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Rewriting Trauma: The Legacy of W.B. Yeats in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* . . .

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Abstract: While a most original and creative playwright in contemporary Ireland, Marina Carr is still unmistakably influenced by her male predecessors. This article will argue that her most renowned work *By the Bog of Cats* . . . (1998) is a bold rewriting of W.B. Yeats's *Purgatory* (1938). Like Yeats's play, *By the Bog of Cats* . . . focuses on abandonment, betrayal, and murder as its main sources of trauma. While Carr's play is a direct descendant from *Purgatory* in terms of its theme, plot, and symbolism, Carr rewrites Yeats's pathetic, shiftless Old Man into a daring, strong, and responsible woman who may be embittered by her domestic trauma, but instead of escaping, she eventually faces up to her own guilt and crime. Hester is not a flat, helpless victim but a complex, well-rounded woman full of agency, passion, and honesty as well as vices. This way, Carr rewrites both the stereotypical stage image of Irish women and the unredeemable Old Man.

Keywords: Marina Carr, *By the Bog of Cats* . . ., W.B. Yeats, *Purgatory*, trauma, infanticide

Marina Carr has put female protagonists firmly in the center of Irish theater and drama. Her plays fuse Greek tragedies with Irish legends, are steeped in a thick Midlands dialect, and explore women's psychological dynamics on an unprecedented scale. Since "the social expectations for Irish women have shifted as the Irish economy grew during the 1990s and second-wave feminist groups fought against the oppressions of the patriarchal Irish state" (Maresh 182), it is time to leave behind the stage Irishwoman as either the idealized Cathleen Ni Houlihan or the male protagonist's wife, mother, daughter, or love interest. Carr may blaze a trail in subverting such a tradition entrenched in Irish dramatic history by portraying women as complex and autonomous individuals, but she is unmistakably influenced by her male predecessors. Her creative use of the Midlands dialect is a direct legacy from J.M. Synge, her early plays heavily mirror Samuel Beckett, and so does her obsession with the dark side of life.

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As I will argue in this article, her most renowned work *By the Bog of Cats* . . . (1998) is a bold reworking of W.B. Yeats's *Purgatory* (1938). If her inheritance of male traditions testifies to the artistic continuity of Irish drama, her rewriting clearly demonstrates its expansion into new territories where women's domestic traumas, which have been hushed and suppressed for so long in Ireland, finally see the light. Like *Purgatory*, *By the Bog of Cats* . . . focuses on abandonment, betrayal, and murder as its main sources of trauma. To Carr, trauma is a natural part of theater because "trauma is a fact of life, and theatre is about conflict. Theatre is about trauma" ("Conversation" 195). While Carr's play is a direct descendant from *Purgatory* in terms of its theme, plot, and symbolism, Carr rewrites Yeats's pathetic, shiftless Old Man into a daring, strong, and responsible woman who may be embittered by her trauma, but instead of escaping, she eventually faces up to her own guilt and crime. Hester is not a helpless victim but a complex, well-rounded woman full of agency, passion, and honesty as well as vices. This way, Carr rewrites both the stereotypical stage image of Irish women and the irredeemable Old Man in *Purgatory*.

Since its premiere at the Abbey in 1998, *By the Bog of Cats* . . . has become a modern classic, produced widely all over the world. Critics are drawn to it and have addressed many important aspects in the play, such as the dysfunctional home and marriage, the struggle between traditions and modernization, the tension between insiders and outsiders, the dilemma between exile and staying, the appropriation of Greek tragedies and Irish myths, the use of a Midlands dialect, and the problems with Carr's feminism. In spite of the rich body of criticism, hardly anyone has approached it from the perspective of trauma studies. By acknowledging that the play is a trauma play, as Hester is definitively shaped by the traumatic events in her life, we can see that Carr's exploration of trauma is indeed built on her male predecessors, especially Yeats. In "Talking with Ghosts of Irish Playwrights Past: Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* . . .," Richard Russell compellingly points out that Carr is indebted to Synge, Yeats, and Beckett in terms of storytelling, verbal theater, use of dialect, the theme of vagrant vs. settled existence, and a plot of infanticide. More specifically, Russell draws a clear parallel between Yeats's *Purgatory* and Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* . . .: both have a *waki*-figure from Japanese Noh drama – the Old Man and Hester – who wander around and invoke ghosts, concerns of contamination, emotions of regret and guilt, repeated murders with the same weapon, and the direct depiction of murder in real stage time (159–163). However, when Russell claims that the Old Man's killing of his son is similar to Hester's mercy killing of her daughter Josie – "their child murders also spring from a real love for their offspring" (161) –, he is quite mistaken. The Old Man commits murder to spare himself, not his son, from misery. The two plays do echo each other in the actions towards the end; however, the

