the diverse array of negative outcomes in incest survivors" (Alexander and Anderson 667) and shed light on the dark and "perplexing nature of the attachment between victim and perpetrator" (Grand and Alpert 330).

Sue Grand and Judith L. Alpert rest their discussion of the "core trauma of incest" mainly on the work of psychoanalysts William R. Fairbairn and Donald W. Winnicott (British Object Relations School). Their perspective on the relationship between perpetrator and victim and the injurious consequences for the internal model of attachment is determined by the concept of the threatening state of being objectless. One of the professed purposes of their argumentation is to come to an understanding of how incest may last for years, with special attention to father-daughter instances. What is so bewildering in these cases is "that much of the incest victim's behavior is a desperate effort to remain attached to her caretakers" (Grand and Alpert 330). It is an act of violence that often continues as a concealed secret within a family. Bowlby argues that events in which "parents have treated children in ways the children find too unbearable to think about" are repressed, yet linger on unconsciously and are "extremely influential in affecting thought, feeling, and behaviour" (*Secure Base* 101). A particularly interesting internal mechanism to cope with the betrayal of trust in the attachment figure is for a child to create two fathers in its mind: a loving father that can be relied on and a menacing one causing a general distrust in men (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 106).¹⁶ Creating a favourable image of the offender-father is a survival strategy that can be explained in reference to attachment organization and the notion of object relations. A child who has to suffer such an utterly terrifying experience does not only lose a caring father, but in effect trust in maternal support as well, as the

¹⁶ Bowlby draws upon unpublished elaborations by his colleague MacCathy.

mother fails to protect the child. The attached subject is thus threatened to be objectless and constructs "an illusory image of a good parent" and "[t]his is accomplished by splitting off and denying bad experiences with the parent" (Grand and Alpert 332). Fairbairn calls this strategy a "moral defence against bad objects" by which the child "seeks to purge [his/her parents] of their badness [and is thus] rewarded by that sense of security which an environment of good objects so characteristically confers" (65). In other words the loss of a primary caregiver, due to the intensely disturbing abuse by a trusted person, and the fear of not having any attachment figure at all, to be objectless, force a child to fabricate a fantasy parent. To avoid this terrifying experience the unrealistic picture of the good parent needs to be kept alive, literally in order for the child to stay alive. All of the child's energy is directed to this task so that the formation of new attachments does not stand the slightest chance (Grand and Alpert 332).

In this context the development of emotionally close relationships with others seems impossible and the ability to build an identity of one's own is blocked. Grand and Alpert emphasize Winnicott's concept of false self and argue that a mistreated child often creates a necessary "mask of compliance that shields the vulnerable true self and remains connected to the parents by providing the parents with whatever they require from the child" (Grand and Alpert 332). This strategy is a means to secure the attachment relationship. Janet L. Jacobs adds the daughter's resulting sense of femininity and masculinity, and her perception of herself as female. She argues that "the internalized aggressor signifies male strength and power while the internalized victim represents female weakness and powerlessness" (165). Self-perception is even more endangered due to the distinction between good and bad. While a favourable view of the father constantly needs to be fed by goodness, "the child takes upon himself[/herself] the burden of badness," (Fairbairn 65). The aggressive and trust-betraying behaviour of the parent and the child's feelings of shame and guilt destroy "the ability to experience a sense of trust and confidence in relationships" (Cole and Putnam 175) as well as any kind of emotional intimacy. In adulthood for a woman this clearly could furthermore lead to a struggle with her own sexuality or a "withdrawal from all intimate relationships" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 105).

Considering the fragile nature of the human psyche and a human's survival instinct, one can only agree with Grand and Alpert when they conclude that "the experience of being fatherless (usually motherless as well) and full of traumatic memories is

psychologically worse than being attached to an abusive parent" (333). For victims to overcome their "sense of inner blackness, of 'a black stain'" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 105) seems almost impossible. The challenge is to face the actual trauma, to dig deep into the maze of the unconscious and retrace the cruel reality of this abusive violent act. Jacobs argues that this is the only possible way to destroy the ideal picture of the father and the beginning of the reconstruction of the woman's identity. "Through the development of [new] attachments that affirm the female self she discovers the sense of value and personal worth that the trauma of incest has taken from her. To this process of reintegration and healing, survivors bring their creativity and belief in themselves" (Jacobs 165). It is a long process which in the end enables new rewarding relationships that give the emotional and social support which had once been denied.

2.3 Transference

The here-and-now is primarily important because it leads back to the past where it originates.

Rangell (qtd. in Thomä and Kächele 67)

Internalized experiences, expectations and schemata built during childhood, without being elicited and made aware of, will always be part of the human psyche and influence one's behaviour. Only if the real sources of interfering or inappropriate emotions are discovered is change or healing possible. Bowlby links attachment behaviour and the exclusion of painful events from the consciousness to the concept of transference as he argues that repressed emotions will continue to erupt to the surface in certain situations:

So long as current modes of perceiving and construing situations, and the feelings and actions that ensue therefrom, are determined by emotionally significant events and experiences that have become shut away from further conscious processing, the personality will be prone to cognition, affect, and behaviour maladapted to the current situation. [...] When there is anger, it will continue to be directed at inappropriate targets. Similarly anxiety will continue to be aroused by inappropriate situations and hostile behaviour be expected from inappropriate sources. (*Secure Base* 117-8)

Transference can be seen as a more or less severe intruder into relationships and everyday-life situations. Usually people are not aware of their unconscious responses, of the interference of memories or past events. As transference is an unconscious repetition of the past in the present, it may be found in daily interactions, and of

course, and this has filled the pages of many books, in a psychotherapeutical setting. Joseph Sandler et al. aptly sum up the phenomenon of transference by describing it as a "specific illusion which develops in regard to the other person, one which, unbeknown to the subject, represents in some of its features a repetition of a relationship towards an important figure in the person's past" (58). "Transference arises spontaneously in all human relationships," according to Freud, and "the less its presence is suspected, the more powerfully it operates" (*Fifth Lecture* 51). Nevertheless, the challenging part here is that this 'remake' is created on an unconscious level and blurs the perception of present reality. It is an obstacle that many people seek to overcome with the help of a therapist.

Transferences arise in close combination of inner schemata and an outer catalyst: sets of stored information and beliefs responsible for the concept of self, for future decisions and responses to human interactions. A tool to uncover these "personal constructs",¹⁷ to find the true trigger of certain emotions is to observe them in various transference situations. And within the safe environment of a therapy room, it is possible to "rework[...] childhood-derived distortions that continue to plague the patient's real or fantasied [sic] relationships" (Singer 191). The arising reactions and feelings arising are frequently intense and the "internal events [connected to the transference] of the patient often disturbing and threatening" (Kaslow and Magnavita 461). Experience has shown that people are quite resistant to change, and to overcome a childhood construction is not the easiest undertaking. It is primarily difficult because, according to Roy Schafer, past and present foundations of relationships and self "follow the same set of rules[:] [p]ast and present are coordinated to show continuity rather than arranged in a definite causal sequence" (qtd. in Singer 192). One of the keys to the unconscious is transference, and the way to healing or resolving unpleasant 'souvenirs' from the past is to bring these transferences "at the center of conscious attention" (Singer 210), becoming aware of "expectancies, memories, or fantasies held over from one's past" (Singer 193).

¹⁷ See George A. Kelly for the concept of "personal constructs" in relation to personality variation.

2.4 Conclusion

The past frequently interferes with life, with present relationships and situations, often without the conscious awareness of the individual. Childhood experiences form our concept of self and others, they appear to be responsible for the life we are leading and for who we are. It is not easy to overcome old patterns and often we fail. But it is possible and worth it, because after all,

[i]ntimate attachments to other human beings are the hub around which a person's life revolves, not only when [s/]he is an infant or a toddler or a schoolchild but throughout [...] adolescence and [...] years of maturity as well, and on into old age. From these intimate attachments a person draws [...] strength and enjoyment of life and, through what [s/]he contributes, [s/]he gives strength and enjoyment to others. (Bowlby, *Loss* 442)

In parts Carr's plays offer a dramatic representation of worst-case-scenarios of people leading a failed existence, characters who fight in the present for their future and are defeated by their past. They are characters without a secure base but with a heavy bag full of memories and past experiences that anticipate complicated human contacts and a tragic denouement.

3 Expect the Expected: An Analysis of Characters and Images Against the Concepts of Self-Determination and Destiny

[E]ach individual piece of information becomes much more important [in drama]. Even the most incidental piece of information can [...] be of fundamental significance in the analysis of a dramatic figure.

Pfister (161)

Skillfully developed characters, their specific flaws and traits, whether explicitly or implicitly presented, attract the reader's attention and lure us into a life constructed in writing (or on stage). The reaction to fictional characters is composed of particular processes that are equally stimulated when we encounter real people unknown to us: we observe; we develop empathy, sympathy or even antipathy; we expect and predict, evaluate and in the end expectations will be fulfilled or denied. Although characters are constructed by an author's imagination and inspiration, these fabricated creatures are in fact not mere "paper people" rather they become characters of "flesh and blood" in the eyes of the reader/spectator¹⁸.

Bits and pieces of information about a character in a play are greedily gathered "to solve the riddle of their behaviour, to find the fatal flaw of character or crucial choice of action that brings about their fate, if unhappy" (Wallis and Sheperd 12). Reading plays by Marina Carr one might wonder what causes The Mai's self-abandonment. Why does she eventually drown herself in a lake of tears? Is it her only possible escape from a vicious circle of a cross-generational female calamity she is seemingly trapped in? Why does Portia lose sight of the good in life, why is she attracted by the darkness of death? Could Portia have been saved? Morgan argues that the bait which lures, and in the end catches, the attention of the reader is above all the display of various human experiences and "a variety of different emotions that [find] echoes in most people's consciousness" (116). The reader's past virtually participates in forming the present perception of a literary character, readers are not merely "passive recipients of information, readers venture beyond the text to explain and predict aspects of the unfolding story" (Gerrig and Allbritton 380)¹⁹.

¹⁸ Cf. Bal, who defines characters as paper people without flesh and blood (115).

¹⁹ Gerrig and Allbritton offer a detailed elaboration on the active participation of readers in the construction of literary characters.

Emotional involvement makes it difficult to resist the temptation of trying to understand a fictional character's actions and mind, to treat a character like a living being. Character analysis often tends towards psychoanalytic interpretation and is therefore at the same time "also most subject to projection and fallacies" (Bal 115). Many critics therefore warn against, and criticize, psychoanalytic description of literary characters, simply because there is a great danger to hypothesize and diagnose instead of "understanding how texts affectively address the reader on a level that comes close to unconscious preoccupations" (Bal 121). Given that, on the other hand, fictional characters are based on the experiences of real-life people with real psychological issues, they do "possess characteristics which make psychological and ideological description possible" (Bal 115) as long as the hard facts, for instance context and constellations in which they appear, are not disregarded.²⁰ The characters' age and gender, their function within the plot, their dominance within the story, their relation to other characters, the way they interact or react in certain situations, the environment to which they are bound, hidden or obvious intertextual influences or references, these are all established facts encased in actions, behaviour and words which help draw the profile of a character. This means that "[t]he grounding of characterization in psychological detail need not detract from the structural and ideological functions of character" (Aston 35).

There are a number of building blocks or different ways in which a playwright can give form to his/her puppets, breathe life into them, so that the characters fulfil their function within the story and stir the reader's emotions. In drama, of course, media-related limits narrow the set of information that frame the fictional figure. Figural speech, for one, creates a perfect playground for the author to embed explicit or implicit information about the characters. Particularly with regard to Carr's plays, one can only agree with Morgan, who states that "[w]hen the dramatist chooses to give [...] details [about a character's biography], they are certainly relevant" (115). Readers start forming an opinion about a character from the very first appearance, and frequently the first actual detail presented is the character's name. The name given to a fictional character can already reveal certain character traits and flaws, might limit its possible actions and sometimes even foreshadow its fate. A deliberate and meaningful use of names is a characterization technique that Carr has retained until today; from symbolic names in *Low in the Dark* (Binder and Bender), to Portia in *Portia Coughlan*,

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion about real person versus fictional character, see Bal (114-9) and Pfister (160-1).

an intertextual reference to Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (Carr, *Afterword* 311), to Grandma Fraochlán in *The Mai*, named after the island she was born on, as symbol of heredity as destiny (and, of course, of the influence of the past in the present), the names given bear multiple significances.

A further technique used by Carr and many other playwrights is to establish a relation between character, environment and setting: be it Fraochlán, the island The Mai's grandma was born on; Owl Lake, the legendary lake of tears where The Mai drowns herself; or Belmont River, in which Portia reunites with her dead twin brother. These are all "highly-charged settings" (Ní Dhuibhne 66), rural Irish places "which combine great beauty with inescapable threat" (Ní Dhuibhne 65). A character is not merely placed within a meaningful surrounding, quite often there exists a symbiotic connection or tie between them. In many cases the setting reflects or seems synonymous with certain character traits: for instance, being confined to one's home, might act as an indicator for a character's narrow mindset or its limited possibilities.

A character composition or, to be more precise, a detailed elaboration of a character through social environment and setting, for instance, frequently highlights hereditary personal struggles in Carr's work. Certain characteristics passed on from one generation to another might confine the character's room for manoeuvre, if development seems impossible, and reminds one once more of a real person: "[s]ocial conditions can influence or determine the life of a real person, in drama, the fictional context serves the function of actually defining the fictional figure" (Pfister 161). Psychological aspects are simply used for characterization, often to touch the reader emotionally. In naturalist drama priority is given to presenting the struggle of the individual with its environment and "to bring out the features that are unique and contingent" (Pfister 180) to the character.

Carr's plays move between naturalistic, realistic and symbolic elements. Cleary argues that in Irish literature "the old naturalism is denaturalized by pushing its content and conventions to violent [...] extremes", he calls it "neo-naturalism" or "naturalism on steroids" (100) and Carr's work, especially the stories set in rural Ireland, with "extravagantly crazy, repressed and demented characters" (99), draws on naturalist drama. Considering drama in general one can argue that "the more ways in which any given character contributes to the richness of interest in the play as a whole, the more complex and arresting as a human image that character is likely to be" (Morgan 115).

Carr's plays, for instance, rely heavily on her characters and their inner struggles. Her characters are presented in the harshness of life with a frequently pessimistic view both of their inner psychology and their socially interacting outer self and thus provide a fertile ground for a certainly legitimate psychoanalytical perspective on them. What Bowlby says with regard to attachment behaviour and violence within families seems also applicable to Carr's characters: "Whilst horror at their acts is inevitable, greater understanding of how they have come to behave in these violent ways evoke compassion rather than blame" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 79).

In an interview, Carr says about her writing, "It's such a sly craft. In a sense, all you need is one image, or a couple of dislocated images, and you try and bind them together" (*Rage and Reason* 147). The simplicity suggested by herself is quite an understatement considering the complexity of some of her characters and stories. When readers engage more closely with her plays they will discover numerous and highly elaborate details and particular elements that allow an assertion like Eilis Ní Dhuibhne's when she argues that Carr is "a dramatist as well as a storyteller, and as such, of course, reveals dramatic tensions between the characters. She relies heavily, however, on the power of the narrated rather than the acted story" (67). The characters divulge far more about themselves through their words than their actions. By means of carefully constructed characters, Carr raises the issue of how far the past may interfere with the present and the future and links this to various psychological aspects, especially unconscious behaviour patterns and their consequences. Carr's interest in her own heritage, as a mother and as a writer, her love of Greek tragedies and fascination with the concept of destiny and fate adds extra zest to many of her stories. "The strength of her work is often attributed to its engagement with eternal and essential dilemmas" (Wallace, *Reproductions* 43), to which readers are able to relate. The attention of this discussion is directed to past and present events influencing the *dramatis personae* and serving the purpose of plot development, as well as to diverse authorial techniques to forge the stories of Hester and Josie, Dinah and Ded, Frances and Fermoy, and many other broken characters.

4 Clinging to the Past: *By the Bog of Cats...*

You lead so many lives. So many. [...] When you think of just an hour of space and what you come up with, all the range of emotions from dark to light, from the hilarious to the really tragic. There are a thousand lives in each of us. There's this huge history that you're only peripherally aware of.

Carr (*Rage and Reason* 148)

With *By the Bog of Cats...*, a play which premièred in 1998, Carr created a drama full of intense and complex emotions, humorous and tragic elements, consciously and unconsciously induced disturbances from the characters' past affecting them as well as readers or theatre audiences. There are many sides to the story of Hester Swane: pitch-black and spotless white moments, innocent and guilty characters, love and violence embedded in the tale of a motherless daughter which is partly inspired by the Greek tragedy *Medea*. Sihra makes an important point by noting that *By the Bog of Cats...* "offer[s] concentrated drama, after which the remaining characters must resolve to endure their previous life existences but with a new awareness. They must face the consequences that lie in the wake of the whirlwind" (*Cautionary Tale* 266). At the heart of the play, the 'whirlwind' is a wronged woman fighting a fierce battle. Hester Swane, abandoned by her mother as a child, betrayed and spurned as a woman, is forced to leave her home by the bog, everything she ever loved and where she feels secure. A tragic ending is predetermined and clearly foreshadowed. Hester is aware of her situation, she embraces her fate but does not surrender easily ("I have regained my pride and it tells me I'm stayin'" (*BoC* 293).²¹ Still, it seems as if she made the wrong decision due to her being angry with the past and for fear of the future. Marina Carr problematizes psychological aspects of internal barriers (often originating in the past) and present conflicts, which, woven together with visual images, meaningful settings and references to the Greek idea of destiny and Irish mythology, leaves the reader with an intense image of the characters' dealings with their own fate or potential self-determination.

²¹ The following abbreviations are repeatedly used throughout the thesis: *BoC* for *By the Bog of Cats...*; *RH* for *On Raftery's Hill*; *A* for *Ariel*; *WS* for *Woman and Scarecrow* and *CD* for *The Cordelia Dream*.

4.1 Motherless Daughters

After *The Mai* and *Portia*, Carr introduces another heroine/anti-heroine. Like her predecessors, Hester Swane is helplessly detained by a 'ghost' from the past. Feeling she is only able to rely on herself, she decides to end her hapless life by suicide. Carr continues to scrutinize destiny and personal free choice. She produces interesting characters at different stages of their life journeys, most of them held back by their own past: Hester, a wronged child; Carthage, about to make an advantageous marriage and influenced by his feelings of guilt; Mrs Kilbride, not able to let go of her son; Caroline, still depending on her cruel money-hungry father. The information given about childhood influences and attachment experiences sheds light on various behavioural patterns of the characters in the present, especially of the motherless daughters within the play. Thus, it seems helpful to clarify to what extent these characters bear a resemblance in dealing with the past and in forging their own future. In how far do they display free will untinged by unconsciously driven motives? In what way is the dénouement of the play caused by tragic destiny or the inability to act due to influences from the past? Carr's piece challenges readers and audiences to ask the same questions related to their own decisions and lives. This analysis will show "parents [who] sometimes engage in horrific behaviour, [identify] casualties, old as well as young, psychological as well as physical" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 79).²²

4.1.1 Hester, the Abandoned Child

[...] too soon,
too sudden, the wrenching apart, that woman's heartbeat
heard ever after from a distance,
the loss of that ground-note echoing
whenever we are happy, or in despair.
Rich (*Transcendental Etude* 61-65)

Hester Swane's mother, Big Josie, left when she was seven years old. During adolescence, as a young woman and later as a mother, Hester would have needed a secure base for love and support in difficult times. In distress Hester, who is also fatherless and a social outcast, could only turn to substitute caregivers like kind neighbour Monica Murray, who, once a mother herself, "is preoccupied with her own

²² See Bowlby's account of attachment behaviour and violence within families (*Secure Base* 77-98).

trauma of loss due to her son's tragic death" (Martinovich 121). The loss of her primary attachment figure and the lack of another stable, emotionally intimate relationship cause Hester to set herself apart from others, to be independent of the emotional affection of others. Carr's use of the black swan highlights this aspect of disparity. She already hints at it in Josie Swane's song in which the black swan sleeps "[h]idden in a nest of leaves / So none can disturb her" (*BoC* 263). Swans are shunned as they are said to be dangerous, just like Hester. She uses violent threats to frighten people and to keep them at bay. In some ways, Hester willingly occupies the role of an outsider, her tinker blood "giv[ing] [her] an edge over all [people] around here" (*BoC* 289). It enables her to justify her distance to the others and her distrust in everyone. Anxiously she longs for autarchy to escape the threatening danger of another abandonment. The only two people she allows close are her lover Carthage and her daughter little Josie. Hester has "no close relationship with another family member towards whom she can transfer some of the ties which bound her to her [mother]" (Bowlby, *Bonds* 119), therefore she directs her attachment towards her partner and their offspring.

Big Josie Swane, the absent and, some argue, main character of the play,²³ is powerfully present in Hester's heart and mind, as if her mother's heartbeat still echoed within Hester's body. While Hester, the seemingly lost daughter, still yearns for her mother and carries an ideal picture of her in her mind, the other characters' memories threaten to damage this image. The crude descriptions of Big Josie are clearly contradicting with Hester's fantasy mother. Big Josie, in fact, never provided a secure base to trust in for her child. "Throughout the play, Hester's ideal Josie is continually dismantled and destroyed by the fragmentary stories told by other characters" (Wallace, *Reproductions* 62). The play conveys the idea that Hester did not have a happy childhood, suggested especially by the fact that she can remember nothing about it, "[o]nly small things" (*BoC* 275). The inability to recall childhood memories of love and care leads to the conclusion that there never have been any.²⁴ As Hester runs the risk of losing not only Carthage to a younger woman but also her own daughter, she increasingly longs for love and tries to draw a more concrete picture of her mother ("Every day I forget more and more till I'm startin' to think I made her up out of air."

²³ Sihra refers to Big Josie as "the protagonist of the play" (*Cautionary Tale* 258). Matt O'Brien identifies her as "the single most important character (207).

²⁴ Furthermore, Bowlby argues that "the less complete and accurate the picture available of what happened in the past [...] the more persistent are [...] misperceptions and misinterpretations" (*Bonds* 173).

(*BoC* 320)). Hester, however, does not want to hear the truth, she “wishes to tailor [...] unsatisfactory versions to her own needs” (Wallace, *Reproductions* 62). In Catwoman’s eyes, Josie Swane was “small and bitter and mean” (*BoC* 275), a woman who abandoned her baby the night it was born. Xavier Cassidy provokes Hester by telling her that Josie Swane would often disappear “for days with anywan who’d buy her a drink” and leave her “chained to the door of the caravan” (*BoC* 294-5). Monica Murray supports the view of Big Josie as an inaccessible mother, as “[s]he was a harsh auld yoke [that] came and went like the moon” (*BoC* 323). For Hester these accounts are “[l]ies! All lies!” (*BoC* 295). She keeps rejecting these images and frantically holds on to the gifted song stitcher whom she loves “[m]ore than anythin’ in this cold white world” (*BoC* 296).

