Notions of Fate in Marina Carr’s Dramas

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Abstract: Marina Carr's plays *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, and *By the Bog of Cats…* represent Carr's effort to reimagine traditional literary forms and challenge male dominance by centering female characters in a male-dominated landscape of Ireland. The struggles of The Mai, Portia, and Hester against external forces resonate profoundly, with the modern dramatic adaptation of the concept of fate closely following them. Will women and their heritage be the fate of other women? Will the influence of other fatalistic devices prevail over female agency? The Mai, Portia, and Hester will each strive to find another way to prevent this from happening.

Key words: Marina Carr, *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, *By the Bog of Cats…*, female characters, external forces, fate, heritage, modern, agency

Contents

1. Introduction

Fate, a concept deeply rooted in classical literature and mythology, has been a persistent theme in storytelling throughout history. Traditionally, fate is seen as an inescapable force, a predestined path that characters must follow, often leading to their tragic ends. However, the representation of fate has evolved in modern literature, reflecting contemporary understandings of free will, individual agency, and the complexities of human existence. This thesis explores how Marina Carr, a prominent Irish playwright, reinterprets the concept of fate in a modern context in her plays *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, and *By the Bog of Cats…*.

Carr's work is renowned for its blending of mythic elements with contemporary settings, creating a unique narrative space where the past and present collide. In these three plays, Carr presents a nuanced version of fate, one that is deeply entwined with personal and familial histories, psychological depth, and the socio-cultural landscape of modern Ireland. Rather than adhering to a fatalistic view of fate, Carr's characters navigate a world where fate is a complex interplay of inherited burdens, choices, and the often inescapable pull of the past.

This thesis begins with an analysis of the connection between Marina Carr and Lady Augusta Gregory, a celebrated Irish playwright, and their roles in the male-dominated world of Irish theatre. By providing a brief outline of Carr's life, we can see the motifs from her life that featured in her three plays. Next, we will explore the modern representation of fate, examining how contemporary interpretations, shaped by developments in the fields of sociology, psychology, and history, have shifted from classical notions of destiny to more intricate explorations of human agency and existential choice. Following this, the thesis will delve into a detailed analysis of *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, and *By the Bog of Cats…*, highlighting how Carr's depiction of fate transcends traditional boundaries and offers a profound commentary on the female condition through the implementation of dreams, memories, myths, curses, and other devices. Through this examination, the thesis aims to demonstrate how Carr's plays not only reflect modern anxieties about fate and free will but also challenge the audience to reconsider the enduring power of fate in the contemporary world through the female characters' responses to it.

2. Marina Carr: A Journey Through Her Life and Works

It is no secret that women dramatists have had a harder time making their voices heard. Marina Carr is one of the very few who have managed to have a level of success comparable to her male peers.[1]

Before Marina Carr's plays were performed in Irish theatres in the 90s, Lady Augusta Gregory, a co-founder of Abbey Theatre and a central figure of the Irish Literary Revival, was considered the only female playwright who had a prominent standing in Irish theatre. As Melissa Sihra states in her book, *Marina Carr: Pastures of the Unknown*, though, both Lady Gregory and Marina Carr have assumed the status of token women. In other words, these are women whose achievements are evaluated in terms of how they meet male-dominant standards. If they fulfill these standards, they are granted the opportunity to act and be heard in modern society. Upon earning this status, the token woman is a representative of an entire population of women, playing a symbol of how-to (act) for a system that has neglected them. However, the token woman is not a paragon to be followed. Instead, she represents an impossible ideal imposed by a repressive patriarchy and so has a detrimental effect on other women. It is a status that makes no allowances for women's actual identities, apart from subjugating them to that which is unattainable.[2]

As Sihra notes, in 2004 the Abbey Theatre celebrated its centenary and organized a programme for the occasion. Lady Gregory and Marina Carr were the only female playwrights to feature in the programme, which contained another seven male playwrights. Marina Carr's profile was situated at the heart of the programme, while Lady Gregory's profile was the smallest out of them all. Carr's *Portia Coughlan* was performed on the Peacock stage, one of the smaller

[1] Wallace, 2001, pp.431-32
[2] Sihra, 2018, pp.1-2

stages rather than the main Abbey stage, while Lady Gregory and her work were not performed in the least.[3]

Furthermore, Sihra mentions a commentary in *The Irish Times* in 2000 where Marina Carr is presented as "the youngest, most accomplished and many would argue the only Irish woman playwright who has made her mark", which further attests to her token status and how it marginalises other Irish women playwrights.[4]

2015, however, saw the emergence of a social media movement #WakingTheFeminists which was a reaction to the Abbey Theatre programme 'Waking the Nation', which looked to celebrate the theatre's role in the creation of the new Irish state, but proposed a programme that predominantly featured male dramatists. The movement facilitated extensive discussions on gender (in)equality, impacting not only the theatre community but also developed into a broader cultural movement.[5]

Sihra argues for what she calls 'tilting the lens' of the history of Irish theatre to show that female history is as much a part of Irish theatre history as the male one. By doing this, a new picture emerges – one where Lady Augusta Gregory plays a more crucial role than has been contended. Sihra claims that, by choosing to see things from the perspective of this female lineage, one can say that the playwrights of, and after, the Irish Dramatic Revival are all beneficiaries of Lady Gregory's work in some way or another. Sihra emphasizes the patriarchal oppression on women by bringing to view an example concerning Lady Gregory. She states that John Millington Synge's visits to Aran Islands and the consequent impact of them on his imagination have only been attributed to Synge, while, in fact, Lady Gregory was the first to visit them and the Aran Islands had a powerful impact on her creativity, which has been relatively excluded from the narrative. This revised and renewed appreciation sets the scene for understanding the history and current situations of Irish women playwrights. [6]

Moving to Marina Carr, it is essential to introduce how her childhood and life affected her writing. Marina Carr was born on 17 November 1964 in Dublin. At the age of 10, on account of her mother, Maura Éibhlín Walshe's wishes, the family moved to Tullamore, a rural part of

[3] Sihra, 2018, p.2
[4] Battersby, 2000, as cited in Sihra, 2018, p.3
[5] Sihra, 2018, p.3
[6] Sihra, 2018, pp.5-8

Ireland, near Pallas Lake in the Irish midlands. Her mother fostered Carr's affection for nature and landscape and Carr herself has stated that her mother wished to live near a lake because of her love for swans. Carr grew up in an artistic family that encouraged a love of education, music, writing, and reading. Her mother was born on Indreabhán, Connemara, in a house facing the Aran Islands. Maura was an educated woman, a principal teacher in Carr's elementary school. She wrote poetry and played the violin. Carr's father, Hugh Carr, was a playwright and Carr herself accompanied her father to see his plays. Carr's childhood consisted of roaming around nature, playing with her six siblings, and constructing plays from an early age. Carr graduated from University College Dublin where she earned her BA degree in English Literature and Philosophy. She wrote her first play *Ullaloo* (1989) in her last year of university and started a MA in Anglo-Irish Literature before dropping out in order to devote herself fully to playwriting. Carr has written more than twenty plays, including *Low in the Dark* (1991), *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996), *By the Bog of Cats…* (1998), *Ariel* (2000), *On Raftery's Hill* (2000) among others, and has had success all over the world. She has been awarded many times, including an Honorary Doctorate from University College Dublin and the Yale Windham-Campbell Award for Drama.[7]

It is crucial to acknowledge the era and legislative processes during which Marina Carr composed her plays. Her play *The Mai* confronts the issue of divorce just one year before the 1995 referendum legalising divorce in Ireland was passed. In 1992, although the referendum on the legalization of abortion was overruled, changes allowing women the liberty to travel abroad for an abortion and the right to gather information on abortion matters were approved. The 1990s were a period in which the question of women's rights were becoming ever more urgent.[8]

This thesis examines three of Marina Carr's plays: *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, and *By the Bog of Cats…* to demonstrate how fate operates in Carr's works. Clare Wallace, in her article 'Tragic Destiny and Abjection in Marina Carr's *The Mai, Portia Coughlan,* and *By the Bog of Cats…*', remarks that these plays can be considered both as a trilogy and as stand-alone works. If we agree to read them as a triad, studying them in a given order unveils a growing sense of culmination and surrealness. It is almost as if each play progressively unfolds into a realm of absurdity and outrageousness while still clinging to reality and the tangible world.

[7] Sihra, 2018, pp.8-11
[8] Hill, 2009, p.45

Carr partly relies on motifs from her childhood, such as swans, water, a love for nature, and rural scenery, and incorporates them into her plays. She manages to wade into "this Greek idea of destiny and fate and little escape"[9] with impressive lucidity. She takes elements from classical Greek tragedy and adapts them to contemporary mores.[10]

One difference that sets Greek tragedy apart from the work of Marina Carr is the shift from the patriarchal society of the Greek world to a matriarchal sphere. Marina Carr introduces female characters as focal points whose struggles take place in a male-dominated world. Her plays centre on and revolve around women's endeavours to stay afloat against the riptide of desertion each character experiences. These heroines are haunted by the void left by the loss of either their menage or their significant other. The inner turmoil they experience as a consequence of that abandonment, and their inability to overcome it, seals their destinies in a similar fashion. Each woman dies by her own hand as a response to this.

Furthermore, Carr departs from the classical Greek form of tragedy in that the audience does not have complete knowledge of the main protagonists and their demise, unlike in *Oedipus Rex* where that knowledge is present from the beginning. Instead, Carr allows this insight to unfold in the middle of her plays, with the exception of *By the Bog of Cats…*

Fate, or the concept of fate, plays an essential role in *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, and *By the Bog of Cats…*, known as *The Midlands Trilogy*. Where *Oedipus Rex* employs prophecy to demonstrate the idea of fate's unavoidability, Marina Carr draws upon a number of devices to show inescapable fate governing the lives of the main characters. Her utilization of names, myths, dreams, memories, and other characters, among many additional instruments, express the idea of powerlessness and inefficacy against one's fate. Before we move on to explore this more fully, a summary of each play will be offered.