characters' final murders are not the same acts of mercy but rather the same attempts to bring closure to their ongoing traumas.

Looking through the lens of trauma studies, the Old Man and Hester are strikingly similar: they both lose their mothers and are traumatized by such a loss; they both commit a revenge murder of their family members and are haunted by the ghosts of the murdered persons; they both commit a second murder – killing their children – to end their trauma's chain reaction, but fail eventually. Such an uncanny likeness is represented in different ways, though: in an all-male cast, *Big House*, verse drama on the one hand; and in a female-led, *Midlands* peasant play on the other hand. Although Carr refuses the label of feminism, she admits that being a woman writer makes her plays different: "Most plays in the history of theatre have been written by men. So if you come along, the very fact that you are of a different gender, different mindset, in a different era, your concerns are automatically going to be different" ("Conversation" 192). This statement explains that her rewriting of Yeats is not simple imitation but reappropriation – to reuse his dramatic themes and strategies to express unique female experiences: "kinds of translations of a traditionally male-centered Irish dramatic discourse" (Trotter 604). Although Mary Trotter is discussing "one of the central tropes of Irish realism" – the "family memory play" – her observation can equally apply to trauma plays, a discourse that has been dominated by male dramatists as well if we think about all the plays that make a traumatic event or its impact their subject matter: Yeats's *Purgatory*, Beckett's *Not I* (1972), Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* (1929), Brian Friel's *Living Quarters* (1977), Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* (1985), and Sebastian Barry's *The Steward of Christendom* (1995), to name just a few. Carr's rewriting thus challenges the status quo by reclaiming this dramatic discourse to voice female experiences with trauma.

Like in Yeats's play, the original trauma of the character in Carr's play starts with the mother. In *Purgatory*, the Old Man loses his mother when he is born: "She died in giving birth to me" (30), so the mother to him is an unknown and symbolic entity which holds unrealized promise. Hester, on the other hand, spends her first seven years with Big Josie before her mother leaves her, which not only bonds them psychologically but also makes the abandonment harder to take, leaving indelible marks on Hester's personality, identity, and childhood memory. In contrast to the Old Man's gentry mother who lives in the Big House, Hester's mother lives a "tinker's" life in a caravan. As the lowest "song-stitcher" (358), wandering from one place to another, Big Josie is not accepted by any community, but treated with contempt and fear.

Class disparity apart, however, both mothers shape their children's lives permanently: their untimely departure continuously anchors their children to the

trauma site. While the Old Man spends his life circling around the Big House where his mother died giving birth to him, Hester is tethered to the Bog of Cats where her mother abandoned her: “I watched her walk away from me across the Bog of Cats. And across the Bog of Cats I’ll watch her return” (371). Their obsession with their location of loss, nevertheless, is of a different nature. The Old Man is past-oriented: tormented by the guilt that his life caused his mother’s death, he seeks to reverse the impregnation on the wedding night to prevent his own birth, while Hester is geared towards the future: she is waiting for her mother’s return even if the chance is as slim as overturning the past. Facing the absence of mothers, both the Old Man and Hester cling to things related to their mothers. The Old Man is attached to his mother’s Big House; Hester feels bound to the Bog of Cats as if by an invisible umbilical cord: “it holds me to it in ways it has never held yees” (366), and her walking the bog during the night not only quiets down the “longin’ in me for her that won’t quell this while gone” (358) but also gives her full knowledge of the bog: “I know every barrow and rivulet and bog hole of its nine square mile, I know where the best bog rosemary grows and the sweetest wild bog rue. I could lead yees around the Bog of Cats in me sleep” (380). While her nightly roaming is clearly symptomatic of her trauma, for she is not only suffering from sleepless nights but also picking up her mother’s restless habit of “pausin’” (358), the knowledge she gains about the bog makes up for her lack of knowledge about her mother – the Bog of Cats thus becomes the substitute for Big Josie by association. While the Old Man loses his mother’s house to the fire his father sets, Hester is forced by the villagers to leave the Bog of Cats. In both plays, exile from their mothers’ places amounts to depriving the characters of their mothers again. Such a retraumatization must be resisted at all costs: “I can’t lave till me mother comes [. . .] Don’t make me lave this place or somethin’ terrible’ll happen” (381). Hester’s vehement resistance to leaving the Bog of Cats must be understood in the context of her trauma: scarred for life by her mother’s abandonment, Hester simply cannot take a second leaving and stay alive.

