

T.C.
UNIVERSITY OF GAZİANTEP
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

**THE GROTESQUE AND DUALITIES IN THE
SELECTED PLAYS OF MARINA CARR**

MASTER OF ART THESIS

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Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Enes KAVAK

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my lovely daughter Doğa GÖKDEMİR who has been my inspiration since the first day I learnt about her.

ABSTRACT

THE GROTESQUE AND DUALITIES IN THE SELECTED PLAYS OF MARINA CARR

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With the discovery of Bath of Titus in the 15th century, it was found essential frescoes on the walls, differed from the conventions in art and architecture of the time. The term grotesque was applied to them, and grotesque showed its effect in art and architecture of the time, then in literature as time passed. The form and position of the grotesque have changed over time because it has always been against the norm. The Irish theatre in the 1990s was deeply affected by political, social and economic problems as a result of Ireland's being an English colony for centuries and after all contemporary upheavals such as World War II. It witnessed the use of the grotesque as an experimental form of express in drama. Marina Carr, accepted as one of the pioneers, contributed a lot to the 1990s Irish theatre with changes she made in the content, form and use of language in her plays. In this study, Marina Carr's *The Mai* (1995) and *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) are examined under the grotesque theory. In Chapter I, *The Mai* is examined according to the grotesque theory of Geoffrey Galt Harpham and the abjection theory of Julia Kristeva. In Chapter II, *By the Bog of Cats* is discussed in the light of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of grotesque and carnivalesque. The thesis aims to show that the grotesque is a pervasive feature in relation with dualities, content, form and use of language in the selected plays.

Keywords: Marina Carr, *The Mai*, *By the Bog of Cats*, the grotesque, Irish theatre

ÖZET

MARINA CARR'IN SEÇİLİ OYUNLARINDA GROTESK VE İKİLİKLER

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15. yy'de, Eski Roma İmparatoru Titus'a ait olduğu düşünülen yapıların keşfedilmesiyle birlikte bu yapıların duvarlarında dönemin sanat ve mimari anlayışından tamamen farklı eserler ile karşılaşmıştır. Bu eserler için kullanılmaya başlanan grotesk terimi, ilk etkilerini döneminin sanat ve mimari akımlarında göstermiş, zamanla edebiyat alanında da kullanılmaya başlamıştır. Norm karşıtı duruşu nedeniyle şekli ve uygulaması sürekli değişmiştir ve değişmeye devam etmektedir. 1990'lı yıllarda İrlanda tiyatrosu, İrlanda'nın yüzyıllar boyunca İngiliz sömürgesi olması ve ardından II. Dünya Savaşı gibi çağdaş çalkantıların bir sonucu olarak siyasi, sosyal ve ekonomik sorunlardan derinden etkilendi. Dramada groteskin deneysel bir anlatım biçimi olarak kullanımına tanık oldu. Bunun öncülerden biri olarak kabul edilen Marina Carr, oyunlarında içerik, biçim ve dil kullanımında yaptığı değişikliklerle 1990'lar İrlanda tiyatrosuna büyük katkı sağladı. Bu çalışmada Marina Carr'ın *The Mai* (1995) ve *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) adlı eserleri grotesk kuram kapsamında incelenmiştir. Birinci bölümde *The Mai*, Geoffrey Galt Harpham'ın grotesk teorisi ve Julia Kristeva'nın iğrençlik teorisine göre incelenmektedir. İkinci bölümde *By the Bog of Cats* Mikhail Bakhtin'in grotesk ve karnavalesk teorileri ışığında tartışılmaktadır. Tez, seçilen oyunlarda groteskin ikilikler, içerik, biçim ve dil kullanımıyla ilişkili olarak yaygın bir özellik olduğunu göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Marina Carr, *The Mai*, *By the Bog of Cats*, grotesk, İrlanda tiyatrosu

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INTRODUCTION

THE GROTESQUE AS REPRESENTED IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH THEATRE AND SELECTED PLAYS OF MARINA CARR

The Irish theatre in the 1990s staged political, social, psychological and cultural problems dealing with Ireland's colonial past and conflicts of the twentieth century such as World War II. Particularly, the English rule for centuries affected Irish culture and politics profoundly, which resulted in the foundation of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in 1918 as the official army of the Republic of Ireland. For the nation, IRA has become the main inspiration for revolt against English rule, and it has resulted in dramatic changes in the culture and literature of Irish people. The presence of the IRA and the conflict it created in the way of determining a free national identity for the Irish "inevitably shaped the life of the society in most of the time in the twentieth century" (Bozbey, 2015, p. 9). In this sense, "the long-term socio-political, economic and cultural effects of imperial power relationships" of the island have a considerable effect on its cultural development, which influences the Irish drama as well (Jones, 2002, p. 10). Nationalism and constructing an Irish identity were common themes for former playwrights of the island. However, with the decreasing importance of nationalism, "contemporary Ireland has witnessed a paradigm shift in modes of theatre-making ... works which request or demand active participation from their audiences" (Haughton, 2014, p. 2). Therefore, contemporary Irish playwrights have dealt with new forms and contents with the "influence from global postmodern thinking and politics" (p. 2). In this context, it can be asserted that contemporary Irish playwrights intertwine their themes, structures and strategies with postmodern techniques in order to interrogate, observe, debate, decode or disrupt "notions of Irishness, national identities, gender identities, sexual identities, racial identities,

religious identities and class identities” (p. 4), and “modernist master-narratives and established beliefs” (p. 5). A noteworthy aspect of their dramatic works appears to be the revitalisation of the use of grotesque elements. One of the most influential figures among Irish playwrights is Marina Carr, who makes use of the grotesque as a technique in contemporary Irish theatre. In this regard, this dissertation aims to examine the selected plays of Marina Carr in the light of the theories of grotesque to demonstrate that the grotesque is a commonly used technique in contemporary Irish theatre, particularly in the deconstruction and subversion of the former dramatic and cultural notions.

Irish people and their traditions have an old history although there are some theories about the origins of the Irish nation. The first asserts that “when they learned to write they recorded that they originally came from Northern Spain” (Curtis, 2002, p. 1) while the second alleges “this destiny began with the aboriginal settlers of prehistoric Ireland who crossed the land bridge which is now Scotland nearly ten thousand years ago” (Sternlicht, 2010, p. 3). In both respects, there are certain important influences on the culture and drama of Irish nation. The first influence is the nation’s acceptance of “Christianity as religion through St. Patrick, who was the first great spiritual name in the history of Ireland” (Bozbey, 2015, p. 8). The second influence is the English rule over the Irish for centuries, which has affected their culture and drama deeply. The last influence is the foundation of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in 1918 as the official army of the Republic of Ireland. The presence of the IRA and the conflict it created in the way of determining a free national identity for the Irish “inevitably shaped the life of the society in most of the time in the twentieth century” (p. 9).

The political history of the island has had a considerable impact on its cultural development, which has influenced the Irish drama as well. Christopher Morash (2002) states in his book titled *A History of the Irish Theatre 1601-2000*: “Moore’s presence should remind us that while Ireland did not have any theatres in 1601, it had a long history of performance, extending back to at least to the seventh century” (p. 3). “Neale Moore” is an Irish fool, “a traditional Gaelic clown, or *druth*, who had been in the service of English nobleman since at least 1600” (p. 3), appearing in the written texts and on the stage, which reveals the early existence and prominence of drama and dramatic culture for the Irish.

Oral tradition in Irish culture was “performed by poets called ‘file’” before drama became significant (Bozbey, 2015, p. 10). It “found a place in storytelling” (p. 10), which had a positive effect on the development of Irish theatre. However, until the first half of the 17th century, there were not theatre places. Morash (2002) elaborates on the issue stating:

... plays continued to be produced privately in great houses around the island, but it was not until Thomas Wentworth, the Earl of Strafford, arrived as Lord Lieutenant in July of 1633 that the first attempt was made to build a theatre ... The theatre was a major part of life at the court of Charles I in London; consequently, Wentworth set about building a theatre for his court in Dublin. (p. 4)

It is clear that the art of drama was affected by English dominance in Ireland. Nevertheless, Irish drama continued to exert its influence in the following centuries. In the late 17th century and early 18th century, the interest in drama “spread quickly ... especially by Dublin-centered theatre companies and the Royal Theatre” (Bozbey, 2015, p. 12). Additionally, “between 17th and 19th centuries, melodrama became popular in Ireland but that was mostly performed by English writers and English players” (p. 12). However, at the beginning of the 20th century, Ireland began to focus on an independent form of art, especially with the effect of nationalist movements in the 19th and 20th centuries. It underwent radical shifts and changes, especially about funding and economic prosperity. The critics Finola Cronin and Eamonn Jordan (2016) discuss the same issue saying: “Arts-funding rose considerably during the Celtic Tiger years (1993-2007), but with the age of austerity and recession from 2007 forward, many of the smaller theatre companies went out of business having lost state funding ...” (p. 2). The state funding had great meaning for the companies and the effects of the Celtic Tiger period was particularly important as voiced by Anne Etienne and Thierry Dubost (2017):

If, from an economic point of view, the Celtic Tiger meant catching up with the most prosperous countries of the western world, it may also have been a means of aesthetic catch-up, enabling Irish artists to collaborate with European counterparts and develop new forms of writing and staging within a heavily subsidized system. As the thriving decade collapsed, followed by the concretised fear of budget cuts and empty seats, Irish playwrights and theatre practitioners have responded or anticipated by breaking with old tropes to try new forms of expression beyond the frames of traditional Irish drama. (pp. 1-2)

It can be asserted that the art of drama in Ireland changed and made developments throughout the centuries, mostly influenced by the social, political and economic shifts on the island. Thus, “Irish society started to have interest in their own culture and wanted to learn more about themselves and their past” (p. 14), and theatre became an important tool for the educated people of the society to escape the effects of English rule, and to construct an independent Irish identity. With the help of plays, it became easier to convey ideas to ordinary people to constitute a kind of cultural development in the society. Playwrights of the period focused on Irishness, accordingly, they chose to adopt nationalist ideas, in that Ireland was under the impact of “the long-term socio-political, economic and cultural effects of imperial power relationships” (Jones, 2002, p. 10). At the beginning of the new Irish Theatre Movement, Abbey Theatre was “founded as a national theatre for Ireland by W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory in 1904. These revolutionaries defined the ambition of the Abbey Theatre with their manifesto ‘to bring upon the stage the deeper emotions of Ireland’” (“History-Abbey Theatre,” n.d.). However, “tragically in 1951, the original buildings of the Abbey Theatre were damaged by fire during the run of *The Plough and the Stars*” (“History-Abbey Theatre,” n.d.), and after this period “several theatre companies were established under the influence of Abbey Theatre” (Bozbey, 2015, p. 19) in 1970s and 80s such as “Project Theatre Company, Focus Theatre and Druid Theatre” (p. 19), which paved the way for contemporary Irish theatre. Such companies provided new playwrights with opportunities to reflect “the current social conditions of the late 20th century Ireland” (p. 20). With the decreasing importance of nationalism, “contemporary Ireland has witnessed a paradigm shift in modes of theatre-making ... works which request or demand active participation from their audiences” (Haughton, 2014, p. 2). Therefore, contemporary Irish playwrights have dealt with new forms and contents with the “influence from global postmodern thinking and politics” (p. 2). They have frequently used postmodern tools in order to interrogate, observe, debate, decode or disrupt “notions of Irishness, national identities, gender identities, sexual identities, racial identities, religious identities and class identities” (p. 4), and “modernist master-narratives and established beliefs” (p. 5). In doing so, they do not avoid totally from previous themes, dramatic structures and strategies, but they intertwine past with present themes, structures and strategies. Margaret Llewellyn Jones (2002) explicates this as follows:

Other themes, dramatic structures and strategies common to many contemporary Irish plays can be linked with the post-colonial situation through the tension between tradition and modernism ... These may include, for example: the function of verbal and oral language; the relationship of genre, ideology and form; the dynamic relationship of politics, history and myth; religion; perceptions of gender; traditional elements such as the grotesque; rural and urban contexts; diaspora, exile and return. These themes are expressed through re-working the conventions of realism by drawing upon the mythic, the grotesque and the carnivalesque body to question history, tradition, and national identity as a fixed, unified concept. (p. 15)

It is essential to highlight the traces of postmodern elements, especially the grotesque particularly. First of all, the grotesque is a constantly changing concept, and it has been one of the most controversial terms in art and literature. The problem of a clear-cut definition stems from its ever-changing nature with several components characterizing it. The grotesque is intricately related to many other terms such as abnormal, uncanny, monstrous, absurd, comic and caricature, etc. Furthermore, as a concept, it functions as a complementary term in different arts and academic subjects. It can be used as a noun, adjective, verb, adverb, or interjection (Semler, 2018, p. 14). The most notable feature of it is that it shapes and is shaped by the society in which it is born, and it poses against the established and accepted norms of that society, which situates it in a constant state of flux.