[9] interview with Marina Carr
[10] Wallace, 2001, pp.436-37

2.1. The Mai

The Mai, the first drama in *The Midlands Trilogy*, is set in the rural midlands of Ireland, in a family house The Mai built specifically for her husband, Robert. The play revolves around the life of the titular character, The Mai, over the course of two summers. The Mai is a woman in her forties, a passionate teacher who is deeply in love with her husband Robert, despite his repeated infidelities. The story is narrated by Millie, The Mai's daughter, at ages sixteen and thirty, who provides a reflective and nostalgic perspective on the events and characters. Through thirty-year-old Millie's eyes, the audience gains insight into the generational conflicts and the legacy of pain and hope within the Connemara family. The play explores the intergenerational dynamics between The Mai and her sisters, Beck and Connie, her aunts Julie and Agnes, and the woman who raised them all, Grandma Fraochlán, and the pervasive influence of past traumas.

The story opens with Robert's return to The Mai after he had abandoned her and their family in favour of another woman. Robert is a cellist and has returned to his wife for the sake of composing since The Mai represents a source of inspiration for him. Upon coming back, Robert is unable to identify his daughter Millie, questioning whether it is really her or the other daughter, Orla, which points to his (future) indifference towards his offspring. The story takes in a nonlinear fashion, with Millie interjecting as a narrator and explaining the event of Robert's abandonment and The Mai's falling to pieces because of the betrayal. She also brings forward the reason behind The Mai's intense motivation for building the house, seeing it as The Mai's vehement cry for Robert to come home.

The story returns to the present day, welcoming The Mai's extended family - Grandma Fraochlán and The Mai's sister Connie, and shedding light on their relationships through constant quarrelling and tongue-lashing. From the outset, Grandma Fraochlán spares no thought to minding her language around Robert, speaking plainly and directly about the situation The Mai has found herself in. She keeps reverting to the past, fighting the ghosts of times gone by. Just like The Mai's adoration of Robert, Grandma Fraochlán loudly broadcasts her own fixation on her late husband, Thómas. The middle of Act One is interrupted by The Mai and Robert's dreams which foreshadow future events, and the episode of Millie's reminiscing about the

atmosphere in which she and Robert found themselves, not long after The Mai's passing, when the two went to the shops to procure The Mai's funeral attire.

The next sequence introduces Beck and The Mai's heated discussion about Beck's resigned surrender to the belief that nothing good will ever befall her, and her secret marriage to Wesley, another one of Beck's fleeting relationships. After news spread around about Beck's potential divorce, The Mai's aunts – Agnes and Julie with their shared conservative believes, rush to visit The Mai and voice their opinions on the matter. Once again, the Connemara clan indulges in an altercation, and resentments from the past flow from their tongues. The family cannot leave behind the bitterness and hurt they have shared, inflicted on them by the person who raised them all - Grandma Fraochlán. Act One concludes with Millie's recollection of the legend of the Owl Lake, colouring the atmosphere in a tone of predestination due to the similarities between the story of Owl Lake and The Mai and Robert's story.

Act Two begins on a more sombre note, leaving behind The Mai's hopefulness of mending her relationship with Robert, amid Robert's unfailing drive to carry on with his affairs. It is The Mai's birthday and Robert has once again slipped back to his old ways, having no shame in committing adultery. The Mai and Robert get into a fierce row, with Robert showering The Mai with gifts as if he knows nothing about her.

In response to the previous scene, The Mai, Connie, and Beck foregather and converse, sharing the stories they grew up with, and become conscious of the effect these fairytales had and continue to have on their lives. During this scene, The Mai finally acknowledges uncertainty in terms of fixing what has been broken between her and Robert. The Mai's denouement is preceded by two episodes charged with feelings of hurt and desperation. The first one is Beck and Grandma Fraochlán's shared evocation of past pains inflicted on them by their kin, which is followed by The Mai and Robert's ultimate fight. Robert's blatantly public abdication of The Mai at the Lion's Ball is more than she can stand and sends The Mai over the edge.

2.2. *Portia Coughlan*

Portia Coughlan is set in the rural midlands of Ireland and is a dark and intense drama that explores the complexities of grief, loss, and the inescapable ties of family. The play centres around the eponymous character, Portia Coughlan, a thirty-year-old woman wrecked by her twin brother's death by drowning in the Belmont River on their fifteenth birthday. The story follows Portia and her struggle to stay among the living while her brother, Gabriel, beckons her to join him in the world of the dead. Portia is portrayed as a deeply restless and tormented soul, overcome with profound sadness. She feels trapped in a loveless marriage with her husband, Raphael, and feels completely disconnected from her children. She tries to find some comfort with her lover, Damus Halion, but to little avail. Her family—her mother, Marianne Scully, father, Sly Scully, and grandmother, Blaize Scully—offer no solace or kindness when she laments her twin. Portia's interactions with her family and the people around her reveal the depth of her internal suffering and her inability to find solace in her current life.

Portia Coughlan strikes a mystical tone from the get-go by introducing the ghost of Portia's dead twin, Gabriel Scully. The opening of Act One creates a feeling of suspense, suggesting that something of immense importance has transpired in the Belmont Valley and will shadow the main protagonist until the play's resolution.

The play opens on Portia Coughlan's birthday. Portia's defeated state of mind is evident from the very beginning. What is commonly a joyful celebration is replaced with a bleak atmosphere. This melancholic tone threatens to persist throughout the entire play. The beginning and end of Act One Scene One unveil Gabriel's presence and show Portia's enthrallment to his ghost. In a more poetic sense, we may infer that everything begins and ends with the twin.

The first to offer congratulations on her birthday is her husband Raphael, who comes back from work to gift her a diamond bracelet, noting how none of the house chores are done, and questioning whether she had taken the kids to school. She assures him that her friend Stacia has taken care of that, while remaining in the same sorrowful mood as before.

Following Raphael's 'birthday wishes,' Portia is greeted by her aunt, Maggie May, and her husband, Senchil, who offer their own. Before the smothering air of the house completely consumes her, Portia initiates a conversation with Maggie May, expressing her resentment

towards Raphael and their children, and the fact she had them far too early, marrying Raphael on account of her father's wishes.

Portia soon after departs the house to seek comfort at Belmont River where her lover, Damus Halion, awaits. Portia cannot help her dejected mood and starts a fight with Damus, and in a cat and mouse fashion, reveals that the rationale behind coming to Belmont River is not Damus , but the riverbank itself.

Soon after meeting Damus, Portia finds herself in the High Chaparral, a bar, accompanied by Stacia. She shows no concern for her neglect of one of her sons, Quintin, barely listening to Stacia's pleas to show compassion. Portia also fends off Stacia's suggestions to go on a holiday, which are made in the hope of offering her some peace. The proposal is strongly refuted by Portia due to her inability to depart from the river, even if it is just for a little while. Their conversation is interrupted by Fintan, a bartender, who entertains Portia by flirting with her, and secures a 'date' with her.

The next sequence introduces Portia's parents, Marianne and Sly, and Portia's grandmother, Blaize, who are next in line to offer their wishes to Portia. Throughout their visit, Portia barely joins the conversation, except in the moments when Gabriel's name is uttered, expressing disgust at her parents' attempt to forget him. The family partakes in a shouting match, spitting venomous slurs to provoke one another. Marianne and Sly offer no birthday gifts to their daughter, justifying themselves by stating that she already has everything she wants, while in actuality, Sly is notoriously tight-fisted. He also expresses his dissatisfaction with Portia for not hiding her interactions with Damus, concerned about the judgments of others. After Portia exits the hostile environment, Marianne and Blaize indulge in a duel of transferring insults to each other, bringing up the topic of incest, while simultaneously denying engaging in it.

The final scene in Act One shows a neurotic Portia who has just returned from her meeting with Fintan to an awaiting Raphael. In response to his attempt to show his understanding regarding the difficulty and the meaning behind her birthday, Portia loses her temper and explodes, showing no restraint in the insults she fires towards Raphael.

The beginning of Act Two showcases Portia's death, an echo of Gabriel's. The ominous event unsettles her family and friends and initiates contemplation on the similarities between

Portia and Gabriel, both in life and in death. In the aftermath of Portia's death, the family tries to cope with her departure and fails miserably. Instead, Blaize leads with provocation, stressing the foreboding air and the corrupt nature of Portia and once again hinting at the incestuous behaviour between the twins, while Maggie May counters with accusations of Blaize's ungodly relationship with her husband.

Act Three reverts to the time prior to Portia's suicide, unveiling Portia's unwillingness and fears about raising her children. Shortly after, Portia finds herself at the Belmont River, addressing Gabriel anew with Maggie May and recalling past times. At last, she confides in Maggie May and reveals a secret she has been guarding for the last fifteen years—that she was an accomplice in her brother's suicide. Portia was supposed to follow Gabriel in their plan but changed her mind in the middle of Gabriel's suicide. The guilt has been eating away at her ever since.

In her final moments before following Gabriel to the other side, Portia makes a last attempt to elicit her parents' forgiveness and sympathy yet receives none. The nuclear family once again engages in a brutal match of channelling blame to one another after finding out Portia had a hand in Gabriel's death. At last, Raphael allows no atonement for Portia, despite her begging him not to leave her with her own thoughts. His departure fortifies the path she ends up following.

2.3. By the Bog of Cats…

By the Bog of Cats…, the final play in *The Midlands Trilogy*, is set in the boglands of rural Ireland. It is a dark and modern drama that draws on themes from Greek tragedy. The story is suffused with supernatural elements and a spiritual and otherworldly atmosphere. The play follows Hester Swane, a forty-year-old tinker woman who was abandoned by her mother, Josie Swane, at an early age and who never quite got over that abandonment. Hester is on the brink of losing her home to her former lover, Carthage Kilbride, who is trying to climb the social ladder by marrying his young bride, Caroline Cassidy. Hester is an independent and strong-willed force of nature who is fighting tooth and nail to reclaim what she believes is rightfully hers and to protect her seven-year-old daughter, Josie Kilbride, despite the forces and pressure exerted on her to cast her daughter aside.