In both plays, the original trauma of losing one’s mother sets off a chain of traumas. Similar to the Old Man, Hester’s anger and guilt regarding her mother’s leaving – anger because no mother should abandon her child, and guilt because she does not know what she has done wrong to drive her away – inevitably lead to the revenge murder of a family member. While the Old Man blames his father for impregnating his mother and burning her house, “he killed the house” (31), Hester blames her brother Joseph for robbing her of her mother: “ya just wouldn’t shut up talkin’ about her as if she wasn’t my mother at all [. . .] And she even called ya after her. And calls me Hester. What sourt of a name is Hester? Hester’s after no wan. And she saves her own name for you – Didn’t she ever tell ya about me?” (383). Hester’s jealousy and resentment spike when she knows her mother left her to stay

with her brother, to have “a whole other life” (391) away from her, a life that she knows nothing of and has no part in. Her obsession with names reflects her concern with lineage – she wants to properly inherit her mother’s identities, traditions, and qualities –, which echoes the Old Man’s wish to preserve his mother’s culture and history in “a house / Where great men grew up, married, died” (31). The feeling of being disinherited is fueled even more by deprivation, which turns Hester into a morbidly possessive character: “You’ve a nerve singin’ that song. That song is mine! She made it for me and only me. Can’t yees lave me with anything!” (382). By channeling all her fury towards her brother, Hester also conceals her deep guilt and self-doubt: “Was it something I done on her?” (383). The visit of her brother stirs up all the toxic feelings about her mother’s abandonment, feelings she can neither work through nor dismiss but displace on her brother:

HESTER: She stole my life from me.
 JOSEPH: So you stole mine.
 HESTER: Well somewan had to pay. (384)

Scapegoating her brother seems an easy way out: it relieves the unbearable weight of self-doubt and safely transfers her implacable anger and hatred towards her mother to her brother. By killing her brother, Hester tries to mend the wrong her mother has done to her and move on with her life. That is why she takes her brother’s money to build herself a settled, land-owning life with Carthage, as if to prove to her mother that she is “standin’ strong. She would see me life was complete, that I had Carthage and Josie and me own house. I so much wanted her to see that I had flourished without her and maybe then I could forgive her” (393). This is also where Hester differs from the Old Man: while the Old Man kills his father to revenge his dead mother and her destroyed Big House, he does not build a new life for himself; instead, he flees and lives a degraded life: “I ran away, worked here and there / Till I became a pedlar on the roads” (32). In this way, Carr rewrites Yeats’s miserable, pitiful Old Man into a strong-willed woman whose fighting spirit never dies. Hester’s whole life is focused on her mother’s leaving, so much so that her life choices – no matter if it is to murder her brother or to live a “normal” life with Carthage – are all defined by this trauma. Ironically, Hester’s attempts to untie the knot of abandonment only get her life tied into more deadly knots.