Although it is challenging to trace the grotesque historically, the origin and the common significations of the term can be traced back to Ancient Rome as pointed out by many critics studying the subject. The term originally came to be used in the 1500s in art by being derived from the Italian word *grotto*, meaning caves, because some ancient cave paintings were discovered in Ancient Rome. These paintings included mixtures of human and animal creatures, and they had no resemblance to the art and architecture of the contemporary time. They were against the notion of art and architecture of the period, which respected mainly order and regularity. However, after a while, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries, “these imitations soon to be called *grottesche* (n. ‘grotesques’) in sixteenth-century Italy ... But they (Italians) were first to indicate that the word denoted specific designs found in the ruins of Ancient Rome” (p. 10) as Frances K. Barasch (1971), an important critic in the field, explains in her *The Grotesque: A Study in Meanings*. To her, “‘grotesque’ is associated with ‘grotto’ and the antique style in Vassari’s preface to *The Lives* and in his life of *Perino del Vaga*” (p. 10), having its origin ‘in painting, architecture, and the other arts; with its

use in other languages and literature, and with theories of rhetoric, aesthetics, and literature, for each spheres of thought concerns the development of ‘grotesque’ as an English literary term” (Barasch, 1971, p. 3). Therefore, in the first step, these roots are clarified. Barasch (1971) gives a detailed explanation of it stating:

The grandeur that had been Rome’s during the reign of Augustus was gone. The ancient capital of the civilized world had turned into heaps of debris, and the fragments of his palaces, its baths, and its temples had accumulated the dust and rubbish of almost a thousand years ... Then, late in the quattrocento, a few curious antiquarians began to rummage in the overgrown ruins, searching the grottoes for remnants of the glorious past. Underground, in the rooms or caverns of the Baths of Titus, they discovered free-standing statues, elaborately sculptured fountains, and the remarkable remains of delicately designed, colored walls and ceilings al fresco and al stucco ... The ceilings and the walls of the Titus Baths aroused special interest. These paintings were designed to please the fancy, and the eye rather than to instruct the soul. Such works were virtually unheard of before that time, and because they were the cheapest and simplest of the antique forms to reproduce, the paintings immediately gained favor among the architectural decorators of Italy. (p. 9)

The walls and the ceilings contained different arrangements and specific designs for the time. Therefore, the grotesque as a term is used for those specific designs found in the ruins of ancient Rome. At this point, it is important to point that the Italian Renaissance art was dominated by Vitruvius, the famous Ancient Roman architect. He believed that “an architect should focus on three central themes when preparing a design for a building: *firmitas* (strength), *utilitas* (functionality), and *venustas* (beauty)” (Vitruvius, 1970). Following Vitruvian viewpoint in architecture, it was believed that “a timeless notion of beauty could be learnt from the ‘truth of nature’, that nature’s designs were based on universal laws of proportion and symmetry” and Vitruvius (1970) believed that “the body's proportions could be used as a model of natural proportional perfection” (1970). Similarly, Ralf Remshardt (2004) focuses on that issue in *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance* and states:

The grotesquely deformed body also challenges another fixed system, that of physical harmony, and proportion. To fulfill the demands of total harmony, the Vitruvian body (which remained the effective model for centuries) must adhere to certain numerical proportions: the head is one-eighth of the total height; the face and the hand are one-tenth each; the foot is one-sixth; the cubit one-fourth; and so on (p. 33)

Hence, the grotesque and the discovered ruins were not typical of the Italian Renaissance following the Vitruvian point of art, they contained mixtures and contradictions, thus “grotesques were irrational, in bad taste, and immoral” (Barasch, 1971, p. 21). As Frances S. Connelly (2012) asserts, “these inventions offend both nature and society, because they cannot exist as living beings and controvert their necessary functions” (p. 27). For this reason, “Vitruvius brands it as bastard, illegitimate in its intermixing with and subverting of the structure itself” (p. 30). However, Michelangelo chose to depart from Vitruvian rules. He returned to use a distinctive style, so, the meaning of grotesque was extended to a “subjective form of art” (Barasch, 1971, p. 21).

Geoffrey Galt Harpham (1982), another important critic of the grotesque explains a similar issue in his seminal work titled *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradictions in Art and Literature*, and he sets out to define as follows:

... when the word *grottesche* was applied to certain ornamental designs modeled on recently excavated Roman *frescoes*. These designs were primarily decorative in character but they differed from the most traditional ornament in that not only were they capable of filling a space alone with no help from any central subject, but they also incorporated interpretable, frequently human, elements into the design, and so they were ambivalently meaning-bearing as well as decorative. (p. xxi)

These paintings were between real and fantastic (non-real). They were both funny and frightening or disgusting, as the grotesque implies. Generally, it means ‘comically or repulsively ugly or distorted’ as an adjective; and ‘a very ugly or comically distorted figure or image’ as a noun. At that point, the paintings in the cave were described as ugly, funny, repulsive and disgusting images, because they were against the general notion of the Vitruvian universe. Barasch (1971) clarifies as follows:

... that the universe was created in an absolute mathematical harmony; that the universe was conceived as a perfect geometric form; and that its corresponding parts – the stars, the globe, the trees, man, all nature – were based on a circle, most perfect of geometric forms. Squares and polygons, although less perfect, nevertheless, were worthy of use, for their shapes were derived from the circle. (p. 16)

The grotesque and the historical background of it has different interpretations. Considering this rooted background of the grotesque, which has been discussed so far, it is only understandable why Geoffrey Galt Harpham (1982) points out that “the

grotesque has no history capable of being narrated, for it never began anywhere” (p. xvi). That is, its birth traces back to the first sparks of imagination, as early as the first means of self-expression emerged. It embraces such expressive mediums as gestures, speech, art, and literature. It is shaped and interpreted according to the culture of its time. Therefore, “the field of the grotesque is exceptional in that although there is almost no agreement among critics, there is almost no disagreement either” (Harpham, 1982, p. xviii). At this point, Harpham (1982) questions the issue of the grotesque by stating two main questions: “What is the character of the grotesque, what kind of thing it is?” (p. xv) Various critics of the grotesque begin their analysis, “locating the first use of the word in the connection with the excavations during the late fifteenth century in Italy of Roman ruins, particularly with the ornaments on the walls of these rooms” (Duggan, 2013, p. 14). Harpham (1982) explains it as “a newly ornamental style they [the first generation of artists] called grottesche” (p. xvi). Therefore, the roots of the grotesque as a term go back to those cave paintings as mentioned above. What comes to the fore is accumulating and extracting common features of the grotesque. To the common view ‘ugliness’ would be the common feature, however, “the grottesche of the Renaissance was primarily intended to be, simply, beautiful” (Harpham, 1982, p. xviii). Over the centuries, the grotesque evolved and turned out to mean something different from what it meant to be in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Harpham (1982) maintains that “we find the word associated with caricature ... By the beginning of the twentieth century the grotesque had outflanked an unvigilant reality” (p. xviii). As it is understood, the term has changed much over the period, and it has embraced many connotations. For example, Harpham (1982) mentions Thomas Mann comments in *Mediations of a Nonpolitical Man*: “The grotesque was ‘properly something more than the truth, something real in the extreme, not something arbitrary, false, absurd, and contrary to reality’”. Since Mann’s time, the difference has evaporated (p. xix).

Thus, the grotesque has always been in progress, because it occurs in a constant state of flux. It was first meant to be purely beautiful, and then evolved to be ‘unnatural’. However, after some period, it has also become “the very opposite of the real”, because it has been the opposite of a norm (Harpham, 1982, p. xix). Being against a norm, questioning assumptions and challenging the truths of its time are the basic features of the grotesque. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that “it does not stand in direct opposition to the norm, however: it occupies a liminal position” (Pilny, 2016,

p. 4). Hence, “it challenges accepted norms, it is always inappropriate; it may be perceived as offensive, dangerous, and may cause destruction” (p. 5). As the norm evolved or changed, so did the meaning of the grotesque. However, it had many descriptive points such as absurdity, ugliness, distortion, or degradation. It is important to note that the grotesque “is not just bizarre but extremely engaging”, rather “it leaves the beholder puzzled” (p. 1). The same could be claimed for the relation between the grotesque and the natural, as well. It is said that “the grotesque sometimes gave ‘evidence of deep insight into nature’” (p. xix). One way to interpret the grotesque is to acknowledge that it “exists only in the tension between distinct realities” (Connelly, 2012, p. 8). In this manner, Harpham (1982) asks an important question: “What makes a work grotesque?” (p. xx) He makes the explanation as indicated below:

That the grotesque exists has always been a given. But it is up to the culture to provide the conventions and assumptions which determine its forms. Culture does this by establishing conditions of order and coherence, especially by specifying which categories are logically or generically incompatible with which others. Despite the accelerating acceptance of the grotesque as a ‘mode’ in contemporary art ... the grotesque is becoming less and less possible because of the pervasive, soupy tolerance of disorder, of the *genre mixte*. (Harpham, 1982, p. xx)

Relevantly, the grotesque is defined as a *genre mixte* by Harpham, which articulates the complexity of the term. It is “a species of confusion – that is, it is defined and recognized in common usage by a certain set of obstacles to structured thought” (Harpham, 1982, p. xxi). However, it is becoming typical, in that the marginal is becoming more and more indiscriminable in the age of technology. Harpham (1982) sets out to explain as follows:

... in more innocent times it was possible to create a grotesque by mingling human with animal or mechanical elements; but as we learn more about the languages of animals, and teach more and more complex languages to computers, the membranes dividing these realms from that of the human begin to dissolve, and with them go the potentiality for many forms of the grotesque. (p. xx)

That is, the grotesque is a term with certain methodological problems as it causes confusion of many other terms and language categories. The word itself offers many different meanings under the same concept. It is a concept traced back to the beginning of humanity. However, as a concept, it flourished in the fifteenth century, in which the grotesque designs differed from the mainstream idea of architecture at

that time. Meanwhile, they marked a milestone for the architectural attitude in the first step. In the literary realm, the grotesque gained currency in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin (1965), an important critic of *Rabelais and His World*, set out to describe that “of all great writers of world literature, *Rabelais* is the least popular, the least understood and appreciated” (p. 25). *Rabelais* affected the history of grotesque because his works were different from the mainstream. Bakhtin (1965) argues that:

... his place in history among the creators of modern European writing, such as Dante, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, and Cervantes, is not subject to doubt. Rabelais not only determined the fate of French literature and of the French literary tongue, but influenced the fate of world literature as well (probably no less than Cervantes). (p. 26)

Rabelais can be thought as a precursor of modern literature, who influenced the grotesque literature of his time. He looked and saw literature from a different viewpoint, making others see different perspectives according to Bakhtin. “[It also explains] Rabelais’ ‘nonliterary’ nature, that is the nonconformity of his images to the literary norms and ‘canons predominating in the sixteenth century’” (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 27). “Rabelais is the most difficult classical author of world literature ... Rabelais is difficult” (p. 27). Bakhtin (1965) states the essential principle of the grotesque and mentions that “grotesque realism is degradation, that is, lowering of all that is high, spiritual, and ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth, and body in their indissoluble unity” (p. 19). Bakhtin exemplifies and criticizes the accepted norms and values of his time by referring to an aspect of the grotesque:

Not only parody in its narrow sense but all the other forms of realism degrade, bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh. This fact is the peculiar trait of this genre which differentiates it from all the forms of medieval high art and literature. The people’s laughter which characterized all the forms of grotesque realism from immemorial times was linked with the bodily lower stratum. Laughter degrades and materializes. (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 20)

The interpretation of Frances S. Connelly can be discussed better in light of Bakhtin’s words. She clarifies that the grotesque “courts ambiguity and flux; it is remarkably consistent in its operations, especially in its intermixture of high and low” (Connelly, 2012, p. 14). She elaborates on three specific kinds of the grotesque, and calls them “the improvisational, witty grotesque”, “the subversive grotesque” and “the traumatic grotesque” (Connelly, 2012). All three of them have specific functions, but they all serve to a common point, which is that “the grotesque exists where established realities are put into play” whether in “cultural conventions” or “the forms of visual

and literary representation” (p. 14). To Connelly (2012), “the grotesque is indeed the image at play: whatever the rules and the conventions, the grotesque subverts them” (p. 14). By doing so, she states as indicated below:

Linking play with the grotesque might seem incongruous, but this is in large part because the modern connotations of play have narrowed, much like those of the grotesque. Play has dwindled to associations with leisure and laughter, while the grotesque rarely used to describe anything other than the horrible and disgusting. Laughter and play do in fact take a central role in two of the grotesque’s major standards: specifically the witty, ornamental grotesque and the bawdy, bodied carnivalesque.” (p. 15)

Accordingly, the grotesque found its way both to apply it to different literary forms and to extend them. Despite all the conflicts and disagreements, in the literary field, because the grotesque filled the gap between “the known and the unknown, the perceived and the unperceived” (Harpham, 1982, p. 3). Harpham (1982) debates this issue stating:

When we use the word “grotesque” we record, among other things, the sense that though our attention has been arrested, our understanding is unsatisfied [...] they are neither so regular and rhythmical that they settle easily into our categories, nor so unprecedented that we do not recognize them at all [...] diving the continuum of experience into knowable particles. (3)

Philip Thomson, another important critic in the field, mentions a similar point in *The Grotesque*. He discusses “the extreme incongruity associated with the grotesque” and “the confusion between a sense of the comic and something – revulsion, horror, fear-which is incompatible with the comic” (Thomson, 1972, p. 13). He sets out to explain that “unless we take ‘eerie’ to also contain some suggestion of the comic – and this would be most unusual – it is not the most appropriate word ... it is narrated in an entirely realistic, indeed matter-of-fact fashion, as if it were a quite ordinary event” (p. 14).