By the Bog of Cats… is characterised by supernatural elements and otherworldly settings, colouring the play in an unearthly hue, even more so than *Portia Coughlan*. As the play opens, a character by the name of Ghost Fancier is introduced. Marina Carr utilizes the figure of the Ghost Fancier, who acts as a stand-in for a Grim Reaper, to unveil what the future holds. Immediately, the audience speculates on what will become of the main protagonist. The Ghost Fancier has come too early for Hester Swane, confusing dawn for dusk, the time she is supposed to part ways with earthly life. Hester seems distraught by this revelation but shortly dismisses it from her mind, being preoccupied with dealing with the death of Black Wing, a swan she feels connected to.

After a brief conversation with her friend, Monica Murray, who reminds Hester of her approaching eviction from her home, Hester sets about burying the swan, with Catwoman, the Bog of the Cats' personal prophet, looming around her. Catwoman informs Hester of her dream, recounting how Hester will bring everything to ruin by the end of the day. She dwells upon a secret she is certain Hester hides, which Hester evades with questions about her mother's nature. Hester eagerly drinks up every detail Catwoman provides about her mother, Josie Swane, but once she sullies Josie's reputation, Hester pays no heed to the stories, accusing Catwoman of lying. Catwoman warns her for a second time to leave the Bog of Cats or suffer the consequences, for her own mother has condemned her to live as long as the Black Wing lives, no more, no less.

The next scene displays the relationship between Hester's daughter, Josie Kilbride, and her grandmother, Mrs. Kilbride. Mrs. Kilbride is a cold and devious woman, concerned only about her social status and her son, Carthage. She asks Josie to spell her name and once Josie heeds her grandmother's request, Mrs. Kilbride launches into a tirade on how Josie is Hester's bastard and will never bear a Kilbride's name.

Caroline Cassidy, Carthage's future young bride wearing a wedding gown, visits Hester in her home to warn her about the date which they have agreed upon for Hester to evacuate the premises of the bog where she has been living. They start to argue about Carthage, Hester's ex-lover. Their argument is followed by Carthage who, like his bride, arrives in his wedding attire. Hester and Carthage also get into a dispute, with Carthage giving Hester money for a secret

which is yet to be revealed. Hester reminds Carthage of his background and how he sold Josie and her to marry into a wealthy family merely to gain land.

Once again, Caroline Cassidy pays a visit to Hester, this time in the presence of her father, Xavier Cassidy. He starts to terrorize and intimidate Hester to get her to leave as per their agreement but to no effect. Hester is adamant about staying, keeping her ground despite the constant attempts to cast her aside. Xavier aggravates Hester further by pulling her mother to pieces and questioning her own legitimacy, which she takes as a pure fabrication on his part.

The next act welcomes yet another ghost, Joseph Swane, Hester's brother. He finds himself at Caroline and Carthage's wedding and discovers that Catwoman is the only person able to see him. He tells Catwoman of his premature death and begs her to talk to him, only for Catwoman to redirect him to his sister.

On the day of the wedding, Caroline feels miserable and heavy-hearted because of the whole situation with Hester. Hester used to babysit her, and she begins to wonder if she is doing the right thing by marrying Carthage. Mrs. Kilbride rolls in next, proudly wearing an outfit strangely reminiscent of a bridal dress.

During the wedding reception, Xavier and Mrs. Kilbride discuss Catwoman and how ill-fated it would be not to invite her, despite their obvious contempt for her and her nature. Both Xavier and Mrs. Kilbride publicly address their apparent happiness regarding Carthage and Caroline's bond. The reason behind Xavier's satisfaction lies in his motive to leave his property—the farm—in the hands of Carthage, for nothing is more important to him than taking care of his land. Mrs. Kilbride hints at an incestuous relationship with her son, showing contentedness that her son married a woman of high social status and not a tinker like Hester, while at the same time, her own blood through lineage is tied to the travelling people.

The wedding function is interrupted by Hester, appearing unexpectedly in her own wedding dress. She appeals for the last time for Carthage to come away with her and Josie, begging him to let her stay in the place she grew up, as she promised to wait for her mother to come home and is incapable of leaving. Hester receives no sympathy or understanding, except from her friend Monica. Carthage even threatens to cut her out completely from Josie's life.

On account of being discarded by her community, Carthage, and her mother, Hester does the unthinkable—she sets fire to the house and the sheds. In her final moments, Hester has an honest conversation with the ghost of her brother, confessing that she killed him because of their mother and the bond the two shared, and not for the sake of money she and Carthage divided amongst one another. Desperate not to leave her as Hester's mother did to her, Hester takes Josie with her, ensuring that they will stay together, even if it means dying together.

The next chapter will analyze how fate comes into effect in modern drama, followed by the way Marina Carr adopts different vehicles to portray fate and the idea of inescapability in these three plays.

3. Fate in/and Modern Drama

In his article 'Toward a Poetic of Modern Realistic Tragedy', Alfred Schwarz gives an account of the modern representation of fate in 19th-century drama. According to Schwarz, the emergence of new drama was influenced by modern theories of history, sociology, psychology, and biology, and left old theories behind. In doing so, the locus of this new drama was transferred from the metaphysical world to the tangible one. It departed from Classicism and the Greek postulation of tragedy and the Enlightenment and Shakespearian supernatural morality stories and advanced towards a psychical world in pursuance of explicating social powers beguiling the modern man. Hermann Hettner, Friedrich Hebbel, Emile Zola, August Strindberg, and Georg Lukács are among the most influential theorists and dramatists of the 19th century, who advocated for and prompted the formulation of modern realistic tragedy.[11]

Schwarz stresses that in anticipation of developing a modern tragedy, one needs to understand that realism and its more extremist approach, naturalism, were both philosophical approaches to human life and not merely an imitation techniques. He illustrates the difference by proposing a distinction between Leo Tolstoy's *The Power of Darkness* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman,* two modern dramas. While Miller's *Death of a Salesman* was written in a realistic fashion, the entire setting of the play is far from the realistic *mise-en-scène*. Willy Loman's flashbacks and hallucinations, and the lighting and music in *Death of a Salesman* hardly fall under realistic devices. Nevertheless, Miller manages to realistically capture modern man's struggles in a society that has turned its back on him. On the contrary, Tolstoy offers a realistic imitation of the everyday life of a Russian peasant but the whole play is fashioned in a moral package. While he employs realistic techniques, the play itself is a replication of an allegory of the fall and atonement. [12]

A realist dramatist's objective is to reveal the genuine rawness of the world and rationalize the reasoning behind one's suffering caused by certain circumstances. Therefore, a realist playwright takes on the identity of a historian enacting the discord between an individual and his environment. In doing so, the playwright appraises the given situation as a contributing

[11] Schwarz, 1966, pp.136-37
[12] Schwarz, 1966, p. 137

factor to a tragic development. The dramatist sets out to showcase the conflict involving the individual and his/her social environment as an example of the problem thrust upon the modern character by the influence of history and, as Shwartz puts it, "natural forces beyond his power". This does not mean that the tragic action must be completely deterministic but as the naturalists argued, modern man is still, to a point, a hostage to his social milieu and lineage. Realists allow for an individual with personal agency which enables the interaction between historical forces and one's autonomy. Hereof, we can surmise the distinction between modern drama and the old one. Forasmuch as the protagonist in the new drama acts as an exemplar of that chapter in history and the society he is part of, the protagonist in Greek or Shakespearean plays embodies human experience driven by omnipotent forces.[13] In Alfred Schwarz's words:

> (…) in one instance the necessity lies in the way of the world so that the tragedy is the result of conditions at a given time, whereas in the other instance the necessity lies in the inexorable consequences of a moral commitment, where the momentary circumstances do not function as an independent fatalistic power, but only as an instrument of supernatural agencies.[14]

According to Friedrich Hebbel, the modern protagonist finds himself betwixt and between the conflicting attitudes of different generations during which one acts as both an observer and a casualty of social and historical revolutions. Hence, as stated by Georg Lukács, a new kind of discordance emerges – a clash between generations. Now, modern drama functions as a medium between two demographic groups, both tied to their respective time-frames, and both dramas, the old one and the new one, ending tragically due to the different moral frameworks of both milieus.[15] Following Lukács: "The conflict has to do with the relative claims of different values at a given moment of confrontation".[16] Therefore, Hebbel perceives the ethical ideology of the older generation, which the younger generation is supposed to follow, as a historical occurrence that is bound to be transformed as the world evolves. Therefore, these verities are challenged in a modern environment. For this very reason, the clash between generations ends tragically.[17]

On a separate note, the modern playwright is oriented towards exploring the tragic actions of a protagonist - who is the victim within the established social structure and an individual who

[13] Schwarz, 1966, pp. 138-39
[14] Schwarz, 1966, p. 139
[15] Lukacs, 1914, as cited in Schwarz, 1966, p.139
[16] Ibid.
[17] Schwarz, 1966, p.139

possesses agency, all at once, standing at a crossing of the ideas of the old and the new age value-system. Given that historical events or social environments determine the fate of a protagonist in modern drama to some degree, his character is formed in the wake of those external influences. Then the fate of a modern hero becomes an external fate and, in the words of Hebbel, "He suffers before he acts, (…), the suffering gives birth to action".[18] The difference between a modern protagonist and a traditional one can be surmised in the way one acts when one finds oneself face-to-face with a predicament. A modern hero is more unassertive and detached than the traditional hero and his act of doing does not only depend on his own volition to act in some way or another but is, to some extent, subjected to external elements relevant to the surrounding one finds oneself in. Therefore, modern protagonist is lessened to the role of catalyst and victim at the same time, doomed to act in relation to external factors which are not of his own accord.[19]

Realists and naturalists recognized this view of the world as far more real and authentic than the one idealists valued. They rejected the sentiment that one's fate is solely one's own, given that you only needed to walk the earth in the modern world to see that the actual lay of the land of the world is something very different from that. Realists and naturalists perceived the modern hero as susceptible to the world around him – the world and all the historical, sociological, and psychological parameters relevant to him.