The emotional relief provided by her revenge murder soon gives way to a troubled conscience: Hester’s guilt is now doubled. Like the Old Man haunted by his parents’ ghosts (32), Hester is haunted by both her absent mother and her dead brother, and, wittingly or unwittingly, she also embarks on a self-destructive journey when she turns to alcohol to drown out her guilt: “If I had somewan to talk to I mightn’t have drunk so hard, somewan to roam the bog with me, somewan to take away a tiny piece of this guilt I carry with me, but ya never would [. . .]

however harshly ya judged me, I judged meself harsher” (392). Burdened by the guilt of murder, Hester and Carthage are not bound closer but drifting apart: Hester takes to drinking and bog-roaming while Carthage abandons their home. His leaving Hester for another woman, according to Hester, is his attempt to erase the part he played in the murder: “You rose in the world on his ashes! And that’s what haunts ya and that’s why ya want to forget I ever existed” (392). In spite of Hester’s attempts to rebuild herself and regain a normal life, the guilt of murder undoes her new life, which not only puts her in a self-destructive mode but also drives a wedge between her and her partner. Therefore, the revenge murder actually derails Hester’s life in a similar way it does the Old Man’s, causing her to lose her partner and her home.

No matter how hard Hester tries to hold onto the few things and people she has, the worst still happens: she is abandoned and betrayed again, this time by Carthage, the father of her child. Since he was sixteen, Carthage has been with Hester, and she is convinced that she formed him during their fourteen years together: “it was me built Carthage Kilbride up from nothin’, him a labourer’s son [. . .]. It was me who tould him he could do better. It was my money that bought his first fine acres. It was in my bed he slowly turned from a slavish pup to a man” (363). Hester claims Carthage to be of her making, yet Carthage repays her by marrying a much younger woman, Caroline, in order to climb socially into the respectable gentry class and get hold of her father Xavier’s lands. To Hester, Carthage’s departure reenacts her mother’s leaving – it feels like a repeated, ongoing trauma to her, as she tells Josie: “Another that had your name walked away from me. Your perfect Daddy walked away from me. And you’ll walk from me too. All me life people have walked away without a word of explanation” (387). Hester sees her life trapped in a cycle of being betrayed, abandoned, and left alone. By making her go through additional betrayal and abandonment, Carr builds a stronger case for the audience to see Hester as the victim of trauma and to understand her pressing need to end the cycle. In comparison, Yeats does not build momentum for the Old Man to act out in the end – his decision to murder his son to put an end to his trauma is an abrupt one, although understandable, given the haunting ghosts of his parents. Carr’s rewriting thus prepares the audience better for the finale while highlighting the repetitive nature of trauma. Although Hester is left behind again, she is no longer the helpless little girl seeing her mother walking away from her. When her emotional pleading and begging come to no avail, she stands up for herself by accusing Carthage of wrongdoings and maltreatment, but when all fails, she is determined to take her own life before he takes it through a second abandonment.

Many critics are troubled by the inconsistency expressed in Hester’s attitude towards Carthage – she rebels against him and clings to him at the same time. As

Emily L. Kader points out: “Carr’s subversive traditionalism [. . .] has made defining her position on feminism difficult for some critics. [. . .] Perhaps Carr’s protagonists’ undeniable need for the men in (as well as those out of) their lives is what makes some critics uncomfortable with her personal brand of feminism” (168). Hester’s need for men is fully shown in her conflicting attitudes towards Carthage, the man she cannot live without even if he maltreats her. In the light of trauma studies, Hester’s perplexing dependence on Carthage is a symptom of her trauma rather than of Carr’s abortive feminism. Her prior traumatic experience has instilled a fear of abandonment in her that gives rise to her “undeniable need” for Carthage. Given her childhood trauma, separation only destroys rather than facilitates her sense of self, and that is why she is so desperately clinging to Carthage. Without a better understanding of Hester’s past trauma, we cannot properly understand her pathological attachment to Carthage. Likewise, Hester’s refusal to leave the Bog of Cats is also psychologically rooted: by defying the whole community to physically stay near her mother by the bog, Hester remains true to her audacious, insolent, free-spirited mother. Unlike the Old Man who forsakes his mother’s way of life – “I am my father’s son, / Because of what I did or may do” (32) –, Hester upholds a “tinker’s” spunk, identity, and lifestyle to honor her mother.