Obviously, the effect of the grotesque is described by Thomson in detail. The grotesque derives in a realistic framework; however, its attempt to be both comic and terrifying is undeniable. It causes a cynical laughter, but it is a “barbaric delight” (Thomson, 1972, p. 15), because “this is laughter that mocks the weakness and foolishness of humanity” (Connelly, 2012, p. 16). Accordingly, Thomson (1972) states as follows:

Certain problems are raised by this, most important being the possibility that our laughter at some kinds of the grotesque, and the opposite response – disgust, horror, etc. – mixed with it, are both reaction to physically cruel, abnormal or obscene; the possibility, that is, alongside our civilized response something deep within us, some area of our unconscious, some hidden but very much sadistic impulse makes us react to such things with unholy glee and barbaric delight. (p. 15)

One must approve that such an abundance use of the grotesque paved the way for arousing interest in writers. ‘... soon grotesque furnishings began to appear in literary figures and descriptions. Allusions to grotesque ornamentation and the word ‘grotesque’ appeared in “Rabelais, Montaigne, Ronsard, Du Bartas, Vauquelin de la Fresnaye, and others” (p. 24) as Barasch (1971) explains. By this means, the meaning of the grotesque which was so far used in art and architecture extended to the literature and literary criticism.

Wolfgang Kayser, one of the first critics who proposed a definition of the grotesque to the maximum, is important in the field because he applied it to literature and literary criticism. He suggested that after the discovery of these ornamental designs, countries other than Italy adopted the term grotesque with the type of art it created. He mentions that “the first instance of such usage in the German language refers to the monstrous fusion of human and nonhuman elements as the most typical feature of the grotesque style” (Kayser, 1963, p. 24). In his belief, the grotesque became a prominent word that was used to involve many prominent figures, such as humans and nonhumans. The fusion of elements contained different terms under the same roof: strange, peculiar and fantastic or common, ordinary and reasonable. Kayser (1963) exemplifies the term by giving an explanation of it in the *Dictionary of the French Academy* (1694 and after): “Figuratively speaking, it signifies silly, bizarre, extravagant” (p. 26). Likewise, a German-French dictionary by Schmidlin offers the following description: “Figuratively speaking, grotesque means odd, unnatural, bizarre, strange, funny, ridiculous, caricatural, etc” (Kayser, 1963, p. 28).

The grotesque is a concept without a proper form but comes with certain characteristics. It overlaps many other fields and meanings under the same roof. Harpham (1982) states that “it accommodates the things left over when the categories of language are exhausted; it is a defence against silence when other words are failed” (p. 4). There are recurring notions that characterize the grotesque such as suddenness

and surprise. They can be considered as essential parts of it. The abrupt and surprising nature of the grotesque converts the world that is familiar into an alien and threatening one. It unsettles the audience with suddenness and surprise Kayser (1982) sets out to describe:

The grotesque is not concerned with individual actions, or the destruction of the moral order. It is primarily our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe. Finally, the tragic does not remain within the sphere of incomprehensibility ... the sphere of the meaningless and the absurd. (p. 185)

The fusion of the meaningless and the absurd, the human and the nonhuman, the known and the unknown sometimes creates a satirical effect. Therefore, it can be said that the grotesque causes bitterness and laughter concurrently. Kayser (1963) explains it as follows:

Laughter originates on the comic, and the caricatural fringe of the grotesque. Filled with bitterness, it takes on the characteristics of the mocking, cynical, and ultimately satanic laughter while turning into the grotesque ... the role of the laughter within the complex of the grotesque poses the most difficult question that arises in conjunction with the phenomenon. A clear-cut answer is impossible. (p. 187)

The uncanny sensation created by the grotesque is another characteristic of it. Through the uncanny sensation, the grotesque takes hold of the audience and throws it into a complicated experience. Its practical usage comes into prominence at this point, because through eccentricity, it achieves to be opposite of what is normally acceptable in society. It challenges the conventional idea of art, architecture, and literature.

The grotesque derives from the incomprehensible, the inexplicable and the impersonal. Incongruities and disharmony outline the grotesque at once. It is “in a state of change” (Connelly, 2012, p. 7). The fusion of different forms under the same roof and being in constant flux are the reasons behind its being disharmonious. It intermixes the disparate entities and violates the boundaries. It intermingles the familiar with the alien. For that, the conflict and the unresolved nature become the distinguishing features of the grotesque. Herein, disharmony occurs. It is related not only to the artwork but also to the response of the audience and the creative process of the author. Disharmony refers to “conflict, clash, mixture of the heterogeneous or conflation of dispartes” (Thomson, 1972, p. 20). It refers to both the comic and the

monstrous. In all, Kayser (1963) maintains that “the grotesque is a play with the absurd” (p. 17). It causes a cynical laughter, but it is a barbaric delight. Thus, a final explication of the grotesque is produced: an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects worldwide.

Therefore, it would not be rational to accept predictable behaviour, activity or effect from the grotesque. The grotesques are beyond the reach of language; they only imply the collision of other concepts. At this stage, when both the grotesque and literary forms are taken into consideration, it becomes obvious that they complete and strengthen each other. They both “break down the strange into the recognizable” (Harpham, 1982, p. 5). Harpham claims that the grotesque became important among artists. The reason is explained in the following way:

Grotesque figures test us similarly, for they seem to be singular events, appearing in the world by virtue of an illegitimate act of creation, manifesting no coherent, and certainly no divine intention. This is why the grotesque is embraced by “aesthetic” artists who insist on the non-mimetic character of artistic creation. (p. 5)

Starting its life as a theoretical concept, the grotesque has become a practical term that was applied to different literary forms. Applications of the grotesque to the literature provoked the fusion of the familiar, and the unfamiliar under the same roof. The grotesque helped literature represent the struggle between the form and the content. As Harpham (1982) suggests that “the grotesque often arises in the clash between ‘virtuous’ limitations of form and a rebellious content that refuses to be constrained” (p. 7).

Accordingly, the grotesque and the scope of the literature correspond to each other. That is, in the grotesque, many meanings and forms are integrated into one another; *normally*, the things that should be kept apart are into unity. In the sense of literature, as the grotesque does, many meanings, and forms are integrated into one another. Feelings, emotions, thoughts, events, etc. are all fused together. That brings the fusion of the grotesque, and the literature on the same page.

The literature overlaps with the grotesque in the idea that both try to achieve a “striking insight” (Harpham, 1982, p. 12). Accordingly, Pilny (2016) states that “its meaning is created only in the act of reception” (p. 12). In this sense, it is possible to claim that the grotesque components achieve striking insights for the readers of literary

works with such fusions, creating confusion and reactions, finally leading to apprehensions and cognizance. Likewise, as Harpham (1982) states “the perception of the grotesque is never a fixed or stable thing, but always a process, a progression” (p. 14). Literature is also in a constant state of flux. Both the grotesque and the literary forms combine analogies and juxtapositions in various ways. That is the reason for reconciliation and rapport between the grotesque and literary forms. The literature promotes the grotesque/ness, therefore, they overlap.

After its application to art and architecture, the grotesque started to be applied to literature. It showed its impact in novels primarily, as mentioned in *Rabelais and His World*. Then, it was employed distinctly in drama. Wolfgang Kayser (1963) points out the connection by stating that “it was especially Shakespeare, the master of the grotesque, and the eccentric gestic style of the *commedia dell’arte* which inspired the German writers” (p. 41). Additionally, “the drama of the *Sturm and Drang* (and especially Lenz’ theatre) is more replete with grotesque elements than has hitherto been acknowledged” (p. 41). Therefore, the grotesque emerged “as an esthetic category” (p. 37).

What is suggested is that the grotesque is to be applied in three realms: “the creative process, the work of art itself, and its reception” (Kayser, 1963, p. 180). The reception of the grotesque is the most important realm among all, because the perception of the grotesque is closely related to the culture that gives birth to it. It is “a cultural action” (Connelly, 2012, p. 13). The grotesque is understood because of its effect mostly. What is unfamiliar and inaccessible is labelled as the grotesque in most of the cultures. For instance, certain animals such as snakes, owls, toads, and spiders, since they generally cause one to experience strangeness, almost of the ominous; in that “certain animals are especially suitable to be the grotesque” (p. 182).

What is important here is the application of the grotesque to different literary forms, especially drama. The critic Ralf Remshardt (2004) makes this point by stating “... every performance is a kind of grotesque, every grotesque is a kind of performance” (p. 2). That is, the grotesque and theatre are two inseparable pairs for Remshardt. He debates the issue by quoting the Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold’s arguments:

The theater, being a combination of natural, temporal, spatial, and numerical phenomena, is itself outside of nature. It finds that these phenomena invariably contradict our everyday experience and that the theater itself is essentially an example of the grotesque. Arising from the grotesque of a ritual masquerade, the theater inevitably is destroyed by any given attempt to remove the grotesque — the basis of existence — from it. (as cited in Remshardt, 2004, p. 2)

Remshardt and Meyerhold elaborate on the close relationship between the theatre and the grotesque indicating their characteristics of being ‘outside of nature’. Viewed from this perspective, there occurs a reconciliation between theatre and the grotesque. As the critic Bert O. States attests, “in theatre image and object, pretense and pretender, sign-vehicle and content draw unusually close” (p. 20), which is a similar characteristic of the grotesque. Similarly, the theatre creates “... new ‘doubles’ and thus new doubts, restlessly exposing the world as one which is dynamic ...” (George, 1989, p. 74). Accordingly, the grotesque makes use of these doubles and doubts by liberating “the interpretation ... of the absences and gaps and of suppressed and sublimated wraps in our conventional perception of actuality” (Remshardt, 2004, p. 255). As Luigi Pirandello (1966) observes, “Nothing is true!” (p. 54). What comes out here is that the grotesque exercises in the form of performance “to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world” (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 34).

The current relationship between the grotesque and performance leads to the discussion of a mutual reconciliation, which connects us to the contemporary Irish theatre. The creation of textual and non-textual uncanny by using aggressive and provocative language and images in a way to challenge the conventional notion of passive and unresponsive theatre spectatorship can be observed in many contemporary Irish playwrights. Pilný (2016) discusses the issue:

... the work of the authors such as Philip Ridley or McDonagh is also indicative of the new, vivid forms of the grotesque that have emerged since in the 1990s in the plays that have shocked their audiences by their aggressive displays of physical and verbal violence. (p. 13)

One of the most important of these playwrights is Marina Carr with her offensive and humorous language, desperate but challenging woman characters and playful experiments on the form and content in her notable plays such as *The Mai* and *By the Bog of Cats*.... With her experimental plays, she has become known in Ireland in the late 1980s and early 1990s. She is exceptional because “she is the only Irish woman to have her plays produced on Ireland’s main stages in recent years” (Sihra,

2007, p.19). Her emergence on stage coincides with “a major moment of visibility and change for women in Irish culture – the inauguration of the first female President of Ireland, Mary Robinson” (Sihra, 2007, p. 19). She was awarded “a McCauley Fellowship, the American/Ireland Fund award, the Puterrbaugh Fellowship and E.M. Foster Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters” (People, n.d., para. 1). Additionally, her plays have been translated into many languages and attracted attention all over the world. Her early plays such as *Low in the Dark* (1989) and *Ullalo* (1991) mainly focus on the themes of “love, sex, life and death in surreal, absurdist and comic ways” (Sihra, 2007, p. 201) in standard Hiberno- English. Her recent plays such as *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996) and *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998), however, explore the themes of the “fraught relationship between women, family and home in rural Irish settings” (Sihra, 2007, p. 201) with a dramatic change in the language she uses. Sihra (2005) debates the subversion theme as follows:

Marina Carr's theatre is inscribed within the canonical legacy of predominantly male Irish playwrights, a tradition which focuses conspicuously around mutually dependent male-pairings, offering representations which challenge conventional depictions of identity and culture in particular with regard to woman, motherhood, and the family. (p.133)

In each of Carr's plays, the audience face disruption of form and content “where inventive dramaturgical strategies such as flash-backs, simultaneous playing spaces, symbolic time, dreams, ghosts, monologues, and memory-narratives, express an imaginative resistance to dominant forms of dramatic realism” (Sihra, 2005, p. 134). The subversion of language in her later works is accepted as a “physical attack on the conventions of syntax, spelling and sounds of Standard English” (McGuinness, 2003, 78). In addition to the language, her use of the Irish Midlands is another important issue to mention, in that the Midlands can be considered as a “passageway into an ancient new imaginative world” (Harris, 2003, p. 219). Cathy Leeney (2006) elaborates on the issue and states that “the geography in her plays works on many levels, paralleling emotional states in the characters, opening Ireland out into a metonym for the world as the vulnerable home and sanctuary of the human race” (p. 510). Within this context, Carr's use of the grotesque can be specifically traced by her use of language and the spatio-temporal aspects of the plays.