Georg Lukács observed the integral change in the new drama. Supposing that the tragic action ceases to be a subject of free will and that the modern protagonist is controlled by external factors such as one's environment, social milieu, and the established set of principles of his time, which presupposes a lack of sovereignty on the part of one's will, then the relationship between the agent and the act must be challenged. Lukács questions if then one can define such tragedy as tragedy, considering a modern hero is governed by the social powers around him and loses his autonomy in the process. This characterization of the modern hero lessens him to a puppet, making a tragic action not tragic. What, then, can be done to protect one's autonomy? Friedrich

[18] Schwarz, 1966, p.140
[19] Ibid.

Hebbel thinks the answer may lie in the notion of tragic guilt. According to him, guilt can be found in all acts, to the extent that one's assertiveness clashes with society's will.[20]

Lukács diminishes the distinction between realistic social drama and naturalistic milieu drama and their tragic circumstances. He states that it carries no weight whether or not will, which defies fate, is autonomous or subject to outside factors, or whether or not that will can be found solely inside the individual. It is maybe more intriguing to observe a situation where one's will is determined by outside powers. The question that arises then concerns the quality of this dispute. Hebbel steps forward once again with his proposal, remarking that suffering in the modern scenario is synonymous with the action aimed internally and that every action that goes against one's fate is to be considered suffering.[21] In Georg Lukács' words:

> his will is not his own, he is driven to defend himself, he acts from desperation and necessity-yet the intensity of his commitment is such that he symbolizes the fate of the modern individual in a conflict of essentially abstract forces[22]

We can see the difference in the essence of tragic experiences in modern and classical drama. In classical drama, the moral nature of the world is preordained. On the other hand, in modern drama, we must begin by identifying the social atmosphere and its principles of that time and we must every time define the outside powers determining the modern hero's character and anticipating his fate. As with fate in modern drama, there has been a secularization of tragic guilt, which shows that the core of tragic guilt does not irrefutably need to be moral. Instead, a combination of the internalization of guilt, guilt which clashes with the social forces, and existential burdens comes into play. [23]

Also, tragic irony, in a conventional sense accepted by classicism, has ceased to be. A sense of pity has been replaced with a sense of terror, or chiefly emotional self-pity.[24]Incidental irony has not been completely abandoned in modern drama, but tragic irony, based upon the premise of obliviousness of the agent in traditional drama, has. In its wake, new drama embraces "a sense of tragic paradox predicated on the guiltless guilt of the modern hero".[25] The society he

[20] Schwarz, 1966, p. 141
[21] Schwarz, 1966, p. 141-42
[22] Schwarz, 1966, p. 142
[23] Ibid.
[24] Schwarz, 1966, p.143
[25] Ibid.

is part of makes no allowances for the modern protagonist's autonomy, passion, or aspirations. Oftentimes, even his mere existence comes into conflict with the world around him, which yields feelings of powerlessness and disheartenment.[26]

Furthermore, the denouement of the modern drama is to outline and delineate the actuality and realness of the world and the possibility of a common man's tragic entanglement with the outside and inner powers affecting him, and not his own collapse and abolition of the moral code.[27]

In short, the new drama opposed traditional forms in such a way that the tragic thinking departed from the ethical and psychological interrelation involving protagonists within an established paradigm of the cosmos one is part of to the interrelation of the modern heroes and their concrete social milieu and the external powers at hand at that time.[28]

[26] Ibid.
[27] Schwarz, 1966, p.145
[28] Ibid.

4. Fate in the Form of Auguries

Morgens Brønsted, in his article 'The Transformations of The Concept of Fate in Literature', indicates that fate can be envisioned through auguries. He specifically mentions literary auguries, which are described as having an aesthetic impression that directs one's attention to future ventures, creating and building up suspense. Auguries provide early warnings or clues about the course of fate and the ensuing actions. Brønsted mentions two approaches to how one may deal with fate. The first is surrendering in resignation, also known as the fatalistic or quietistic attitude, and the second is resistance.[29]

4.1. Dreams

Complementary to what has been said, Marina Carr employs dreams as a means of foreshadowing future events. The Mai's dream before the wedding is particularly noteworthy:

> I dreamt it was the end of the world (...) and as you come nearer I smile and wave, so happy to see you, and you pass me saying, 'Not yet, not yet, not for thousands and thousands of years.' And I turn to look after you and you're gone and the river is gone and away in the distance I see a black cavern and I know it leads to nowhere and I start walking that way because I know I'll find you there.[30]

What we can deduce from this reflection is exactly what will become of The Mai. The Mai's stubborn fixation on following Robert to the ends of the earth ensures her death. The Mai may be aware of this on a subconscious level, but she nonetheless chooses the nothingness and abyss, as her need for Robert proves to be stronger than her will to live.

In a similar fashion, Scene Two in Act One of *By the Bog of Cats…* ushers in a character under the name of Catwoman who personifies a seer. Catwoman is a self-proclaimed Keeper of the Bog of Cats and is haunted by the visions and dreams of her community. Like Tiresias in the *Oedipus Rex*, Catwoman is blind. One dream in particular seems noteworthy:

> Dreamt ya were a black train motorin' through the Bog of Cats and, oh, the scorch off of this train and it blastin' by and all the bog was dark in your wake, and I had to run from the burn. Hester Swane, you'll bring this place down by evenin'.[31]

[29] Brønsted, 1967, p.175
[30] Carr, 1999, p.126
[31] Carr, 1999, p.273

This dream-vision symbolizes a prophecy that will later come true. Hester acknowledges her awareness of it but feels powerless to leave the Bog of Cats, as everything she is connected to is there. She also remarks that she will stay, even at the expense of her life.

4.2. Myths

Carr's fascination with myths is clearly evident in the way she structures her dramas. *The Mai* is loosely based on Homer's *Odyssey*, but told from the perspective of Odysseus' devoted wife, Penelope, while *By the Bog of Cats…* is inspired by Euripides' *Medea*.

We can liken The Mai to Penelope and Robert to Odysseus. In imitation of Penelope's faithfulness as she waits for Odysseus to return home, The Mai similarly awaits Robert's anticipated reappearance. Throughout the play, Carr reveals the connection between the two by drawing on the imagery of a needle and thread. While Penelope weaves the burial shroud to fend off her 108 suitors, Marina Carr uses images of a needle and thread in relation to Robert. This imagery appears when Robert leaves for the first time, and a distraught The Mai begs Millie to go to the butcher to purchase a needle and thread. It also appears in a scene where Robert and Millie stop at a shop to select a dress for The Mai's funeral. The Mai has always "set about looking for that magic thread that would stitch (…) [them] together again."[32].

On the other hand, Hester Swane's situation is reminiscent of Medea's. Both have been abandoned by their respective partners for another woman of higher social status. Both are to be exiled from their homes. Finally, both commit filicide, but unlike Medea, Hester does so as not to condemn Josie to the life she was sentenced to by her own mother. Instead, she tries to break the cyclical nature of grief and longing for someone who is never coming back.

Perhaps the most beautiful rendition of fate is revealed at the very end of Act One of *The Mai*:

> Owl Lake comes from the Irish, *loch cailleachoíche,* Lake of the Night Hag or Pool of the Dark Witch. The legend goes that Coillte, daughter of the mountain god Bloom, fell in love with Bláth, Lord of all the flowers. So away she bounded like a young deer, across her father's mountain, down through Croc's Valley of Stone, over the dark witch's boglands till she came to Bláth's domain. There he lay, under an oak tree, playing his pipes, a crown of forget-me-nots in his ebony hair. And so they lived freely through the spring and summer, sleeping on beds of leaves and grass, drinking soups of nettle and rosehip, dressing in acorn and poppy. One evening approaching autumn Bláth told Coillte that soon he must go and live with the dark witch of the bog,

[32] Carr, 1999, p.111

> that he would return in the spring, and the next morning he was gone. Coillte followed him and found him ensconced in the dark witch's lair. He would not speak to her, look at her, touch her, and heartbroken Coillte lay down outside of the dark witch's lair and cried a lake of tears that stretched for miles around. One night, seizing a long-awaited opportunity, the dark witch pushed Coillte into her lake of tears. When spring came around again Bláth was released from the dark witch's spell and he went in search of Coillte, only to be told she had dissolved.[33]

Carr calls upon the legend of Coillte and Bláth and juxtaposes it with The Mai and Robert's storyline. The main characters in the legend mirror The Mai and Robert. Where Bláth plays his pipes, Robert plays the cello. Where Coillte drowns in her pool of tears, The Mai commits suicide by drowning. Both The Mai and Robert, and Coillte and Bláth experience a period of deep affection for one another, only for the men to turn away from their respective women in pursuit of other women. The lore functions as a forewarning, even if Marina Carr's characters may not make much sense of it. Nobody else but Millie becomes aware of it, and it is only years later, at the break of reminiscing about the events that transpired, that Millie latches on to it:

> A tremor runs through me when I recall the legend of Owl Lake. I knew that story as a child. So did The Mai and Robert. But we were unaffected by it and in our blindness moved along with it like sleepwalkers along a precipice and all around gods and mortals called out for us to change our course and, not listening, we walked on and on.[34]

Similarly, *Portia Coughlan* uses a story about the mythic origins of Belmont River's name:

> FINTAN. Wasn't it about some auld river God be the name of Bel and a mad hoor of a witch as was doin' all sorts of evil round here (...)
>
> PORTIA. She wasn't a mad hoor of a witch! And she wasn't evil! Just different, is all, and the people round here impaled her on a stake and left her to die. And Bel heard her cries and came down the Belmont Valley and taken her away from here and the river was born.[35]

Portia empathizes with the girl in the legend, and the story itself feels predictive of her trajectory. The girl in the tale represents Portia, while Bel parallels Gabriel. Portia feels deeply misunderstood by everyone she meets, and just as Bel heard the girl's sobs, Gabriel also heard Portia's lamentations, leading to their reunification in the afterlife.