Carr clearly created Big Josie not only as a frame and offstage ‘mainspring’ of the plot, this character also functions as a point of comparison and contrast to her daughter. Hester may be viewed as a good onstage example of the notion that “object-loss [is] a fundamental moment in the structuring of the human psyche” (Green 143), as her identity is closely connected to her lost mother’s. As the main protagonist Hester also embodies the idea of psychic heritage, “the gene-pool, [...] the blue-print, [and] the hard-wiring” passed on from one generation to another. Carr, nevertheless, believes “in the individual’s ability to put their own version on it – their own variation”, and criticizes not being “alive when you are living. Being alive and not being there. [...] It is like removing yourself from yourself” (*Conversation with Sihra* 60). Hester even expresses this thought herself: “for a long time now I been thinkin’ I’m already a ghost” (*BoC* 321). The dramatic conflict of the play revolves around this image of lost self, of missing a separate identity and hence “the chronic inability to imagine freedom” (Wallace, *Tragic Destiny* 435). Carr stages the importance of being aware of one’s formative past and argues for self-responsibility of one’s present by offering a play about the consequences of “little [...] assertive self-empowerment” (Wallace, *Tragic Destiny* 435). At first sight, Hester is a self-contained and strong character claiming to be “as settle as any of yees” (*BoC* 295); however, she is also an extremely weak character, who in the end “throw[s] in the towel by committing suicide” (Wallace, *Tragic Destiny* 435). For her the loss of love is equivalent to the loss of meaning. Clare Wallace argues therefore that “[h]er identity depends upon [the] relation to her absent mother” (*Tragic Destiny* 448). Referring to Green, Gregorio Kohon states that children, father- and motherless, develop an unconscious strategy to avoid objectlessness: “following the decathexis of the maternal object, the child unconsciously identifies with

the mother" (3). In numerous scenes, Carr allows a comparison of Big Josie and Hester, who frequently appears like a mirror image of her own mother: a restless and whiskey-drinking traveller, a shunned outsider feared by people, "[l]eft sore [with] a heart brimfull of rue" (*BoC* 262). It is only maternal care that distinguishes the two women. In the end, this inherent difference reaches its peak when Hester decides never to leave little Josie motherless, because she does not want her child to be "waitin' a lifetime for somewan to return, because they don't" (*BoC* 339).

Over the short passage of one day, Carthage and Caroline's wedding day, the reader (audience) is able to witness repressed feelings of anger, despair and pain erupt and finally resolve in a last violent act. Slowly the truth about Big Josie is revealed, and Hester is forced to stop the idealization of her mother, a survival strategy acquired a long time ago. She eventually loses her footing and herself. It almost appears to be a textbook example of a disordered variant of mourning.²⁵ Hester never completed the process of mourning, continuously awaiting the return of her lost mother:

Hester [...] I'm all the time wonderin' whatever happened to her.

Monica You're still waitin' on her, aren't ya?

Hester It's still like she only walked away yesterday. (*BoC* 324)

In this context, M. K. Martinovich accurately argues that Carr presents two Hesters: "Hester the little girl [...] waiting for her mother [and] Hester the woman [...] still waiting for her mother's love" (126). Her chronic longing for love haunts her and distinguishes her from others, and without defined self, this yearning becomes her destiny. Wallace relates Hester to The Mai and Portia by arguing further that "[t]he protagonists derive their sense of self in relation to what they imagine is their destiny" (*Tragic Destiny* 445). When Hester is re-experiencing the trauma of the past through "Carthage's betrayal and the eviction from her home", she is "draw[n][...] toward recognition of the futility of hoping to mend the separation from her mother" (Wallace, *Tragic Destiny* 448), something that Kristeva identifies as an "inaugural loss that laid the foundation of [her] being" (qtd. in Wallace, *Tragic Destiny* 448), her world collapses once more. The repeated loss of a loved person and the foreboding that all losses are irretrievable trigger overwhelming emotions in her. Hester claims that her "life doesn't hang together without him" (*BoC* 269). Even though Carthage is "a man

²⁵ Bowlby offers a detailed discussion about disordered variants of the mourning of adults, see *Loss* (137-71).

[...] faithless as an acorn on a high wind" (*BoC* 325) and already married to another woman, she still clings to him as if he was a crucial part of her self:

Hester [...] the Kilbrides who never owned anythin' till I came along, tinker and all. Tell me what to do, Carthage, and I'll do it, anythin' for you to come back.

Carthage Just stop, will ya –

Hester Anythin', Carthage, anythin', and I'll do it if it's in me power. (*BoC* 289)

Wallace points out that her "hunger for security and fear of being abandoned again are reflected in the jealous and possessive nature of her relationships with Carthage and her daughter" (*Tragic Destiny* 443).²⁶ The displaced anger and despair, which she expresses in response to the present loss, might be seen as a transference from the past, as a resurgence of repressed feelings towards her negligent mother. The close combination of the inner expectation to be abandoned and Carthage as outer catalyst, whose leaving represents a repetition of Hester's very painful experience during childhood, leads to a revival of strong feelings, which belong to the past rather than the present. Hester never voices anger at her mother (except at the end). She never resolves this trauma of loss, but she is rather "repeatedly seized [...] by an urge to call for, to search for and to recover the lost person and [...] acts in accordance with that urge" (Bowlby, *Loss* 27-8). This prevents her from moving on, figuratively as well as literally.

Catwoman is the first to advise Hester to let go, "[i]f ya lave this place you'll be alright" (*BoC* 273). If she stays by the bog, however, she will share the same fate as the black swan and die at the end of the day. It is a curse put on Hester, when she was only a baby; Big Josie Swane predicts that the child "will live as long as this black swan, not a day more, not a day less" (*BoC* 275). As the Ghost Fancier, who is "ghoulin' for a woman be the name of Hester Swane" (*BoC* 266), supports this prediction, Hester increasingly expects an inevitable tragedy to happen. Hester is aware of her strong connection to the bog and certain that her identity is inseparably bound up with her mother's. This self-knowledge in combination with an arising feeling of guilt slowly leads Hester to accept the prophecy. Carr includes the aspect of guilt to strengthen her main character's abandonment of hope and self-determination. Catwoman, once again, is the first to notice this sense of fear and guilt that Hester carries with her, "some fierce wrong [she has] done that's caught up with [her]" (*BoC* 274). It is 'a fierce

²⁶ Wallace further argues that Hester's "need for [Carthage] is only a substitute for her desperate hankering for her mother" (*Tragic Destiny* 447).

wrong' that clouds Hester's judgement, prevents her from "seein' things as they are" (*BoC* 274) and clearly causes immense self-reproaches. The feelings of guilt arise from the murder of Joseph Swane, her own brother. It is a secret still connecting Carthage and Hester and a reason for their separation ("however harshly ya judged me, I judged meself harsher" (*BoC* 334-5)). The crime itself, however, originates from grief and despair at her mother's leaving, she "killed her brother out of [...] obsession for her mother" (Jordan, *Unmasking* 248):

Hester How does anywan know why they done anythin'? Somethin' evil moved in on me blood – and the fishin' knife was there in the bottom of the boat – and Bergit's Lake was wide – and I looked across the lake to me father's house and it went through me like a spear that she had a whole other life there – How could she have and I a part of her? (*BoC* 333)

The evil in Hester is repressed anger at her mother overpowering her, which is misdirected at her brother, who received the love and security she so desperately longed for her whole life. In the end feelings of guilt resulting from this violent act additionally leads to self-destruction and self-punishment. Finally, however, Hester is able to voice her long-denied anger against her mother ("If she showed up now I'd spit in her face, I'd box the jaws off of her, I'd go after her with a knife" (*BoC* 318)). The moment Hester loses everything, even her ideal mother, she does "what the tinkers do, [...] burn everythin' after them" (*BoC* 322). Now she is prepared to meet what she assumes is her fate, ready to embrace the Ghost Fancier in a death dance. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy, a self-induced destiny.²⁷

Carr succeeds in evoking compassion and understanding for a wronged woman instead of blame for a violent maniac,²⁸ by taking us on a journey "into the depths of the past, towards a hidden knowledge, a world-other, where memory and imagination are necessary companions" (Cerquoni 70). Along the way "discomforting questions are posed", desires and psychological prisons uncovered, and "[t]he constancy of that which essentially informs who and what we are, memory, [...] dis-integrated" (Sihra, *Cautionary Tale* 267). McGuinness suggests that Carr's "characters die from fatal

²⁷ For this play the concept of self-fulfilling prophecy is not only interesting on an individual level but also on a sociological level. As Lee Jussim and Christopher Fleming point out "[s]elf-fulfilling prophecies may be particularly pernicious sources of stereotype maintenance" (161), which is applicable to an examination of the attitude of the settled community towards Hester, the traveller.

²⁸ Comparable to what Bowlby says, "[w]hilst horror at their acts is inevitable, greater understanding of how they have come to behave in these violent ways evoke compassion rather than blame" (*Secure Base* 79).

excess of self-knowledge. Their truth kills them" (ix-x). There is undoubtedly an awareness of self and of the relation between past, present and future, of unfulfilled yearning. However, what is fatal in the end is not unbearable self-knowledge but the lack of self-determination and reorganization. "With the dissolution of memory and truth must come a reappraisal of the ideologies that have informed our existence thus far" (Sihra, *Cautionary Tale* 267) or tragic destiny will be a consequence of self-abandonment.

4.1.2 The Story of Little Josie

Josie, Hester's seven-year-old daughter, adds another perspective on mother-daughter relationships to the play; in some ways it is similar to the one discussed earlier but it also differs decisively. Carr first presents Josie as a settled Kilbride, who is nevertheless in close touch with nature, akin to her mother and her grandmother Big Josie Swane. Josie opens Scene Two "barefoot, [in] pyjamas, kicking the snow [and] singing" (*BoC* 270) a song handed down from one generation to the next: "By the Bog of Cats...". Big Josie already expressed her desire and yearning with this song, Josie, the "little wagon of a girl child" (*BoC* 270), continues this 'tradition'. Carr's use of the song, on the one hand, builds a bridge between three generations of Swane women, then again, it also hints at the 'tinker heritage' passed on by Big Josie and foreshadows a shared destiny. Like her mother and her grandmother, Josie is portrayed as an "[i]llegitimate and unapologetic" individual (Sihra, *Cautionary Tale* 260), strong-willed but still attached to her mother.

Big Josie has not only handed down certain characteristics, little Josie even owes her name to Hester's yearning for her own mother. Right at the beginning of the play, when the Ghost Fancier comes for Hester, Carr suggests that she, unlike her negligent mother, is a loving caregiver to her child, aware of the responsibility as a mother ("I can't die - I have a daughter" (*BoC* 267)). While there are numerous scenes strengthening the picture of a caring and supportive mother,²⁹ we also get to know Hester as a highly possessive person under the pressure of threatening loss and as

²⁹ Hester is burying Black Wing "before Josie wakes and sees her" (*BoC* 269); Hester always lets her daughter win at card games (*BoC* 277); Scene Six, Hester and Josie mocking Mrs. Kilbride – shows a strong bond between them (*BoC* 285-7); A further good example is a particular conversation during which Hester suddenly becomes aware of her behaviour towards Josie and immediately switches to a softer tone to avoid being like her own mother (*BoC* 291-2).

preoccupied with waiting for the return of her lost mother ("Isn't she always on the bog?" (Josie, *BoC* 282)).³⁰ Monica Murray reminds Hester of her role as mother, asking her to "pull [her]self together for her [child], [and] stop this broodin'" (*BoC* 268). What Sihra calls "the symbiotic dynamic of loss and desire" (*Cautionary Tale* 258) is continued here, as the unrealizable longing for Big Josie results in intense possessive behaviour towards Carthage and her own little girl. She even tries to manipulate Josie by telling her that she will die if she leaves Hester. "Hester has failed to become a fully subjectified individual as she has never gained a sufficient substitute for the loss of her mother" (Sihra, *Cautionary Tale* 257), and therefore she clings to the only people who ever brought love to her life.

Unlike Hester, little Josie does have a caring and close relationship with her father. Carthage is not only patient and compassionate with his daughter, "[h]e cherishes Josie" (Merriman 156). One of the most harmonious scenes of the play is when Josie, wanting to attend her father's wedding, asks him for help:

Josie Will you ax her for me?
Carthage We'll see, Josie, we'll see.
Josie I'll wear me Communion dress. Remember me Communion, Daddy?
Carthage I do.
Josie Wasn't it just a brilliant day?
Carthage It was, sweetheart, it was. Come on, we go check the calves.
And exit the pair. (BoC 282)

Carthage may not be the most loyal and faithful lover, but Carr certainly depicts him as a reliable parent, in contrast to Xavier Cassidy and, at times, even contrary to Hester. In order to secure Josie's childhood and well-being, Carthage is not only prepared to care for her financially,³¹ he also sets a high value on the strong mother-daughter bond. Despite the conflict between Hester and himself, he does not allow anyone to "poison[... Josie] with [...] bile and rage" (*BoC* 281). Hester, on the other hand, tries to win Josie over to her side completely, at first without success ("I'm not listenin' to ya givin' out about him" (Josie, *BoC* 326)), so at the beginning, Josie is frequently torn between her parents.

Carr addresses Josie's inner conflict and her origin, "both identities and lineages, maternal and paternal, as both a Kilbride and a Swane" (Wallace, *Reproductions* 61),

³⁰ Similar to her own mother, Hester is "a great wan for the pausing" (*BoC* 275).

³¹ "Look Hetty, I want Josie to do well in the world, she'll get her share of everythin' I own and will own. I want her to have a chance in life [...]" (Carthage, *BoC* 290).

by letting her have two different surnames: for Hester she is always a Swane although Josie calls herself a Kilbride.³² Her sense of self is further challenged when her grandmother refuses Josie her own surname: "You're Hester Swane's little bastard. You're not a Kilbride and never will be" (*BoC* 279). Due to the upcoming wedding and Hester's increasing despair, the situation worsens, Josie's secure base is turned inside out (like her jumper). She wants to enjoy herself, she wants to be an explorer, but feels impelled to decide in favour of one of her parents. On various occasions, we witness that Josie is probably aware of her mother's feelings, even trying to spare her any further emotional distress.³³ In the end, young Josie "want[s] to go with [her] Mam" (*BoC* 316), follow her wherever she goes because she does not want to "be watchin' for [her] all the time 'long the Bog of Cats. [She]'d be hopin' and waitin' and prayin' for [her] return" (*BoC* 338).

This desperate pleading is a key moment within the play, it is an utterance connecting Hester's and Josie's fate. While Act One concludes with Hester's painful memory of her mother's leaving and her begging to join her, Carr uses this image again to end the play, thus history seemingly repeating itself functions as an additional framework for the storyline. The mirrored scene not only once more connects all three generations of Swane women, it also seems to speak to the human struggle to liberate ourselves from the past. Hester is stuck in the struggle with her past and instead of a favourable coming to terms with it, her way of freeing herself from it is rather drastic. The palimpsest of the tragic loss of her mother eventually leads to an unimaginable act of violence when Hester, in an "act of love",³⁴ kills her own daughter and herself. It is the result of a long-lived yearning, a desire for reunion finally fulfilled when both, Hester and her daughter Josie, softly call for their "Mam – Mam –" (*BoC* 339/341).

4.1.3 Caroline, the Bride-to-Be

Carr spares no feelings in her evocation of the freedom which is sometimes taken away in return for the joy of being a princess for a day.

White

³² "I'm not a Swane. I'm a Kilbride" (Josie, *BoC* 292).

³³ Josie compliments her mother on her wedding dress (*BoC* 316); Josie comforts her mother after an emotionally charged discussion ("I know ya didn't mean it") and brings her mother "a big lump of weddin' cake" to make her feel better (*BoC* 327).

³⁴ See Bourke (141) and Fouéré (166). Jordan calls the murder "a curiously protective device" (*Unmasking* 249).

It is Caroline's big day, her wedding day – "[I]t's meant to be happy. It's meant to be the best day of [her] life" (*BoC* 284). Caroline, who is going to be Carthage's wife, however, does not turn out to be the princess of the day but rather somewhat the unlucky one of the story, through no fault of her own. At first sight, the fragile and mild daughter of the invidious and pecunious farmer Xavier Cassidy is merely a minor character, lacking complexity and substance. Caroline lost her mother as well, yet her painful experience is only hinted at throughout the play. Carr's use of a story within a story, however, once again, reveals more about the character and its function. Trying to secure harmony and peace, Caroline stands in contrast to Hester and her own father.

The father-daughter relationship depicted proves to be far from healthy. Although Caroline turns to her father in distress, Xavier Cassidy is not a loving father. Control and money are of importance to him and not "the whiny little rip" (*BoC* 330), which he simply cares for because it is the only affectional bond left for him.³⁵ The motherless child appears to have taken over her mother's role and now serves her father with "care and gentleness" (*BoC* 309). On closer inspection, Caroline is not Daddy's little girl but "Daddy's little ice-pop" (*BoC* 283). Hester, who used to mind Caroline as a child when Xavier "'d be off at the races or the mart or the pub" (*BoC* 284), hints at their abusive and dysfunctional relationship.³⁶ Her anger expressed towards her opponent, of course, allows for reasonable doubts on the character's reliability concerning her utterances that suggest an incestuous father-daughter bond. The doubts, however, are dispelled when Caroline and Hester meet for the last time. Finally the "little china bit of a girl" admits to herself that "[t]here's somethin' wrong" with her and that Hester is right that something/someone indeed has "broke[n her] a long while back" (*BoC* 337).

Caroline's overt traits are clearly contrary to Hester's: she is a classy, meek and young farmer's daughter; whereas Hester is depicted as a crude, loud and middle-aged tinker. Only slowly, inch by inch, does it become obvious that these characters have one thing in common: a craving for a close bond with Carthage. Both women seem to have an unstable identity, they seem to conceal their grief over maternal loss and do not find a remedy for it. Like for various other characters, Caroline's wedding day inspires reminiscing. It is a thought-provoking event, especially for the bride it is a moment to

³⁵ "[S]he's all I've got" (*BoC* 330).

³⁶ Hester to Xavier "G'wan home and do whatever it is ya do with your daughter [...]" (*BoC* 293).

long for her mother ("This is the tablecloth me mother had for her weddin' and it's the same silver too. I've really like for her to have been here today – Aye, I would" (*BoC* 301)).³⁷ The experience of separation and paternal abuse in some way leaves Caroline, like Hester, mother- and fatherless. Seen in this light, one comes to the conclusion that their low self-esteem and self-reliance, the lack of a secure and trustworthy haven, leads them to create a new base, since "[a]nyone who has no such base is rootless and intensely lonely" (Bowlby, *Bonds* 157). Carr strengthens this thought with the last conversation between Caroline and Hester. They seem closely connected, most notably when Hester talks about her own yearning for her mother:

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

Carthage is to both women a substitute attachment figure and the role as wife serves them as identity. Therefore, one can argue that Caroline's jealousy and distrust in Carthage stems from the threatening non-fulfillment in the newly formed relationship.³⁸ Some critics see Caroline only in connection to Hester, as a flat character, as a rival not to be reckoned with, as yet a further object of comparison adding richness to the female protagonist. This character, however, plays a distinctive part not to be underestimated in the whole picture as she tells her own story of lack of self-awareness and self-determination which originates in the past.

4.2 The Story of the Groom's Mother

Strange what these weddin's drag up.
(*BoC* 305)

Carr remains true to her interest in the characters' black spots and unconscious drives also in the case of another key figure of the play: Mrs Kilbride, the mother-in-law. According to Sihra, Carr uses this character to ask questions regarding "personal and political identity"; she sees Mrs Kilbride as quite "[d]omineering and manipulative [...] in her will to overpower and control those around her" (*BoC* 262). This character

³⁷ See also the scene when Caroline remembers her mother describing her daughter's future wedding day (*BoC* 336).

³⁸ Caroline accuses Carthage of being still bound to Hester: "You're far more attached to her than ya'd led me to believe" (*BoC* 302).

indeed plays an important part in denigrating Hester as a social outcast. Rhona Trench points out that Mrs Kilbride “demonstrates on a number of occasions the stereotypical intolerance she has of [travellers]” (*Bloody* 145), although her grandfather was a “wanderin’ tinsmith” (*BoC* 314) as well. The denial of her own heritage and her animosity against the travelling community seem to be an expression of a mother’s wish for a better life for her son, better than her own. Elsie Kilbride is a character not attracting much attention, although she is far more than a stereotypical ‘dragon-in-law’. Apart from Hester, a caring and loving mother, and Monica Murray, the “ineffectual yet well-meaning neighbor”, Mrs Kilbride is another “representation of ‘mother’” (Martinovich 120) displaying a motherly love not free of interpersonal tensions. Similar to Hester and Caroline, she struggles to let go and to move on. As we saw earlier that the play features motherless daughters, still yearning for their primary caregivers and being almost pathologically attached to substitute attachment figures. This also applies to Mrs Kilbride for whom her son is apparently functioning as an attachment figure.³⁹

Her offspring is the focal point of desire and identity. She is overprotective and tends towards obsessive behaviour, jealously guarding her son. Carr reveals the details about this maternal figure in bits and pieces, mainly we learn that her love is only devoted to Carthage, there even seems to be no affection left for her own granddaughter. Young Josie is just an incarnation of Hester to Mrs Kilbride: Hester, as the tinker who got “her claws in” (*BoC* 279) her son, and Josie, her “little bastard” (*BoC* 278) who only complicates her dear son’s life. Free of Hester, Mrs Kilbride hopes to get Carthage back, by her side to “where he rightfully belongs” (*BoC* 279). Her possessiveness resembles Hester’s. She clings to her son as if losing him is equivalent to jeopardizing the only identity she has, that of a righteous and self-sacrificing mother. In her memory, her own childhood was not pleasant at all, already looking after others at the age of seven and later on,⁴⁰ as a woman, she continues to play the part of a person fending for someone else (her son). Particularly with a dead husband, the role of a mother (of a caring person) is her source of self-worth. Lacking the ability for self-affirmation, Mrs Kilbride runs the risk of painfully feeling worthless after her son’s wedding:

³⁹ Bowlby argues that an attachment figure is “often a spouse, sometimes a parent, and more often than might be supposed a child” (*Bonds* 157).

⁴⁰ “When I was seven I was cookin’ dinners for a houseful of men, I was thinnin’ turnips twelve hour a day, I was birthin’ calves, sowin’ corn [...]” (*BoC* 278).

Mrs Kilbride I never left you on your own.

Carthage Ya should have.

Mrs Kilbride And ya never called in to see the new dress I got for today and Ya promised ya would.

Carthage glares at her.