In the following chapters, *The Mai* (1994) and *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998) will be examined according to the theories of the grotesque with the issues of content, form

and use of language in the plays. *The Mai* will be analysed in light of the grotesque theory of Geoffrey Galt Harpham and the abjection theory of Julia Kristeva examining concepts such as tragedy, myths, deformation, reformation, liberation, metamorphosis, transformation and absent/mysterious characters. *By the Bog of Cats...* will be analysed in regard to carnivalesque and Mikhail Bakhtin's views on the grotesque. This study intends to demonstrate the current debates on the use of the grotesque as an interdisciplinary concept in Irish theatre and will argue that the grotesque is prevalent in the selected plays of Marina Carr.



CHAPTER I

THE GROTESQUE ELEMENTS IN *THE MAI*: REFORMATION, DEFORMATION, ABJECTION AND DUALITIES

1.1. *The Mai*

The Mai is the first play of Carr's Midlands trilogy, followed by *Portia Coughlan* in 1996 and *By the Bog of Cats...* in 1998. *The Mai* premiered at The Abbey Theatre Peacock Stage on October 5, 1994. A forty-year-old woman, The Mai is the lead character, who is a teacher and struggles to save her marriage. The play centres around four generations of women in one family ranging from one-hundred-year-old Grandma Froachlán to sixteen-year-old Millie. Grandma is the mother of The Mai and Millie is the daughter. Additionally, there are her sisters Beck and Connie and her aunts Julie and Agnes.

The Mai is an epic tale about love and loss. After seventeen years of marriage, The Mai is abandoned by her husband, Robert leaving her with the kids behind. In the hope that he will return one day, The Mai builds and decorates a dream house in the midlands by Owl Lake and waits for Robert by the window. The play opens with this scene, the return of Robert after an absence of four years. Throughout the play, the audience is faced with the troubled reunion of The Mai and Robert, hearing the story from the eyes of Millie, their daughter. Millie stays on the stage the entire play and tells relevant legends to make the story clear for the audience. She plays the role of a storyteller with her fanciful tales and dreams. The play is divided into two acts: one takes place in Summer 1979 and the latter one year later. At the end of Act One, The Mai drowns herself in Owl Lake and in Act Two she appears on the stage again. The

rest of the play revolves around The Mai's struggle, Millie's narratives of her mother's desperate love and the course of actions of other female characters. Despite her struggle, their marriage is beyond repair. Realising that she cannot continue without Robert, The Mai commits suicide.

1.2. Geoffrey Galt Harpham's Theory of the Grotesque

The Mai is a good example of the grotesque, particularly regarding the use of myths in the characters' processes of deformation and reformation such as the metamorphosis of The Mai and others. Such grotesque transformation features concepts such as sublime, repulsion and degradation, especially if this are read in the context of abjection. Geoffrey Galt Harpham's theory helps shed light on the grotesque features in *The Mai*. Moreover, viewed from these perspectives, this study examines the overlapping features of Harpham's theory of the grotesque and Kristeva's theory of abjection in order to examine *The Mai*, suggesting the use of metamorphosis, deformation, reformation, construction of tragedy and abjection as central elements of grotesqueness in the play.

The first thing to note about Harpham's theory is that he questions the issue of the grotesque asking two direct questions: "What is the character of the grotesque [and] what kind of a thing is it?" (Harpham, 1982, p. xv). He goes on his discussion with another question: "For how can the meaning-in-form of a thing be defined when the forms under consideration have no common structure and the range of possible meanings approaches the random?" (p. xvi). At this point, the difficulty arises from the fact that the grotesque "is anything but clear" (Harpham, 1982) and Harpham proposes the audience with varieties of the grotesque forms. What is important here is to be aware of their junction points and realise that there is neither agreement nor disagreement among critics of the field. He offers that culture is a prominent element in the discussion of the grotesque by maintaining that:

But it is up to the culture to provide the conventions and assumptions that determine us particular forms. Culture does this by establishing conditions of order and coherence, especially by specifying which categories are logically or generically incompatible with which others. (p. xx)

Harpham (1982) suggests the grotesque as a *genre mixte* and “recognizes its own incongruities and paradoxes” (p. xxii). He starts to clarify the term as being both a noun and an adjective requiring and defeating clear cut definitions because the term is queer and represents queerness itself at the same time. It is difficult to determine predictable behaviour for the grotesque, but it is possible to discuss about their nature in the light of “formation, deformation, and reformation” (p. 3) to perceive the grotesque form. What comes to the fore is the function of the grotesque holding the left over and putting them somewhere between the known and the unknown and making “knowable particles” (p. 3) out of them. The distinctions made by Susan Steward (1960) are useful at this point: “The anomalous stands between the categories of an existing classification system ... The ambiguous is that which cannot be defined in terms of any given category ... The ambivalent is that which belongs to more than one domain at a time” (as cited in Harpham, 1982, p. 4). In this way, the grotesque forms “break down the strange into recognizable” by resolving “structural confusion, reproductive irregularity, or typological incoherence” (p. 5). However, it occurs “a warfare, a struggle” between the form and content during the process, in that unlike conventional forms the grotesque “cannot be described generically” (p. 7). For Harpham (1982), the best place to put the grotesque form is the space between hell and heaven because “[t]his mid-region is dynamic and unpredictable, a scene of transformation and metamorphosis” (p. 8). This middle phase is the liminal space of the grotesque and indicates “between two worlds” (p. 11) and it is not of a shape. What it means is detailed below:

Round is, in short, what we have emerged from, will return to, and fail to achieve in the meantime. It is the most formal form, the shape most ideal. The idea as Idea itself, total coherence and unity. The grotesque is the opposite, the least ideal form. The circle’s tension is perfectly controlled, but the grotesque is always a civil war of attraction/repulsion ... Most grotesques are marked by such and affinity/antagonism, by the co-presence of the normative, fully formed, “high” or ideal, and the abnormal, unformed, degenerate, “low” or material ... The result is a compromise, a taboo, a non-thing. (Harpham, 1982, p. 9)

This remarkable passage clearly indicates that the grotesque is not something to be explained in clear-cut definitions, and in-betweenness is a core element of the term. The principles of high and low or the properties of hierarchy are all demolished, and “things that should be kept apart are fused together” in the sense of the grotesque (Harpham, 1982, p. 11). What emerges is this non-thing. When viewed from this

aspect, the sense of the grotesque occupies a gap and the grotesque forms fulfil this gap rupturing existing boundaries and breaking the rules. The grotesque elements formed in this view provide the viewer with striking insights with multiple interpretations. The outcome is the confusion, and “then we have the grotesque” (Santayana, 1896, p. 256). What appears as the grotesque is “the half-formed, the perplexed, and the suggestively monstrous” (p. 256). According to Harpham (1982), “the process of confusion generating new insight applies to the understanding of the ‘data’” (p. 17). The perplexed leads the audience into the grotesque, and “fragmented, jumbled or corrected representation” (Harpham, 1982, p. 18) makes the audience experience a strong sense of the grotesque because “the more naïve and intense our belief, the more violent will be the transition from one interpretation to another” (p. 18). Harpham (1982) elaborates on the interpretation issue stating that “the delight of interpretation is the puzzling-out of this truth, which is implied just as strongly by what is left out as by what is included” (p. 19). The gaps and left-outs are put somewhere suitable in the imagination of the audience and pave the way for various interpretations. The process generates “a fine grotesque” (Cook & Wedderburn, 2010, p. 4) and “penetrates to new and unexpected realms of experience” (Harpham, 1982, p. 20). Fittingly, interpretation creates “a shift of vision and a new awareness”, “even a sublime awareness” (p. 20), which leads to the deformation of the former ‘data’ and reformation of a new point of view. A similar perspective is voiced by Harpham as follows:

All interpretation disfigures the artifact by rearranging it, taking elements out of their contexts and placing them in new juxtaposition to one another; but it takes a nonnon to enable us to see that distortion. The handsome and sensible form we see in the mirror is, quite simply, meaning – a recreation of the text according to the demands of design or pattern, formal qualities which are prerequisites for any sense of significance. (p. 21)

More precisely, the grotesque provides the audience with a model for a sublime awareness with active participation. The formation of the former data and its deformation signifies the perplexity and confusion of the audience, and the reformation of the present data shows the audience’s filling in the gaps generated. The audience finds “a troubling and destabilizing awareness of the problematic nature of the facts” and becomes distant from the conventional to enjoy the exceptional or marginal (Harpham, 1982, p. 22). In this spirit, the grotesque threatens the notion of conventional and provides a pattern to “observe our own projections, catching

ourselves, as it were, in the act of perception” (p. 43), which provokes a kind of transformation and metamorphosis.

Stated in this way, the problem appears when “metamorphosing into an alienated form” takes place because it renders to be dynamic (Harpham, 1982, p. 72). More to the point, as Harpham (1982) mentions, “grotesque is a word for that dynamic state of low-ascending and high-descending” (p. 74), which causes ambivalence. He continues to explain stating that “one way to escape this dilemma is to develop a system of decorum with indeterminacy or ambivalence as the norm” (p. 74). However, it naturally turns into “customs, traditions, which are, naturally, decay into clichés and formulae that are, naturally, themselves meaningless” (p. 74). It is clear that it becomes a vicious circle and the meaning is lost. To avoid this, it is important to realise that the interpretation of the audience is key. Harpham (1982) refers to the issue: “Interpretation always falls between the poles of absolute certainty and absolute indeterminacy” (p. 85). The gaps between the poles are filled with the grotesque and the meaning is generated by the audience first. When the audience encounters the grotesque forms, the meaning making process occurs on a deeper level. Harpham (1982) notes that

Meaning is made through connections, by linking something with something else outside itself; it is made by establishing relations both within and outside the text, by ascribing intentionality to things that do not inherently possess it, by seeing elements in contexts other than the ones in which they occur, by seeing one thing as another. These operations are carried out at high intensity when we encounter grotesque forms, ... but they are in a broader sense the marks of all interpretation, the methods by which any meaning is made. (p. 187-188)

The meaning created through the grotesque forms needs a transformation of the text and the audience. However, this is not always easy and most of the time causes confusion and disorder, which provokes metamorphosis. This shows the true nature of the grotesque because the process starts with the deformation and ends with the reformation. Something totally new is generated in the process. That is the reason why it is met with repulsion under the influence of confusion of the audience. At the same time, the repulsion opens the road to a new point of view, an alternative perspective. Coupled with repulsion, it is also tempting and enthralling, which leads the audience to another term: abjection.

1.3. Julia Kristeva's Theory of Abjection

Abjection is a significant term to understand the processes of the grotesque. As mentioned before, this starts with the deformation of a specific idea, form, content, and more of the same. The abjection here refers to “a desire for a meaning, a point where meaning collapses” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 125). One of the basic theories of abjection comes from Julia Kristeva's 1982 book entitled *Powers of Horrors*. In this work, Kristeva (1982) looks specifically at abjection as “something to be scared of” (p. 32). Kristeva labels this new perspective as “unnameable” (p. 34) because it is “another ‘object’?” (p. 34) outside of usual perception. The transformation process becomes “alien” (p. 50) for the beholder. Kristeva (1982) specifies that “The body's inside, in that case, shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside” (p. 53). The next step is a passage “from filth to defilement” (p. 56), a process similar to Harpham's theory of deformation. The beholder comes “face to face with the unnameable” (p. 58) and is obliged to make it normalise in his/her terms. It is not “differentiating itself as *other*, but threatens one's *own and clean self*, which is the underpinning of any organization constituted by exclusions and hierarchies” (p. 65). When the beholder comes to the same terms with the unnameable, the defilement process turns into rebirth. Kristeva entitles it as “the remainder: defilement and rebirth” (p. 76). Within this context, the theories of Kristeva and Harpham overlap each other. More precisely, Kristeva's ‘rebirth’ is similar to Harpham's ‘reformation’ in the grotesque forms. Both refer to the meaning-making process with the help of the grotesque and both put the beholder into chaos in the first hand. According to Kristeva, abjection is inescapable in the ongoing period because it is painful for the beholder and causes “suffering and horror” (p. 140). Kristeva (1982) discusses this as follows:

There is, in abjection, one of those violent and obscure revolts of being against that which threatens it and which seems to it to come from and outside or an exorbitant inside; something that is thrown next to the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It is there, very close, but unassimilable. It solicits, disturbs, fascinates desire, which nevertheless, does not let itself to be seduced. Fearful, it turns away. Sickened, it rejects. It is protected for the vileness by an absolute of which it is proud, to which it is attached. But at the same time, even so, the *élan*, this spasm, this leap, is attracted towards an elsewhere as much as tempting as it is condemned. Tirelessly, like a wild boomerang, a pole of attraction and repulsion draws the one inhabited literally out of himself. (p. 125)

This remarkable passage clearly describes the duality generated and affected by the abjection from the viewpoint of the grotesque. When Kristeva's abjection theory and Harpham's grotesque theory are taken into consideration, it is seen that both have overlapping features: Both are bizarre and disgusting but tempting at the same time, which indicates their mixed perception. Both make the beholder take an alternative step to comprehend and alter the point of view, in that active participation and interpretation are a crucial specialty for them. The process for both ends up with a totally new sight. In short, both have common characteristics when this remarkable passage is considered. For Kristeva (1982), abject has some specific features as follows:

[It] perturbs an identity, a system, an order ... does not respect limits, places and rules. It is the in-between, the ambiguous, the mixed. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the rapist without scruple, the killer who claims to save ... abjection is immoral, murky, devious and suspect: a terror which is dissimulated, a smiling hatred, a passion which abandons the body instead of flaming it, a man in debt who sells you, a friend who stabs you in the back. (pp. 127-128)

Such binary oppositions, opposite poles and dualities betoken the similarity between Kristeva's abjection and Harpham's grotesque. The meaning of the abjection is generally built upon its contradictions and thus it strengthens the sense of marginalization. It is "the fundamental *lack* of all being, meaning, language and desire" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 128). It delimits its own universe so it is uncertain (p. 131). Kristeva focuses on the dualities of the abject by stating that "What is being sought turns into what is banished, and the fascination into opprobrium" (p. 131). Thus, it causes "sublime alienation" (p. 132). Sublime is an important term for the abject because "the abject is bordered by the sublime" (p. 133), which indicates the dualities that the abject possesses once more. What makes the abject perceptible is its being interbedded with the sublime as the sublime occurs with and through perception and words (p. 134). It needs the understandability of the sublime, or else it becomes lost. Besides, the abject is corruption and "related to perversion" (p. 136) by its nature. Its in-betweenness and vagueness make the abject perverted. Therefore, the abject rejects all the limits. It is described as "a heterogeneous corporeal and verbal experience of fundamental incompleteness" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 145). That is the reason behind the gaps generated by the abject and completed by the grotesque.