[33] Carr, 1999, p.147
[34] Carr, 1999, p.148
[35] Carr, 1999, p.219

4.3. Memories

Another representation of fate in *The Mai* can be seen in a story Millie recounts about Sam Brady, a neighbour, and his newfound resentment towards Robert. In this memory, Millie recalls how Sam Brady killed an innocent male swan and the wailing sound of his mate echoed in response. Carr interpolates The Mai into this incident, shedding light on The Mai's deteriorating mental state due to Robert's affair. She identifies the pen with The Mai and the cod with Robert. By doing this, she predicts the same tragic event happening to The Mai, or more precisely, she forecasts The Mai languishing after Robert:

> The Mai was transfixed at the window. It's a high haunting sound [of a female swan mourning its mate] that sings the once-living out of this world. It's a sound you hope to never hear again and it's a sound you know you will.[36]

Another scene that invokes fate in *Portia Coughlan* is the conversation between Portia and Maggie May in Act Three, Scene Three, where the two muse over the past "Just thinkin' about the time the cemetery gates fell on Gabriel. (...) I think it was a sign – he was never right after that.".[37] This prompts Portia to ponder the meaning behind the preceding incident and whether one's life is carefully predetermined or if everything happens as an accident.

4.4. Escapism

Portia has been trying to escape from physical reality throughout the play. It all started with Gabriel, as everything does. In a conversation between Damus and Fintan, right after Portia's successful departure from the real world, the men reminisce about a school trip when the twins disappeared. Reflecting on that day, they recall the connection between the two, the uniformity in their manners, looks, and pauses, as well as their response to the reason behind their disappearance:

> 'We were just goin' away,' says one of them. 'Away! Away where, in the name of God?' says Miss Sullivan. 'Anywhere,' says the other one of them, ' just anywhere that's not here.'[38]

[36] Carr, 1999, p.158
[37] Carr, 1999, pp 238-9
[38] Carr, 1999, p.225

The incident itself is a xerox of the future event where only Gabriel managed to get away. The circumstances are no different in the venture they both undertook and in the one where Gabriel prevailed. Both involve a river, rowing, and going away. In Portia's words: "Be history repeatin' itself." [39].

Another instance of escape can be read from the birthday present her aunt gave her. It was a three-foot white delft horse. Upon seeing it, Portia laughs and comments that she may straddle it and get away from this place. Furthermore, in a heated exchange with Raphael, she lurches into a raging fit, bursting out how at night when she is "slidin' into a dream that'll take me away from this livin' hell"[40] Raphael's caress plunges her right back into reality. She proceeds to wound Raphael with "I completely and utterly despise you for what you are in yourself, but more for who you will never be".[41] The person she is alluding to, as one would expect, is her twin soulmate. Towards the end, Portia becomes excruciatingly more passive with regard to her expectations of life, seemingly making peace with death as the only acceptable escape there is "Where did I think I was goin'?"[42].

What is more, towards the climax of the play, in Act Three, Scene Three, Portia starts to reassess accompanying Gabriel wherever he may be considering he may not be where she goes. Having said that, she acknowledges that in spite of this, she still "know(s) that somewhere he lives and that's the place I want to be".[43]

If we consider the motif of escape through the prism of fate, we may indicate that Portia, by constantly trying to get away, only serves to emphasise her resigned attitude to her destiny. Her escape comes in absolute terms, and her yearnings are fulfilled at the cost of her life. Furthermore, Marina Carr seems to postulate, through the example of John McCormack's auspicious singing career, that if only Portia had managed to flee Belmont Valley, her fate might not have turned out so bleak: "Isn't he magnificent? Born only up the road, but he got away. "[44].

[39] Carr, 1999, p.210
[40] Carr, 1999, p.222
[41] Ibid.
[42] Carr, 1999, p.237
[43] Carr, 1999, p.240
[44] Carr, 1999, p.226

4.5. Curses

Upon mentioning Hester's absentee mother, Josie Swane, Catwoman recounts how Josie ordained Hester to live a life forever entwined with the swan named the Black Wing: "'Swane means swan.' (…) 'That child,' says Josie Swane, 'will live as long as this black swan, not a day more, not a day less.'" The invocation of the curse further corroborates the Ghost Fancier's ominous assignment of collecting Hester and taking her to the underworld. The forewarning from both Catwoman and the Ghost Fancier is palpably clear: "Lave this place now or ya never will." The Black Wing took its last breath at sunrise, freezing to its core, with the looming promise that Hester will have no different fate. Indeed, Monica Murray, a neighbour, compares the black swan with Hester, noting how Hester looks frost-covered, just like her alter ego.

Similarly to the above promises**,** during an altercation with Caroline Cassidy, Carthage's soon-to-be wife, Hester issues a promise of her own "You're takin' me husband, you're takin' me house, ya even want me daughter. Over my dead body."[45]. What is more, an additional pledge is put forth by Hester with respect to Carthage:

> I'm warnin' ya now, Carthage, you go through with this sham weddin' and you'll never see Josie again. (...) If it's the last thing I do I'll find a way to keep her from ya.[46]

However, the promise that carries the most weight is the one Hester made to herself – to return to the Bog of Cats in expectation of her mother's return and never to leave again. By doing this, Hester curses herself to a life of lingering and seals her fate to a liminal space, forever waiting for something beyond her reach. All these vows serve as indications of an imminent future. Carr presents them inconspicuously until the audience comprehends their true magnitude at the very end of the play, when all is said and done.

Moreover, Carr posits a seemingly innocent puzzle sentences that, when considered holistically, reveals themselves as premonitions. An example of such a sentence is Catwoman's remark to Hester: "I only took it [the garden chair] because ya won't be needin' it any more." The wording might suggest that Hester is expected to vacate the premises to honour her agreement with her estranged lover, Carthage Kilbride, and thus won't need the garden chair.

[45] Carr, 1999, p.283
[46] Carr, 1999, pp 289-90

However, considering Catwoman's role as a soothsayer, this statement gives forewarning of a more fateful outcome than the practicality of moving.

By incorporating these auguries, Marina Carr builds on older dramatic and literary forms, adapting them to a modern milieu. She takes instances from the past and adapts them to an Irish context, while subtly commenting on the position of women in Ireland, making her stories resonate with contemporary audiences. Her appropriation of these forms allows her to comment on contemporary issues through historical and cultural lenses, highlighting the timeless nature of female experiences and societal issues. By structuring her dramas around myths, she provides a sense of inevitability and predestination, with little to no evading of one's destiny. However, she reconstructs these myths, traditionally told from a male perspective, and contemporizes them by highlighting the female angle. In doing so, Carr introduces the possibility of a new narrative, one where female agency is not repressed by male dominance but instead gives birth to female means of expression and their reaction to their predicaments. Furthermore, drawing on the tradition of Irish storytelling, Carr's characters struggle to cope with the stories they were told in their childhood, implementing them in their lives as instructions to live by, a topic that is addressed in the next chapter.

5. Fate in the Form of Heredity and Internalization of Fate

5.1. *The Mai*

At the start of *The Mai* Grandma Fraochlán, alongside Connie, The Mai's sister, visits The Mai's newly constructed house which she built in the expectation of her husband's return. Grandma Fraochlán makes a rather harrowing entrance demanding her possessions be brought in instantaneously. She pays special attention to the oar. The meaning behind it is soon revealed when Grandma Fraochlán apologizes, justifying herself and ascribing her obsession with the oar to the fact that it rested in her late husband's hands. This back-and-forth bickering between the relatives and the reason behind it may make one think of The Mai's obsession with building the house for Robert. Nothing would have stopped her in that undertaking. The Mai even spends one summer working in a hair saloon to secure the money needed for Robert's house, leaving her four children with a friend of hers. For The Mai, Robert comes first, the children are only second to him almost an addendum, whose existences makes no sense without Robert. This is confirmed by The Mai reassuring Millie and herself with the assertion "Don't you worry about a thing, Millie, your Dad'll come back and we will have the best of lives".[47] This was also true for Grandma Fraochlán and her husband Thómas as well:

> I know he was a useless father, Julie, I know, and I was a useless mother. It's the way we were made! There's two types of people in this world from what I can gather, them as puts their children first and them as puts their lover first and for what it's worth, the nine-fingered fisherman and meself belongs ta the latter of these. I would gladly have hurled all seven of ye down the slopes of hell for one more night with the nine-fingered fisherman and may I rot eternally for such umotherly feelin'.[48]

The message is clear: without Robert, there is no happiness, just as was the case for Grandma Fraochlán and her nine-fingered fisherman. The Mai and Grandma Fraochlán's futures and happiness are governed by Robert and the nine-fingered fisherman's lives which is why they are so similar.

On the other hand, they differ in the fact that The Mai has deliberately been left behind for a second time by a man, while Grandma Fraochlán's husband did not leave her but was taken

[47] Carr, 1999. p 110
[48] Carr, 1999, p.182

from her. What is more, one might say that the two have different degrees of awareness towards their lack of nurturing feeling for their children. Where The Mai is completely oblivious to this and desires to live in a bubble with Robert, unaccompanied by her children, Grandma Fraochlán seems to apprehend it "Maybe parents as is lovers is not parents at all, not enough love left over",[49] but nevertheless shares the same dream as The Mai.