While the Old Man and Hester go their separate ways, they come to the same destination – both end up murdering their children to close off their lifelong traumas. The parallels between the two plays are most striking here: not only do the characters use the same murder weapons from their last killings, but their children are exact mirror images of them when being killed. Like the Old Man, who kills his son with the knife he used on his father years ago, “My father and my son on the same jack-knife! / That finishes – there – there – there” (34), Hester uses the same “auld fishin’ knife” (394) that ended her brother’s life to cut her daughter’s throat. The same weapon locks the two murders together and indicates their innate connectedness – they derive from the same original trauma of losing the mother. If Hester murders her brother to revenge her abandonment by her mother, she kills her daughter to spare her from that fate. Hester cannot bear the idea of letting Josie go through what she herself has gone through:

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

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

JOSIE: I wouldn’t want to if you’re not here, Mam. [. . .] Mam, I’d be watchin’ for ya all the time ‘long the Bog of Cats. I’d be hopin’ and waitin’ and prayin’ for ya to return.

HESTER: Don’t be sayin’ those things to me now.

JOSIE: Just take me with ya, Mam. [. . .]

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

It's alright. Close your eyes. (*JOSIE closes her eyes.*) Are they closed tight?

JOSIE: Yeah.

(*HESTER cuts JOSIE's throat in one savage movement.*)

JOSIE: (*Softly.*) Mam – Mam –

(*And JOSIE dies in her arms.*) (394–395)

Hester sees her own lifelong, agonizing waiting for her mother in her daughter's begging to be with her. Being seven years old and in her white Communion dress, Josie is the exact likeness of Hester when Big Josie left her. The shocking identification between Hester and her daughter also exists between the Old Man and the Boy: of the same age, sixteen years old (31), and in the same mind of killing his father (33), the Boy is the spitting image of the Old Man when he murdered his father. Such mirror images enable the Old Man and Hester to see themselves in their children: while the Old Man sees his evil self, a father-killing son, in the Boy, Hester sees her orphaned self, a hopeless wretch, in Josie. They may both kill their children, but their reasons are quite different: the Old Man acts out of self-hatred and guilt, and kills a substitute patricidal son to appease his father's ghost, while Hester kills out of love and protection to save a daughter from losing her mother and being condemned for life. Seeing Josie as her young self nevertheless blocks Hester's sight of their differences – Josie has a loving father and a kind stepmother (while Hester did not), who may mitigate the intolerable pains brought by her mother's leaving and the hopeless waiting for her return. Deeply troubled by her own past, Hester does the only thing she knows to protect her daughter: by cutting her throat, she spares Josie from repeating her trauma. Her mercy killing, however, becomes Hester's biggest crime. Carr has admitted that in many of her plays she de-idealizes motherhood: "I was tired of the sentimental portrayal of mothers [. . .] We have this blessed Virgin myth embedded in us," while "The relationship between parent and child is so difficult and so complex. There's every emotion there. We mostly only acknowledge the good ones. If we were allowed to talk about the other ones, maybe it would alleviate them in some way" (qtd. in Sihra 137). Hester is not an idealized mother: she loves and protects Josie in a flawed way, and her act of killing is ironically an act of love – there is even tenderness in her "*savage movement*." By asking her daughter to close her eyes, Hester carefully prepares her for death, which contrasts sharply with the Old Man's underhanded, sneaky, savage "*stabs again and again*" at his son (34). Motivated and carried out differently, both killings nevertheless aim to bring closure to their generational traumas: the original trauma will no longer pass its harms from the Old Man to his son or from Hester to Josie, as the Old Man says, "I finished all that consequence" (34). Killing their offspring, the characters hope to break the chain of traumas and end their suffering, which, however, is unlikely to happen judging by the ways the plays end.