1.4. Tragedy, Abjection and Mythifications

When it comes to *The Mai*, the grotesque and abjection take an important role in our comprehension of the protagonist's transformation or metamorphosis. The Mai turns into an emancipated woman eluding the restricting boundaries of the society in the course of the play. Therefore, the tragic form is essential to be discussed on a deeper level. As the critic Clare Wallace (2001) attests, one of the distinguishing marks of *The Mai* is that the play can be regarded as "a progressional exploration of the themes of desire and destiny within a tragic form" (p. 436). Tragedy has an important place in the play as Carr mentions "her fascination with great dead writers including Homer, Keats, Dickinson, Ibsen and above all Shakespeare" (p. 437). In *The Mai* "tragedy is presented as private and psychologized" (p. 437) because Carr's drama reflects the destiny of the female protagonist in a tragic form. In a similar manner like 'the great dead writers', Carr presents individual destiny of the character The Mai with a huge struggle with her own instability, which makes her commit suicide in the end. This struggle also indicates the tension of the female characters in Irish society to form a free identity. The Mai experiences the same struggle against her female family members and her husband Robert. However, she sees that it is not possible for her to bring to a triumphant end. Wallace (2001) discusses a similar issue and states that "Carr's creative negotiation of a concept of tragedy which possesses in bleakness, through shades of despair and brutality towards a dystopic nemesis" (p. 437). The notion of dystopia connects to the theory of abjection as remarked earlier. More to the point, The Mai and Carr's other female characters are trapped in this dystopia without sufficient perceptiveness and cannot "free themselves from the psychological prisons which they construct and inhabit" (p. 436). The tragedy they experience determines their destiny. In this parable, the tragic destiny and desire of the miserable female protagonist overlap with Kristeva's theory of abjection. Kristeva (1982) argues that "'I' am simultaneously compelled and repelled by the abject, so that perversely, ... I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (p. 3). In the same manner, the character cannot achieve to establish herself and "the abject shadows of *her* throughout the play and in a sense determines *her* destination or destiny" (Wallace, 2001, p. 436). Within this tragic realm, The Mai's self-realisation kills and transforms herself. Her notion of herself cannot fit in well with the stereotyped Irish female identity in the society.

Viewed from a different perspective, it can be asserted that myths in Irish culture play a fundamental role in establishing the stereotyped female identities based on the realities of the society. For instance, the legend of Owl Lake is important in *The Mai* because she experiences the same process in the course of the play. The play is a further revision of this myth. Sherine Moustafa El Shoura (2016) debates the issue of myth in his article titled “Rewriting Myths Through Abjection in Marina Carr’s *The Mai*” and voices as follows:

Myths are long-established beliefs that are uncritically accepted and that influence the way nations and peoples are portrayed and remembered throughout ages ... myths are sometimes responsible for communicating false ideas and misconceptions that lead to the creation of fake distorted identities ... Myths transform humans into stones-like identities that, through powerful, can be reshaped by imagination. (p. 4)

It is clear that the forged identity shaped by the society corrupts and distances one from her/his real self. As Shoura (2016) asserts, these identities are made powerful through myths in the Irish culture. That is the reason behind Carr’s choice to work over some specific myths in her plays, for instance the legend of Owl Lake in *The Mai*, and reappropriate them with slight differences so as to reveal the effects of them on the female identities. Structured beliefs about the characteristics of women have an important place in the play, and uncovers the deeply-flawed and disturbing beliefs behind the tragedy that these women face. Specifically, the notion of motherhood is abjected in the play and the new version the former myth is used to “subvert the image of the mother as the abject” (Shoura, 2016, p. 9). Accordingly, Melisa Sihra (2007) quotes Carr as indicated: “I was tired of the sentimental portrayal of mothers We have this blessed Virgin myth imbedded in us, ... They like to talk about childbirth, which is beautiful, but there is another side of it where it is mystery” (p. 203). In this spirit, what Carr does is to fulfil the gap between “the heroines of myth and traditional female stereotypes” (Jones, 2002, p. 12), and she subverts the conventional notion of all types. Herein, it is pivotal to recall the part of the myths in the construction and deconstruction of traditional notions because Carr. Richard Kearney (1988) focuses on the issue in his book entitled *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* and remarks that “myths are concerned with wish fulfilment and reversal, with making possible at an imaginary level what is impossible in our real or empirical experience” (p. 109). Similarly, Carr explores “what *the myth* is meant by Irish identity in the modern world, she is now a powerful figure in international terms” (Jones, 2002, p.

71). Consequently, “when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning” (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 12), and it is Carr to reshape it in her play with the help of her female protagonists.

1.5. The Analysis of *The Mai*

When all these aspects are taken into consideration, it can be claimed that Carr’s *The Mai* is one of the most suitable plays to be truly discussed in accordance with Harpham’s grotesque and Kristeva’s abjection theories. Additionally, it is a good example to a tragedy with the importance of the myths in it. In the first step, the play is evaluated in the light of the grotesque theory with some specific examples. The most prominent grotesque feature of the play is its characters. Apart from the protagonist The Mai, her daughter Millie has an essential role in the play because she stays on stage as the storyteller and the observer with her total “seven monologues, ranging from dramatic exposition to lyrical folklore” in the course of the play (Sihra, 2018, p. 74). In the stage direction of Act One, Marina Carr (1995) especially remarks: “... Millie is standing at the window. (Note: Millie remains onstage throughout the play)” (p. 4). Her part is innovative in the form and content of the play because Millie is the one who makes an impact on the audience more than the other characters. Even the acts of *The Mai* are deciphered and interpreted by the audience according to Millie’s observation. When a character appears on the stage or an issue referred in the conversation, Millie sets to explain as indicated below:

Millie: When I was eleven The Mai sent me into the butcher’s to buy a needle and thread. It was the day Robert left us. No explanations, no goodbyes, he just got into his car with his cello and drove away. ... ‘Mom, they don’t sell needles and thread in the butcher’s.’ ‘Do they not sweetheart?’ The Mai whispered and started to cry. (Carr, 1995, p. 6)

In this specific explanation, the audience learns the details of the past through the monologue of Millie. She also indicates the absurdity of the relationship between The Mai and Robert with the example of needle and thread in the butcher’s. Additionally, she sets out to introduce the characters with her own interpretation:

Millie: Two of The Mai’s aunts, bastions of the Connemara click, decided not to take the prospect of a divorcee in the family lying down. [...] Births, marriages and deaths were their forte and by Christ, if they had anything to do with, Beck would stay married even if it was a tree (Carr, 1995, p. 26).

Thus, she shows the way to the audience with her experience and makes an effect on their point of view. That is why she becomes the reflection of Marina Carr as the storyteller throughout the play. Eilis Ní Dhuibhne (2003) argues a similar issue in the article titled “Playing the Story: Narrative Techniques in *The Mai*” and states as follows: “A storyteller, in the context of drama, is someone who narrates rather than acts out an epic event. A storyteller is someone who understands how to affect an audience’s emotions by the judicious selection of images, ideas, and words” (p. 66). It is clear that as the storyteller Millie becomes both the dramatic character and the narrator, and she is the representative of Marina Carr on the stage, in that she “sits on the side of the stage throughout most of the play, introducing, commentating, interpreting, and summing up” (p. 68). She is not an objective commentator but part of a principal theme focusing on the problems of the parents and the reflections of these problems on the wounded offspring. She “occupies a dual role” as “the daughter who bears the brunt of the tensions between Robert and the Mai” (Roche, 1995, pp. 159-160). It is at this joint when Millie ceases to be the narrator and starts to be the dramatic character. The audience foresees the struggle and the dramatic end of *The Mai* when Millie begins to tell the legend of Owl Lake at the end of Act One. The love story of Bláth and Coillte is identical to *The Mai* and Robert. Marina Carr presents a modern perspective on the past with the use of this legend, and the audience faces the issue of *The Mai*’s suicide in light of Millie’s comments. The myth is important for Millie herself as she narrates her own thirty-year-old story with her son Joseph when it occurs a time shift in the play. In this aspect, it can be attested that Carr takes the use of myth a step further and offers a totally different perspective to the audience, and she lets Millie tell the story as “it is essential for the audience to hear the actual story to understand its place in the play” (Dhuibhne, 2003, p. 69). This shift becomes more of an issue as Anthony Roche (1995) attempts to trace a direct explanation: “Such a move is not without precedent in the recent history of contemporary Irish drama” (p. 160). Moreover, “[t]he figure who takes responsibility for bringing the story of *The Mai* into the dramatic present is Millie” (p. 160) according to Roche (1995). With her own miserable story similar to her mom’s, Millie experiences the same misery because *The Mai* handed down her misery to her daughter. It is the point where Millie becomes the dramatic character as mentioned below:

Millie: None of *The Mai* and Robert’s children are very strong. We teeter along the fringe of the world with halting gait, reeking of Owl Lake at every turn. I dream of water all the time.

I'm floundering off the shore, or bursting towards the surface for air, or wrestling with a black swan trying to drag me under. I have not yet emerged triumphant from those lakes of the night. Sometimes I wear Owl Lake like a caul around my chest to protect me from all that is good and hopeful and worth pursuing. (Carr, 1995, p. 64)

This remarkable monologue points out the poor position of the storyteller as the dramatic character because she is the child “involved in the matters from which she should be protected, a scene in which the daughter takes on the role of counsellor to her mother” (Dhuibhne, 2003, p. 72). It is best displayed at the end of Act Two when Millie challenges The Mai with a distinctive standpoint:

Millie: Why don't you leave him?

The Mai: Millie, please.

Millie: Or ask him to leave. Or have an affair.

The Mai: I already did.

...

Millie: Mom, you've never tried. (Carr, 1995, p. 65)

With these multiple stories and distinctive standpoints, Carr produces an effect on the audience through Millie. This is because Carr is fully aware of the power of the stories. As Dhuibhne (2003) observes, “[s]tory strives to bring the dead to life, to make a present of past. It allows the narrator to control the chaos of experience and to achieve an understanding of it” (p. 73). However, it takes a different turn in the play and Millie cannot achieve what she wants. At the same time, she becomes the grotesque character of the play because she provides the audience with fresh aspects and “is of the present and the future, like Marina Carr herself, expressing uncertainty and openness in the telling of a story and the making of a play” (Roche, 1995, p. 162), which indicates Millie's role in fulfilling this gap. Thus, Carr restores “the storytellers' perspective to the drama” (p. 160).