Carr, in a sense, uses Grandma Fraochlán to render what fate has in store for The Mai and the other women in the family. The death grip she has on everyone, makes one feel there is no way out from the plague that is felt in the Owl Lake. It is a disease she has inherited from her own mother in turn, and just like Beck and Julie before her, Grandma Fraochlán is still recuperating from the old gashes:

> (...) I came into the world without a father – born to an absolute nut. (...) I don't know, but I'm not over dismantlin' of that dream yet. Even still, every summer, I expect somethin' momentous to happen.[50]

The female characters (Grandma Fraochlán, Millie, Agnes, and Julie) are tormented by their mothers' desertion. The scars that are left behind on account of that abandonment play a part in how each woman's life is shaped. Their fates are linked to their (broken) lineage, as they have let their family have that hold over them. This misery has been handed down through generations of the Connemara clan and each woman suffers in turn.

Their maternal figures taught them fairytales of princes riding on horses and endorsed the patriarchal ideas of women being supplementary to men, which moulded them into a version of women who needed men and men's love to exist. These stories defined their course of life, conditioning them to experience heartbreak if not fulfilled. Some were marred by their father's absence (Beck, Grandma Fraochlán), but all were traumatized by the 'mad proud women' who were supposed to minister to them. Each woman's life is determined and formed on account of the heartbreak they experienced from their motherly figures:

> I'm seventy-five years of age, Mai, and I'm still not over my childhood. It's not fair they should teach us desperation so young or if they do they should never mention hope.[51]

[49] Carr, 1999, p.144
[50] Carr, 1999, p.169
[51] Carr, 1999, p.146

The life of Grandma Fraochlán has been shaped by her mother's fictious stories about her father, while The Mai, Beck, and Connie engineered their lives according to the stories they grew up with. Beck even seemingly surrenders and accepts defeat, for her life has no meaning, while The Mai and Connie adopted the stories and thrived in them, if only for a little while. Honouring the tradition, Millie falls into the act of storytelling, having a hand in her son's future by passing down the sort of stories that corrupted her kin before her. As a result, the women in the play feel they have no agency to act according to their own volition. Their lives are not their own, but a hollow act dictated by the wounds of the past and stories they have grown up on. However, even if these female characters are ignorant of their agency, it does not mean that they are devoid of will or the potential for change; rather, their struggles highlight the complex interplay between heredity and personal choices. The act of storytelling sets the scene for the possibility of achieving agency through creation, both for the narrators and those who listen to the stories. It is up to the recipients of the stories to respond to them and negotiate the meaning behind them.

Another instancing of fate can be seen in the discourse between Grandma Fraochlán and Robert where Grandma Fraochlán sternly announces that one cannot simply change one's nature. She takes a swipe at Robert and his father for being alike and deserting their respective families and forewarns the same fate for The Mai:

> And thousands stayed, war or no war, or brung their wives and children with them. But not you, no, and not your father, and sure as I'm sittin' here, you'll not be stoppin' long, because we can't help repeatin', Robert, we repeat and repeat, the orchestration may be different but the tune is always the same.[52]

Additionally, Millie is the only child who is included in The Mai and Robert's life, which is only natural seeing as Millie is a narrator of the play and is recounting the most memorable moments in her life concerning her parents. The words *mum* and *dad* seem odd to use because Millie distances herself from them and only affirms the severance she feels from her parents. The dysfunctional family connection she has with them is indicative of her future behaviour towards her own child. "We repeat and we repeat. "[53] Millie becomes the exact replica of what The Mai hated the most. In trying not to "breathe in the damaged air"[54] of her parents, she grows into the very thing The Mai begged her not to become: "You'll be different, won't you, Millie? You won't

[52] Carr, 1999, p.123
[53] Carr, 1999, p.123
[54] Carr, p.129

be like me and Robert".[55] In her desperation to get away from the destructiveness of Owl Lake, she repeats the wrongs of her ancestors. She takes after The Mai in following a man who is not worth her attention and in dissociating herself from her son. She echoes Robert in having an affair, just like he did. Finally, she reeks of Grandma Fraochlán (and Grandma Fraochlán's mother) in making up stories about her son's father. The cyclical outcome of every character in The Mai has been secured by their lineage and no different fate promises to meet each of them.

5.2. *Portia Coughlan*

Just as in *The Mai,* Carr posits grounds for fateful happenings in Portia's bloodline. The first indication of this can be seen in the altercation between Marianne, Portia's mother, and Blaize, Portia's grandmother:

BLAIZE. I warned ya and I told ya, Sly, to keep away from the Joyces of Blacklion. (...) We don't know where ye came from, the histories of yeer blood. I warned ya, Sly! Do ya think you'd listen? There's a devil in that Joyce blood, was in Gabriel, and it's in Portia too.

> MARIANNE. And what were you before ya were married? One of the inbred, ingrown, scurvied McGoverns. They say your father was your brother!
>
> (...)
>
> BLAIZE. All of the McGoverns was bred fair and square which is more than you can say for the Joyces! (...)
>
> I know what's atin' you and I've watched it ate the very heart out of you this fifteen years![56]

The incestuous relationship between Sly, Portia's father, and her mother is confirmed later in a dialogue between her aunt and Stacia Doyle, Portia's one-eyed friend:

> MAGGIE. (...) Did ya know that Marianne, Portia's mother, was a twin too? (...) Marianne and Sly is a brother and sister. Same father, different mothers, born within a month of one another. (...) Young Gabriel Scully was insane from too much inbreedin' and I'd near swear he walked into the Belmont River be accident. Aither that or his antennae were too high; couldn't take the asphyxiation of that house.
>
> STACIA. Portia know all this?
>
> MAGGIE. No, but her blood do (...).[57]

[55] Carr, p.185
[56] Carr, 1999, pp. 215-6
[57] Carr, 1999, p. 245

Portia is doomed to repeat the same fate of her mother and father insomuch as it is in her blood. In Maggie May's words "You and I know when the rot began and how the rot began."[58] Portia and Gabriel's incestuous entanglement is evocative of her mother and father's relationship and in the face of it all, Portia is unable to alter the history she was nurtured into.

What is more, Portia's neglect of her children is explained by her not wanting her children to be exposed to the same fate she endured because of her parents: "My sons'll be fine for if I do nothin' else I leave them alone and no mark is better than a black one".[59] She deems herself not to be of mother material and is afraid of what she may do to them upon being left alone with them. At the end of Act Three, Portia even pleads with her mother to explain why she could not leave Gabriel and her to themselves. To repay the favour, she does the exact thing to her children she wishes was done to her and her twin – she leaves them to their own devices.

Portia's terrible fate in Act Two is an invocation of Gabriel's "It's happend again. It's happend again."[60] Even Damus and Fintan, a bartender, recognize the twins' parting happened at the same premises. Furthermore, this fateful occurrence is affirmed all the greater by Blaize "*(to Marianne)* Dry your eyes, girl, been comin' this fifteen year. *(to Sly)* Warned ya and I told you! Would ya listen!"[61] Blaize's malicious homage to Portia brings forth fatidic implications to the same effect:

> *Sláinte!* To the Joyces! *(Drinks.)* To Portia in the murky clay of Belmont graveyard where she was headin' from the day she was born, because when you breed animals with humans you can only bring forth poor haunted monsters who've no sense of God or man. Portia and Gabriel. Changelin's. *Sláinte.*[62]

Even in death, there is no Portia without Gabriel. Even in death, the two seem interchangeable and the family needs prompting to reconcile themselves to whose funeral they are attending "This is Portia's funeral! Gabriel died fifteen year ago. Today is for Portia. Portia is dead. Portia is dead. And you won't even mourn her."[63] Even in death, the twins' departing mirrors each other. It seems as if when Gabriel died, Portia died with him, not only for herself but for her family as well.

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[58] Carr, 1999, p.230
[59] Carr, 1999, p.210
[60] Carr, 1999, p. 223
[61] Carr, 1999, p. 228
[62] Carr, 1999, p. 229
[63] Carr, 1999, p. 230

The penultimate scene in the ultimate act of the play displays a delirious Portia who has one leg in the otherworld with Gabriel and is desperately clawing to stay in the real world. Her slanging match with her mother acts as a final plea for her mother to save her from the guilt and oneself "Mother, stop – I can't bear it – Mother, (...) I'm just tryin' to tell ya how it was, he's closin' in on me, I hear his footfall crossin' the world."[64] Portia's parents offer no redemption for her as an accomplice in her brother's suicide, despite her heartbreaking beseeching. Even though they recognize the tragedy that will ensue if she does not sever herself from her twin "Came out of the womb clutchin' your leg and he's still clutchin' it from wherever he is",[65] no absolution is proffered.

Gabriel's forewarning "I'm goin' now but I'll come back and I'll keep comin' back until I have you"[66] starts to reverberate vociferously throughout her whole being. In the end, not even Raphael could help her join the world and remain in it "*Sound of Gabriel's voice, triumphant.*"[67] By constantly repeating the stories concerning Gabriel, Portia generates a whole world around her miserable reality. She gains authority in a narrative of her own making, which allows her to articulate the grief and hardship she experiences, and her struggle to reclaim her identity after the death of her brother. After being ostracized by her immediate family upon mentioning her twin, storytelling enables her to purge and express her deepest emotions. At moments, the act of storytelling reveals her self-awareness and understanding of her life and its trajectory.