[...] Just don't think now ya've got Caroline Cassidy ya can do away with me, the same as you're doin' away with Hester Swane. I'm your mother and I won't be goin' away. Ever. (*Exits*). (*BoC* 281-2)

Although the newly established legitimate connection to the wealthy, landowning Cassidys makes her a valuable social member of the village community, she still "refus[es] to part with her son" (Bourke 142). Her clinging culminates in the scene when mother and son pose for a photo like bride and groom: Carr suggests, especially with the following wedding speech, an "Oedipal bond" (Bourke 142). Mrs Kilbride not only turns up in a white dress, she moreover "speaks of her son's childhood in a way that is alarmingly Freudian in its emphasis" (Jordan, *Unmasking* 253).⁴¹ Doubtlessly, the bond between mother and son is very strong, which also shows in Carthage's patience with his mother and his behaviour towards her. Mrs Kilbride mentions that Carthage, even as child, "went to the greatest pains always to see that [her] spirits was [sic] good, that [her] heart was uplifted" (*BoC* 310). The roles seem to have been reversed in this relationship, the mother was at times also the care-receiving person, which tightens the mother's attachment to her son (her caregiver). The fear of losing her attachment figure and her social position as the mother of a prestigious and successful son due to Hester's interference provokes Mrs Kilbride into voicing a terrible threat ("We'll burn ya out if we have to – Won't we, Xavier" (*BoC* 315)). Her dramatic last sentence within the play shows her despair, her animosity towards Hester and foreshadows the fire that will gut Kilbride's property in the end. Driven by jealousy and fear, Mrs Kilbride's constant exclusion of Hester and expressed hatred certainly contribute to the protagonist's desperate deed.

4.3 Unconscious Bogland and White Dresses

I've always thought that landscape was another character in the work, and if you can get it right it'll resonate and enrich the overall piece.

Carr (Interview with Murphy 47)

⁴¹ "When his father died he used come into the bed beside me for fear I would be lonely. Often I woke from a deep slumber and his two arms would be around me, a small leg thrown over me in sleep" (*BoC* 310).

Particularly in Carr's play *By the Bog of Cats...* there is a great harmony between action, inner moods of the characters and place. Carr uses locations and objects to comment or reflect on certain characters' struggles with the past, with restraining dependencies. The bog, for one, reverberates in the title and plays a major role right from the beginning of the play. The song of the same title also conveys the idea that there is a sense of sorrow and yearning in the Bog of Cats, there "in the darkling dew" (*BoC* 262). It is a "bleak white landscape of ice and snow" which foreshadows the frozen atmosphere among the characters, as if "the age of ice ha[d] returned" (Hester, *BoC* 267) to the Irish Midlands and to the hearts of the people in the village. For the female protagonist it is a retreat, where "none can disturb her" (*BoC* 263), and a place of remembrance, where she unceasingly awaits the return of her mother.⁴² Hester restlessly wanders and scans the bog for signs of Big Josie Swane, it is, in her imagination, the place in which her mother is most likely to be found.

Pfister remarks that one of the functions of space is to show how a character is formed by external factors (265). In various analyses of the play the prominent presence of the bog received closer attention. For Sihra "[t]he repetition of the name "Bog of Cats" throughout the play highlights the link between place, identity and memory" (*Cautionary Tale* 263). It is agreed that the bog is a symbol for "the pull of the prehistoric past on the trapped present" (Sternlicht xvi). Wallace comments on the negative connotations of this location and relates them to Hester's psyche: she associates it with a "no-man's land, a claustrophobic zone of entrapment, a state of mind, and ultimately [...] a dystopia" (*Tragic Destiny* 438). The bog, however, cannot be seen as lifeless or merely direful; for Hester, it is a realm of idealized memories, it is a sanctuary to take comfort from. Cathy Leeney, for instance, describes it also as animate, as a "site of passion" (*Violence and Destruction* 517). It is, however, a passion not particularly wholesome for the difficult situation Hester has to face. The place is a biological metaphor to express the main protagonist's longing for her mother and therefore, as discussed earlier, is closely linked to her own identity: "[i]t is the object of desire that affects Hester's sense of personal identity" (Trench, *Bloody* 142), "[her] life is symbiotic with the bog" (Leeney, *Violence and Destruction* 516). Pursuing this thought, there is a "passionate emotional identification" (Fitzpatrick 332), and for

⁴² Bowlby argues in relation to loss that the person left behind is longing for a reunion and "[s]ometimes the person is conscious of this urge, though often [s/]he is not: sometimes a person willingly falls in with it, as when [s/]he visits the grave or visits other places closely linked with the lost figure [...]" (*Bonds* 103).

Hester leaving the bog is equal to losing her self, leaving her frightfully blank, which results in black despair.

Carr strikingly shifts between light images, like a white landscape, and dark ones.⁴³ The snowy bog, as a case in point, mirrors Hester's void, the hole which had been torn into the fabric of her self through Big Josie's early parting. Green argues that the destructiveness accompanying anxiety "bears the colours of mourning: black or white": white, also a synonym for blank, represents "states of emptiness" (146). He connects this sense of blankness to loss and repression and the resulting, unconsciously created 'psychical holes' (146). The cold white outside, seen in this light, captures Hester's inside world. For Carr, feelings which are kept locked inside consequently constitute a darkness:

We do not pay attention to every emotion, like we should. That pursuit of darkness is linked into not paying attention, and to not paying attention to the pursuit of light. Because once you realize that you are in the darkness, you are kind of scrambling to get out of it. And sometimes you relish the darkness. (*Conversation with Sihra* 58)

Emotions which are blacked out often hinder a prosperous personal development, a "pursuit of light". Fear holds Hester back, she is not willing to face her blankness, to conquer it, and neither does she want to linger on in the darkness. She is an insecure and unstable individual unable to move on and leave the bog but inclined to let go of her painful longing: as a last resort, as a release, she chooses death. In this sense, Wallace is right in referring to the bog as a symbol for inescapable boundaries of the mind.

Hester's relation to this particular piece of nature and to the swan "auld Black Wing" (*BoC* 265), clearly also amplifies her status as a wild bird that never wants a cage,⁴⁴ as a member of the travelling community. She is portrayed as a traveller in contrast to the settled community, as "the kettle [black] callin' the pot white" (*BoC* 312) and as untamable as the black swan. Then again, "Hester wants security, a home, [...] and a place free of an oppressive dominant culture" (Trench, *Bloody* 24). When Hester appears in her white wedding dress, it seems as if "the Jezebel witch" (*BoC* 280) is in parts as innocent as the other women dressed in white (Caroline, young Josie and Mrs

⁴³ For Nowlan, for instance, the texture of *By the Bog of Cats* "is bleak and black".

⁴⁴ Cf. Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, Hilda: "A forest bird never wants a cage" (*BoC* 339).

Kilbride), all trying to be part of someone, to maintain a secure bond.⁴⁵ Hester defends her home and her right to stay ("This here is my house and my garden and my stretch of the bog [...]") (*BoC* 268)) and thus her unstable identity. Sihra argues that "[t]he conceptualising of space and property in *By the Bog of Cats...* is unstable and indicative of the nature of identity" (*Cautionary Tale* 261), or, as Carr simply puts it, her female protagonist is "[h]alf-settled" (qtd. in Sihra, *Cautionary Tale* 261).

Hester Swane is indeed not only half-settled (in between settled and travelling community),⁴⁶ in psychological terms she is not fully resting in herself either, not self-contained. The pristine nature of the snow-covered bogland symbolizes what lies covered in her mind, her unconscious, and like the caravan it also stands for her tinker heritage (Bourke 139); in other words it embodies the obstacles restraining her. For Carr, "nature that is invested with memory or nature of character, or associations, faith, is so important. It's another dimension" of the story (*Rage and Reason* 154), and in this case it provides a powerful representation of the main protagonist's struggle with her past. "But then plays have to be set somewhere" (Carr, *Interview with Murphy* 47).

4.4 The Ghosts from the Past as Sources of Inspiration

I had read in books that art is not easy
But no one warned that the mind repeats
In its ignorance the vision of others. I am still
The black swan of trespass on alien waters.
Malley (*Durer: Innsbruck, 1495-9-12*
qtd. in Heyward)

Carr uses characterization, choice of setting and various references to literature to express the tension between the idea of destiny and the notion of a present which is affected by the past. Her protagonist Hester is hunted by events and people from the past, while Carr uses the 'ghosts' from the past to add another level to her work. Not only does she weave autobiographical elements into the stories,⁴⁷ she frequently

⁴⁵ Trench argues that "[d]riven by the longing to belong, Carr's characters stray through territories where their longing is misplaced" (*Bloody* 14).

⁴⁶ See Trench for a more detailed discussion of Hester's position between settled and travelling communities (*Bloody* 135-59).

⁴⁷ In an interview Carr remembers, for instance, the swans on the lake when her mother died. In Irish mythology "the swan is the soul bird" (*Interview with Murphy* 50), this picture is nicely woven into the play through Hester's soul connection with the black swan.

resorts to great writers for inspiration and, one might say, guidance. Hence, she frequently repeats or uses "the vision of others" yet makes it particularly her own; the only wrong for Carr "would be to diminish or desecrate what you have stolen" (*Dealing with the Dead* 196). Carr believes that authors must be brave to 'meet' the dead writers from the past: "[i]t's about the courage to sit down and face the ghosts and have a conversation with them. It's about going over to the other side and coming back with something, new, hopefully; gold, possibly" (*Dealing with the Dead* 191). In *By the Bog of Cats...*, she echoes Greek themes and refers to Euripides' *Medea*.

Ancient myths often raise questions about genealogy and origin. By means of the Greek notion of fate, Carr is able to foreshadow a tragic dénouement of the story and, furthermore, to challenge the aspect of genealogy and self-reliance. In an interview, she declares her love for "the whole Greek idea of tragedy, that it's all uncontrollable and that there's a destiny. It's about the journey rather than the event itself" (*Rage and Reason* 151). In *By the Bog of Cats...*, she makes use of betrayal and violence, similar to the original Greek tragedy, and compares two wronged women, Medea and Hester, to contrast the concept of destiny with the idea of self-determination. Actress Olwen Fouéré "believe[s] that all those Greek mythic figures are representations of the primal energies within us" (163).⁴⁸ In Hester's case enormous energy is released by primal fear of abandonment and the loss of love, it is a conscious rage with unconscious reasons. According to Eamonn Jordan, rage is one of the aspects that are inherent in Irish versions of Greek classic drama, as "curses, revenge and the bond of blood [are] commonplace and resolution [is] problematic on many fronts" (*Introduction* xvii), just as in Carr's play.

The connection between Medea and Hester is visible on different levels. Similar to Hester, Medea is "an outsider, a sexual threat, a savage revenger. Her frustration, anger, and hatred lead her to madness as well as death" (Sternlicht xvi). Both women have to face betrayed love and the hopelessness of their situation. Medea is discarded by her lover Jason, who marries the daughter of Creon to strengthen his standing (comparable to Creon, Xavier Cassidy is also "proud, powerful, and controlling but unable to alter fate" (Sternlicht xvi)). Medea, deprived of love and deeply hurt, reacts with great anger, her revenge is brutal: she kills their two sons. Both women are "powerless to take control of [their] fate except through murderous violence" (Leeney,

⁴⁸ Fouéré played the leading part in the world premiere of *By the Bog of Cats...*

Women Playwrights 160), yet their respective motivations are different. Medea's filicide is an act of vengeance and a direct consequence of her lost love for Jason, which is stronger than her love for her own children. Hester's killing is also triggered by loss of love; but the killing of her own daughter, an act of love. Although Hester Swane is warned by an omen, the death of the black swan,⁴⁹ and by the prediction of Catwoman, tragedy inexorably takes its course. Catwoman, a Teiresias-like figure,⁵⁰ similar to the Greek version, is old and blind but superior to the others as she has "the gift of seein' things as they are, not as they should be, but exactly as they are" (*BoC* 274). The judgement of Medea and Hester is clouded by anger and despair, and their decisions in the end fatal: be it the destruction of others or self-abandonment.⁵¹

Carr repeatedly expressed her concern about the human capacity to face the past and our black spots. In this regard, she feels that there is also a similarity between Greek mythology and the human psyche:

The Greeks divided the world, and there were the new Gods and the old Gods. The Daimons were the old Gods, the pre-Gods, the Gods of darkness. And there was a belief that a certain portion of us would hold onto the old Gods. I think that makes so much sense. It is not just the Daimons holding on, it is in all of us, holding on to that darkness. And also that desire for the light, for advancement and improvement. That is in everyone also. Everyone wants the light, and yet there is this awful undertow that is going to hold us back, that holds us back everyday. (*Conversation with Sihra* 59)

Carr's statement is not only reflected in the characters' struggle to let go of their dark sides, their unconscious burdens, she also draws attention to the human desire for utter happiness, which is often frustrated due to unconscious drives and repressed issues.

Besides the Greek influence, *By the Bog of Cats...* shows references to Henrik Ibsen and Irish mythology: for one, by the use of the image of the Banshee, yet mainly through the presence of ghosts. In the last scene, the Banshee, a feminine herald foretelling death, can be observed in Hester. She is comparable to this mythical figure as she keens after killing Josie with a "wail, a terrible animal wail [...], barely

⁴⁹ Wallace notes that "Hester Swane's destiny [...] seems largely dictated by her name which yokes her life span with that of a black swan which also lives by the bog" (*Reproductions* 61). Martinovich even calls the black swan Hester's alter ego (122).

⁵⁰ Sternlicht points to the link between Teiresias and Catwoman (xvi).

⁵¹ See Jordan for a detailed discussion about the parallels between Euripides's *Medea* and *By the Bog of Cats...* (*Unmasking* 249-52).

recognizable as something human" (*BoC* 339).⁵² Carr's belief in such presences, angels and ghosts frequently finds its way into her work. In so doing she leaves the conventions of naturalistic drama and opens up the play for symbolism. In this context, the great influence of Ibsen on Carr's work is best shown by quoting a passage from *Ghosts*:

Mrs. Alving I am half inclined to think we are all ghosts, Mr. Manders. It is not only what we have inherited from our fathers and mothers that exists again in us, but all sorts of old dead ideas and all kinds of old dead beliefs and things of that kind. They are not actually alive in us; but there they are dormant, all the same, and we can never be rid of them. [...] There must be ghosts all over the world. They must be as countless as the grains of the sands, it seems to me. And we are so miserably afraid of the light, all of us. (99)

In this short passage, Mrs. Alving articulates exactly what Carr also conveys in the play: the notion of heritage, past ideas and memories that hinder development and make us half-alive, the notion of self-defeat, the fear of the light (of change) and the comfortable lingering in the dark. After Hester's conversation with her dead brother Joseph, she painfully realizes that she has never been really alive, that part of her left with her mother, that she too lingers on in the darkness: it is a moment best described in the words of Ibsen's character Irena, "When we dead wake. ... We see that we have never lived" (*When We Dead Wake* 278).

4.5 He that Conceals His Grief Finds No Remedy for It⁵³

The central energy of this play evolves from a skilful combination of characters and, ironically, their inability to act. *By the Bog of Cats...* is infused with the past and with a grieving, hurt woman at its centre. Carr never presents easy solutions to inner conflicts, no process of coming to terms with one's own past but characters full of "[y]earning for the impossible, intemperate anger, [...] horror at the prospect of loneliness, pitiful pleading for sympathy and support [...]" (Bowlby, *Bonds* 117). Her characters are not facing reality and trying to determine their own destiny. They are locked in a struggle with the past or are not even aware of their unconscious drives and their consequences. Carr blurs the clear-cut difference between victim and victimizer. Anger, jealousy and unhealthy attachment restrict the characters' chances

⁵² The Banshee is particularly known for its wail announcing death.

⁵³ Turkish proverb.

for development and happiness. A true and honest expression of what is concealed inside is missing; remedy from the outside impossible. Images and landscape heavy with meaning and the use of intertextuality underline Carr's search for an answer to the question of how much our parents and past form our present. Similar to Euripides, she demonstrates "psychological acuity [... and] appreciation of suffering and its effects on human beings" (McDonald, *Irish and Greek* 42).⁵⁴

Personal experience and social knowledge allow readers (and audiences) to relate to the main protagonist, allow them to anticipate what Hester's hopeless situation must mean for her. Robert L. King notes that "[a]ssuming a ready audience, Carr can shift from humor to shock, from laughter to bloody violence, and sometimes can raise the uneasy laugh that anticipates a deathly silence" (*Life in the Theater* 45). Extensive knowledge of literature can help the reader/spectator to understand Hester and enables to imagine a possible dénouement, to expect the expected. Hester's love for her daughter, her painful search for her lost love and mother and the merciless labelling as outsider create empathy for this character, moral tension and encourage to reflect on one's own life. The minor characters also claim the readers' empathy by their own stories and troubled feelings. The presentation of possible burdens from the past, the persistence of unconscious drives and a clear argument for self-determination make for the universality of this play, which is probably its formula for success.

⁵⁴ For McDonald Euripides' "psychological characterization is outstanding" (*Irish and Greek* 42).

5 Dysfunctional Family on Raftery's Hill

It is as depressingly black a tale as could be dreamt up for the stage, making even *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* seem like a light romantic comedy.

Adams

On Raftery's Hill, commissioned by the Druid Theatre Company and premièred at the Town Hall Theatre, Galway, in 2000, caused different reactions by public and press: while some applauded Marina Carr's "fine new play" (Ruane, *Raftery's* 76), others disliked its visceral force. In *By the Bog of Cats...* Carr already adds traces of abuse and incest to the story and presents filicide and suicide as dénouement; now the playwright moves farther into a very dark realm where self-determination makes way for complete self-abandonment; or as Sean Doran terms it, it is a "strange, half-demented world of White Trash; a resort of ignorance, squalor, bullying and [...] incest" (221). Again set in the rural Irish Midlands, *On Raftery's Hill* is a play which includes not merely hints at violence but rather a frank presentation of an abusive and dysfunctional family. It is a disturbingly bleak piece of writing. Lyn Gardner states that reading the play felt "as if a cold, clammy hand has taken hold of [her] heart", it is a story "as terrible as any Greek tragedy" (*Champion*). Medb Ruane's review for the *Irish Theatre Magazine* notes: "*On Raftery's Hill* shocks, appalls, and sensitises its audience to Ireland's formerly most secret crime" (*Raftery's* 76). Susannah Clapp argues that "preposterousness becomes predictable: given the troglodytic nature of the family" (*What Did You Do*), there is no space for change or hope. *On Raftery's Hill* attracts controversy not only due to the overt display of brutal child abuse, but also because Carr abstains from condemning the perpetrator. Instead, she presents for each character a kind of possible explanation for their behaviour and tries to answer questions arising out of the seemingly hopeless situation of the characters. What are the ties that bind this family together? Why is the grandmother the only family member who attempts to escape? Are the other characters simply accepting their destiny? The play, once more, does not deliver an easy solution or a way out for the characters. Carr paints a grim picture of a family whose members seem to stand on quicksand, where struggle is impossible and resignation a survival strategy.

5.1 The Silence of the Hares – Abused Children

The explicit reality of interfamilial sexual violation is stripped to the core in *On Raftery's Hill*.

Sihra (*New Stages* 105)

Carr ventures to touch on the quite sensitive subject of incest, but then again "anything that is taboo is fascinating" to her (*Rage and Reason* 152). Four generations of Rafterys live together on a hilltop isolated from the valley, in their own dismal world. *On Raftery's Hill* centres on Dinah, "a tragic elder-daughter-turned mother to her siblings" (Battersby, *Marina*), and her abusive father Red Raftery. She cares like a mother for Sorrel, her little sister, Ded, her crazed brother, and Shalome, her doting grandmother, and serves Red as a substitute wife. Verbal violation happens on a regular basis, but after Red rapes his youngest daughter, even more disturbing details about the Rafterys are revealed: Dinah is in fact her own sister's mother. Escape from this close-knit but almost unrealistically dysfunctional family is impossible and a positive denouement of the story scene by scene appears beyond all question. There is an intense attachment of the victims towards their offender-father which is exceedingly disturbing but not unrealistic.⁵⁵ From the perspective of attachment behaviour, it is especially interesting what kind of information about the characters and their past Carr unveils to explain the extreme numbness of the situation the characters find themselves in and which the audience might wish to see resolved. It is also intriguing how the author makes use of the animal kingdom to establish and emphasize Red Raftery as king of the castle,⁵⁶ impossible to dispossess. In the patriarchal household physical as well as verbal boundaries are disregarded; home, which is normally "the main source of support and socialization" (Cole and Putnam 174), is in this play the site of distress and violence. How this affects the children and why the abusive dynamic of the Raftery family seems unstoppable are questions several critics set out to answer.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Grand and Alpert try to explain the attachment of an incest victim to its perpetrator.

⁵⁶ Trench fittingly uses the expression "king of his castle" in her discussion (*Bloody* 169).

⁵⁷ Trench provides the most detailed discussion of this play in *Bloody Living*. Her work is therefore an important point of reference for this thesis.

5.1.1 Dinah: "What's wrong a'her apart from everythin?"⁵⁸

Dinah's role within the family is established right at the beginning of the play, she is introduced as caretaker, as the person who "put[s] the dinner on the table" (*RH* 8) and keeps the family together. The character's mother is absent, like Hester's; although the absence of Big Josie is a more prominent factor within the story of *By the Bog of Cats...*, Dinah's lack of maternal support is not to be dismissed within the discussion of the displayed interpersonal dynamics and problems displayed on Raftery's hill. There are various scenes in which Dinah acts as the mother figure of the household;⁵⁹ these moments are accompanied by statements which express frustration about her maternal role within the family ("Where's the time for me, hah?" (*RH* 12)). There is no space for her self to develop. Dinah has no choice when her own mother dies because, as she pinpoints, "who'd look after yeas all?" (*RH* 39). Trench argues that "parental roles are blurred or absent [...] within the circumstances of familial incest" (*Staging Morality* 73), yet Dinah clearly performs the role of "the typical traditional female [...] as outlined by the [Irish] Constitution" (*Bloody* 180).⁶⁰ Not only is this female character mothering her own siblings, she is also wife to her own father. Matt O'Brien states that the father-daughter relationship "resembles nothing so much as that of a constantly arguing married couple" (212). Director Garry Hynes agrees, saying that "Dinah and her father are locked in a terrible kind of marriage" (qtd. in Gardner, *Champion*).

The first quarrel, or rather clash, takes place after Dinah just 'fed' Ded, brought her demented grandmother back to bed, and when Red expects dinner for his hunting companion Isaac Dunn and himself. Certainly this sequence may remind the reader of a scene from a malfunctioning marriage, yet it rather highlights Red's general disrespect for women, and in particular for his own daughter.

Red (*knocks on her head*) What's in there? Wool? Friggin moths.

Dinah I forgoh, okay!

Red What's wrong a' yeas women?

Isaac Lave ud Red, sure I'm noh even hungry.

Red You want to disgrace me! Thah's what you want! Ya want word goin round thah Raftery kapes a sparse house, ya want me to have no company bar you.

⁵⁸ Ded does not understand Dinah's frustration and impatience (*RH* 9).