Apart from Millie, Grandma Fraochlán is the other grotesque character in the play. As the critic Tom Mac Intyre (2003) remarks, “Grandma Fraochlán, indeed, is “an extraordinary creation” (p. 76) because “[t]he comedy of romantic yearning, the contortions of sibling rivalry, the opium-drenched meanderings of Grandma Fraochlán, all these are rendered with a deliciously ample warmth” (p. 76). She is the representative of all womanly features in the play: She is the eldest character, both the

mother and grandmother, and at the same time famous for her love to the missing husband, nine-fingered fisherman, Tomás. She is one of the unique characters in the play. There is always a blur between illusion and reality as she always makes things up. She is also brave enough to declare that

I know he was a useless father, Julie, I know 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 what it's worth, the nine-fingered fisherman and meself belongs ta the latter of these. I would gladly have hurled all seven of ya down the slopes of hell for one night more with the nine-fingered fisherman and may I rot eternally for such unmotherly feelin'. (Carr, 1995, p. 33)

From this angle, she is the subversion of these mentioned womanly characteristics fixed in society. It is clear that she ruins the idea of ideal motherhood and provides the audience with a different perspective which may be dissimilar to what they expect. It is the way the grotesque operates in the character of Grandma Fraochlán. Her anomalous features, her illusionary vision, her disconnected dialogues and her accented language are instances of the grotesqueness of her presence in the course of the play. Her illusionary vision, her speeches with the ghosts and her hypothetical stories of the nine-fingered fisherman are exemplary. Through the end of Act Two, Grandma Fraochlán talks about romanticised and inconsistent story of him as indicated below:

Grandma Fraochlán: It was my third birth and Tomás was at sea. He didn't want to go out on account of my impendin' delivery but word came the salmon was leppin' on the 'Bofin side. He'd been out a day and nigh' when he left there was somethin' wrong of me ... Tomás axed the skipper to turn round and the skipper refused on account of the big haul, anyway the nests was out. So in he jumped and swam for Fraochlán, the skipper follyin' him in the boat, beggin' him to get back on board, fearin' he'd be drowned, every net on Fraochlán in ribbons ... He examines me and sees I am alive and then he feels for the pulse of the new infant, Donal it was. And then he collapses, doesn't come round for days. He lost the little finger on his left and from there on in he was known as the nine-fingered fisherman. He wore that missin' finger like a trophy for me. And up and down the coast the story became known as how he'd lost it ... [P]eople never tire of great love stories. (Carr, 1995, p. 62)

What is important about this story is that it is voiced by Grandma Fraochlán nearly through the end of the play. The nine-fingered fisherman is introduced to the audience as a ghostly figure of Grandma Fraochlán's dreams. However, this mysterious and absent figure has an essential place for Grandma as the audience hears

about him in bits and pieces during the play, but never learns about him in detail until the end. Additionally, his absence indicates his illusionary position because it is not always clear whether the stories about him are true or false. The above story is highly romanticised and exaggerated. Thus, it leaves the audience in a dilemma. The nine-fingered fisherman is portrayed as the devoted lover but leaves Grandma Fraochlán unaware and penniless with nine kids. Grandma Fraochlán lives with made-up stories for her kids and sisters in a bizarre grotesqueness and dreamy atmosphere.

Likewise, Ellen is another nontrivial character with her absence. As she is not present throughout the play, she is the source of the mystery. The other characters talk about her and pity her. However, the audience does not have the chance to witness Ellen's point of view because she dies in childbirth long before the play starts. She is the absent mother of The Mai and the daughter of Grandma Fraochlán. All the things the audience knows about her are conveyed by other characters. Grandma Fraochlán's conversation with her daughters Julie and Agnes sheds some light on the presence of Ellen:

Julie: It was shameful what happened to Ellen.

Agnes: It couldn't be helped.

Julie: I'll never understand how a young woman in the whole of her health dies in childbirth in the best nursing home in Galway.

Grandma Fraochlán: She was worn out from all them miscarriages and pregnancies.

Julie: Twenty-seven years of age. You should've looked after her better, Grandma Fraochlán.

Grandma Fraochlán: So it was all my fault, was it?

Julie: I'm not saying it was.

Grandma Fraochlán: Then what are ya sayin'?

Julie: Nothing', only I remember a few nights before she got married, she appeared on my doorstep, three months pregnant with The Mai there, and she begged me to take her until the child was born and she wanted me to go and talk to you and make you see that she didn't have to marry him. (Carr, 1995, p. 30)

Julie and Agnes give some clues to the audience and make them think about the presence of the character of Ellen. There occur some information gaps, and the audience is to fulfil them on their own with scattered clues. The cruelty of Grandma

Fraochlán and the indifference of Julie and Agnes become clearly apparent. Julie presents more detail about the missing character Ellen as follows:

Julie: And then Ellen, she was brilliant, that girl was going places but there was seven something in Grandma Fraochlán that must stop it, and she did. She made that child marry that innocent. He wasn't Ellen's steam at all and he only married her because Grandma Fraochlán saw he did. He married her and then he left her on Fraochlán to rot. Came home every summer, left her with another pregnancy. And she belittled your father all the time to Ellen, till Ellen grew to hate him and looked down on him. He couldn't write or spell very well and Grandma Fraochlán would mock his letters until finally Ellen stopped writing to him. And at the same time she filled the girl's head with all sorts of impossible hope, always talkin' about the time she was in college, and how brilliant she was, and maybe in a few years she'd go back and study. And it only filled Ellen with more longing and made her feel that what she had lost was all the greater. And do you know the worst, the worst of it all, Ellen adored her and looked up to her and believed everything she said, and that's what killed her, not childbirth, no, her spirit was broken. (Carr, 1995, p. 35)

Julie witnesses all these things and does not make any attempt to change the course. Agnes falls in line with Julie, and she is just an onlooker to what happens. It is also important to emphasise the dual position of Grandma Fraochlán in light of Ellen's story. As Melissa Sihra (2005) states, Grandma Fraochlán "was born post-Famine in 1879, up to her birthday in 1979, the year in which the play is set, and the heightened period of the second wave of feminism in Ireland" (p. 139). She is presented as the *grandma* of the play but converts into a total opposite pole. She is the opposite of what is expected from her in the eyes of society. In this way, the audience witnesses Carr's idea for a different perception of motherhood again, away from the generally accepted perception. What she does through the character of Grandma Fraochlán is to "explore de-idealized and controversial aspects of motherhood" and challenge the norms and the ideals (Sihra, 2005, p. 137): "She is irreverent, boisterous, and demanding, possessing a subversive sense of humour and gleeful, excessive sensibility" (p. 139). By this means, established boundaries of ideals are turned into new forms with the help of the grotesque character of the grandma. Carr creates a new way for the audience to change direction for a fresh view by subverting general-romanticised mother notion, and she presents grandma's dual character as follows: "Julie: ... a dagger in one hand, a flower in the other ..." (Carr, 1995, p. 34). Apart from Grandma Fraochlán, Julie and Agnes are the contrary as clear in the short quotation above. They stand for the established ideals of the womanhood in the Irish society. They are the implementers

of conventions and “the gatekeepers of hierarchy” (Sihra, 2018, p. 81) as explained by Millie as “bastions of the Connemara click” (Carr, 1995, p. 26).

Independently of all these characters, the relationship and dialogue between the protagonist and her husband have a specific place in the course of the play. On the one hand, by adding of ‘the’ before her name, The Mai becomes someone special with a specific meaning. On the other hand, Robert has a huge denotation for her instead of his shadowy and dreamy presence. When examining the protagonist, she is called “The Mai”, which shows the special purpose of Marina Carr. The use of “the” before her name is an indicator of her being specific and powerful. The critic Rhona Trench (2010) debates this issue as follows: “The name ‘The Mai’ indicates strength and authority; her name readapts the Irish tradition of adding ‘the’ before the last name of the (male) head of the clan” (p. 115). With this specific use, Carr offers a way to “reconstruct the patriarchal architecture ... and the foundations of Irish theatre as an all-male preserve” (Sihra, 2018, p. 75). Accordingly, the critic Shonagh Hill (2009) observes the same issue and articulates that “[i]n order to reinforce Mai’s mythic status, she is referred to throughout the play as the Mai rather than just Mai” (p. 47). It is clear that both critics highlight the significance of the strength that Carr gives to The Mai by adding “the” before her name.

Besides, the elements of metamorphosis and abjection are intricately plaited in the character of The Mai. Its basic indicator is her bond with Robert. The Mai’s metamorphosis between two acts has the potential to offer something new in the state of affairs because it is closely related to the abjection theory of Kristeva, through which The Mai’s potential to explore and subvert her own idealised and passive Irish woman identity can be scrutinised. Act One ends with The Mai’s image lying dead in Robert’s arms. Therefore, the audience expects The Mai’s narrative to be silenced. However, she turns the linear chronology upside down by showing up in Act Two. In this moment, Millie’s foreshadowing of The Mai’s death through the myth of Coillte becomes more of an issue, in that it demonstrates Carr’s intent for “a metonymic shift where the protagonists are doubled in their ‘fictions’” (Wallace, 2001, p. 443). The myth is voiced by Millie as indicated below:

Millie: Owl Lake comes from the Irish, *Ioch cailleach oiche*, Lake of the Night Hag or Pool of the Dark Witch. The legend goes that Coillte, the 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 come to Bláth's domain. There he lay, under an oak tree, playing his pipes, a crown of forget-me-nots in his ebony hair ... One evening approaching autumn Bláth told Coillte that soon he must go and live with the dark witch of the bog, that he would return in the spring, and the next morning he was gone. Coillte followed him and found him ensconsed in the dark witch's hair ... Coillte lay down outside 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 lakes of tears. When spring came round again Bláth was released from the dark witch's spell and he went in search of Coillte, only to be told that she had dissolved. (Carr, 1995, p. 36)

Herein, what comes to the fore is that Millie helps The Mai to create her double in the course of the myth. As the playwright, Carr engages the play with inherited narratives of myths and allows The Mai to choose another path to follow because The Mai has the choice to free herself from the limits of these narratives with the help of Carr's attempts to subvert the accepted narratives and to generate distinct realities. Her resurrection in Act Two is a clear demonstration of it. Her engagement with the alternatives produces a kind of "discursive creation and corporeal performance" (Hill, 2009, p. 49). As the critic Shonagh Hill (2009) observes, "The Mai's metamorphosis into a lake is created through both Millie's narration of the Coillte myth and through the Mai's movement from the stage, which is followed by sounds of water off-stage to suggest her transformation" (p. 49). This is best explained in the stage direction of Act Two:

Enter The Mai in a summer dress. She goes to the window, looks out, reaches into the pocket of her dress, takes the envelope with the card and ten-pound note out, looks at them hopelessly, and puts them back into her pocket. (Carr, 1995, p. 36)

The Mai's transformation opens a way to liberate herself from the previously accepted images of being a woman, mother and wife in Irish society. As Shoura (2016) claims, her suicide and metamorphosis empower her and transcend the limitations of her female body (p. 21). Within this content, the metamorphosis is the way that threatens the fixed boundaries of the society which she comes from, as she "offers a means of building Irish identity" through abjection. Shoura (2016) explains:

Carr offers to rewrite myth as well as Irish identity through the medium of subversion. Subversion in Carr's play is performed on different levels not only on cultural levels but also on psychoanalytic one. On psychoanalytic level, Carr subverts association between woman and the less civilized stage (the semiotic) and man and the more civilized stage (the symbolic). This

is meant to destabilize a patriarchal society with its related oppressive codes ... Carr digs out the content of the readers's unconscious while rewriting his conscious concepts. This makes Carr's drama a drama of subversion that is meant to weaken rules and tradition. (p. 23).

It clarifies the impulse of Carr to make use of suicide and metamorphoses as the transformation of The Mai in the course of the play because "The Mai's body becomes uncontrollable and threatening, a metamorphic body which unsettles the limits of identity and narrative convention through its rematerialization" (Hill, 2009, p. 51). Her resurrected body at the start of Act Two and her second metamorphosis at the end of the play deliberately "disrupt the inherited narratives and corporeal roles" (p. 51). Additionally, it suggests "other possible worlds, beyond the limits of the one she is contained on stage" because hers is a creative and imaginative transformation" (p. 52). Hill (2009) debates the issue in detail: "The Mai rewrites the mythic signification of woman as land to reshape the landscape, physical and theatrical, and suggest an alternative creative space for woman which opens up and enables the exploration of identity" (p. 56). At this point, it becomes essential to focus on the theory of the abject "to question the inherited roles and to evoke other possibilities" (p. 57). The metamorphosis in two acts suggests another option as voiced by Hill (2009): "Ultimately, it is through the staging of metamorphosis and the possibilities for the articulation of the abject that the means of controlling, exploring, and exceeding the body within a patriarchal world are offered to the Mai" (p. 57) as The Mai declares:

The Mai: (*pushing them off*) I'm all right, I'll be all right in a minute – I'm sorry about this – I didn't mean to spoil your – (Carr, 1995, p. 37)

Apart from The Mai's abjection of her identity and the body, the most obvious examples of the abjection are observed in the relationship between The Mai and Robert. Not The Mai's abjection of herself, but Robert's abjection of The Mai is more of an issue in this sense. It becomes more intense in Act Two after the resurrection of The Mai because Robert represents the utmost impediment before The Mai's metamorphoses and transformation. He restrains The Mai to go beyond the social boundaries in which she is entrapped.

In the first instance, the use of "the" before her name points out the strength that Carr gives to her according to the Irish tradition. However, Robert does not use it throughout the play: "Robert: Why'd I come back? Difficult one – it's not so great out there, Mai" (Carr, 1995, p. 18). When taken into detailed consideration, it is quite

obvious that he refuses to witness what The Mai tries to achieve for the sake of him. Literally, he turns out to be the reason for her death. However, he becomes the reason for her deformation and reformation at the same time, which is indicated by the means of the resurrection of The Mai. Their dialogue demonstrates it as follows:

Robert: I dreamt that you were dead and my cello case was your coffin and a carriage drawn by two black swans, takes you away from me over a dark expanse of water and I ran after this strange hearse shouting, 'Mai, Mai,' and it seemed as if you could hear my voice on the moon, and I'm running, running, running over water, trees, mountains, though I've long lost sight of the carriage and of you – And I wake, pack my bags, take the next plane home.