5.3. *By the Bog of Cats…*

Hester, just like the heroines before her (The Mai and Portia), is defenceless against the hollowness she feels, incurred from the incessant forsaking of the people she loves the most. Thus, a grim fate of the same kind is probable and foreseeable. In trying to patch the brokenness between her mother and herself, and her lover and herself, Hester generates the complete opposite. As far as her mother goes, no mending of the relationship is possible given that her mother is nowhere to be found. And yet Hester still yearns for her mother's return "There's a

[64] Carr, 1999, pp 250-1
[65] Carr, 1999, p.247
[66] Carr, 1999, p.250
[67] Carr, 1999, p.255

longin' in me for her that won't quell the whole time."[68] At the end of Act Two, Hester provides a reason as to why she is incapable of leaving the Bog of Cats:

> I can't lave – Ya see me mother said she'd come back here. (...) (*close to tears*) I can't go till me mother comes. I'd hoped she'd have come before now and it wouldn't come to this. Don't make me lave or somethin' terrible'll happen. Don't.[69]

She is still not past her mother's desertion and is hoping against hope that Josie Swane will return home. Nothing and no one will stop her in that endeavour. The closure she seeks from not knowing why her mother abandoned her makes it impossible for her to continue with her life:

> MONICA. You're still waitin' on her, aren't ya?
>
> HESTER. It's still like she only walked away yesterday.[70]

Hester even murders her own brother, Joseph Swane, in a jealous rage because she wanted her mother to be hers and hers only. Undeterred by horrid stories of her mother, Hester would rather die than leave the Bog of Cats before joining Josie at the place she has last seen her. By taking to heart the stories of her mother, Hester manages to finalize her life only in terms of waiting. On the other hand, much like Portia, the stories provide for a new realm of her own design, where she remains close to her mother and is not abandoned by her. Storytelling helps Hester to nurture her connection to the cultural heritage that many have shunned her for. It provides her with comfort and reinforces her sense of identity.

This predicament she finds herself in shapes her in ways others are not capable of understanding and she finds herself echoing more the essence of ghosts than human beings. If only Josie had returned and seen that Hester could fend for herself, then maybe Hester would have stopped harbouring a grudge against her and would have had a chance to enter and stay in the present.

The final scene in Act Three displays a rampant Hester, devoid of the will to live. In her venture to follow the Ghost Fancier to the shadow world, Hester takes Josie with her, but not without attempting to reason with Josie first to stay with her dad instead. Upon soothing Josie

[68] Carr, 1999, p.275
[69] Carr, 1999, pp 315-6
[70] Carr, 1999, p. 324

and reassuring her that she will take her with her, Hester seizes a knife and swiftly cuts her throat:

> Alright, alright! Shhh! (*Picks her up.*) It's alright, I'll take ya with me, I won't have ya as I was, waitin' a lifetime for somewan to return, because they don't, Josie, they don't. It's alright. Cloze your eyes.[71]

Hester has been well acquainted with the sour taste her mother's desertion left in her mouth. It voided her of everything. In the teeth of it all, her whole being still awaits her mother's return. The end of Scene Six of Act One leads up to Hester dwelling on memories of the last time she saw her mother. It happened many years ago, when she was just seven years old, the same age her daughter Josie is in the play. She was wearing her Communion dress and was pleading with her mother to let her keep her company while she roamed around the Bog of Cats. After a dismissive response from her mother, Hester could only watch as her mother's promise of returning in a short while became an unspoken farewell. We can draw a parallel to the end of the play where Josie is wearing a Communion dress as well and, following the pattern of her mother before her, begs Hester not to desert her. In an attempt to not repeat the defining moment that stripped her of a chance of a normal life, Hester takes another approach to save her daughter. Ultimately, both Hester and Josie end by crying out for their respected mothers with their last breaths.

5.4. Fate in the Form of Symbolism of Names

Another instancing of fate-channelling can be considered through symbolism of names which gestures towards heredity as a form of fate. According to Clare Wallace, the characters are marked with names that bear a scarlet letter or a stigma.[72] The name The Mai seems to be an invocation of the Greek goddess Maia who was one of seven daughters of Atlas. She is associated with water, darkness, and remoteness, as she is portrayed as living in a cave, isolated from the rest of the deities. Similarly, The Mai lives in a huge, but dark and empty house on Owl Lake, a house she built specifically for her husband, and is isolated from everyone as she spends her days in front of massive windows, holding her breath for Robert's return. Maia was a mother to Hermes and Robert Graves mentions how one time, while her back was turned, Hermes

[71] Carr, 1999, p.339
[72] Wallace, 2001, p. 441

sneaked past her and set sail to look for new adventures, just as Robert went in search of new adventures with other women. These invocations allude to The Mai being isolated and yet surrounded by the women of her family.[73]

The character of Grandma Fraochlán is portrayed as a vehicle that sets into motion the fates of the women around her. Her name and her origins are described in the play:

> the Spanish beauty though she was born and bred on Inis Fraochlán, north of Bofin. She was the result of a brief tryst between an ageing island spinster and a Spanish or Moroccan sailor – no one is quite sure – who was never heard of or seen since the night of her conception. There were many stories about him as there are about those who appear briefly in our lives and change them for ever. Whoever he was, he left Grandma Fraochlán his dark skin and a yearning for all that was exotic and unattainable. [74]

The question of legitimacy is further brought into question by Grandma Fraochlán and her inconsistent stories of various descents. She even forces her daughter Ellen into an unloving marriage so as not to expose Ellen's children to the same fearful fate of being illegitimate. Grandma Fraochlán is a representative of the repetitive history of the Connemara clan. Just like her mother before her, The Duchess, Grandma Fraochlán has been left behind by a man, albeit in different circumstances, and this desertion fully affected her course of life. The echo of repetition seems to grow through the family tree by a name that shaped them all.

Moreover, as stated by Wallace, the meaning behind Portia Coughlan's name alludes to the character of Portia in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice.* Considered in light of that play, Portia has at her disposal three suitors: Gabriel, Raphael, and Damus. Gabriel and Raphael both bear an angel's name, though Raphael, rather ironically, bears the name of a healer while being a crippler. Wallace emphasizes that the roles of choosers and the chosen have been reversed. She also states that it is debatable whether Portia chose Gabriel or Gabriel Portia.[75] I believe the pair chose one another, despite Portia faltering at the defining moment where both Portia and Gabriel were supposed to depart from their earthly lives. By consciously choosing Gabriel over everything and everyone else, Portia has been running all her life towards her tragic fate.

In addition to what has been said, Hester Swane's name has a two-fold meaning. The first one alludes to Nathaniel Hawthorn's character in *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne, and the

[73]Graves 1981, cited as in González-Chacón, 2015, pp. 61-2
[74] Carr, 1999, pp.115-6
[75] Wallace, 2001, p.441

second to her lifelong bond with The Black Wing, the black swan living in the bog. Hester Swane, just as Hester Prynne, albeit under different conditions, has been forsaken by the community she grew up with on account of her coming from a long line of tinkers. Her daughter, Josie Kilbride, like Pearl, faces questions of (il)legitimacy. Josie Kilbride bears both the name on her mother's side and on her father's / grandmother's side. What is more, the name that carries the most adverse connotations is Carthage Kilbride, Hester's former lover. The mere sound of it is reminiscent of the words "carnage" and "kill bride", which seems suitable for the play's conclusion. According to Wallace, the name also alludes to Aeneas' tragic love affair with Dido and his abandonment which resulted in Dido's suicide. Carthage is the echo of the terrible fate of the city itself, starting from his dowry ending up in a pyre, to the fatal murder-suicide of his former lover, Hester, and their daughter, Josie.[76]

5.5. Fate in the Form of Location

A trail of predetermination can equally be felt in the effect of landscapes on characters' psyches. The significance of the land and the power of it on one's nature is anchored in heredity and love relationships. Carr manages to locate this impact of landscape on one's identity in a modern framework.

Paula Murphy, in her analysis of Marina Carr's plays, *Staging History in Marina Carr's Midlands plays,* identifies the Midlands as an in-between place, hovering between reality and the spirit world, nestled between the mortal world and the mythical.[77] Clare Wallace confirms the overtone of the Midlands, stating that Carr herself has asserted that the Midlands have come to be known as "a metaphor for the crossroads between worlds".[78] What is more, the Midlands are described as "a no-man's land",[79] a liminal place where each heroine's fate is inevitably sealed through heredity.

The first example of how Carr utilizes the significance of landscape can be seen in the effect of Owl Lake on The Mai: "The Mai set about looking for that magic thread that would

[76] Wallace, 2001, p.442
[77] Murphy, 2006, p.6
[78] McGuinness, as cited in Wallace, 2001, p.437
[79] Wallace, 2001, p.438

stich us together again and she found it at Owl Lake, the most coveted site in the county."[80] The Mai devotes herself to the task of bringing her family together at Owl Lake, which she comes to associate with Robert's loving return to her.

In *Portia Coughlan* the bank of the Belmont River has a fateful significance for Portia. In a discourse with Damus Halion, her lover, Portia emphasizes that the reason behind her arrival is not Damus himself, but the riverbank and the event that hasn't yet been revealed to the audience: "I've come here because I've always come here and I reckon I'll be comin' here long after I'm gone."[81] The significance of Belmont Valley can be seen in the following quote as well:

> (...) don't think I'd survive a night away from the Belmont Valley. (...) me mind'd be turnin' on the Belmont River. Be wonderin' was it flowin' rough or smooth, was the bank mucky nor dry, was the salmon beginnin' their rowin' for the sea, was the frogs spawin' the waterlilies, had the heron returned, be wonderin' all of these and a thousand other wonderin's that river washes over me.

Belmont River symbolizes a haven for the twins, a place where they could escape the harshness of the world around them and where they spent most of their free time. It was a place they were perpetually drawn to, feeling more like home than their supposed home. Belmont River is where everything began for Portia and Gabriel, and ultimately, where they both took their last breaths. Portia remembers her beginning in the womb, intertwined with her twin and surrounded by amniotic fluid. Her tragic end, however, comes in the waters of the Belmont River. It is only natural that her end should come in such a way. After all, she has been running towards it and towards Gabriel for all these fifteen years.

Similarly to *Portia Coughlan, By the Bog of Cats…* confronts the gravity of landscape on one's being through the bog where Hester last saw her mother:

> I made a promise, Monica, a promise to meeself a long while back. All them years I was in the Industrial School I swore to meeself that wan day I'm comin' back to the Bog of Cats to wait for her there and I'm never lavin' again.[82]

Hester plans on fulfilling her promise at the expense of everything else going up in smoke. Her whole life is defined and sculpted around that promise, and no external force will drive her out of the bog.