The ending, as a matter of fact, shows the biggest difference between Yeats's *Purgatory* and Carr's play. After the murder, the Old Man seeks escape and relief in a remote place while Hester confronts her guilt and fate by committing suicide. This has always been a controversial point in the play. While some critics view her action as the ultimate rebellion or triumphant resistance, others see it as a defeat: Carr's heroines "seem to abdicate from a confrontation with patriarchy, or if they do engage, they, disappointingly, throw in the towel by committing suicide" (Wallace qtd. in Murphy 397). The issue really boils down to whether Hester's suicide completes or thwarts her rebellion. Throughout the play, Hester is fighting back against Carthage and the villagers in order to stay relevant and retain her place in the Bog of Cats. She will not allow anyone to "fling [her] on the dunghill" (366) at will: "I'm the one who chooses and discards, not him, and certainly not any of ye. And I'm not runnin' with me tail between me legs just because certain people wants me out of their way" (355). Being discarded once by her mother and scarred for life, Hester will do anything to prevent the same fate from happening again. In this sense, her suicide speaks loudly of her agency – she will not be shifted or disposed of by anyone but stand firm by the Bog of Cats, in life or in death; she will not suffer the consequences of anyone's choice but be the one to decide the ways she shall live or die. Death is the choice Hester makes with free will and full agency to never part with her mother, her child, and the black swan in the bog. By killing herself the night of Carthage's wedding, she makes it impossible for him to forget her: "Ya won't forget me now, Carthage, and when all of this is over or half remembered and ya think ya've almost forgotten me again, take a walk along the Bog of Cats and wait for a purlin' wind through your hair or a soft breath be your ear or a rustle behind ya" (392). Hester's suicide seems to imbue the Bog of Cats with her spirit that haunts Carthage no matter where he goes. By killing herself by the Bog of Cats, Hester seals her place in the bog – her leaving is actually her staying, forever. In this light, Hester's suicide is not an aborted fight, but a committed battle that she wages even beyond life.

What is more, by her suicide, Hester also owns up to her actions. Carr once said, "In *Bog of Cats*, the only thing I wanted for Hester Swane was that she would have an answer for everything. So no one was going to do her down, basically. She was going to answer everything" ("Conversation" 194). Having an answer for everything is to face up to what one has done and be responsible for one's actions, which Hester fulfills through her self-destruction. Before she commits suicide, Hester burns down everything she and Carthage have built up – the house, the shed, and the cattle:

Well, Carthage, ya think them were only idle threats I made? Ya think I can be flung in a bog hole like a bag of newborn pups? Let's see how ya like this – Ya hear that sound? Them's

your cattle howlin'. Ya smell that smell? That's your forty calves roastin'. I tied them all in and flung diesel on them. And the house, I burnt the bed and the whole place went up in flames. I'd burn down the world if I'd enough diesel. (382)

On the surface level, it is easy to see that Hester puts her threat into action to take revenge on Carthage: by burning down all his belongings, she makes sure he will remember her through the sound and the smell of destruction – her afterlife presence thus becomes as inescapable as the five senses to Carthage. Her hatred, however, goes beyond Carthage to their house since she admits: “only an auld house, it should never have been built in the first place. Let the bog have it back. [. . .] I never liked that house anyway” (385). The house, as the very opposite of the caravan, stands for Hester's attempted assimilation into a settled, “normal” life in the community, which does not work out because not only is the money they built the house with stained with blood, but with restless, rebellious “tinker's” blood in her, Hester could never settle down and conform. Like her mother, “she couldn't breathe the same air as yees all here by the Bog of Cats” (389). If Hester goes along with Carthage and builds this house “again' me better judgement” (391), burning it down cleanses Hester because it destroys her guilty wealth obtained from a bloody murder and symbolizes her return to her true inheritance: her “tinker” identity. Although the fire and the burning house evoke a similar image in Yeats's *Purgatory*, its meaning could not be more different: the fire that seals Hester's loyalty to her mother's tradition severs the Old Man from his mother's cultural heritage: “And everything was burnt; / Books, library, all were burnt” (31). Therefore, Carr's rewriting has transformed the destructive fire in Yeats's play into something more constructive and reaffirming.