The Mai: So you've come back to bury me, that what you're sayin'? (Carr, 1995, p. 18)

The Mai is aware of the process, which shows how she manages to transform herself out of social bonds and construct her identity and freedom. A similar process is articulated by Kristeva in the discussion of what an abject does and how it operates. She talks about "violent and obscure revolts" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 125) of the abject against the thing "which threatens it" (p.125). The issue is similar to The Mai in this sense and The Mai experiences this revolt against Robert as much as it is possible:

It's evening, sound a car door closing. The Mai stands at the window. Robert, walks past the window, and stops. He looks at The Mai. The Mai takes off her knickers, and throws them at him through the window! They land on his face.

The Mai: *(banging window)* Fuckin' bastard!

Robert stands there in shock. He passes into the house. The Mai sits down, kind of smug, pleased with herself ... He stands there defiantly a minute: nervous, guilty, at pains for some peace. The Mai looks him over, and looks away. (Carr, 1995, p. 39)

It is clear that the relationship between them "provokes a discharge, a convulsion, a cry" (126). What is suggested is the actuality of the abjection of The Mai by Robert, but The Mai's revolt is worth mentioning. Hereby, the transformation in her identity self-actualises and the grotesqueness of her character manifests itself because she manages to revolt against the already accepted restrictive images, especially against the ones which Robert imposes on her:

Robert moves away from her. The Mai eats the strawberry. She moves around the study, sound a note on the cello, takes the bow, begins screeching it across the cello to annoy Robert.

Robert: Look, will you leave it alone?

The Mai sits down and play a few phrases expertly.

The Mai: Not bad, hah? For someone who hasn't played over fifteen years. With a bit of practice I'd be as good as you. Now there's a frightening thought – for both of us. How dare you throw ten pounds at me on my fortieth birthday! (Carr, 1995, p. 40)

Therefore, subversion becomes the key word to make sense of her actions. She is aware of her capabilities, and after 'over fifteen years', she chooses to take control and achieves to shock Robert with her actions. Despite Robert's abjection of her, she declares that she has the capacity to defeat him, and demonstrates her power. She frees herself from Robert's abjection by means of revolt. Within this context, the insurrection is best portrayed as indicated below:

The Mai: I collected the children from their schools, I did twelve loads of laundry, I prepared eight meals, I dropped the children back to their schools, and I read Plato and Aristotle on education, because education is my business, and do you know the differences between their philosophies? No, I didn't think you would.

Robert: It was I who brought Plato and Aristotle into this house. When I met you, you were reading Mills and Boons!

The Mai: 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. (*She brandishes the cello bow all over the place.*)

Robert: Look, will you put that down, you'll break it.

The Mai: And so what, you'll replace it, you're good at replacing things. (*She taps the bow along her toes, stops, pulls, a string from it, looks at Robert, looks away, resumes playing herself: knees, thighs, stomach. Then she stops to snap a string as it suits her. She plays her breasts and makes notes on her throat with her other hand. Eyes closed, playing herself*) Tell me, Robert – tell me, is it that faraway pussies are greener or is it your mother crowin' on your cock?

Robert: You've a filthy tongue and the cut of a tinker.

The Mai: This is my house and I'll speak as I fuckin' well like! (Carr, 1995, p. 42)

Her outburst is actually crucial, in that her first urge to build the house is her desire to impress Robert: "Millie: ... What was certain was nothing was going to stop that house being built for Robert ..." (Carr, 1995, p. 38). Nevertheless, "what is being sought is turned into what is banished, and fascination into opprobrium" as Kristeva (1982) puts into words (p. 131). With this, the dualities and the doubles created by the abjection come out, which refers to the grotesque feature of the play totally. The shift among the actions of the characters is a proper example for it. Herein, the grotesque

theory can help decipher those dualities and doubles because “[t]he time of abjection is double: there is the time of oblivion and the time of thunder, of the infinite as veiled and the moment of the flash of revelation” (p. 131).

The issue of creating doubles is significant in the state of Robert and The Mai because The Mai finds the way out of “twisted, woven, ambivalent, a heterogenous flux” by this means (132). She opposes the determined limits repressed by the society around her. This issue agrees with Kristeva’s theory of abjection and Harpham’s theory of the grotesque, which are based on utter subversion and their refusal to submit the boundaries is important. Specific to the abjection, Kristeva (1982) discusses the issue as follows:

... the abject appears in order to support ‘I’ in the Other. The abject is the violence of mourning for an ‘object’ which is always lost. The abject breaks through the wall of repression and its judgments. It re-sources the ego at the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has become detached – it re-sources it at the non-ego, the drive and death. Abjection is a resurrection which goes via death (of the ego). It is an alchemy which transforms the death drive into a brusque movement of life and new *significance* (p. 136).

The metamorphoses of The Mai in the course of the play function as a similar target. It is to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the society surrounding her. More precisely, the death of The Mai speaks for a greater purpose and ‘breaks through the wall of repression’. When viewed from this aspect, the awareness of The Mai on her own charge is another important point to be made:

Connie: You’ll be all right, *a stoir*.

The Mai: For once in ye’er lives, will ye stop this family solidarity shite! You’ll be all right *a stoir*! Well I won’t be all right! I’ll never be all right and neither will ye!

Connie: Ara will you stop it. You’re drunk!

The Mai: I’m not drunk! I’m trapped. (Carr, 1995, p. 46)

Her awareness is so clear that she experiences “the sense of freedom and imprisonment at the same time” (Harpham, 1982, p. 82). Additionally, she begins to question herself about the choices she has made so far, which indicates that the conventions in her life fade away gradually. She is now aware that she is not as entangled as she has always thought. On the contrary, she is more powerful. This is

the deformation process of Harpham's grotesque theory. She starts to realise the way out of this mess, and it is time to go into action:

The Mai: And I started off so well, gained entry everywhere I wanted, did exceedingly well academically, and I was good on the cello – I know I was – The more I think about it, the more I begin to realize that, one by one, I have to let go of all the beautiful things in my life, though I didn't mean to. Does anyone do that or is it just me? (Carr, 1995, p. 47)

Harpham (1982) observes the grotesque character and states that the character "represents an older system gradually phased out, but still retaining, even in its most enfeebled state, vestiges of its ancient power" (p. 86). This image fits well with Robert's presence in the play, in that he becomes decorative and increasingly irrelevant when he takes the cello and starts music. He becomes a burden for The Mai in an irrelevant way as remarked earlier: "... his presence is neither ludicrous nor decorative, it is increasingly irrelevant ... his existence compresses a history that took centuries to enact. Nor it is concluded" (p. 87). Most of these interpretations throw some light on the relationship between Robert and The Mai because it performs as ambivalent as possible. Fittingly, it is the governing principle of their relation. Robert becomes "an allegory of the outside becoming inside" (p. 118). That is the reason why both The Mai and Robert experience the sense of the grotesque in the mind of the illegitimacy of their relationship (p. 118). Accordingly, Robert keeps his ambivalent company as Harpham (1982) traces as follows: "And, in gathering into himself the contradictions of a half-mythic, half-historical world, he also embodies the torsions of the text itself" (pp. 94-95). He openly states his part as the ambivalent company as "the wandering Odysseus" in the text after attending the new year ball with The Mai and leaving her alone on the dance floor for another woman (Wallace, 2001, p. 445):

Robert: The Mai will not listen, because, you see, The Mai thinks in absolutes. And I am The Mai's absolute husband and when I refuse to behave as The Mai's absolute husband, The Mai shuts down because the reality of everyday living is too complicated for The Mai.

The Mai: What reality are you speaking about, Robert?

Robert: Oh, you are listening.

The Mai: What reality?

Robert : Love, the reality of love.

The Mai: Thought you didn't believe in it.

Robert : And neither do I, but I believe in its absence, I believe in the black hole it leaves after it, like the way – (Carr, 1995, p. 55)

What is suggested is that after the kind of ball or banquet, the diffuse starts even if the audience does not see it on stage as a sign of the grotesque. Fundamentally, The Mai's being other starts in her own family as her mother is Ellen – dead and absent. Then it goes on in her marriage with Robert as he is not aware or interested in The Mai's presence and struggle. They are all signs of "the discourse of grotesque humiliation" (Shoura, 2016, p. 19). However, The Mai achieves the rupture of the static pattern of the society surrounding her, in that deformation is essential for reformation. Unlike the other characters who "are trapped by their desires and seem to lack sufficient perceptiveness from the psychological prisons which they construct and inhabit" (Wallace, 2001, p. 436), The Mai puts herself in a place where she is alienated from her talented and patient wife role. Another point to be noted is repetition. Repetition plays an important role in the creation of the dualities in the play. Shoura (2016) addresses the issue and states as follows:

According to Carr, repetition is meant to universalize the characters' experience and shake it off its individuality highlighting it as a universal state that might occur and reoccur like nature's phenomena ... In *The Mai* the characters repeat old patterns of behaviour and follow myths like sleepwalkers. For example, The Mai's story is in fact Millie's story. Act two of *The Mai* whose actions are suppose to take place a year later, repeats the actions of Act one in some differences ... To highlight repetition, Carr builds her play upon a set of dual characters: two sisters, two aunts, a daughter and a hundred-year-old grandmother. (pp. 22-23)

Subversion is achieved in the course of the play with the help of "the repeated transformation and the cyclic move of life and death" (Shoura, 2016, p. 19). It refers to the reformation process of the former data of Harpham's grotesque theory in the light of The Mai's metamorphosis at the end of Act Two:

Millie watches The Mai looking out the window. A few seconds later, The Mai turns and drifts from the room. Sounds of geese and swans taking flight, sounds of water. Silence.

Lights down. (Carr, 1995, p. 65)

All these features show Carr's engagement with grotesque aesthetics, which in turn shows an attempt to step forward and display resistance against the norms and aesthetic ideals. Especially, through the character of The Mai, Carr challenges the

conventions of society and subverts the accepted narratives. She provides the audience with a distinctive point of view in this way.



CHAPTER II

THE GROTESQUE AND CARNIVALESQUE ELEMENTS AND DUALITIES IN *BY THE BOG OF CATS...*

2.1. *By the Bog of Cats...* and *Medea*

By the Bog of Cats... was first premiered in the Abbey Theatre in 1998. It is a controversial play of Marina Carr. It is loosely based on the Euripides' tragedy *Medea*. Medea is a sorceress in Greek mythology and kills her children after her husband leaves her for another woman. Marina Carr's play centres around the character of Hester Swane. Living in a caravan with her daughter, Hester is a woman of forty, an Irish traveller and proud of her origin. She was abandoned by her mother, Big Josie Swane, when she was seven. In the present time, she is faced with being abandoned by her lover Carthage Killbride. He is the father of Hester's daughter, Josie. As Hester is abandoned by her mother and undesirable for her lover, she is viewed as an anti-social woman.

The play is set on 'the bleak white landscape' of the Bog of Cats, in the Irish Midlands. At the beginning of the play, the audience is introduced to "a mythic realm" (Sayin, 2008, p. 81), a gloomy bog with grotesque characters such as the Catwoman, the Ghost Fancier, and the Ghost of Joseph Swane:

Daunt. On the Bog of Cats. A bleak white landscape of ice and snow. Music, a lone violin. Hester Swane trails the corpse of a black swan after her, leaving a trail of blood in the snow. The Ghost Fancier stands there watching her. (Carr, 1998, p. 1)

This introduction to the setting of the play indicates the blurry line and tension between distinct realities, which substantiates the grotesqueness of the setting "where the boundaries of the living and the dead, the human and nonhuman, the natural and

the unnatural, the real and the mythical, the rational and the irrational merge into one another” (Sayın, 2008, p. 81). The bog is place which Hester Swane is strongly attached to.

The play opens with the scene of Hester carrying the dead black swan over the snow to bury it. The Ghost Fancier is watching Hester and they have a brief chat about Hester playing with the swan when she was young. After the Ghost Fancier leaves implying that Hester will die on that day, Hester’s friend Monica enters the stage and tells Hester not to insist on staying in the bog, otherwise she will lose her daughter, Josie. The land on which Hester lives is currently owned by Caroline Cassidy who is going to marry Hester’s lover Carthage. However, Hester is determined not to give up the land and Carthage without a fight. After that, Hester and Catwoman come together on the stage, and they talk about Hester’s mother, Big Josie Swane who abandoned her when she was seven. Catwoman speaks of Josie’s improper motherhood and of leaving Hester out of the house during the cold nights. She states that Josie said Hester would live as long as the black swan, and not a day longer. Therefore, Catwoman advises Hester not to wait for her mother to return and to leave the bog on that day. However, Hester insists on staying and the prophecy comes true.