[80] Carr, 1999, p.111
[81] Carr, 1999, p.203
[82] Carr, 1999, p.324

For Carr, landscape represents a living and vigorous entity that reflects and controls character's fates. In *The Mai,* the lake and the remoteness of the house directly influence The Mai's inherited and emotional (hi)story. The lake in *Portia Coughlan* functions as a siren song, constantly pulling Portia towards her fate, with her being inevitably drawn to it. Finally, the bog in the *By the Bog of Cats…* is drenched in the mythical and untamed colours, much like Hester. Her inability to depart from it and all that is wild moulds her fate.

6. Fate in the Form of Social Values

As has been previously stated, the social environment and circumstances play a major role in determining the direction of protagonists' lives. Social norms and conventions, and the expectations they impose, place a direct responsibility on individuals to behave within those set parameters. Their responses to these conventions determines the characters' identities, nature, and ethos.

Looking at Irish history and the position of Irish women within its context, we can see that women largely occupied the roles of mothers and wives. This is clearly seen in the Irish Constitution and the article on women's roles as caregivers and child-bearers within homes. To ensure they did not neglect their 'natural' responsibilities, the State acknowledged that they should not need to be part of the workforce. Despite public demand to alter the wording in the article to use more neutral terminology and/or include the paternal side, Ireland has yet to make those ratifications.[83]

As maintained by Ivana Bacik, in her article 'From Virgins and Mothers to Popstars and Presidents: Changing Roles of Women in Ireland', the formation of Irish women as mothers creates a number of issues. The first concerns the nationalist imagery of women in connection with the concept of 'Mother Ireland,' which proves oppressive for innumerable reasons. Women are reduced to mere symbols of nurturing and sacrificial victims, allowing no space for other parts of their individuality to be seen. Furthermore, this concept enforces adherence to the traditional gender roles of caregivers and child-bearers, lessening their autonomy and the complexities they might foster. By encouraging the perpetuation of linking women with this symbolism, women take on a secondary role in a narrative dominated by male standards. They are permitted to participate in society within those set boundaries, while their needs are disregarded and undervalued 'for a greater good.'[84]

The second issue concerns the legal system and the treatment of women within the roles of mothers and the enforcement of laws. In 1983, Ireland introduced a referendum which banned abortion by recognizing the equal right to life of the mother and the unborn child. When a

[83] Bacik, 2007, p.101
[84] Bacik, 2007, pp101-2

woman's life and that of an unborn child are considered equal in the eyes of the Constitution, that woman is degraded to exist merely as a procreative machine for the welfare of society.[85] It took Ireland only 35 years to legalize preforming an abortion within the State.

With this in mind, we will assess how Marina Carr brings to light the pressures of societal customs on one's being.

6.1. *The Mai*

Marina Carr shows the antagonism between the roles of a mother and a wife in the character of The Mai. The Mai performs her wifely duties willingly and devotedly, having idealized her husband Robert as one of those childhood princes from the fairytales she was raised on. This idealization leads to subsequent disappointment and disillusionment when Robert fails to fulfil the role according to The Mai's vision. She surrenders much of her happiness and parts of her identity in pursuit of the unattainable and imaginary, repeatedly being humbled by Robert's letdowns until the actuality of Robert's actions becomes the continual reality of her choices:

> THE MAI. [to Robert] You're a fuckin' liar! When you met me I was a cellist in the college orchestra! I had a B.A. under my belt and I was halfway through my Masters! You lower me, all the time you lower me.[86]

Carr uses The Mai to show the dangers of the societal pressure on women to sacrifice much of their lives when fulfilling the role of a wife, which consequently leads to The Mai's reclusion and solitude. Furthermore, her failure and need to mend what is broken between her and Robert directly influence her role as a mother. Since she gives so much of herself to her role as a wife, there is not much left of her to give as a mother. The Mai provides for all of her children, but emotional support seems to be lacking. Much like the women in her family before her, The Mai experiences repetitiveness and overdependence on an idealized version of a person she cannot let go, which unmistakably affects her connection with her own flesh and blood.

Furthermore, The Mai's aunts, Agnes and Julie, display traditional values that were still present in Ireland at that time:

> AGNES. She's a holy show in those tight black pants.

[85] Bacik, 2007, p. 102
[86] Carr, 1999, p.155

Julie. I hope to God she's not pregnant.

[…]

AGNES. She'd never have it.

JULIE. God forbid! A divorcee with a child, born after the divorce.

AGNES. She'd never go for an (whisper) abortion, would she?

JULIE. We'll find out if she's pregnant first, and if she is, with the luck of God she'll miscarry.[87]

Agnes and Julie's conversation and their values are reminiscent of the regressive stance that the life of a foetus is more important than the life of an illegitimate child, which represents one of the impossibly conservative constraints Irish society imposed on women and their existence.

6.2. Portia Coughlan

With the character of Portia Coughlan, Carr demonstrates the extent to which societal expectations condition one's frame of mind and life. Portia is overwhelmed by the insistence on fulfilling the responsibilities of being a wife and a mother. The more pressure is exerted on her to behave in such a way, the more she is incapable of fitting the role everyone wants her to fill. She completely rejects domestic life, having no heart to perform according to everyone's demands.

Portia finds herself in a strained marriage with Raphael, the wounds of the past numbing her towards her husband. She feels trapped and misunderstood, constantly trying to find comfort at the banks of Belmont River, as opposed to the confines of her house and the burdens brought about by domestic responsibilities.

Portia's inability to assume the role of a mother mirrors her inability to summon her motherly instincts. Her neglect of her children is rooted in her past, and she never cared for having them:

> I never wanted sons nor daughters and I never pretended otherwise to ya; told ya from the start. But ya thought ya could woo me into motherhood. Well, it hasn't worked out, has it? You've your three sons now, so ya better mind them because I can't love them, Raphael. I'm just not able.[88]

[87] Carr, 1999, p.136
[88] Carr, 1999, p.221

Her character stands for all those mothers who are scorned for being unnatural and deviant, due to their indifference towards their kin and the system that works against them, offering no support but relishing the suffering of those they deem abnormal. These mothers are marginalized and vilified, their struggles ignored by a society that fails to understand or support them.

Her family – her mother, father, and grandmother - represents an illustration of the conservative community that sits in judgment of Portia's (in)actions, while they simultaneously showing from where everything transpired and how they nurtured the same misdeeds in themselves for which they condemn Portia.

6.3. By the Bog of Cats…

Hester, unlike the protagonists before her, is defined by her immense love for her daughter, Josie. She fears being forsaken by Josie, as she was by her own mother. Her entire existence is a struggle against the forces trying to separate them, haunted by the fear of repeating the past that has shaped her identity and determined her fate. Her relationship with Josie is influenced by the community, which offers judgments on whether Hester or her former lover, Carthage, should care for Josie.

Hester is an outsider and intruder in the collective she grew up in. As a traveller, she is regarded with contempt and criticized for her unconventional ways. She is marginalized and ostracized for her undomesticated and unrestrained behaviour. She represents all that cannot be controlled, which is the cause of her mistreatment by others. The residents strive to excommunicate her out of fear of what they deem unnatural, despite the fact that she is simply being her unfiltered self

> Have you ever been discarded, Elsie Kilbride? – the way I've been discarded. Do ya know what that feels like? To be flung on the ashpit and you still alive! […] Yees have taken everythin' from me. I've done nothin' again' any of yees. I'm just bein' who I am, […][89]

The townspeople project their own poor behaviour onto Hester, with many of them engaging in far greater misconduct, such as domestic violence (Xavier) or harbouring incestuous fantasies (Mrs. Kilbride).

[89] Carr, 1999, p.313

In response to the narrow-mindedness and intolerance towards their true selves, The Mai, Portia, and Hester retaliate by fulfilling what they believe is their duty to themselves. By committing suicide, the main heroines take control of their ill-fortunes and cry out against those who worked hard to control and silence them.

7. Conclusion

Marina Carr intricately weaves a modern account of fate throughout her three plays, *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, and *By the Bog of Cats…*. She delves into the complexities of her female protagonists, who are often caught in a web of predestination and familial legacy. In these plays, Carr portrays her characters as struggling against the weight of their heritage and the expectations placed upon them by society and family. The Mai, Portia, and Hester each face unique challenges that stem from their pasts and the people who have left them, either by choice or circumstance. This sense of abandonment and the resulting grief is a recurring theme that shapes their actions and decisions.

Carr's depiction of these women highlights the tension between their desires and the seemingly inescapable fate that binds them. The Mai and her sisters feel their upbringing has stripped them of the ability to make autonomous decisions. Portia's identity and actions are deeply intertwined with her deceased twin, making it difficult for her to act independently. Hester, on the other hand, is caught in a cycle of waiting for her mother's return, which dictates her life's direction.

The female characters navigate their heartfelt longings and hopes against the social constraints and expectations placed on them, rejecting traditional roles and choosing their own troubled paths. A sense of predestination suggests that the sins and misfortunes of these characters are not entirely of their own making but are inherited through their familial and social contexts. This creates a compelling commentary on the limitations placed on female agency and the struggle to break free from the past. However, each woman consciously chooses her own journey, pursuing what they believe is right. While their suicides might seem like an escape, these acts are their final rebellion against the oppression and victimization they have suffered.

Had they made different choices, their outcomes might have been less tragic. If The Mai had stopped trying to mend her relationship with Robert, her fate might not have been so bleak. If Portia had moved on from Gabriel's death and left the river behind, she might not have felt driven to end her life. If Hester had healed from her mother's abandonment, she might not have led herself and her daughter to such a tragic end. But choosing to act differently, independent of

their innermost desires, would mean conforming to societal expectations and losing their identities and agency in the process. Instead, The Mai, Portia, and Hester act on their own accord, at last free from the pressures trying to shape them.

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