⁵⁹ The following scenes are good examples for Dinah's maternal care: Dinah asks Ded to clean himself before dinner (*RH* 9) or she tries to fit the hem of Sorrel's wedding dress (*RH* 38); Dinah also tends very patiently to her own grandmother (*RH* 11-4).

⁶⁰ Trench goes into detail comparing Dinah's female position within the Raftery household with the Irish Constitution (*Staging Morality* 79-81).

Dinah Ah, would ya shuhup you're givin me a migraine.

Red Donten you talk to me like thah ya lazy rip ya, wud your skinny arms and your lunatic drames a somewan takin ya off a this Hill. I wouldn't use ya for silage. (*RH* 16)

Frequent verbal assaults like this are already irritating, the incestuous nature of the relationship between Red Raftery and his daughter even more so. Dinah, who in Red's own words is not good enough to be fed to the animals, serves him as surrogate for his dead wife. For almost 28 years they have been doing "ud from time to time" (*RH* 57). The first allusion to their sexual relationship comes fairly early in the play: the otherwise absent-minded grandmother Shalome points out that Dinah manages to have "time a plenty for [her] sly pursuits" (*RH* 12). Dinah, however, never has the time, or rather the energy, to live her own life: she lost her childhood, her youth and now, nearly forty years old, she still tries to protect her sister/daughter from the incestuous monster in the house. When Red woos Dinah with the promise of a day in town to indulge herself, she rejects him, refusing to buy a new dress for Red to "ogle ud off", repelling the idea of being just an object for him (*RH* 27-9). For the reader (audience) a troubling and quite persistent question, which permeates the whole play, is why Dinah is not leaving.

For the outside world the abuse is kept in the dark; within the family unit it is an open secret, outspokenly acknowledged by no one. It is silence which is a great driving force within this family. Dinah's painful situation in the present particularly originates from her own mother's muteness, her negligence and unattainability. At the age of twelve, Red's wife sends her own daughter into the marital bed with her father, sexually abusing her while she claims to have headaches.⁶¹ Dinah remembers her as being never available as "[s]he was allas sick [...] lyin in the back parlour wud a dish cloth on her head" (*RH* 40) while she is offered to meet Red's sexual needs. On various occasions she voices her bitter anger towards her mother who failed to protect her. In a sense, Dinah can be identified as a motherless character, her primary caretaker is always emotionally absent due to her aloofness and silence about the ongoing abuse. The emotional absence of the mother, while she was still alive, is emphasized by the fact that nobody refers to her by using her first name; she is a mother, a "lady" with musical talent and a perfect host to her dancing parties (*RH* 11), a "lunatic wud an antique violin and an eternal case a' migraine" (*RH* 30) and a "[f]ierce selfish" woman

⁶¹ Mika Funahashi argues that the ongoing incest between father and daughter is already disturbing, yet "[t]he most horrendous disclosure is that her dead mother made Dinah go to her father's bed" (142).

(RH 40). Like Hester, yet in a different way, Dinah had to experience the painful loss of her secure base during childhood. However, unlike Hester's parents, Dinah's were still physically present when she was young, but they were no longer safe and trustworthy attachment figures due to their heartless actions. Ironically Dinah says that "[a]ny attention I goh was from Daddy"; even though the abuse constitutes a "disturbance in an existing primary attachment relationship" (Cole and Putnam 175), her only remaining attachment is with her father. Trench suggests that Dinah "has no one to look out for her, because her position as daughter and 'wife' is absorbed within the family as a unit" (*Bloody* 181). This is certainly true as the character points out herself that she never had a protector,⁶² her family practically devouring her, she lacks a strong sense of self due to physical and psychological violation. Dinah never formed any new emotionally significant relationships.⁶³ According to Pamela M. Cole and Frank W. Putnam an incest victim is disturbed in the "development of self and others" and in "the ability to have satisfying relationships in which one feels loved and protected. In fact, the typical child's social supports are, in incestuous families, the source of distress" (175). Given that Dinah devalues and distrusts a relationship outside the Raftery family, yet is like every human being in need of an attachment figure and additionally worried about Sorrel's well-being, it is not surprising that escape for her is impossible. So she lingers on Raftery's farm half-alive, held back by a devastating experience in the past and ongoing psychological paralysis in the present. The notion of 'removing yourself from yourself',⁶⁴ of not being completely present, particularly embodied by Hester in the earlier play, is continued in this story.

Dinah, compared to Carr's former female protagonists, stands out due to her resignation and stagnation, death is no resort to her. This female character is portrayed as a victim whose only coping strategy is denial and dissociation. The constant negative aura surrounding Dinah arises from frequent expressions of her anger and frustration over the unchangeable situation. She surrendered a long time ago. A part of her self already 'died' at the age of twelve, particularly because her mother colluded in the abuse. Dinah never lived the spring or summer of her life; trapped in autumn she asks, "Me now, what do I have to look forward to?" (RH 55), only winter. Similar to Xavier Cassidy, Red broke his daughter, but she lives in denial of

⁶² Dinah tries to explain herself to Sorrel "I never had anywan looking ouh for me the way I looked ouh for you" (RH 57).

⁶³ Once she was in love with Dara's brother Jimmy, but "brok ud off wud [him] fierce sudden and fierce hard" (RH 55).

⁶⁴ It is one of Carr's major concerns, which is continuously repeated in her plays.

that fact. Claudia W. Harris argues that "Carr's Dinah certainly models denial more than confrontation" (229). As mentioned earlier it is psychologically more harmful to be father- and motherless than having an abusive parent. The character's denial of problems are therefore also accompanied by idealization of memories, which protects not only herself but the whole family from acknowledging the incest and from disrupting the familiar, and therefore safe, base. On the one hand, Dinah drinks and develops a favourable picture of a good "Daddy", who took her out to the fields, "taught [her] to fish" and "all the name a the trees", in short a father who "knew how to build up a child's heart" (*RH* 40); then again she says, "I allas knew wan of us wouldn't make ud, Ded, allas knew thah. Lots thought ud'd be me" (*RH* 9), well aware of the damage that has been done to her.

Cole and Putnam argue "that all incest victims suffer in their self- and social functioning" (180). Dinah only functions through repression and silence and by fulfilling her role as daughter, mother and substitute wife. Within the play, the violation she had to experience during childhood, and still has to, serves, just as her name suggests,⁶⁵ as vindication for her behaviour in the present. A special scene in Act One, however, leaves the reader with a feeling of unease:

Red Stay a while.

Dinah Look I'm in no mood for ya tonigh.

Red G'wan then, ya contrary rip ya.

Dinah (*pauses on the stairs*) Don't touch Sorrel.

Red I won't ever ... I swear. (*RH* 28-9)

In an earlier scene, Dinah mentions having migraine (like her own mother), now she displays an unwillingness to satisfy Red's needs. The meaningful pause before Dinah expresses her fear allows the reader to speculate that she is well aware of what will happen, the rape of Sorrel. The question which remains unanswered throughout the play is whether Dinah really cannot protect her own daughter from the same fate.

⁶⁵ The name Dinah is derived from Hebrew, meaning 'vindicated'. An episode in the Hebrew Bible is commonly known as *The Rape of Dinah*.

5.1.2 Sorrel, the Blind 'Young Wan', and Ded, the Idiot

One of the most unnerving aspects of this poetic play is the denial of perversion.

Harris (223)

On Raftery's Hill begins and ends with the youngest daughter Sorrel and with Red's only son Ded. The two characters frame the story as they are also the only characters who change in the course of the play. Similar to earlier plays Carr stages once again "[t]he theme of betrayal of the younger generation by the older" (Leeney, *Violence and Destruction* 512). Acutely accentuated in this story is the devastating experience that "the expectation of paternal protection is most deeply betrayed" (Leeney, *Violence and Destruction* 512). This is true for Dinah, as well as Ded and Sorrel. While Sorrel is at first still an innocent character, Ded is already a broken individual, living in the shed with "cowdung all over his clothes" (*RH* 7). While Ded is a fearful and nervous character, deeply affected by the events of the past, his little sister lives in harmony with the other family members, at least, so it seems, at the beginning.

In the stage directions Ded is described as a musical "man in his mid-thirties, big shouldered, long haired, bearded, filthy" (*RH* 7) and obviously afraid of his father.⁶⁶ Trying to avoid Red he stays in the cowshed, only stopping by Raftery's kitchen for a quick smoke and dinner, always "with an eye on the door and an ear cocked like a frightened bird" (*RH* 8). Matt O'Brien calls this character an "idiot savant, a gifted musician" (211), while Harris defines him as "Red's crazed son" who is "haunted still by the blood flowing when Red forced him to deliver Dinah's child", Sorrel (222). While both are certainly right, and there are numerous scenes supporting these views,⁶⁷ this character is particularly interesting because he breaks the silence and confronts his sister Dinah as well as Red with his traumatic experience in the past. In contrast to Dinah, he is, and always has been, very attached to his mother, whose favourite he appears to have been. She is Ded's primary attachment figure, the person who, in his own words, saved him from his father ("She'd kape ya away from me, she promised me she would. I'd liefer she'd pulled me into Heaven after her" (*RH* 24)). His mother was able to protect him from Red, who in Ded's eyes is a person not to be trusted.⁶⁸ In

⁶⁶ Trench refers to Kristeva arguing that Ded is filthy as "a form of self-loathing, which paradoxically protects the self" (*Staging Morality* 74).

⁶⁷ See for instance the scene in which Ded is completely intimidated by his father (*RH* 22-5).

⁶⁸ Ded's distrust manifests itself in his fear of Red, highlighted in the following statement: "Just lay down the rules, don't kape changin them. Don't. I don't know whah to do to make ya happy" (*RH* 24).

this sense, Ded is mother- and fatherless as well. Trench goes further in pointing out that the character shows a "disgust at motherhood and fatherhood" (*Staging Morality* 74) due to incestuous behaviour in the family, ("Perverts the loh a' yees" (*RH* 48)). Since Ded is missing the safety that a dependable attachment relationship provides, he escapes from the house, traumatized by the past and unable to cope with the temperamental character of his father. Ded creates physical distance, also trying to establish psychological distance. He finds the past too unbearable to think about or remember. He fails to "free himself from the role he played in the experience of Sorrel's birth" (Trench, *Staging Morality* 73) and to escape Raftery's hill entirely. It seems impossible for Ded as the binding power of the past and the family's secret weighs too heavily on him. The extraordinary fact is, however, that Ded is able to identify the source of his anxiety and distress and to express his intense anger and feelings of guilt in the otherwise repressing environment of his family. In clear contrast to the speechlessness framing the play, he breaks the silence, which is more than the other characters are capable of.

Unlike Ded, Sorrel is still 'whole' in the first half of the play. About to get married to Dara Mood, she even has the opportunity to leave Raftery's farm. In contrast to the other characters of the story, she first appears well-balanced. Metaphorically speaking, this young woman is the only light still burning bright in the darkness on Raftery's hill; yet it is a candle to be blown out at the end of Act One. Her father and Dinah, as her mother/older sister, are still trustworthy attachment figures to her, so far she is spared sexual assault and therefore still defends her father rejecting every bad image of him ("Whah're ya tellin me all this for? I don't want to hear this kind a gore" (*RH* 32)). Just before Red confirms Dara's bad impression of him and rapes his youngest daughter Sorrel, she is still convinced to live in a secure environment, to have a secure base to trust ("I'm safe here, Daddy's allas been good to me. Ya shouldn't be sayin things like thah. Ud's noh righ" (*RH* 33)). Overpowering Sorrel and "cutting the clothes off her" (*RH* 35) in a cruel act of violence, Red shows his true nature. Her cry for help remains unanswered, there is no one to protect her. And so the "wan perfect thing in this house" (*RH* 45) is broken.

Carr stresses Sorrel's transformation by using Ded and his sister again to open Act Two, set three weeks later. Sorrel, a character once lively, is now apathetic and disillusioned, betrayed by her father and failed by her mother (just like Dinah), deprived of a sense of security and stability. Like Hester and Dinah, Sorrel is damaged

by her attachment figure. Matt O'Brien accurately observes that "[a]ll of the illusions of 'normalcy' in this family disappear from her, with a sordid reality clearly established, requiring her to find a new paradigm for understanding the world" (212). Sorrel, still deeply wounded, is not only seeking to regain physical as well as psychological purity by constantly trying to wash away 'the dirt', she also quests for meaning and truth. She even admits to herself that she unconsciously felt that Dinah is her mother *and* sister ("Suppose I allas knew ud ... buried in me though" (*RH* 38)). In the end, however, Sorrel is infected by "the miasmal mists" (Harris 222) of the other characters and adopts Dinah's method of handling of the situation: denial, resignation and self-abandonment. Similar to her grandmother Shalome and Dinah she "drop[s] the axe on" the person outside of the close-knit family unit, the person she loves, Dara Mood, who might have enabled her to escape this inhuman savagery of the Raftery family. Marriage to Dara implies the possibility of a new secure relationship, a chance for "[p]hysical distance [which] can promote psychological distance and pave the path for the ability to reflect on and to reason about the [...] sexual experience" (Cole and Putnam 179).

For Harris, Sorrel ends the relationship with Dara resulting from his refusal of Red's offer (fifty acres of land and twenty grand), which signifies for her a refusal of what she is entitled to ("Well ud's mine. I'm owed ud" (*RH* 52)) (223). Matt O'Brien, on the other hand, sees it slightly differently, arguing that despite Dara's proud gesture Sorrel "needs Mood to be heroic, and wealthy, and powerful – because she needs him to be like her father" (213). Ruane argues that "[t]he choice faced by the Raftery daughters is to collude or collapse" (*Raftery's* 76). Returning to attachment theory, this new bond with Dara seems impossible, as the survivor of incest experienced a traumatic betrayal of trust and consequently forms "expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies of later intimate relationships" (Alexander and Anderson 674). Thus "a withdrawal from all intimate relationships" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 105) is the only possible consequence. Small wonder, one might argue, that Sorrel distrusts Dara's ability to give her sufficient social support outside of her home. Hence both wronged women, Dinah and Sorrel, have no power to redirect their lives, they shut away their private world of feelings, surrender to their father, their destiny and dark future on Raftery's hill and abandon hope and any sign of self-determination.⁶⁹ Sorrel, once hopeful for the future, joins in

⁶⁹ Their lack of individualism is additionally emphasized by the fact that both characters are the only ones within the play who are not described by stage directions.

the policy of head-in-sand of a family who likes to see themselves as "a respectable family" (RH 58).

5.2 The Father Does Not Hunt Fair

Look into any man you choose and you will find, in every single man, at least one black spot that he has to cover.

Ibsen (*The Pillars of the Community* 93)

Contrary to the other Midlands plays, in which men are either off-stage or play just a minor part, we find a dominant male character at the centre of *On Raftery's Hill*. "Boss", "Daddy", "Redmond" or "Red", no matter what this character is called, he is a brute and "bullish man" (Doran 221), an amoral and "horrifying" (M. O'Brien 214) patriarch, who slaughters his daughters like his livestock. This character's cruel streak, his aggressive and violent traits precede him even before he actually appears for the first time.⁷⁰ When finally the stage is empty, he imposingly enters the scene with a rifle and "with two shot hares around his neck" (RH 14). Besides simply showing Red's violent acts, Carr strengthens the image of an inhuman monster through several stories told by other characters and by using Isaac Dunn, his shooting buddy, as a contrasting figure. More about his childhood and his past is revealed, or rather hinted at, through conversations, amongst others, with his mother Shalome; yet thereby only more black spots are added to his already dirty hands, to his black soul.

This male character certainly stands out due to his brutal and cruel treatment of every living being near him. Seeing Red Raftery, the abusive father, through the lens of Bowlby's attachment theory, it is possible to describe this character as being "cold, rigid, obsessional, and censorious" on the surface, yet also as "extremely distrustful and consequently unable or unwilling to make close relationships", and added to this, according to Bowlby, violent parents are frequently socially isolated (*Secure Base* 83-4). The latter is of course true for all members of the Raftery family, yet Red additionally shows a unique disrespect for life, which is already clearly conveyed at the beginning of the play:

⁷⁰ Red is established as a violent character through Ded's expression of his fear of him and Dinah's utterance about his "blusterin and butcherin [of] all the small helpless creatures a the fields" (RH13).

Red [...] Sorrel, whiskey. (*Flings the hares at her.*) And ya may gut them, young wan.
Sorrel I will noh. Nowan ever tell ya ud's bad luck to shoooh a hare, not to mind two?
Red Auld wives' tales. Skin them now young wan and gut them. I want hare's soup for me breakfast.
Isaac And he went into the lair after them and strangled the leverets. Seven little babbys all huddled in a ball. Ya don't hunt fair, Red.
Red They've the land ruined.
Isaac Ud's not the hares has the land ruined and you wud a stinkin carcass in every field. You'll turn this beauhiful farm into an abattoir. (*RH 14-5*)

This scene shows Red's attitude towards nature and "metaphorically echoes the oppressive power that occurs within the human relations of the Raftery family" (Trench, *Staging Morality* 77). Furthermore, it tells the reader how the Raftery farm slowly degenerates in Red's callous hands,⁷¹ but it also foreshadows that in the end there will be not one but two innocent creatures falling prey to the unfair hunter, Dinah and Sorrel.

The issue of male-over-female domination attracts the most attention regarding the character's function within the play. It is a family drama "whose narrative is driven by male actions" (Trench, *Bloody* 24). Anna McMullan argues in a discussion about the presentation of 'home' in Irish theatre that in the safe environment of the Raftery home, Red "maintains the internal hegemony of the family" (82) by means of abusing his daughters. This represents to her, in a larger cultural and national context, "an extremely pessimistic view of Irish womanhood" (81). Gardner shares this thought in some respect and states that "the family stands as a metaphor for Ireland" (*Champion*). Marianne McDonald draws a parallel between Ireland's "idealization of England and its culture [...] after so many years of abuse" to the daughters and their unintelligible adoration for their abusive father (*Fatal* 138). Returning to the microcosm of the Raftery family, however, Hynes demands that "you have to see these people's behaviour in the play as a continuum" and adds that "one of the things I realised is that the emotions and needs of these characters are exactly like my own" (qtd. in Gardner, *Champion*).⁷² In search for the characters' feelings and longings to which the reader can relate, it is easier to concentrate on the children in Raftery's family; when it

⁷¹ In relation to a performance, Leeney points out that "[f]rom the accounts of his mistreatment of animals and land, the audience members create the outdoor scene of horror more effectively in their imaginations than a stage setting could suggest" (*Character* 717).

⁷² Quite contrary is Clapp's position as she states in her review of the play that empathy with the characters is impossible due to the grotesque nature of the play, for her "it's hard to care" (*What Did You Do*).

comes to Red, a quite monstrous character, it is difficult to find even a spark of humanity. The modesty of Isaac, a man who treats his cat with more love and respect than Red his own offspring, and the gentleness of Dara Mood harden Daddy's image as a brutal beast. For Leeney, Sorrel's fiancé represents the "notion of an off-stage world beyond the farm, by which the abusiveness on-stage may be measured" (*Violence and Destruction* 515), which is also Isaac's function. According to Jordan they "have access to a different moral code" (*Unmasking* 255-6).

The issue of incest is introduced into the play by Dara Mood, who tells the shocking story about Sarah Brophy, Sorrel's former schoolmate, who carried her own father's child and died grief-stricken after a stillbirth. This scene foreshadows the impending rape and also hints at the fact that Dinah is mother to her own sister. Red dismisses the account as being only false gossip, gossip able to destroy "a man's good name and reputation" (*RH* 20) and in his view "Sarah Brophy goh whah was comin to her" (*RH* 19). Again Raftery shows his true colours and misogynistic self, downplaying incest and ignoring the fact that a "poor misfortunehe girl" (Isaac, *RH* 19) like Sarah lives right under his own roof. In Isaac's religious belief, old Brophy's suicide is an act of self-punishment ("Mebbe the lavins of Christian dacency made him do ud" (*RH* 42)). There is no decency or remorse visible in Red's character, his physical and psychological violence knows no boundaries, just as Dinah fears ("Where are ya goin to stop Daddy? Where?" (*RH* 44)).

Bowlby points out that "[w]hen a sexual liaison develops between a father and his adolescent daughter [...] the liaison is usually acknowledged by the father during the course of daily life by such means as secret glances, secret touching, and innuendoes" (*Secure Base* 105). According to Dinah there are indeed meaningful glances and in their conversations the reader is able to detect various veiled allusions to their nightly games in the "pitch dark" (*RH* 57). Sexual abuse is Red's way of abasing his daughters, denying them an identity outside the confining walls of the Raftery household. This character uses violence as a strategy designed to control others ("I was only puttin manners on her, somewan had to, you've leh her run wild ..." (Red to Dinah, *RH* 46)), while Carr's female characters "struggle to establish a voice for themselves" (Trench, *Staging Morality* 72). Their attempts are, however, too weak, because as they live according Red's rules their voices are never to be heard outside the Raftery farm and hardly acknowledged inside.

The accounts and actions of Shalome, an apparently absent-minded character, emphasize the presentation of "female subjectivity [that] becomes subsumed within the family unit" (Trench, *Staging Morality* 80), which is also true for Red's deceased wife. Information about this absent character is revealed piecemeal. In Shalome's and Ded's memory she is a "good woman" and mother until Red "butchered her" (*RH* 29), whereas to Red and Dinah she was neither a doting wife nor an affectionate caregiver. Nevertheless, granting Red's wife no name also suggests that he has broken her as well, dispossessing her from every spark of individualism, or, as Shalome tells her granddaughter, "your father put a stop to all of that. I don't know why it is, Sorrel, but he never liked to see people enjoy themselves, a big smuth on him when everyone else was happy" (*RH* 11). Red certainly succeeds in spreading unhappiness, stalling all possibilities of personal development. Shalome, his own mother, "spends the entire play marking the limits of Red's control, within which all the Rafterys are trapped" (Leeney, *Violence and Destruction* 517). Continuously, she tries to leave the hill, yet held back by Dinah, Red or the pitch black night ("You'd see better in the coffin" (*RH* 29)), escape is impossible. Shalome claims to return to "Kinneygar and to Daddy" (*RH* 10), which is in fact always a retreat to the past. These short trips also prove to be flashbacks to reveal more information about Red's childhood and origin to the readers.

Shalome's high hopes for her son were destroyed by her husband Brian Raftery, he "wanted [Red] rough and ignorant like himself" (*RH* 25). The accounts of Shalome suggest that Red received little more than harsh and unsympathetic treatment during his own childhood. The question of who Red's biological father really is remains open, most certainly not an "English officer" (*RH* 26). Old Raftery, according to Shalome, "never laid a hand on [her]" (*RH* 26). Additionally, one thing to note is that she constantly tries to return to her Daddy, who is described as a cruel as well as a loving father (comparable to Dinah's schizophrenic accounts of Red), which implies yet another case of incest within the story. Various indirect allusions insinuate that Red's grandfather is also his father.⁷³ But it does not end there. The circle of abuse is completed when past gossip is rehashed, implying an incestuous relationship between Red and his own mother.⁷⁴ In this light, an earlier dialogue between Red and Shalome becomes more significant in terms of a suggested abusive mother-son bond:

⁷³ The incestuous bond between Shalome and her Daddy is also hinted at when Red tells his mother, that her Daddy is already dead, "Don't you remember hees funeral? Ya took me, I must a been whah? Twelve, thirteen, the army out blowin their bugles, a woman came up to me and said, God, but you're the spih of him. (*Laughs.*)" (*RH* 58).