The biggest difference between the Old Man and Hester, however, is their attitudes towards their actions. After murdering his son, the Old Man appears guilt-free and ready to escape to a remote place to live a carefree life:

I am a wretched foul old man
And therefore harmless. When I have stuck
This old jack-knife into a sod
And pulled it out all bright again,
And picked up all the money that he dropped,
I'll to a distant place, and there
Tell my old jokes among new men. (34)

The Old Man's mean, shiftless, and narcissistic mind is on full display when he cleans his conscience the moment he wipes his son's blood off his knife. In contrast, Hester is wailing, grieving, and heart-broken after her daughter's death: “what've I done, what've I done?” (395). Her killing of Josie dements her: it harms her as much as it does Josie. The way Hester dies – “*They go into a death dance*

with the fishing knife, which ends plunged into HESTER's heart. She falls to the ground" (396) – shows clearly what really kills her: she dies of a broken heart. Her death cry "Mam – Mam –" (396) echoes Josie's death cry, and the fishing knife she uses to end her own life is the same one she uses to kill her brother and her daughter: all these repetitions speak to the deadly repercussions of trauma which Hester puts an end to with her suicide. By taking her own life, Hester shows an ultimate responsibility – for her brother's death as well as for her daughter's death – a responsibility the Old Man has avoided throughout Yeats's play. In this way, Carr crafts a more redeemable character than the Old Man.

While both the Old Man and Hester wish for closure to their traumas through death, each of them knows "death as a final conclusion remains out of reach" (Marsh 139). Just as the Old Man's murder of his son cannot stop the hoof-beats from coming back – "How quickly it returns – beat – beat –!" (34) –, Hester's killing her daughter and herself is not the final end either. Their ghosts will haunt the bog people forever, especially Carthage: "That'll be me and Josie ghos-tin' ya" (396). This "evokes the lines of another song sung by Big Josie which also gives the play its title" (Özbey 250): "To the Bog of Cats I one day will return / In mortal form or in ghostly form, / And I will find you there and there with you sojourn, / Forever by the Bog of Cats, my darling one" (356). The unbroken cycle of trauma is further suggested by the rebirth of the black swan at the end: "Hester – She's gone – Hester – She's cut her heart out – it's lyin' there on top of her chest like some dark feathered bird" (396). The "dark feathered bird" rising from dead Hester makes it clear that death is no closure to trauma. Death and birth are so intertwined that it seems no trauma really ends but continues in another form – the trauma of abandonment, betrayal, murder, and suicide will cast the Bog of Cats in shadow and haunt its residents in their memories and post-memories.

As in Yeats's *Purgatory*, Carr's play also contains many symbols, among which the black swan is a dominant one. While the Old Man is identified with the bare tree: "OLD MAN: study that tree, / What is it like? / BOY: A silly old man" (29), the black swan is an obvious symbol for Hester: when she is born, her mother leaves her at the black swan's lair and predicts that "[Hester] will live as long as this black swan, not a day more, not a day less" because her name "Swane means swan" (358). Therefore, not only does the black swan's death at the beginning of the play foreshadow Hester's death, but its torn corpse also indicates a violent, gruesome way to die for Hester: "Found her frozen in a bog hole last night, had to rip her from the ice, left half her underbelly" (353). With half of its body still stuck in the bog with no proper burial, the black swan cannot rest in peace. Neither can Hester – her ghost will keep haunting the bog. In this sense, the black swan is also a symbol of trauma accompanying Hester

since she was born: the ominous color black sets the tone for her tragic life – a life of abandonment, betrayal, and loss. The caravan is another silent yet crucial symbol in Carr's play. It is in the caravan that Hester spends her early years with her mother and assumes her "tinker" identity – it is her real home because she has "never felt at home" in her new house (353). As a relic from her past and the spatial presence of her mother's absence, the caravan reminds Hester of her losses – her childhood, her mother, her home – in exactly the same way as the burnt Big House reminds the Old Man, which makes them the primal trauma sites to the characters: their static and silent presence, nevertheless, determines all the happenings on the stage.

As a trauma play, Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* . . . strikes many parallels with Yeats's *Purgatory* in terms of plot, character, motif, theme, and symbols. While Carr's indebtedness to Yeats is unquestionable, her play has rewritten the Old Man's deplorable sufferings in the grip of a generational trauma into a fearless, strong woman's battling with her ill-fated life whose free spirit, agency, and sense of responsibility pale her pathetic male predecessor. By reappropriating the male-dominated trauma discourse to express female trauma, Carr not only creates a lifelike and complex female character for the Irish stage that has seen too many stale female stereotypes, but also sheds light on the often neglected domestic traumas in women's lives. In this way, Carr's play does an invaluable double service to modern drama and trauma studies in Ireland.

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