⁷⁴ See the conversation between Isaac and Red (*RH* 42).

Shalome You and I, Red, what we've done to this beautiful Hill, it was beautiful and yet we're entirely blameless. What sort of monsters must we have been in a past life to suffer like this?

Red We were big loose monsters, Mother, hurlin through the air, wud carnage in our hearts and blood under our nails, and no stupid laws houldin us down or back or in.

Shalome Speak for yourself.

Red Exactly whah I'm doin. (*RH* 30)

The dynamics within the family changes, Red appears to be a victim himself. It is noteworthy that after this particular conversation and Red's re-entering of the stage, the rape of Sorrel takes place, Red is once more a perpetrator. This again raises the issue of genealogy, heredity and how past experiences and relationships are able to influence the present. For Bowlby, "violence breeds violence, violence in families tends to perpetuate itself from one generation to the next" (*Secure Base* 77).⁷⁵ In relation to this particular case, Trench goes so far as to argue that "[t]he rape is an act of revenge by Red on his mother Shalome, as well as pointing to his own crisis concerning parental relations" (*Staging Morality* 76). In turn, this suggestion supports Jordan's statement that "Carr's violence [...] emerges from the conflict of relationships" (*Unmasking* 247). The aspect of the origins of violence and abuse within this family is even further accentuated by the use of a Greek myth and once more broaches the issue of incest:

Isaac [...] The Grakes however has a different opinion of the mahher. [...] Zeus and Hera, sure they were brother and sister and they goh married and had chaps and young wans and the chaps and young wans done the job wud the mother and father and one another, and sure the whole loh a them were ah ud mornin, noon and nigh, I suppose they had to populahe the world someway. Is ud any wonder the stahe a the country and them for ancestry. (*RH* 43)

In this case, McDonald is right in stating that "[s]ometimes the classics simply provid[e] a skeleton on which new figures come to life" (*Irish and Greek* 38-9). This time, Carr's employment of a Greek element does not grant the play "the easy comfort of a mythological dimension", as she achieved it in *By the Bog of Cats...* (Jordan,

⁷⁵ Linda M. Williams and David Finkelhor published a study exploring "[t]he existence of a biosocial mechanism for inhibiting incest through early caretaking contact" (101) by comparing incestuous and non-incestuous fathers. "Incestuous fathers reported significant histories of child abuse. They were more likely than their nonincestuous counterparts to have experienced severe abuse by their own fathers [...] and by their own mothers [...]. Men who had been severely abused by their fathers were more than four times as likely to become incestuous fathers than were men who had not [...]. Abuse by their mothers nearly tripled the odds of men incestuously abusing a daughter [...]" (106).

Unmasking 255), it merely underlines the issue of legacy and familial sexual relationships. Isaac's account and that of others allude to an abusive circle within the Raftery family which starts already between Shalome and Red. Critics interpret or review the cross-generational incest history on Raftery's hill differently: for some it is a kind of explanation for Red's ruthless raging; for others it blurs, in some respect, the boundaries between perpetrators and victims, it unites the different generations,⁷⁶ or it is seen as just a sheer grotesque exaggeration. Paul Taylor, for instance, writes that "[t]he trouble is that, through sheer overload, the grim tragic determinism of the piece veers closer" to a parody and "the recycling of misery down the generations has an engineered feel". For Trench, *On Raftery's Hill* shows "how the foundations of a damaged past [...] are significant in contributing to a position of abjection in the present" (*Staging Morality* 82). Csilla Bertha, on the other hand, argues that "[t]he unmotivated repetition and accumulation of the same horror dilutes the horror, and turns it into its opposite – an almost grotesque comedy, probably far from the author's purpose" (74). Although opinions on the play vary decisively there is agreement that Red uses violence to control the rest of the Raftery family and thus keeps them from parting. In a sense he is comparable to Big Josie: he betrays the trust of his children but keeps them attached to him. The question whether Red would be able to live alone or whether he would collapse like Brophy is open to speculation.

5.3 What Happens on Raftery's Hill, Stays on Raftery's Hill

[T]he house on the stage often becomes an emotional, psychological shell of self, carrying both "past memory" and "future possibility" – or, if the house emphatically remains incarcerating, that very phenomenon enhances the theme of rootlessness and homelessness.

Bertha (64)

Once more, Marina Carr demonstrates her talent when it comes to choosing images and settings for the story she wants to tell. In *On Raftery's Hill* we are guests on a rural Midland farm, in a rural country kitchen, where animals and flowers do not animate the dismal home of the Raftery's but rather add to an atmosphere between fear and resignation. The characters do not have a retreat or sanctuary like Hester has

⁷⁶ Trench supports this view suggesting that "[w]ith no room for manoeuvre, familial incest becomes part of the shared meanings of the family" (*Bloody* 182).

(except the cowshed). They are confined to the destructive realm of Red Raftery. Even the "natural world offers no consolation", it rather "mirrors the inexorable suffering within the home (Sihra, *House of Woman* 213-4). Trench compares *By the Bog of Cats...* and *Portia Coughlan* with *On Raftery's Hill*, noting that the characters in the latter do not have "access to an alternative safe place", like the bog or Belmont River (*Bloody* 199). Nevertheless, Carr, once again, uses nature and place as "another metaphor, which is feeding into the play" (*Rage and Reason* 154).

Home is usually a place of refuge, but in this play it is the root of oppression and violence. Within this site of instability and violation "[a]ll resistance is crushed, all escape blocked" (McMullan 82) by Red, the head of the household. In the Raftery kitchen, the location where every action takes place, hares are gutted and an innocent life is destroyed. The claustrophobic atmosphere within the walls of the Raftery farmhouse emphasises the inescapability of the past and the sense of paralysis in the present. Leeney argues that due to the ongoing incest in the family "the kitchen, traditional sphere of female values and power, is an apt and a disturbing setting for the female characters' implication in their own corruption, their inability to contest the father's patriarchal control" (*Character* 717). It is a place where change is impossible, it is rigid and immutable like the characters themselves; a prison to keep its inmates enclosed yet also to hold off the outside world, any unwanted intruder.⁷⁷ Due to the insular nature of the family new impulses are missing, and like the hill that is ruined "wud the stink a rotten sheep and cows" and no signs of fresh "air up here" (*RH* 20), change seems impossible. Thinking of Irish hills one imagines a lush green landscape with fertile soil, quite contrary to the description of Raftery's hill with figuratively and literally only barren ground. Leeney points out that "the off-stage landscape in *On Raftery's Hill* is despoiled and corrupted by Red Raftery; it reflects the patriarch's destruction of his own family" (*Violence and Destruction* 517). Once a prosperous place it is now a futureless site, "it's just a river of slurry and rotten animals" (Shalome, *RH* 29).

The play does not require closer scrutiny to notice the human/animal category confusion obvious on various levels of the play. The female characters are trapped like animals and depicted like helpless creatures and constantly at the mercy of their own

⁷⁷ Trench agrees pointing out that "[t]he location of the Raftery home, as a way for the family members to be separate from the community, is also a way for them to fence the nature of their estranged being inside the boundaries of the home" (*Staging Morality* 75).

unpredictable father, ready to hunt down any undomesticated animal on his farm. Carr skilfully includes hares into the play which symbolize, at least at the beginning, the harmlessness and innocence of Dinah, Sorrel and Ded,⁷⁸ quite contrary to the depiction of Red Raftery: first a “[s]kanky auld goat” but then a male bloodthirsty beast of prey “paddin round the duurs and landins, wud [...] cloven toes, spyin on everywan, waitin’ to pounce” (RH 45). In the course of the play, however, these comparisons change to the pictures of a “band a gorillas swingin from the trees” (RH 58), there is no innocent creature left. Behind the closed doors of the Raftery home the “awful game before laws was made” (RH 58) continues: the survival of the fittest.

Jordan points out that the remote hilltop has no “escape route, no alternative reality, other than the animal kingdom” (*Unmasking* 255). In the remoteness of the family’s home “each character negotiates [their] suffering [...], whether as perpetrator, victim or complicit bystander” (Sihra, *House of Woman* 213). In the “language of the gorillas” (12) there is mutual understanding at the end of the play between the characters, a silent agreement that no one is “spreadin lies” (47). What happens on Raftery’s hill, stays on Raftery’s hill. For the characters there is no room for change, but the situation seems less frightful to them than the alternative world outside, the unknown. Bertha argues that “[w]ithout an ideal to long for, without at least an imaginative alternative to the closed-in life in the house, there can be no tragedy” (75). There is only darkness without even a vision of a way out, only dreams and memories of a beautiful past, which are “too weak to counterbalance the power of the house” (Bertha 74), too weak to offer an alternative to self-abandonment. The real tragedy is that no one dies in this play, instead there is an unconscious slow self-destruction on Raftery’s hill, accompanied by intense denial.

5.4 Inglorious Characters Cause Quite a Stir

[C]riticisms arise out of the feeling that the ‘negative’ vision embedded in Carr’s explicit depiction of the issues of incest and rape, which confronts the past in the present in *On Raftery’s Hill*, is conceived as unsuited to a contemporary audience.

Trench (*Staging Morality* 72)

⁷⁸ The image of a slain animal is quite explicitly presented in the rape scene where “[w]e hear the odd animal moan or shriek” (RH 35).

Carr calls *On Raftery's Hill* an "incest play" (*Rage and Reason* 152). It would be, however, an unjust simplification to concentrate merely on the "rampant inbreeding" (Taylor), the story offers ground for a more fruitful approach. The play particularly presents "the subjugation of women, the sometimes destructive loyalty to family" (Murphy 392), the influence of past events, paralysis in the present and a hopeless future. In comparison to *By the Bog of Cats...*, the characters also display acts of self-destruction and violence, but any kind of physical or psychological violation committed on Raftery's hill are selfish acts designed to control others. Wallace argues that Carr's female characters in the Midlands trilogy "seem to abdicate from a confrontation with patriarchy" (*Tragic Destiny* 435), which is true of the end of each play, yet at first there is still a noticeable resistance. In clear contrast, it is resignation and stasis that define the characters in *On Raftery's Hill*. The great difference between Hester and Dinah or Sorrel is the ability to fight back, at least to struggle and not to surrender easily. All Rafterys follow the same fatal path of self-abandonment, all characters accept what they suppose is their fate. A visible sign of self-determinism is missing. Shalome voices the passiveness of the Rafterys, lamenting that "[a]ll [her] life [she has] waited for [her] life to start, somehow it never has" (*RH* 14).

Trench argues that "*On Raftery's Hill* marks a significant move away from the thematic concerns dramatised in the previous trilogy" (*Bloody* 25). On the surface, this is certainly valid although there are noteworthy similarities. For one, the history of violence repeats itself and in a way connects all generations, like the notion of painful loss in *By the Bog of Cats...* does. Both stories show that characteristics and certain behavioural patterns are often passed on from one generation to the next, and a human being is never quite free of influences from the past. In both plays, Carr confronts the audience with consequences of the absence of a secure base and of parental negligence. All Rafterys are in a sense mother- and fatherless, all betrayed by their parents. As past events are still too powerful the characters' survival strategy, like Hester's in the earlier play, is to remove themselves from themselves, not to be completely present. The greatest force in *On Raftery's Hill* is not only the experience of the past that destroys any hope and trust, it is silence. In an atmosphere where abuse is hushed up and its cruelty absolutely denied, it is, according to attachment theory again, "[s]mall wonder [...] that the injunction on no account to tell anyone remains operative, and that the expectation that in any case no one would believe you ensures silence" (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 106).

What is so bewildering in real-life cases and in this play is "that much of the incest victim's behavior is a desperate effort to remain attached to [the] caretakers" (Grand and Alpert 330). All three female characters create in their minds a loving father that can be relied on, and a menacing one causing general distrust in men (Bowlby, *Secure Base* 106). All energy is directed to this task so that the formation of new attachments does not stand the slightest chance (Grand and Alpert 332). There is also no energy left for the development of a separate self.

Bertha argues that a sense of self is missing and that complete darkness permeates the play, there is only "violence, brutality and hatred juxtaposed to defenceless innocence, along with the melodramatic accumulation of sin, disaster, and destruction" (75). It is quite disturbing to witness how the last innocent creature on Raftery's hill is gutted like a hare and how she is deprived of her last spark of lust for life. In *On Raftery's Hill*, similar to *By the Bog of Cats...*, Marina Carr "doesn't condemn any of the characters" (Hynes qtd. in Gardner, *Champion*),⁷⁹ which is not easy to digest for an audience. Additionally, Jordan points out that "[t]he sense of spatial claustrophobia and the psychological confinement of the play resulted in many spectators feeling uneasy" (*Unmasking* 253). The characters' paralysis, their "inescapable sense of stasis, of endless repetition that overwhelms any possibility of action, drama, conflict" (Leeney, *Character* 717), leaves the reader (audience) frustrated, always hoping that an outer impulse puts an end to the incestuous circle. The angry reaction of parts of the audience is, of course, also explained by the fact that the play is set in Ireland, and it presents a rather grim picture of an otherwise idyllic view of the rural countryside. The characters appear barbaric, even inhuman, and immune to change. The Raftery family is quite frequently interpreted as a "microcosm of Ireland" (Bertha 76) and the sense of stasis as a symbol for "Ireland [...] awash with revelations" but stuck in the inability to change (Hynes qtd. in Gardner, *Champion*). For an Irish audience, this is, of course, quite uncomfortable and deeply disturbing.

Ruane notes that "*On Raftery's Hill* offers no redemptive vision to ease its audience's passage towards the bars or bus-stops outside" (*Raftery's* 76). When one follows the news the issue of incest is not something that belongs to the past, it is quite contemporary and not unique to Ireland. Sometimes reality catches us flat-footed. Carr confronts us with an inconvenient truth.

⁷⁹ Many critics overlook that Carr's way of condemning her characters because of their resignation and violence is the fact that nobody is relieved by death. Carr argues that "you have to earn your death on the stage" (*Conversation with Sihra* 60).

6 *Ariel* or Unconscious Hauntings

While the play embraces age-old themes – the power and its price, fate, the importance of remembering *and* of forgetting – it is also the author's most contemporary work. Gorgeously cadenced, elaborately wrought, it is a score for the grand scale of her dreadful imaginings.⁸⁰

In *By the Bog of Cats...* Marina Carr retreated to the world of myths and legends of ancient Greece and wove it into a story of painful loss, self-determination and destiny, whereas in her incest play *On Raftery's Hill* she almost completely abstained from Greek narratives, confronting the reader with a disturbingly dysfunctional family. With *Ariel*, a commissioned piece for the Abbey Theatre, which premièred on 2 October 2002, Carr returns to mythology and presents a story which seemingly shows nearly every theme needed for a successful play: political corruption, a protagonist with a Napoleon complex, characters in grief and despair, religion, revenge, difficult relationships between parents and children, and a past impossible to shake off. Michael Billington's benevolent review reads "formidable Marina Carr [...] imports blood-stained Greek myths into modern Ireland. The result, although thematically overloaded, is a work of dark, unsettling power" (*Ariel*). Ian Kilroy writes for *The Irish Times* that Carr created a "modern-day *Oresteia*, an Athens in Offaly" which brings the audience "into a world that frighteningly mirrors our own". For McDonald, on the other hand, "*Ariel* is instead a play of ideas which leaves the audience (at least this one) as cold as the corpses that lie at the bottom of Cuura lake. Ideas, myths, and metaphors are poor substitutes for vital stories" (*Fatal* 137). Harvey O'Brien points in the same direction noting that "by the time the play reaches its multiple climaxes complete with ghostly apparitions, wailing from the wings, and on-stage bloodletting, some of the audience had given over to inappropriate laughter, suggesting true balance between elements has not been achieved". It is not surprising that *Ariel* received divided responses, it has a lot to offer, almost too much. It offers a fertile ground for various approaches and opinions. In the midst of it all, there are, once more, stories about not letting go, about unresolved traumas, mother- and fatherhood, mixed with pitiless striving for power and religious delusions. The play presents a large selection of themes, yet it appears impossible to miss the dysfunctional family at the heart of it. Similar to *On Raftery's Hill*, the source of affection and security normally provided

⁸⁰ An excerpt from the back cover of the text.

within the caring and loving environment of a family is denied to the characters, each member developing different strategies to overcome the absence of satisfactory and loving attachment.

6.1 Yet Another Dysfunctional Family

A dysfunctional family is one that fails to meet the basic needs of one or more of its members. These basic needs are survival, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem, growth, and development of skills for independent living.

Jamiolkowski (2)

The Fitzgeralds are the epitome of a defective family, each member displaying disordered attachment behaviour. At the centre of the play is Fermoy Fitzgerald, a pathologically ambitious politician, who is persecuted by his past and married to a woman who does not love him. Frances is Fermoy's wife and a proud businesswoman, but first and foremost a mother, who wallows in self-pity and grief for her dead son, and in the end kills her husband, the father of her children. Ariel, their first child, is sacrificed by her fanatically religious father for his political career. Elaine and Stephen are two children who never receive the love and security children need to prosper. Boniface, Fermoy's brother and an alcohol-addicted, guilt-ridden monk, and Aunt Sarah, who married her dead sister's husband, round up the picture of a dysfunctional family. Each character carries an unresolved problem with him/her the roots of which can be found in the past. *Ariel* is a very dark story about a family system partially fractured without the hope to mend, instead "the return of the repressed, [sic] seeps through the cracks" (O'Reilly 171).

The play opens with Ariel's sixteenth birthday, a seemingly happy family gathering. Those who are familiar with Carr's work, immediately realize that this scene is probably the last light moment of the play and that soon hidden secrets will erupt, past events will be revealed and the idyllic family setting deconstructed. In every character's life there is an "appalling thing at the centre" (4 45). The past is difficult to bear for the Fitzgeralds, and each time the piece *Mors et Vita* is heard, the audience is reminded that the play is about death and life; and that the blood sacrifice of the eldest daughter is just the beginning as the characters are continuously haunted by their past and

caught in a web of violence. "Everything ya can possibly imagine has happened already, or if ud hasn't, will shortly" (A 54).

6.1.1 The Inaccessible Father

ἐκ κακοῦ κόρακος κακὸν ᾠόν.

(Greek proverb: A bad egg from a bad crow.)

Fermoy Fitzgerald is a very self-centred character who is primarily concerned with the satisfaction of his own needs, be it his desire for political power or his longing for love from his spouse.⁸¹ He ruthlessly pursues his goal to become Taoiseach with God by his side. It is a merciless God who "hunts us down like deer and flays us alive for sport" (A 59). It is a God whose "will be done", a God to whom Fermoy bows fulfilling his demand for a blood sacrifice by killing his eldest daughter Ariel. For the protagonist faith ensures that everything happens for a reason. His utterances concerning religion and power suggest that Fermoy is simply using God as an excuse for his violent acts. In the first half of Act One Carr includes a rather lengthy dialogue between Fermoy and his brother Boniface, which not only establishes religious faith as one of the major issues in this play, but also offers a good look at the protagonist's character traits and flaws. The discussion displays the main character's pursuit of power and his trust in God to grant him his wishes. Fermoy brags that he and "God's on a wan to wan" (A 14) and that he has "direct access to him" (A 15); yet there is also fear to be read between the lines, deep fear of an "utterly transcendent and vengeful God" (O'Reilly 174). According to Fermoy, Ariel is just a loan which needs to be returned to God, her rightful owner, in exchange for his political success.

Besides fear and obeisance there is more that resonates in Fermoy's remarks. Driven by his dreams about a new religion/world with "no more guilt, no more sorrow, no more good girls and good biys" (A 18) he strives to rule, he longs for "whah [he] was puh on this earth for" (A 19). Anne F. O'Reilly argues that Fermoy uses his image of a vengeful God to "validate and legitimate all kinds of transgressive, perverted and monstrous behaviour" (174). Religion and faith allow Fermoy to blame God for his dirty deeds on the way to power, but it also eases his feelings of guilt and pain. After all he was a co-perpetrator of his mother's murder and the murderer of his own daughter.

⁸¹ McDonald points out that the character's name already says it all: Fermoy meaning "For myself" (*Fatal* 129).

At the age of seven Fermoy was forced by his father to witness and take part in the murder of his own mother. Throughout the play this particular event persistently comes up, reminding the reader of Fermoy's traumatic past and the fact that old Fitzgerald was a murderer as well. According to Boniface and Hannafin, his political opponent, Fermoy is very much like his own father.⁸² Boniface's portrayal of their father is also perfectly apt for Fermoy as he describes their father as charming as "forty divils [...] buh back a the charm was the stuck-up rebellis heart of all a Lucifer's crew" (A 26). The saying "Like father, like son" might not be applied with hundred percent certainty as too little information about Fermoy's father is available, yet there are obvious similarities between Fermoy and his parents to be spotted: first of all, Fermoy, "following his father's footsteps" (Mesquita 293), cold-bloodedly drowned a family member, and he is also married to a woman whose attention and affection is directed elsewhere. Added to this, he is a religious fanatic like his own mother was. The reader might wonder if his mother was an inaccessible caregiver – after all she was "in love wud wan man and wan man only[,] Padre Pio of San Giovanni" (A 27). Boniface argues that it is more desirable to develop and grow up without a mother than with an unfit mother, which strengthens the assumption of an unfulfilled attachment.⁸³ Without a doubt, however, both men lost their mother, and thus their primary attachment figure, during childhood/adolescence. As their own father is responsible for their mother's death, it makes sense to argue that a secure base was not provided at all as both were literally motherless and figuratively fatherless. By implication, Boniface found security and stability in Christianity, at the age of seventeen he "was a maniac for religion" (A 17). Fermoy, left by his older brother, had Auntie Sarah, who "looked after [him] fine" (A 17), as a substitute caregiver, but he also turned to religion as a refuge and a secure base and out of guilt resulting from his involvement in his mother's drowning ("I entered the landscape a God before you, long before" (A 16)).⁸⁴ There are numerous allusions that allow the reader to identify Fermoy's traumatic past as the basis for his current behaviour and beliefs.

When one considers Freud's discussion of demonological neurosis another layer to Fermoy's pact with God may be added. In *The Motive for the Pact with the Devil* Freud

⁸² For Boniface Fermoy is as much a tyrant as his father was ("The auld fella was a tyrant too" (A 26)). Hannafin points out that "[t]he apple doesn't fall far from the tree" (A 32).

⁸³ After Stephen finally leaves his mother Boniface says, partly to himself, "Seems to me everythin worth lookin ah in this world has ne'er a Ma ah all, ud's just there be udself in a flowerin gorgeousness, orphaned and free" (A 69).

⁸⁴ In this scene Boniface immediately makes the connection between Fermoy's emotional connection to God and their mother's death (A 16).

uses *Faust* as an example to explain the motivation for such a bargaining. Freud argues that despondency or depression due to the loss of the father is the driving force behind the bond with the devil (*Motive* 81). Transferring this to Carr's character Fermoy, one can argue that he lost his spirits when he witnessed his mother's murder, which at one fell swoop made him mother- and fatherless. After the additional abandonment by his wife he turned to God in despair and in hope "to regain what he had lost" (Freud, *Motive* 82). Thus, seen through a Freudian lens, Fermoy's neurotic fantasy is a search for the security and stability lost in the past, he longs for a "protector from the cares of life" (Freud, *Father-Substitute* 88). For an understanding of the assumption that God functions as a secure base for Fermoy the following quote by Freud proves quite useful:

To begin with, we know that God is a father-substitute; or, more correctly, that he is an exalted father; or, yet again, that he is a copy of a father as he is seen and experienced in childhood – by individuals in their own childhood and by mankind in its prehistory as the father of the primitive and primal horde. Later on in life the individual sees his father as something different and lesser. But the ideational image belonging to his childhood is preserved and becomes merged with the inherited memory-traces of the primal father to form the individual's idea of God. [...] his relation to his father was perhaps ambivalent from the outset, or, at any rate, soon became so. That is to say, it contained two sets of emotional impulses of an affectionate and submissive nature, but also hostile and defiant ones. It is our view that the same ambivalence governs the relations of mankind to its Deity. (*Father-Substitute* 85)

Returning to the theory of attachment behaviour, witnessing a violent act like the murder of the mother certainly makes a child's feelings torn between dependence on the remaining caregiver and distrust in him. Different father images are created: the good and the bad, the caring and the cruel father.⁸⁵ The same is true for Fermoy himself and certainly for the character's image of God, which appears to be a "reflection of the ambivalence which governs the relation of the individual to his personal father" (Freud, *Father-Substitute* 86).

Fermoy is the character who speaks most of the need to forget, which is quite ironic as he still seems to struggle with the past ("Oh, I remember everythin, don't you ever fear, buh ud's important to forget too" (Fermoy to Frances, *A* 31)). Fermoy did certainly not obliterate his traumatizing experience, but rather represses the emotions

⁸⁵ Just like the female character Dinah does in *On Raftery's Hill*.

aroused by this murder.⁸⁶ Boniface's function within the play is to remind Fermoy continuously of his childhood and origins; he believes in the power of the past. Fermoy, in turn, dismisses the importance of genealogy and heredity arguing that "[l]aineage manes natin anymore" and that the "new wans comin up judge a man for whah he is in heeself, noh where he cem from" (A 33). The character's merit, however, only applies to economic and political success and certainly not to his personal life, to his role as father and husband, as the rest of the Fitzgeralds "find themselves in the whirlpool caused by his madness and obsession" (O'Reilly 171).

The protagonist's goal to become the next Taoiseach allows him to create distance between himself and his family, Fermoy's striving for power is a way to avoid intimacy, it impedes an emotional bond with his children. He is "just busy, busy" (A 30), too busy to spend time with his family. In his own words, he is an adoring father, who is glad when his kids are not around, and a husband, who married so he "could have ud on demand" (A 28). Although the character shuts down emotionally, anger, frustration, and jealousy can be detected concerning his marriage. Fermoy appears rather independent yet his relationship with Frances shows flaws. The main problem presents itself in the form of sexual withdrawal and yet goes even deeper. Like Red Raftery or his own father, Fermoy is "married to a nun, [...] a born agin virgin" (A 27), his affection is not returned by the "snow quane" (A 49). He feels "treahed like a dog" (A 49). What shines through these utterances is a call for affirmation of self-worth. In adulthood, the partner or spouse often takes over the role of an attachment figure, but not in Fermoy's life. Frances has love only for the dead ones and no affectional support for her husband. Fermoy's frustration about Frances' elusiveness and his lack of self-affirmation is noticeable in the expression of his feelings of jealousy towards Stephen, who is overwhelmed by maternal attention, and towards Frances' former husband.

FERMOY (*Dances towards her, for her*) [...]

Go aisy on me a while, will ya, and then I'm yours agin.

FRANCES Where's me locket?

FERMOY takes locket from his pocket, gives it to her, dancing all the time. She examines it.

What's your phoho doin here?

FERMOY I left in the child's phoho. Don't be getting thick over natin agin. I don't mind ya wearin a phoho of the child but noh heeself. I'm the wan should be straddlin your heart. (A 30)

⁸⁶ This is in line with O'Reilly's statement concerning this traumatic event as he argues that Fermoy "carries this memory, in all its experienced and repressed dimensions, into adulthood" (175).

Fermoy wishes for an affectional bond with his wife, but Frances refuses him any sign of devotion and love; she remains cold and dismissive towards him, which forces Fermoy to seek attention outside of this holy bond of matrimony ("I step out this duur and I'm a king" (A 49)).⁸⁷ The constant conflict between Fermoy and his wife does not only culminate in extramarital affairs, but in brutal murder. In Act Two, ten years later, the couple already live apart, and Frances can no longer ignore the fact that her own husband killed their child Ariel ("I drink to forgeh buh wud each glass ud all comes clearer" (A 48)). Blinded by rage she stabs him to death.

O'Reilly writes that the play "foregrounds the difficulties of family relationships" (171); even if one solely considers the main character's flaws and traits including his interpersonal relationships, this is an understatement. Fermoy is not only unable to free himself from the ties of the past, in pursuing his political goals he also gets caught up in religious delusions and sacrifices the people closest to him. He was the child of an inaccessible mother and a murdering father and developed into an inaccessible and murdering father himself. In the well-known manner of many of Carr's characters, Fermoy does not learn from events in the past and continues the family tradition of violence, and how could it be any other way, the remaining characters of the play carry their own emotional baggage. Their own grief and hurt make substantial solidarity impossible. Particularly prominent, of course, also in this play, are the father/daughter and mother/son relationships, which are frequently "exaggerated to breaking point" (H. O'Brien).

6.1.2 Frances and the Replacement Child

FATE gave the word, the arrow sped,
And pierc'd my darling's heart;
And with him all the joys are fled,
Life can to me impart.-
By cruel hands the sapling drops,
In dust dishonour'd laid:
So fell the pride of all my hopes,
My age's future shade.-
Burns (*A Mother's Lament for Her Son's Death* 1-8)

Frances, like any other woman in the play, can be identified as being "bitter, angry, vindictive and murderous" (O'Reilly 171). The female counterpart of Fermoy is an

⁸⁷ It is a holy bond in view of the fact that Fermoy believes that it was destiny, or rather God's interference, that brought Frances and him together ("The man above cleared the way" (A 31)).

prime example of a person who never adequately resolved the process of mourning. While her husband tries to forget the past, she carries it around her neck, near her heart at all times. Well-preserved in a locket are the pictures of Charlie, her former husband, and James, her first son. Every moment of her life she is reminded of the past and the people she lost. Like Hester, Frances clings to the ones gone and is unable to release the images of the dead; both characters are only half-alive, incomplete without them. There is no space for her younger daughter Elaine or her husband as she constantly laments her loss. Frances idealizes the dead and the past, withdraws herself from the present, blames herself and Fermoy for her misery, and is blind to the needs of her children.

The character's grieving and personal guilt trip permeates the whole play. Frances deeply believes that "James' death was as much [Fermoy 's] fault as [hers]" (A 24) as they did not bring the boy on the honeymoon with them. Repeated reproaches and the idealization of the "beauhiful dead" (A 25) render it impossible for her to love her husband. She deeply deplores his advances, his desire for physical contact, and his outbursts of jealousy. As much as Frances rails at Fermoy, she sometimes shows sympathy for his own struggle with the past, acknowledging that he had a difficult childhood ("And Fermoy there in the middle of ud all. The size a the nigh in thah man is past measurin" (A 27)). She is well aware that the murder of his mother influenced him and still does. This, however, does not free Fermoy from incessant accusations of guilt concerning the death of her first son and husband. Frances clearly admits that she has no love for Fermoy, that he was " just a fling, a fling thah wint wrong" (A 35). Her anguish and anger peak when Frances realizes that religion and his striving for political power has driven Fermoy to distraction. The inapprehensible fact that a pact with God ended Ariel's life, that her fanatically religious husband sacrificed their daughter for his career, is more than Frances can endure. Overwhelmed by rage and sorrow she stabs Fermoy to death. Two months later, now that her husband is dead, inaccessible like the ones gone before him, he all of a sudden arouses her interest and gets her attention and affection. Stephen, who especially had to suffer from his mother's mourning during his childhood, pinpoints Frances' main problem in the following way:

FRANCES [...] Thah man was afraid a natin.

STEPHEN Ya boulderin the stable now and your horse is gone.

FRANCES Doesn't everywan?

STEPHEN No, they don't some knows when they're happy ah the time. (A 67)

Frances shows too little appreciation for the things she has, she ignores the present. She longs for the absent and fails to live her life to the fullest; for Frances it is more "important to remember whah has been lost" (A 31). The loss of the loved ones created a sense of void difficult to bear for Frances, so she keeps holding on to the dead. She shows no sign of letting go or moving on, she is stuck in the realm of sorrow, and her grief-stricken world is affirmed when Ariel disappears. It is clear to all the other characters that her mourning is pathological and all-consuming. For the other family members this causes immense frustration, most notably to be observed in an utterance by her husband:

FERMOY Don't you talk to me abouh mournin. [...] Most gets up offa the ground sooner or laher, dusts themselves down, rejines the land a the livin. Not you though. Everythin thah happens to Frances Fitzgerald has to be momentous, spectacular. Her jiys could never be the same as anywan else's and her grafes must be inconsolable. Live! Live! Live! That's whah we're here for. Do somethin! Anhin! Ya'll have all eternihy for pussin in the dark. (A 50-1)

Frances probably enjoys the darkness and self-pity, the role of the suffering mother; but at what cost? The character's strategy to cope with blankness and painfulness in her life impinges on her living children. Two elements of disordered behaviour are combined in the relationship between Frances and Stephen: first, there is a bereaved person who never completed a healthy phase of mourning, a mother idealizing her dead child, and secondly, there is a parent who tries to fill the void within her heart with an innocent young boy. The scene in which the son is asleep on his mother's lap while Frances gently strokes his hair and compares him to James implies that Stephen is meant to replace the dead son. Both have their mother's eyes but the substitute lacks James' "most beauhiful, beauhiful head a blue black curls" (A 25). As mentioned earlier, a replacement child carries the burden of not being allowed to develop a separate identity, instead it is often unconsciously forced by the parents to live up to their expectations, generated by an unrealistic picture of the dead offspring. Stephen is never able to satisfy Frances' yearning for her lost child.⁸⁸ Furthermore, and this is also clearly depicted in the play, a parent who already lost a child is apt to be overly cautious and caring, overwhelmingly anxious and protective in the face of the threatening repetition of painful loss.⁸⁹ Therefore, Frances is like the "cluckin Mammy

⁸⁸ In this spirit Frances argues that a sleeping child can never be as lovely as a "dead wan" (A 25).

⁸⁹ See, for instance, the scene in which Frances, afraid that something might happen to Ariel, does not allow her teenage daughter to go out into the dark on her sixteenth birthday (A 22).

owl" (A 69) Boniface talks about, who does not stop nurturing her offspring while ignoring the importance of fledging. Out of the need to keep her son attached she still breast-feeds her ten-year-old son. Similar to Mrs Kilbride in *On Raftery's Hill* Frances refuses to let go of her son, she does not realize the far-reaching distortions of their relationship. She rejects the suggestion to wean Stephen since this physical link allows Frances to sustain a psychological bond with her son. It is an utterly unhealthy, co-dependent mother/son-relationship where both parties are excessively attached to each other. Additionally, their bond excludes other family members, it creates a distance to Elaine and Fermoy. The father clearly does not approve of their closeness and their little daughter reacts jealously because she never takes the centre stage for neither of her parents. Elaine, however, is more anxious to gain Fermoy's attention than her mother's. She is Daddy's little girl, who openly and constantly confronts her mother throughout the play, whereas Stephen's attitude towards Frances changes towards the end of the story.

In Act One Stephen, a child of ten, does not learn to let go of his mother, he still has his milk teeth and practically no existing emotional connection with his father.⁹⁰ The object of his desire is his mother, and vice versa. Meeting Stephen again as a young adult in Act Two, it is made apparent that the son is well aware of his childhood, the abnormal relationship with his mother and the fact that he had to make up for Frances' loss.⁹¹ Somewhat like Ded, Stephen turns to the arts as a retreat and "through his art he can understand that he is being robbed of his self, as he clearly perceives that he has been nothing but a substitute for someone else in his mother's heart" (Mesquita 297). He uses film-making as a means of processing his memories rather than repressing experiences from the past. Resolution and Stephen's self-determination instead of repression are probably the reason why, contrary to his sister Elaine,⁹² he shows no deep anger but displays a more understanding behaviour towards Frances. Nevertheless, Stephen develops and is eventually able to detach himself from his

⁹⁰ In Act Two, the relationship between father and son proves to be even more distant, Fermoy is too busy even to go for lunch with his son (A 47).

⁹¹ Similar to Ded in *On Raftery's Hill*, he breaks his silence and confronts the perpetrator ("Ten year pretendin I was James. Ten year I went along wud ud. I used pray to die so you'd be given back James, I loved ya thah much. When strangers'd ask me me name, I'd say, James, me name is James, I'm James of the blue black curls" (A 68)).

⁹² The siblings' different attitudes towards their parents, especially their mother, is particularly apparent when the brother and his sister clash on the day of Ariel's burial. Elaine accuses Stephen to still be "slurpin ah her altar after all she's done" (A 62). While Elaine expresses her profound disdain for her mother, Stephen is "sick a [her] givin ouh about her" as after all she is "still [their] mother" (A 62).

mother, which becomes all too apparent by his refusal to take over the family business. Stephen is the only example of "positive individualism" (Mesquita 297) in the play. He frees himself from his past and maternal restrictiveness ("Ud's time ya stopped pullin ouh a me, livin through me" (A 67)). He becomes independent "from his parents' legacy, and, without denying his heritage, he can follow his dreams" (Mesquita 306).

When Stephen finally leaves Frances, his mother does not understand, just "*stand[ing] there distraught, disbelief*" (A 69). As her youngest daughter despises her, Frances has no affectional bond left. Her prolonged presence of mourning proves as destructive as absolute absence of grieving would, or as harmful for the Fitzgeralds as Fermoy's striving for power. She never concealed her sorrow, repressed her emotions, still her heart turns to cinders where it is.⁹³ Although Frances swears that she loves all her children, Carr doubtlessly depicts her as a character who has no real affectional bond with her living daughter and son. Her conscious grieving poisons her emotional relationships in the present, especially after she took the life of the father of her remaining children. Stephen puts his feelings into words for his mother to understand:

STEPHEN Wudouh a thought for Elaine or me. Wudouh a care of how thah rippin away has shadded us. Ya did ud for Ariel. For James. There was ony ever two chambers in your hear, Ma, two dusty chambers, me and Elaine trying to force our way in. Our playground was a graveyard, Ma, we ran among your tombstones like they were swings, we played hop, skip and jump on the bones a your children, your real children, while we whined for ya like ghosts. (A 68)

The reader is constantly reminded of Frances' guilt and pain. The fact that Frances seems to celebrate her sorrow also suggests that she unconsciously feels that she does not deserve to live a happy life, that she perceives the tragic events as punishment because she was not able to protect her first-born. Nevertheless, as in many other plays Carr only delivers an explanation but no justification for her characters' behaviour. The playwright points towards the origins of distress and the consequences rather than serving a solution for the characters' problems on a silver platter. The consequences of Frances' retreat to the realm of the dead are most transparent in her irretrievably broken relationship with her daughter Elaine; their problems appear resolvable and yet the origin so clear.

⁹³ A reference to Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* ("Sorrow concealed, like an oven stopped, /Doth burn the heart to cinders where it is" (2.3.36-7)).

6.1.3 Elaine, Daddy's Little Girl

A little girl is as a rule less aggressive, defiant and self-sufficient; she seems to have a greater need for being shown affection and on that account to be more dependent and pliant.

Freud (*Femininity* 117)

After the discussion of the somewhat Oedipal nature of the relationship between Frances and Stephen, it is time to shed light on the remaining daughter of the Fitzgerald household. Elaine's affectional bonds are also marked by abnormal attachment behaviour. Elaine is a character whose dialogues with the other members of the family appear rather offensive, except, of course, the conversations with her beloved father. McDonald argues that throughout the play Elaine shows nothing but hatred for her mother and undying devotion for her father, just like "Electra did in the *Oresteia*" (*Fatal* 135). Unlike Freud's description of a little girl, Elaine is in fact the most aggressive child of the three, but she also displays a strong need for affection and attention. For Trench, the character's behaviour is a result of her suffering from her mother's negligence and not feeling loved at all (*Bloody* 232-7).

In Act One Elaine is a twelve-year-old girl, rebellious but also in search of tender love and care, but in Acts Two and Three she is "at the age of twenty-two, [...] not a young spirit any longer, but a loyal follower of her father, whom she loves passionately" (Mesquita 303). Fairly early in the play the reader witnesses the daughter's hostile feelings towards her mother and her adoration of her father. From the very beginning Frances' relationship with Elaine is presented as difficult and charged with animosity, so are their dialogues. The communication pattern between them is fairly restricted. It is small wonder that Elaine's utterances show mostly envy: envy at her brother for receiving most of her mother's attention, envy at the dead whom Frances prefers over the living. Her primary caregiver is preoccupied with her own grief and longing. Her mother does not realize that she longs for attention which, as mentioned earlier, causes disappointment and frustration in a child. As Elaine's attachment to her mother is not fulfilling she turns to her father: "[a]lmost everything that we find later in her relation to her father was already present in this earlier attachment and has been transferred subsequently on to her father" (Freud, *Femininity* 119). Unfortunately, this character is inaccessible for Elaine as well.

In Elaine's first scene she is presented as Daddy's little girl, fruitlessly competing with her siblings for attention on Ariel's birthday and clinging to her father, trying to get his attention by asking for "a puff a [his] cigar" (A 12). The next time we meet Elaine she is watching Frances still breast-feeding her ten-year-old son, a scene in which she does not hide her jealousy and great anger towards her mother. Throughout the play her bitterness, her feelings of maternal abandonment and her admiration for her father will not change.

FRANCES That's enough, Elaine. G'wan ouhside the duur and don't come back in till ya say sorry to Auntie Sarah.

ELAINE Well, ud's true, isn't ud, what's to be sorry for when ud's true?
(*Squeezes* FRANCES)

FRANCES Ow, ya rip, ya!

ELAINE Thah's for the last twelve years.

FRANCES Geh ouh!

ELAINE (*Sauntering out*) Ya think ud bothers me goin ouhside the duur? Love ud ouh there. Can't waih to be ouhside your duur forever. (A 24)

Similar to Fermoy Elaine seeks attention away from Frances; yet not like her father outside the Fitzgerald household, she mainly struggles "to exist outside of the maternal" (Trench, *Bloody* 235). There is no place for Elaine in her mother's "empire a sorrow" (A 52), beside the dead children and Stephen, she is only a "bystander in the mother-daughter relationship" (Trench, *Bloody* 234). In any case, having to share the maternal love and care with a 'newcomer' is quite challenging for a child. According to Freud, sibling rivalry develops because "a child's demands for love are immoderate, they make exclusive claims and tolerate no sharing" (*Femininity* 123). The new baby is an unwanted intruder which leaves the older child feeling "dethroned, despoiled, prejudiced in its rights" (Freud, *Femininity* 123). The most notable feature of the new bond is breast-feeding, which in the case of Frances and Stephen is exceptionally prolonged. Goldberg points out that "[m]ost commonly, fathers increase their responsibility and involvement with the older child while the mother devotes her attention to the baby" (*Development* 88), which in this case is difficult as Fermoy's attention is also directed elsewhere. Elaine has every reason to feel bereft of her right to be loved and cared for. Elaine is a character on the search of affection, she is the abandoned and "unlovely daughter" (A 52) in this story.⁹⁴ What Elaine does not realize is that her father is also out of reach.

⁹⁴ In Act One, Frances even calls Elaine her "penance" (A 24).

Elaine develops an "unhealthy obsession with Fermoy" (Trench, *Bloody* 234). Feeling motherless, she is absolutely devoted to her father. Elaine condones his murderous secret and shares Fermoy's view that Ariel's murder was a necessity. Defending Fermoy's act she argues that what he did to her sister "had the grandeur a God in ud. Pure sacrifice" (A 64). Despite Elaine's sense of belonging to her father, of her allegiance, this lonely character will never be an adored daughter, not even an appreciated ally but rather an assistant who succumbed to the charms of an ambitious and ruthless politician with "big mellifluous vice" (A 63). Oedipus-like she "seeks to get rid of her mother and take her place with her father" (Freud, *Femininity* 134).⁹⁵ Fermoy is everything to her. By killing her husband Frances takes that away from Elaine and her world lies in ruins. Her distress and anger are overwhelming when she comes to know that Ariel shall be buried with her father. Elaine pleads with her mother to leave her father's grave untouched because it is all she has left ("Don't touch hees grave. Ud's mine. Ud's all ya've left me wud" (A 65)). What finally breaks Elaine is her father's ghost, who returns and does not recognize her as his own daughter. Carr does not leave it at that, her character has to suffer more. Frances appears and tells her that she never wanted another daughter, instead "prayed for a son to make up for James" (A 74). This final confrontation between mother and daughter fatally ends as Elaine stabs Frances in the throat.

For many critics, Elaine is just an "Electra-like daughter" (Billington, *Ariel*) killing her mother to avenge her father, which is an approach that seems legitimate considering that she never expresses grief over her maternal abandonment, only anger (O'Reilly 180). Still, Carr leaves us with the feeling that there is more to Elaine than a vengeful character and that the relationship with her mother is not only full of hate but also shows a strong longing for love. Freud argues that a "powerful tendency to aggressiveness is always present beside a powerful love, and the more passionately a child loves its object the more sensitive does it become to disappointments and frustrations from that object" (*Femininity* 124). Expressions of disappointment and frustration are clearly noticeable on numerous occasions, especially, however, in the following dialogue towards the end of the story:

SARAH There's a divil the size of a whale inside you. Where in God's name is this hatred a your mother coming from?

ELAINE If I knew thah ... I can't look ah her for too long or me head swims. She appals me, allas has. (*Shudders*) Her eyes, her shoulders, everythin

⁹⁵ "You and your father, swear ya were married to him" (Frances, A 53).

about her. I look at her and I think there's somethin missin. I don't know is
it in me or in her.

SARAH And what is it you think is missin?

ELAINE I think she has no soul. (471)

Particularly in this case a mother without a soul means a mother without feelings for her child, which of course is very painful for Elaine. This pain makes her follow her father's footsteps and continue the family tradition of violence. The "sins of the past continue to haunt the future" (Kilroy) and again the past wins this contest.

6.2 Literary Hauntings

Carr's characters are dealing with the dead once more, so is the playwright herself. Not only is the character Ariel inspired by Shakespeare's airy spirit in *The Tempest*, there are other literary references. In times when "the all-consuming intellectual pursuit seems to be that of demystification" (Carr, *Dead* 191), the playwright again turns to the beauty of myth. In an interview with Sihra, Carr says that *Ariel* (at that time still called *Destiny*) "follows the sensibility of *Iphigenia*" (*Conversation with Sihra* 55). Various critics feel, however, that this time Carr's Irish characters are not able to carry the heavy weight of the original Greek myth, that "the tragic source material overwhelms the local story" (Fitzpatrick 174). For Trench "*Ariel* replays the destructive outcome of the original myth, with the protagonist engaging in his own undertaking for his own sake but the myth disables and fails to be convincing in a wider contemporary context" (*Bloody* 214).

Carr's play does not require closer scrutiny to spot the similarities to the original Greek myth. Fermoy Fitzgerald, the father striving for power, sacrifices his own flesh and blood, his first-born daughter, just like Agamemnon. His wife Frances, just like Clytemnestra, takes vengeance and kills her husband and the father of their two remaining children, Elaine and Stephen (Electra and Orestes), which eventually causes her own downfall. These parallels are fairly obvious yet there are also quite crucial differences. McDonald goes into detail, critically examining single characters in comparison to the Greek models of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and arguing, for instance, that Frances has nothing of the strength of Clytemnestra; on the contrary, this character is rather weak (*Fatal* 131). Zoraide Rodrigues Carrasco de Mesquita and other critics again emphasize the clear contrast between Agamemnon and Fermoy as the latter acts

out of egoism and self-centredness, not for the greater good. She argues that the "chief of the Greek army, Agamemnon, was not free to heed his fatherly feelings, since the possibility of victory for the Greeks against the Trojans depended on his acceptance and fulfilment of the goddess Artemis' design" (295). In Aeschylus' *Oresteia* the spectator is granted a glimpse inside the character's soul, his inner conflict does not remain concealed:

It is a grievous doom not to comply,
and a grievous one if I am to slay my child, the delight of my house,
polluting a father's hands
with streams of slaughtered maiden's blood close by
the altar. Which of these options is free from evil?
How can I become a deserter of the fleet,
losing my alliance? (Aeschylus, Agamemnon 25-6)

The necessity of Agamemnon's act and his feelings for his daughter are present in this monologue. Although the apparition of Ariel's ghost suggests that Fermoy feels a spark of remorse, Carr, above all, highlights her protagonist's dark and narcissistic side. The reader/spectator has to do without a grieving father and be content with occasional attempts to create a sense of necessity for the killing.⁹⁶ Agamemnon's painful decision secured a dearly paid victory for the Greek in the Trojan War, whereas Fermoy as Taoiseach aspires "to cahapult the whole nation ouha sleaze and sentimentaliyh and gombeenism" (4 63). For some, however, a religiously fanatic father who sacrifices his daughter for the common good of contemporary Ireland fails to convince.⁹⁷ The dénouement of both stories is the downfall of the family. In *Ariel* it is, as so very often in Carr's plays, a homemade misery and

[i]t is the house that must provide the plug
for this wound, and the cure cannot come from others
outside, but from members of the house itself,
through cruel, bloody Strife. (Aeschylus, Chorus 271-2)

A cruel and bloody strife ends the play yet it is not the son incited by his sister, as in the Greek myth, who carries out the dirty deed, but the daughter who takes her mother's life. With this aberration, which is quite meaningful, Carr, once again, sets

⁹⁶ Elaine believes in the necessity. She renders her father's thought saying that "Ariel was the stroke a destiny [...]. Ariel was Necessity udself, the thing thah's decided ouhside a time" (4 61).

⁹⁷ O'Toole questions the logic of the story and notes that Carr does not "manage to get to the core of the Greek plays: a sense of necessity" (90).

Stephen apart from the other characters. Different from Orestes he breaks out of the family's pattern of violence.

6.3 Too Much of a Good Thing

I've a fierce destiny, Ma, and you're in ud.
Elaine (425)

The environment a child grows up in is decisive for its development, and the family it is born and raised in normally provides physical and psychological nurture. In *Ariel* Carr again addresses the aspect of heritage and genealogy and combines elements of a dysfunctional family with Greek myths in which the characters believe in destiny. In the story "[v]iolence will clash with violence" (Aeschylus, *Orestes* 271). Some might say that a murder in the past, three killings in the present, all in one family, is too much for one play, others simply note that "[n]o one could call this a perfect play" (Billington, *Ariel*). For none of the characters in the play the family is a source of security, love and stability, most of them search for it outside the family unit, be it as a novice, as a successful politician or a ruthless businesswoman.⁹⁸ Religion, success and power are substitutes to fill the void the past has left behind. There is a strong emphasis on achievement in the Fitzgerald family. Collaboration and solidarity are rare, individualism is preferred and affectional attachments widely dismissed.

McDonald, like several other critics, stresses the main problem of the play: the missing audience (reader) identification. For her it is impossible to develop sympathy for the characters (*Fatal*). Carr aims to show the destructiveness of loss, she presents neglected sons and daughters and their parents, who commit a crime against their children. The characters' sorrow and suffering, however, seems to suffocate under the heavy load of events and themes presented in the play. Mesquita, on the other hand, does not comment on the thematic overload; instead, she views the play in a wider context, writing that *Ariel* questions the dominating values of our society and at the same time "points to the necessity of renewal", which for her does not mean that "[m]aterial progress is not to be condemned, but spirituality and ideality must prevail" (306). Leeney similarly argues that in *Ariel* Carr managed to capture "contemporary anxieties about our status and tenure here on earth" (*Violence and Destruction* 517). Jordan explains that he thinks that "many performances could not evade the

⁹⁸ Frances is "cuttin dales like a shark down ah the cement every day a the wake" (452).

circumstances of the real, the constraints of the psychological and could not muster the necessary intensity of the action" (*Urban Drama* 20). In fact, for many critics Carr's text failed to do so as well. Harvey O'Brien notes that the dialogues turn into heavy monologues and that it is difficult for the audience to filter Carr's "interrelated concerns for the everyday lives of contemporary Irish men and women".

It is probably not Carr's most convincing play. Although *Ariel* is a weighty play, in parts also exaggerated, there is, in my opinion, a quite positive character that adds a little light to the darkness of the play. Stephen breaks out of the constant iteration of the family's mistakes and wrongdoings. This minor character conveys a flicker of hope for the ability to change despite painful experiences in the past. Stephen is an example of a self-determined individual who sets out to free himself from the constraints of the past, he forges his own destiny.

7 Man versus Woman in *Woman and Scarecrow* and *The Cordelia Dream*

In the spirit of the saying "Less is more" Carr reduces the dramatis personae in her next two plays – less characters and less dead bodies on stage. *Woman and Scarecrow* was first performed at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs in London in June 2006, and about two years later (December 2008) *The Cordelia Dream* premièred at Wilton's Music Hall in London. In both plays, Carr tells stories about exhausted and exhausting relationships, the contact with others, ourselves and the past. While *Woman and Scarecrow* received rave reviews, *The Cordelia Dream* was not the reviewers' favourite, to say the least. Clapp excoriates the latter, which is, in her opinion, full of implausible dialogues not conveying anything, "[i]t's as if no one had ever heard of complication or contradiction, let alone of Freud" (*Mozart Meets Nuts*). For Charles Spencer it is even "as punishingly depressing and pretentious a play as [he has] endured for many a long month". In contrast, *Woman and Scarecrow* was received as a play that has "the vital pulse of truth about it" (Cavendish), "crammed with wild laughter and dense with unshed tears, [the play] is not so much about dying as about how to live" (Gardner, *Woman*); while *The Cordelia Dream* is a "rare misstep" of the playwright, yet "makes for an enjoyable enough browse" (E. Kelly), *Woman and Scarecrow* is full of bitter humour and passion. Is *The Cordelia Dream* as bland as described by many critics although it is built around one of Shakespeare's great tragedies, *King Lear*? And what makes *Woman and Scarecrow*, a play set around and in a deathbed appear so vibrant?

7.1 And They Didn't Live Happily After All

It's a fine thing to believe in happiness, but
you mustn't let it rule your life. We mustn't
slide into happiness.

(CD 30)

Every time Carr publishes a new play it is clear for all those who are familiar with her work that right from the start the play will be challenging and far from easy-going. And although the characters always search for utter happiness and satisfaction, there will be no happy ending, which, needless to say, also applies to *Woman and Scarecrow* and *The Cordelia Dream*. Carr certainly does not follow the motto "All's well that ends well".

A mother of eight children is lying in bed, haggard and fatally ill, talking to an uncanny figure, Scarecrow, or, presumably, just to herself. She is afraid of the cruel, deathly creature waiting for her in the wardrobe, she is not quite ready to go yet. Before WOMAN⁹⁹ draws her last breath she is full of memories and questions, and probably ruefulness. What kind of sins need to be confessed? Did she live her life to the full? And what about HIM, her husband? Was it love or just dependency? In the remaining hours of her life WOMAN moves back and forth between the past and the present, sometimes supported by Scarecrow and often forced by her companion. Scarecrow wishes for WOMAN to find the truth before she passes away, before the Thing in the Wardrobe "will eat [her] alive" (*WS* 12). This search happens in a very truthful and, at times, humorous way. WOMAN offers tenacious resistance to death and fights a fierce battle with HIM, Auntie Ah, Scarecrow, the Thing in the Wardrobe and, most importantly, herself, until she has to admit to herself that she has been half-alive all along. It is not without reason that the play is advertised as a "passionate threnody".

The story of *The Cordelia Dream*, in comparison, totally lacks lighter moments but not passion. It is a bitter play about a strong rivalry between two creative and passionate people: Man and Woman. Driven by a dream of Cordelia and King Lear, a daughter calls on her father after years of mutual avoidance. The encounter is marked by distance and antagonism, but also by a longing for reconciliation. Typical for Carr's work, the parent/child-relationship is a fairly complex and difficult one, governed by competition and rejection. The two-hander features two composers: one once a protégé of the other and now successful, while the other feels pushed aside by the fame of his own daughter. It seems as if only one can flourish while the other one must withdraw. Abandoned by her cold and obstinate father, Woman sacrifices herself, gives him "the field" (*CD* 34) and commits suicide. She does not, however, disappear into the dark without visiting her father once more to present him with her "parting gift" (*CD* 52), his master-piece.

⁹⁹ For the sake of readability the character WOMAN in *Woman and Scarecrow* will henceforth be written in capital letters only, while 'Woman', the female character in *The Cordelia Dream*, will only begin with a capital letter.

7.2 Struggle with the Past and the Present

[T]he individual's quest for identity is seen to stem from family and home and once again, family and home are highly problematic and do not provide a sense of belonging. On the contrary, they destabilise identity.

Trench (*Bloody* 77)

The characters in both plays, as well as in the other plays discussed so far, embody their past, their present and their future, never just themselves. What is gone and lost lives on within them and receives more attention than what will be. While memory and events from the past come naturally to WOMAN on her deathbed as she tries to make peace with herself, Man painfully reminds his daughter of her loveless childhood and the ongoing resentment against his own flesh and blood. Both stories shed light on traumas, mistakes, and unfulfilled longings in an imagined world where the characters are denied secure attachment, a stable home base. Mother- and fatherhood are devalued. The inner conflicts of the characters are revealed, while outer battles continue to be fought. The female main characters in *Woman and Scarecrow* and *The Cordelia Dream* strive to free themselves from constraints of the past and the present while their family and, in fact, also the characters themselves, limit their options in life. The women's accentuated roles are that of a daughter, a mother and a wife, while the importance of being a self-determined individual is pushed into the background.

7.2.1 A Woman's Gargantuan Rancour¹⁰⁰

WOMAN's last moments are full of confusion and clarity. The mysterious figure of Scarecrow assists her in clearing out her cluttered mind. Scarecrow, "Carr's otherworldly device" (Cavendish), can be identified as the dying woman's "furious alter ego-cum-guardian angel" (Meany), her Jungian 'shadow-figure' (Cannon),¹⁰¹ "[p]art

¹⁰⁰ Quoting Scarecrow as she tries to find a more fitting expression for WOMAN's "boundless capacity for bitterness" (*WS* 19).

¹⁰¹ The 'shadow' is a Jungian archetype which contains qualities that the ego does not identify with but possesses nonetheless: "The shadow is a living part of the personality and therefore wants to live with it in some form." (Jung 20). "The meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one's own shadow. The shadow is a tight passage, a narrow door, whose painful constriction no one is spared who goes down to the deep well. But one must learn to know oneself in order to know who one is" (Jung 21). "The shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and yet is always thrusting itself upon him directly or indirectly – for instance, inferior traits of character and other incompatible tendencies" (Jung 284-5).

familiar, part confessor, part soul" (O'Gorman) this character is friend and foe, "protector and tormentor" (Whyte), an onstage witness of WOMAN's struggle between life and death. For Emma Jordan, one of the directors, Scarecrow can also be seen as "a kind of eternal being" (qtd. in McBride). Mária Kurdi connects Freud's theory of "the uncanny" and the phenomenon of the "double" with Scarecrow, WOMAN's double (115) who fulfils various functions. According to Freud, the second character possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other (*Uncanny* 141-2), it "performs the function of self-observation and self-criticism, exercises a kind of psychological censorship" (*Uncanny* 142). It can, however, also be seen as an entity which represents unfulfilled but possible futures "to which our imagination still clings, all the strivings of the ego that were frustrated by adverse circumstances, all our suppressed acts of volition" (*Uncanny* 143). The best characterization, one can argue, however, comes from the playwright herself, when she talks about the soul, "this impenetrable thing within us, that is just there, observing it all. It is almost like we are in battle with it, that we are fighting it to the death. We are trying to go the opposite way, and it is the one wise fabric inside us, that makes us stop and think [...]" (*Conversation with Sihra* 58). For the protagonist Scarecrow is often a "vicious parasite" (*WS* 14) who confronts her with uncomfortable issues. The most inconvenient reality is certainly WOMAN's refusal to remain true to herself and her cowardice to accept the world's challenges, to defy them.

WOMAN [...] The world has not yielded all I had hoped of it. That's as good a reason as any to die. [...]

SCARECROW The world has not surrendered to you. In fact the world has given you a bit of a battering, I think it's fair to say. But as I keep telling you it's a question of strategy. A question of how you deal with what's thrown in your lap.

WOMAN I didn't fight back enough? I wasn't brave?

SCARECROW You copped on too late.

WOMAN Did I? And what did I cop on to too late? [...]

SCARECROW [...] The first law. This world's job is to take everything from you. Yours is not to let it. (*WS* 18)

Persistently Scarecrow demands of WOMAN to stop lying to herself, to admit that she surrendered to the stereotypical female social role as mother and wife, completely ignoring her inner voice (her Scarecrow). Now, at the moment of death, she finally listens. All her life WOMAN repressed her real self in favour of her family. She craves for a new beginning, longs to return to where she started, the West of Ireland, her

origin, her place of birth, but it is too late for changes, for reshuffling the pack.¹⁰² It is the time for remorse and sorrow over the things that never happened and never will, to confess that she "barely tasted" (*WS* 13) the world.

On their journey to memories from the past, missed opportunities and mistakes, WOMAN repeatedly mentions her mother and her own children. She, like several of Carr's characters, lost her primary attachment figure early in life. While Auntie Ah took her in after her mother died and tried to be a substitute caregiver for WOMAN, she "never allowed [her] to be [her] mother" (*WS* 45), no one could take that place.¹⁰³ Comparable to Hester, WOMAN has never let go of her mother, and shortly before she has to follow her into the darkness, she remembers the one moment she thought she made her mother utterly happy. Scarecrow accuses WOMAN of holding on too long, meaning her lost mother, her husband and her life (*WS* 35). WOMAN ignores her shadow because she needs to talk about the memory that "has stalked [her] for years". As a child, her mother bought her a "red coat and red hat", heavily pregnant and in "sombre and belligerent" (*WS* 36) mood after hours of fruitless searching, she finally found for her daughter what she was looking for. Looking at her little child in the mirror, seeing her daughter in her "red coat and hat, gave her pleasure, pleasure beyond describing. For one brief moment, a mirror glance, [she] was that thing [her mother] had yearned for and found" (*WS* 36). It is an intimate moment of closeness and harmony between mother and daughter, a memory so painful to her that "there is no comfort" (*WS* 36). Yet sometimes memory betrays us.

Scarecrow, like so very often in the play, forces WOMAN to accept and to face reality.¹⁰⁴ A tenderly remembered moment is deconstructed and replaced by the bitter fact that she witnessed her mother dying in hospital during labour. WOMAN's thoughts are with the past, the borders between the real and the unreal often become blurred, and yet she seems to realize the parallels between her mother's and her own life. In her mind they are both "conspirators too wise to fight what has been decreed on high, long, long ago" (*WS* 48). Destiny always comes as a good excuse for Carr's characters

¹⁰² The fact that catching up on everything is impossible for the protagonist is already conveyed in the first few lines of the play. Returning to the West or even "[w]alking is no longer an option" (*WS* 12).

¹⁰³ In Auntie Ah's utterances, one is occasionally able to detect grief, anger and jealousy as WOMAN never let her emotionally close: "And me all the time thinking I'd nothing you wanted"; "And what am I? Your servant?" (*WS* 49).

¹⁰⁴ Scarecrow confronts her with the truth, urging her to stop lying: "That baloney about the red coat. It never happened" (*WS* 47).

not to take responsibility for their lives, to give up.¹⁰⁵ Her mother also accepted her personal and outer circumstances, capitulated and married a man she did not love, just like herself. WOMAN continues the tradition of an unfulfilled life, love and marriage. The question of heritage and free will is once more highly visible in this play, and again the protagonist is not heroic enough to break out of the cross-generational pattern of self-abandonment. In this context, Scarecrow does neither conceal the truth nor lie about the character of WOMAN's mother:

SCARECROW She lived bitterly. I remember her battering the spuds into a venomous pulp for the dinner. I remember her vagueness on the beach, her refusal to play. I remember the weeping in darkened rooms [...]. I remember her belief that she was somehow inferior and her living out of that belief with such conviction, such passion, such energy invest in taking second place. All of which you have inherited. [...]

WOMAN That wasn't her at all.

SCARECROW Why would I lie? I loved her too.

WOMAN So is that where my coldness comes from? (*WS* 50)

The parent Scarecrow recollects lived a life full of self-abasement and self-deprivation, also a life without happiness. It is disputable whether her mother was able to provide a secure base for the development of a self-confident adolescent/woman. As mentioned earlier a caregiver who is preoccupied with their own instability is at the same time unable to give the sense of stability needed for a child's emotional equilibrium. Scarecrow is the "critical spectator" (*WS* 22) that does not allow false images of the past, misleading memories or a pretended present. WOMAN has chosen to be a housewife, just like her mother was, tending to her children and her husband. It was an acceptable distraction from her inner voice.¹⁰⁶ WOMAN's reference to her sons and daughters using their names underlines the importance they have in her life.¹⁰⁷ WOMAN embodies a mother quite contrary to Carr's image of a good mother; in fact, the playwright's character represents quite the opposite. Carr believes that "the idea that you sacrifice everything for your children – it's a load of rubbish. It leads to very destructive living and thinking, and it has a much worse effect on children than if you go out and live your own life" (*Rage and Reason* 150). WOMAN's children, although remaining offstage, are always present in her conversations with Scarecrow. For her

¹⁰⁵ WOMAN declares that she thinks that her „destiny is to be baffled by happiness“ (*WS* 21).

¹⁰⁶ Scarecrow continuously complains that she was always repressed and that WOMAN never reacted to her inner voice.

¹⁰⁷ Besides Demi Roussos no one else is referred by their the forename. Viewed from a different perspective, Trench rightly points out that the fact that all characters "are referred to by either pronouns or titles [...] plac[es] a universal slant on who they are and what they represent" (*Bloody* 77).

alterego they are primarily WOMAN's "excuse for everything" (*WS* 29), her defensive argument for not living, because "if it wasn't for the children [she]'d have walked years ago" (*WS* 39). Trench suggests that the "repetitious chores of domestic life seem to have been her way of avoiding its harsh realities" (*Bloody* 85). One of these bitter realities is certainly her husband's infidelity and constant betrayal, which weighs heavily on WOMAN's mind.

7.2.2 Cutting out the Past

Es ist ganz richtig, was die Philosophie sagt, dass das Leben rückwärts verstanden werden muss. Aber darüber vergisst man den anderen Satz, dass es vorwärts gelebt werden muss.

Kierkegaard (*Journal* JJ167)

The disturbing elements in the life of the female protagonist in *The Cordelia Dream* also turn out to be a feeling of inferiority and the dependency on a man. The plot-propelling event also involves the image of death, the well-being of individuals depending on the behaviour of others, and the will to achieve closure: it is Woman's dream about being the dead Cordelia not bemoaned by her father King Lear, who celebrates the death of his daughter. This dream already allows two assumptions about the female character and about the play itself: first, it evokes Carr's other characters who depend on the affirmation of their attachment figure and long for love, and, on the other hand, Carr uses the scene of the four howls to foreshadow Woman's death and, at the same time, presents a father who shows no grief or remorse about his daughter's sorrow. Man's attitude towards parenting is clearly the opposite of what has been outlined as ideal by Bowlby. Woman accuses her father that stability and love are alien to him as his parenting style only varies from feeding and washing to leaving the child alone. The dynamic of the father/daughter-relationship gains importance as the reader is told that the mother of the female character died at an early age (like so often in Carr's work). She is once more an absent character who appears in a brief memory. A memory in which the primary caregiver is depicted as inaccessible and her father, for the first and last time, as supporting.¹⁰⁸ The parent/child-relationship is destructive, as "a deeply engrained damaged past [...] continues to impinge on the

¹⁰⁸ Woman's memory of how her father defends and supports her is comparable to WOMAN's remembered and idealized moment with her mother as both show closeness and an emotional bond between parent and child.

present world of the wrathful characters" (Trench, *Bloody* 264). Yet there is more to the conflict between father and daughter than reproaches about past wrongdoings and ongoing hard-heartedness, there is also a fierce competition between two composers.

In the endless dialogue between Man and Woman it transpires that the father is jealous of his daughter's success. In his view she is devoid of talent and to him her work suffers from mediocrity.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, he holds her achievement responsible for his downfall, as if "somehow [it] crippled his creativity" (Spencer). For Sara Keating, both characters are "despicably self-centred, both entirely consumed by their quest for the crux of their creative genius". Man and Woman accuse each other of their failure, both having been unable to produce a noteworthy piece in the last years. While Man blames his daughter to have stolen his gift, she feels smothered by his hatred. It is annihilation so strong that it is difficult to bear, but probably manageable when expressed purely by an opponent, yet devastating when it comes from the father who should be proud instead. While Man has estranged himself from his own flesh and blood declaring that Woman has "stopped being [his] daughter a long time ago" (*CD* 24), that she is just "a bad egg" (*CD* 26), Woman desperately whispers, "My father, my father, I must cut him out of me, I must drain every last drop of his blood from mine" (*CD* 21). Cutting out the past seems for both characters the only solution, yet Woman chooses silence and withdrawal.

7.3 The Familiar Battlefield

I gave you my soul – young and living. And
since then I've been empty – soulless [...]
That was why I died, Arnold.

Ibsen (*When We Dead Wake* Irena 250)

Ibsen's character Irena devoted her life to a man, disregarded her own life for the sake of his inspiration and self-fulfilment, similar to the female protagonists in *The Cordelia Dream* and *Woman and Scarecrow*. As in *On Raftery's Hill* and *Ariel*, "patriarchal control is [...] at the centre of destruction" (Trench, *Bloody* 163) in both plays. Paired with the female characters' fateful cowardice to stand up for themselves, the heavy burden of past and current circumstances is too much for them to carry. Similar to Portia and The Mai, the two female main characters define their identity in relation to a

¹⁰⁹ In Man's opinion the gods are to blame for his daughter's success, they "must have favoured" (*CD* 15) her.

man. While their children receive less affection, the dominant male figure takes centre stage in the women's lives. Besides devotion and silence, missing bravery is part of the characters' flaws, which is typical for Carr's work, but again also to be found in plays by one of her greatest sources of inspiration, Ibsen: the female character Hedda, for instance, remarks on the importance of being daring, "Ah courage. Yes. If one only had that [...] Then perhaps one could even *live* at last" (*Hedda Gabler* 319). *The Cordelia Dream* and *Woman and Scarecrow* mirror not only the influence of playwrights, like Ibsen and Beckett, the plays are also infused with the idea of courage as a driving force in life and are located on Carr's well-known battleground, and probably the most challenging one, families.

Despite the life-or-death struggle of WOMAN, she also has to fight herself and her betraying and insecure husband HIM. *Woman and Scarecrow* is set in the realm of addictive behaviour within romantic relationships and lost chances. For Gardner it is "a play that seeps into your very bones, making you realise that in squandering love we squander the best part of ourselves" (*Woman*). WOMAN, however, succumbs to an illusion: she believes HIM to be her destiny although he is neither her dream come true nor her consolation.¹¹⁰ Her life is far from being a Demi Roussos song. As mythical and unreal the presence of Scarecrow and the Thing in the Wardrobe might be, as mundane and real are the problems of WOMAN and HIM. Similar to *The Mai*, WOMAN is "much more absorbed in her hopeless love for her faithless husband than she is in her children" (McMullan, *Unhomely Women* 16). She is a lover first and a mother second. By betraying her husband as well WOMAN sought relief, yet in her last hours she realizes it was just self-deception. Vengeance is not always sweet.

Scarecrow helps WOMAN to open her book of life, and looking back she feels that she has taken "one wrong turn leading to another wrong turn" (*WS* 31), that for "twenty-five years [HIM has] caused [her] suffering" (*WS* 37). In a final letter WOMAN gives free rein to her anger and pain. Dictated by her alterego, the "seething superior sow", a torrent of hatred is created, a "trail of darkness" (*WS* 54) designed to make her husband's remaining life misery. Her words are so very direct and harsh that WOMAN first demurs, yet as she softly continues to write she and Scarecrow finally become one voice. It is beautifully done when the two characters, who are in fact one person, first complement one another and then, at last, unite:

¹¹⁰ This is a reference to Demi Roussos's song "Forever and Ever" also used by Carr in this play.

Both Slowly taken from me down the years, that is, my capacity to love, which was boundless in the beginning, long ago when we walked by the river [...]. Be aware I go to my grave bewildered by your cruelty. I go angry, I go unforgiving [...]. (*WS* 56)

Carr's own words echo through Auntie Ah, "How we die says it all about how we have lived" (*WS* 45),¹¹¹ and as forgiving as WOMAN lived, as forgiving she is nevertheless in the end. HIM is full of remorse, begging his wife not to "leave [him] like this" (*WS* 58) as he has to live on bearing the burden of guilt without his wife absolving him. Carr's male character shows a strikingly strong attachment to his spouse, WOMAN is his secure base to which he has always been able to come home to.¹¹² One last time WOMAN comforts him, although she realizes that they "were nothing but a façade for procreation" (*WS* 60); and as the snow slowly falls, death is near.

Chilly and cold like a snowscape is the atmosphere in the room where Woman and Man meet after a long period of mutual avoidance. In line with all the plays discussed so far "The Cordelia Dream dramatises destruction within the containment of family" (Trench, *Bloody* 27). As briefly touched upon before, the father/daughter-relationship is charted as rather complex and toxic in this play. Carr presents a "search for the reconnection with a deep-seated injurious past in the present" (Trench, *Bloody* 26). The longing for resolution of painful past conflicts and the hope to eliminate the haunting image of a father who would happily put "flowers on [his daughter's] grave" (*CD* 21) leads Woman to Man's doorstep. According to Carr this piece is her "response to King Lear", and what particularly fascinates the playwright is the daughter's refusal to "play the game, to do the expected party piece in public" (qtd. in Battersby, *Double Take*). One might even say that Cordelia is as confrontational as Woman, whereas Man is far from being a King Lear, just as Fermoy is not as heroic as Agamemnon or Hester as vengeful as Medea. Comparing *The Cordelia Dream* with Shakespeare's tragedy, Billington expresses his disappointment about the "emotional stasis" (*The Cordelia Dream*) of Carr's play, because although the female character itself points out that Lear

¹¹¹ Carr says in an interview with Sihra: "The fact that we are dying probably is the only significant thing for all of us. And *how* we live, and *how* we die. I think that it is so important – *how* we die. I love biography because I love reading about how people die. I think it says everything about how they have lived – it is extraordinary" (*Conversation with Sihra* 56).

¹¹² HIM says, "The only thing I was always sure of ... thought I was sure of, was you, you here, no matter what, you here for me and me only" (*WS* 60).

"grows till the last second" (CD 40), her father's feelings towards his child do not change at all.

Similar to her play *Marble*, Carr uses the world of dreams as a starting point, an unconscious place, "of course tempered with the conscious, but [...] the truest" (*Rage and Reason* 148). In *The Cordelia Dream*, it is also a place where the creative world of Shakespeare and the protagonist's deepest fears and feelings of abandonment are meshed. Man is depicted as a cruel and heartless old man who does not realize that his daughter is "the most beautiful thing in [his] life" (CD 51). Man has never shown any sense of delight for his child, in his opinion children are "walking dead nursing Mommy and Daddy's darkness" (CD 15). Although there is no room for Woman in his selfish little world, she longs for him to love her. Both characters are, nevertheless, strongly connected with each other, and not only attachment behaviour is an issue but also the blood bond between father and daughter, the heritage:

Woman This is not blame. This is beyond blame. This is tectonic plates, this is living, dying. This is cartilage, marrow, blood stuff.

Man Difficult to believe my blood runs through you. Difficult. And more difficult to accept this savage I see before me I had part in making.

Woman You think I like looking in the mirror and seeing your tracks there? (CD 22)

The characters' dialogues often bristle with anger and also convey a striving for self-fulfilment and uniqueness. In terms of obsession with their own musical creativity, therefore, teacher and pupil do not appear to be so different from each other; but one of them seems less lonely while striving for success. Woman, as well as Man once, has a family behind her, a secure base for refuge. Her husband and her five children are not, however, able to stop Woman's self-doubt and self-hatred as she feels unloved and unwanted by her father and thus "deprived of her place in her family, and socially, her identity as a composer is resisted" (Trench, *Bloody* 262).¹¹³ Her father's hatred and ongoing rejection, she believes, enforced her musical hiatus which poses a threat to her place in society, her self as an artist. Man's identity is also tightly bound to his artistic work, hence "recognis[ing] that his musical scores are dependent on Woman's silence," (Trench, *Bloody* 263) he demands that the charlatan gives way for the genius, that his daughter sacrifices herself for his progress. The origin of this conflict lies in the past. Trench argues that Man's expressed anger is a misdirected aggression, a

¹¹³ Similarly to *Woman and Scarecrow*, the children are absent, but also the husband in this play, which puts the focus even more on the protagonist's role as daughter and composer.

transference of his "self-hatred and destructiveness onto Woman" (*Bloody* 263). The artistic rivalry and the interpersonal situation between these characters are inseparably affiliated with each other. Whereas Man remains unaware of the destructiveness of his behaviour, Woman stays loyal to her father, as Cordelia is to Lear. She forgives him at the end and decides to die, to hang herself, for her father's salvation.

Freud argues in *Writing on Art and Literature* that "Lear is not only an old man: he is a dying man" (120). The male protagonist, on that score, resembles Lear, especially in Act Two when Man is already very confused, not even remembering his own daughter's funeral. The composer's end seems near. He even fails to recognize Woman's ghost that reenters the story to lead her father into the realm of the dead, because, as was foreshadowed earlier in the play, "neither of them will survive one another" (Trench, *Bloody* 267):

Man When Cordelia dies, Lear does too.

Woman Meaning?

Man We won't survive each other. (*CD* 22-3)

Woman returns, like Scarecrow, as an unworldly figure and escorts her father on his journey towards death. This again can be related to Freud's reading of *King Lear*, as for him "Cordelia is Death. [...] She is the Death-goddess who [...] carries away the hero from the battlefield" (*Art and Literature* 120). The masterpiece that Man plays at the end is his "magnificent opus", his "farewell to the earth", his "swan song" (*CD* 16). In the end "Woman and Man are victims of each other, their bodies only able to signify when one is sacrificed at the expense of the other" (Trench, *Bloody* 270). As Carr promises there is redemption for Man and Woman (and, as some critics note, for the audience as well).¹¹⁴

7.4 Invisible Women Past their Prime¹¹⁵

I think you can surrender slowly, [...]. I think sometimes we surrender too quickly here. I like a little battle. I like people who fight, [...]. It is not [...] a simple matter of pride, it's about being aware of what is going on with yourself, on every level, physically and psychologically.

Carr (*Conversation with Sihra* 56)

¹¹⁴ Eileen Battersby quotes Carr saying that *The Cordelia Dream* is "about artistic rivalry and the search for redemption" (*Double Take*).

¹¹⁵ A quote from *Woman and Scarecrow* (43).

The central characters in *The Cordelia Dream* and *Woman and Scarecrow* possess several familiar features of characters from Carr's earlier plays, and similarly, the issues presented are not new. The action in both stories is fairly simple: two women are constrained by their roles as mothers, daughters and wives. They fight for a while but eventually make friends with death, death comes as a release to them. Both have been ignoring the voice of their inner selves for too long, both underestimated the power of the past and the necessity to live in the present. Similar to Hester, The Mai and Dinah, these women lost their mother, their primary caregiver, at an early age. Woman in *The Cordelia Dream* additionally longs, like Elaine, for her father's affection and approval, which is denied due to his self-centredness. Attention to the disappointing parent/child-relationship is crucial for the reading of these plays as both women seem to have suffered injuries from it and thus their behaviour appears clearly affected by it. They both live life without being true to themselves. They are invisible due to the half-existence which Carr so often criticizes. The characters are, however, to a certain extent never aware of their fatal flaw, just like Søren Kierkegaard points out, "The greatest danger, that of losing one's own self, may pass off as quietly as if it were nothing; every other loss, that of an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife etc., is sure to be noticed" (*Sickness unto Death* 26).

The intensity of the battles fought convey a sense of despair, despair on the part of the female characters about the immutability of their situation. Repeatedly throughout their whole lives, it seems, both protagonists are disappointed by a dominant male figure, yet they are unable to leave him, to find closure. Unable to establish an identity on the foundation of their true selves unaffected by painful past wounds, the women return to the origin of their problems: a dying mother, who passed on her inability to change, and a dying father, who fails to realize that his greatest enemy is not his daughter but his self-hatred. Both women seek confrontation, first as a last attempt to escape the inevitability of death, but eventually to make their peace with the people who betrayed them and with themselves. Yet although these two plays have so much in common they also diverge decisively. Whilst in *Woman and Scarecrow* the darkness of dying is illuminated with humorous remarks by the two main characters, and hence grant the reader some relief from the heavy subject,¹¹⁶ the dismal dialogue of Man and Woman in *The Cordelia Dream* and their sable situation gains even more severity

¹¹⁶ The critics favourite funny moment, for instance, is the often quoted scene when WOMAN admires herself looking in the mirror and says, "And now finally I have achieved bones. My dear, I have transformed myself into the ideal. Look at me! I am graveyard chic, angular, lupine, dangerous" (*WS* 21).

through the language used and the father's rigour. Whilst WOMAN is able to move the reader through "remembering small moments of lost tenderness" (Meany), Woman battles against the painful memories of a wronged child. Yet in the end both women lose, knowing that there has always been something missing in their lives, something wrong with them, or, as Kierkegaard, calls it "a sickness of the spirit":

Just as the physician might say that there lives perhaps not one single man who is in perfect health, so one might say perhaps that there lives not one single man who after all is not to some extent in despair, in whose inmost parts there does not dwell a disquietude, a perturbation, a discord, an anxious dread of an unknown something, or of a something he does not even dare to make acquaintance with, dread of a possibility of life, or dread of himself, so that, after all, as physicians speak of a man going about with a disease in him, this man is going about and carrying a sickness of the spirit, which only rarely and in glimpses, by and with a dread which to him is inexplicable, gives evidence of its presence within. (*Sickness unto Death* 17)

In a minimal setting great issues are discussed: heritage, love, sickness and death. Influenced by the ghosts that haunt Carr as a writer these plays carry the heavy weight of dead playwrights, such as Beckett, Ibsen or Shakespeare, and, in parts, philosophers, like Kierkegaard. Numerous critics welcomed Carr's excursion to Irish folk traditions, ancient myths, "Irish plays from Beckett to Enda Walsh" (Meany), and the glimpses of Ibsen in *Woman and Scarecrow*. Whilst the story of a dying woman is rated a success, the British press predominantly thought that Shakespeare's *King Lear* weighs too heavily on the characters in *The Cordelia Dream*. In a Q & A, Carr expressed her admiration for the old king: "what I love about Lear is that with every new thing that happens to him, he learns something new and is affected and transformed". Yet what probably bewilders the reader and the critics is the fact that Man is immune to change and that the reiterative dialogue between father and daughter is difficult to relate to. Spencer even goes so far as to say that the audience is excluded from the play as the theatregoers are merely voyeurs watching the portrait of a young generation who is betrayed by the old. In his view, the audience is uncomfortably attending a "private therapy [rather] than public entertainment".¹¹⁷

The theme of *Woman and Scarecrow* is universal and does not need the skeleton of a great tragedy to support its substance. It is easy for the reader/spectator to relate to its core, or, as Gardner writes, "[t]hose who have lived every single second to the full,

¹¹⁷ Spencer especially refers to the programme note which promised that this piece was "addressing themes that have long haunted" Carr (RSC director Michael Boyd), which immediately adds a strong autobiographical aspect as Carr's father also was a playwright.

have loved and been loved with unrestrained passion and who have never let rancour and revenge curdle them, have absolutely no need to visit this play. The rest of us most certainly do". The play to her raises the question of why "do we so often choose unhappiness, when the only person we spite is ourselves?" (*Woman*). The play once more also addresses the aspect of legacy, but so does *The Cordelia Dream*, and both stories present the power of accepting destiny and, at the same time, although their heroines fail, ask one to challenge one's ghosts and one's past. For these women it is too late to realize that they have never really lived, their chance for change is irretrievably lost. They share the same fate as their naturalist predecessor Irena:

But *I* was a human being, in those days. I had a life to lead too, and a human destiny to fulfil. And I let it all go, you see – gave it up to become servant to you. That was self-murder – a mortal sin against myself [...] a sin that I can never atone for. (Ibsen, *When We Dead Wake* 271)

8 Conclusion

MANDERS Do you feel any better or the happier for reading books of this kind?

MRS ALVING I think it makes me [...] more self-reliant.

MANDERS That is remarkable. But why?

MRS ALVING Well, they give me an explanation or a confirmation of lots of different ideas that have come into my own mind. But what surprises me, Mr. Manders, is that properly speaking, there is nothing at all new in these books. There is nothing more in them than what most people think and believe. The only thing is, that most people either take no account of it or won't admit it to themselves.

Ibsen (*Ghosts*, 79)

Marina Carr persistently moves between the past and the present, the real and the unreal, the living and the dead. In doing so the playwright borrows scenarios from classical drama and returns to the mythical. For Róisín O'Gorman Carr is "[l]ike the graveyard crow, [who] picks over the bones of theatre history, scavenging from the Bard, the Bible, Beckett, and others" (O'Gorman). The works of dead writers inspire her own, yet she does not just copy, she picks out stories and makes them particularly her own. As this thesis has shown neither is the essence of her stories new nor do her plays deliver ground-breaking insights, they rather deal with what most people already know but often find difficult to put into practice: "It's all about trying to live in the present. Everything is the past or future. I haven't mastered that one" (Carr, *Rage and Reason* 151).

The past is often as real as the present for Carr's characters. What the analysis of her work brought to the fore as a common feature is a questioning of how we might deal with memories and our past. The texts remind us of how the past often interferes with life and with the pursuit of happiness. In Carr's imaginative world characters exist, brimful of emotions, who break under the heavy load of the present as they do not succeed in overcoming the obstacles from the past. They relive the mistakes of the previous generation or even desperately try to repeat the past in the present (Jordan, *Any Myth* 159). Carr's stories possess the determinist logic of naturalism, the fatal course of events frequently seems predestined. The investigation of *By the Bog of Cats...*, *On Raftery's Hill*, *Ariel*, *Woman and Scarecrow* and *The Cordelia Dream* has attempted to reveal that some of the characters are awake to their parents' wrongdoings, their childhood traumas and the roles they play within the family unit and within society, yet the characters' downfall derives from their inability to act out of

that self-knowledge, to be self-determined. They focus on the wound, rather than the cure; that is what appears to be fatal in the end. Only minor characters such as Stephen in *Ariel* and in some ways Ded in *On Raftery's Hill* allow hope and prove that it is possible to break out of old patterns, to face our fears and to design our own paths in life.

The main purpose of this thesis was to demonstrate that, although for the theatregoers it is often difficult to enjoy Carr's work as "[h]er shocking tale brutally told reveals truths that are seldom acknowledged, let alone articulated [...]" (Sihra, *Stitching the Words*), Carr's primary concerns speak to many readers and audiences. The analysis of the characters through the lens of attachment theory and with a Freudian perspectives has shown that, similar to the variety of human characters that are to be observed in real life, there is no clear cut between good and bad. The inclusion of the past of each character gives them a claim on empathy. Carr presents perpetrators and victims who have the troubled feelings of a real human being. Their identities are not stable and the characters are often still very much under the influence of their parents, directly or indirectly. None of the characters has/had a secure base as a child, the daughters and sons are motherless, their intimate relationships a source of anger and despair. Carr shows that "children have to be protected[, that t]hey have to be loved" (*Rage and Reason* 150) while acknowledging at the same time that not everyone is so fortunate to have a wholesome childhood. Yet she also argues that we forge our own destinies. Even though our lives, thankfully, may be very different from those presented by Carr, following the characters' stories allows us to accompany them on their journeys to the past and their inner selves, and although we may not always be able to identify with their feelings and experiences, their all too human struggle with the past and quest for happiness is, I dare say, not alien to many readers or theatregoers.

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10 Zusammenfassung

In dieser Diplomarbeit wurde die Darstellung von Vergangenheit, der Umgang mit Erinnerungen aus der Kindheit und die Auswirkungen von Traumata in der fiktiven Welt des Dramas untersucht. Dabei wurde zuerst ein theoretischer Grundstein gelegt, der sich, ausgehend von John Bowlbys Bindungstheorie, speziell mit Auswirkungen von Übertragung, Verlust und Inzest beschäftigt.

Die Analysekapitel beschäftigen sich mit fünf Stücken (*By the Bog of Cats...*, *On Raftery's Hill*, *Ariel*, *Woman and Scarecrow* und *The Cordelia Dream*) der irischen Autorin Marina Carr, die sich immer wieder mit Vergangenheit und deren Einfluss auf die Gegenwart von einzelnen Individuen auseinandersetzt. Diese fiktionalen Darstellungen vom Leben verschiedener Charaktere geprägt durch Eltern, Erziehung und unterschiedlichen Erfahrungen erlauben eine Untersuchung darüber wie Marina Carr das Konzept der Selbstbestimmtheit dem des Schicksals und der Selbstaufgabe gegenüberstellt. Die Autorin lässt sich dabei oft von griechischer Mythologie aber auch von großen Dramatikern wie Shakespeare, Ibsen oder Beckett inspirieren. Fokus der Analyse ist dabei der Schauplatz der erzählten Geschichten, Intertextualität, Pressereaktionen und vor allem die Konstruktion der einzelnen fiktiven Figuren. Die Charaktere der ausgewählten Stücke zeigen ähnliche Zugangsformen und Umgangsweisen mit der eigenen Vergangenheit, wenn auch die Umgebung und die Situationen, in denen sie sich befinden, ganz andere sind. Es gibt keine klare Unterscheidung zwischen Opfer und Täter. Eine Weiterentwicklung der einzelnen Figuren scheint unmöglich. Sämtliche Charaktere befinden sich in einem Stadium der psychischen Unausgeglichenheit, die wiederum eine Handlungsunfähigkeit bewirkt. Die Handlung der Stücke wird vor allem durch generationsübergreifende Konflikte der Figuren, deren traumatische Erlebnisse in der Vergangenheit, Verlust und Verlustängste und das Fehlen einer sicheren Basis vorangetrieben. Speziell der Mangel an stabilen und liebevollen zwischenmenschliche Verbindungen, speziell Eltern/Kindbeziehungen, erweisen sich oft als Herausforderung bzw. Hindernis im Prozess der Identitätsentwicklung in der realen wie auch in der fiktiven Welt von Marina Carr.

11 Curriculum Vitae

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Aus- und Weiterbildung

2003 - 2012	Studentin an der Anglistik Wien
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1986 - 1995	Hauptschule Leoben Donawitz, anschließend Handelsakademie Bruck/Mur, Matura Frühjahr 1995

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2007 / 2008 / 2011	Steirischer Herbst Festival GmbH, Graz Presseassistentin
Herbst 2005	Stream Global Services, Dublin CallCenterAgent für Linux und Nikon
Herbst 2002, 2004, 2006	Steirischer Herbst Festival GmbH, Graz Kartenbüro
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Herbst 2000	EKRO Kronsteiner, Krieglach Kaufmännische Büroangestellte
1997 / 1998	Pendl Getränkeautomaten, Graz Buchhaltung und Büroführung
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