By the Bog of Cats... by Marina Carr is a reconstructed and reconsidered version of the Greek drama, *Medea* by Euripides. In the play, Carr reworks the myth of Medea representing Hester Swane who has somehow kindred spirits as Medea. Originally in Greek mythology, Medea is “an enchantress who helped Jason, leader of the Argonauts, to obtain the Golden Fleece from her father, King Aeetes of Colchis” (“Medea,” para. 1). Medea and Jason got married, and she used her magic powers to make him get some power. In the *Medea* of Euripides, the story starts after this period during the couple’s time in Corinth after escaping from Colchis. The play is set at the time when Jason leaves Medea to get married to the daughter of King Creon of Corinth. Flaming with vengeance, Medea murders the King, his daughter and her own sons. She flees from the city leaving Jason behind.

Similarly, Hester Swane can be seen as “an outsider, a dispossessed woman living on the margins of society, who, at the age of seven, was abandoned by her mother, and now is struggling to establish her identity” (Sayın, 2008, p. 75) like that of Medea. Carr’s appropriation of Medea as the basis of her play gives her some

freedom in technical and thematical terms. In the first place, Carr grasps the opportunity to “keep away from the ‘prison of realism’” (p. 76) in technical terms. Additionally, the use of Medea’s story “to historicise the woman’s struggle for constructing her identity and reaching a subject position in a culture structured by male-centered values” (p. 77) provides her an elbowroom. By this means, Carr focuses on the position of women in Ireland as discarded, degraded and differentiated and challenges it with the help of Hester Swane. The critic Gülşen Sayın (2008) discusses the issue in her article titled “Quest for the lost M/Other: Medea Re-Constructed in Marina Carr’s *By the Bog Of Cats*... (1998)” and states as indicated below:

Medea has often been associated with the characteristics of the wicked woman, the monster, the savage, the hysteric, the mad, or the witch, precisely because she has been constructed by the anxieties of the male psyche. Her uncontrollable anger, hatred, and desire for revenge as well as her supernatural power have been gendered and rejected by the patriarchal order, as they are not compatible with the requirements for womanhood and motherhood. (p. 77)

Carr shifts the focus of the myth of Medea and reconstructs it with a different perspective this time. It is the woman’s perspective, which shows the dualities of Medea’s and Hester’s character in terms of womanhood and motherhood because both have the courage to challenge the male-centered world and establish their own identity. As a deserted child, Hester struggles to reshape her identity through a connection with her past and present under the shade of a split in her adult identity. It is the abandonment that caused the split and it cascades as a result of her husband’s abandonment. All in all, everything ends up in catastrophe. Unlike Medea, Hester kills her brother not to help her lover or kills her daughter not because of revenge but because she does her actions solely for her own sake. She kills her brother to save the mother for herself, and she kills her daughter to relieve the kid of “the pain of endless waiting for an image who will never come back” (Sayın, 2008, p. 80). In doing so, Carr provides Hester with more freedom in a sense. In the so-called ‘Mother’ Ireland, Carr achieves a critique of the female stereotypes imposed by the canonical Irish male playwrights. Rather than “a loving, caring, self-sacrificing, pure and faithful lover/wife and mother” (p. 80), Carr presents the lack the feminine virtues such as being a proper mother and housewife with the character of Hester. Hester is the representation of anger and violence to subvert the traditionally imposed female roles as a mother and housewife. She refuses her mothering and housewifing role and claims an individual place of her own. When she is restrained from doing so and forced to leave everything

behind, she becomes frustrated, makes everyone pay for that and causes a disaster in the end. In *Medea*, Euripides (1944) gives a convenience example of this and states as follows:

It is obvious the cloud of bitter grief
rising inside her is only just the start.
As her temper grows even more intense,
it will soon catch fire. She is a passionate soul,
hard to restrain. What will she do next,
now her heart's been bitten by these injuries? (p. 4)

It indicates how Medea (at the same time Hester) can be dangerous and revengeful. It is clear that Hester and Medea overlap at this very point. Their womanhood is different from the generally accepted notion. They reject and subvert it if they do not reach a position in society. In this manner, Carr presents the challenge to the male-dominated Irish dramatic tradition and raises her voice with the help of a woman's perspective to Euripides's *Medea*. Further, Carr offers a different perspective to the audience with the practice of the grotesque and carnivalesque features when Hester kills her daughter, Josie in full view of everyone and "dances her own death with Ghost Fancier" (Carr, 1998, p. 66). Herein, it is pivotal to recall the role of Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque and carnivalesque.

2.2. Mikhail Bakhtin's Theory of the Grotesque and Carnavalesque

Bakhtin's theory of art is focused on folk culture and carnival. According to his view, carnival or carnivalization is the condition for "the ultimate structure of life" (Pomorska, 1968, p. xi) that is formed by "behaviour and cognition" (p. xi). His study of Rabelais' novel puts forward the idea of carnivals as the basics of folk culture and the use of laughter as the core element. In folk culture, carnivals have an important place because they are the ways of getting away from everyday life and all kinds of responsibilities, titles and so on. Both Bakhtin and Rabelais highlight the importance of "the desire for change from below, between old and new, official and unofficial" (Holquist, 1968, p. xvi). Essentially for Bakhtin, carnival is not "mere holiday ... with self-serving festivals fostered by governments, secular or theocratic" (p. xviii). On the contrary, it is along the lines of revolutionary change. In that way, Bakhtin starts a

debate on the folk and the nature of the folk. In addition, laughter has a place in folk because carnival laughter has a special meaning and it “builds its own world in opposition to the official world, its own church versus the official church, its own state versus the official state” (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 88). Herein, the importance of Rabelais emerges in the history of literature and politics:

Rabelais's basic goal was to destroy the official picture of the events ... He summoned all the resources of sober popular imagery in order to break up the official lies and the narrow seriousness of dictated by the ruling classes. (p. 489)

Rabelais mainly focused on the culture of folk humour in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in the light of carnival tradition with specific examples. In the book, Bakhtin (1965) debates this issue and gives a detailed explanation of carnival:

The basis of laughter which gives form to carnival rituals frees them completely from all religious and ecclesiastic dogmatism, from all mysticism and piety ... They belong to an entirely sphere ... Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While the carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of the carnival, vividly felt by all its participants ... Thus carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life. Festivity is a peculiar quality of all comic rituals and spectacles of the Middle Ages. (pp. 7-8).

Carnival does not merely indicate a festival, but it shows the total alteration of the lives of ordinary people for quite a while. The people find ways to become distanced from their ordinary lives by effacing all their titles or responsibilities. Additionally, Bakhtin (1965) clarifies carnival as “the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal” (p. 10). It is considered as “a world inside out” (p. 11). In this sense, carnival laughter has a crucial place in carnival tradition because it is “the laughter of all people” (p. 11) without making any difference among them. Bakhtin (1965) focuses on the issue and states:

It is, first of all, a festive laughter. Therefore it is not an individual reaction to some isolated “comic” event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed to all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival. (pp. 11-12)

Viewed from this aspect, the reason behind the importance of laughter in carnivalesque can be seen clearly. In that way, there “occurs a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men and of certain forms and prohibitions of usual life” (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 15). For Rabelais and Bakhtin, laughter is the basic form of the folk humour culture. Those forms of carnival tradition pave the way for the concept of grotesque realism, in that “this whole is gay and gracious” (p. 19) for Rabelais and Bakhtin. Bakhtin (1965) elaborates on the issue and states as indicated below:

In grotesque realism, therefore, the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people. As such it is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretence to renunciation of the earthy, or independence of the earth and the body ... The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people who are continually growing and renewed. (p. 19)

Bakhtin highlights the significance of growing and renewing the concept of grotesque realism, which indicates its being in a state of flux. However, it is not a negative character for the concept, but a “positive, assertive character” because it means “fertility, growth and a brimming-over abundance” (Bakhtin, 1965, p.19).

Meanwhile, Bakhtin (1965) mentions ‘degradation’ as “an essential principle of grotesque realism” (p. 20) and he indicates that “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (p. 20). This is because it is the form of how “grotesque realism degrades, brings down to earth, turns their subject into flesh” (p. 20). In this regard, what comes to the fore is the importance of laughter in the form of grotesque realism because “laughter degrades and materialises” (p. 20). Bakhtin observes the issue as indicated below:

“Downward” is earth, “upward” is heaven ... Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better. To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive of the organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to

hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other lower level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving. (p. 21)

In balance, degradation refers to the bury, sow and kill in order to bring something more and better back, which leads to regeneration and a typical grotesque carnival according to Bakhtin (1965) (p. 22). He specifically mentions the dualities of this kind of grotesque carnival by stating that “the gay principle of regeneration” and the images of a typical grotesque carnival “turn a kitchen and banquet into a battle, kitchen utensils and shaving bowls into arms and helmets, and wine into blood” (p. 23). It is clear that Bakhtin talks about the complexity and contradictory combination of material bodily images, and he signifies “the bodily lower stratum of grotesque realism” as “unifying, degrading, uncrowning and simultaneously regenerating” (p. 23). He highlights the essential dualities of grotesque carnival in that way because “the grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, and as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming” (p. 24). Additionally, the grotesque image is ambivalent, there are “both poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis” (p. 24). As Bakhtin (1965) goes on the debate, he implies that grotesque images become more ambivalent and contradictory: “They are ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of “classic” aesthetics, that is, the aesthetics of the ready-made and the completed” (p. 25). This explanation indicates the grotesque body is in a state of flux. Bakhtin (1965) asserts “the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgress its own limits” (p. 26). Correlatively, it does not have “clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects” (p. 27).

Besides, abusive language has a significant role in the grotesque carnival tradition, as it is closely connected with ‘degradation’ and ‘down-to-earth’ concepts. In this manner, the grotesque demonstrates its ties to the folk culture and carnivalesque, and it offers freedom from “the prevailing point of the view of the world” (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 34). As carnivalesque does, the grotesque creates ambivalence and complexity in order to make some difference in the lives of the usual people. For Bakhtin (1965), the grotesque and carnivalesque forms fulfil a similar function within this context:

[T]o consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things. (p. 34)

Herein, Bakhtin (1965) gives the example of *commedia dell'arte* tradition as linked with carnival tradition and the German character of *Harlequin* as a grotesque feature. For him, *commedia dell'arte* “constitutes a whole; it has its own legitimate order, its own criterion of perfection which does not obey the aesthetics of the beautiful and sublime” (p. 35). Within this brief context, Bakhtin (1965) mentions the theme of madness as a grotesque form and describes it as “a ‘festive’ madness” (p. 39). The theme of madness in the grotesque, however, has a particular manner as Bakhtin (1965) mentions: “It is the way of escaping ‘the false truth of this world’ in order to look at the world with the eyes free from this ‘truth’”, and this state of mind “frees human consciousness, thought and imagination for new possibilities” (p. 49).

Furthermore, the mask is one of the important themes of this tradition because it is “connected with the joy of the change and reincarnation” (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 39). Bakhtin (1965) clarifies the theme of the mask and states that “the mask hides something, keeps a secret, deceives” (p. 40). He connects it to the grotesque and reflects the essence of the grotesque “in the fantastic combination of heterogenous elements of the reality, in the breaking up of the established world order” (p. 41). In doing so, “destructive humour” plays a vital role, in that “the entire world is turned into something alien, something terrifying and unjustified. The ground slips from under our feet, and we are dizzy because we find nothing stable around us” (p. 42). By this means, the world is demolished and regenerated or renewed once more. As a result, it is described as the “joy of change” (p. 48).

Hence, the theme of death as an indication of renewal and regeneration has an importance in the grotesque and carnivalesque. It demonstrates the “flux of time” and “flux of becoming” (p. 53). What comes to the fore is that “the essence of the grotesque is precisely to present contradictory and double-faced fullness of life” (p. 62). As Bakhtin (1965) puts into word, “negation and destruction (death of the old) are included as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation, from the birth for something new and better” (p. 62). Consequently, the general idea is distorted by the

grotesque forms and something new grows out of this mess. Thus, the basic nature of the grotesque emerges: “to exaggerate and caricaturise the negative and the inappropriate” (p. 306). The grotesque “combines in one image the positive and negative poles” (p. 308). It reveals the importance of fusing with other objects and transgressing its own limits and outgrowing itself. It also means fusing the body and the world, and coming up with a new form: the grotesque form of the body. The “transformation of the human element into animal one” or “the combination of human and animal traits” are considered ancient grotesque forms (p. 316). Bakhtin (1965) describes the grotesque body as follows:

The grotesque body ... is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallow the world and is itself swallowed by the world ... there is an interchange and interorientation. (p. 317)

Viewed from this perspective, as the other grotesque traits do, the image of the body opens the way for renewed interchange in life and discovers a “double body”, which is “cosmic and universal” (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 318). All in all, death does not mean the end, but it reflects the body which is “renewed in the next generation” (p. 322). Accordingly, it is intermingled with “the social, utopian and historic theme”, and it refers to “the renewal of culture” (p. 325). Therefore, ‘the theme of death-renewal-fertility’ plays a prominent part in the grotesque literature and the image of the grotesque body has a pivotal role in the grotesque manifest. In many respects, the carnivalesque and grotesque exercise a similar function: cosmic terror of the world is overcome by laughter. Death becomes nothing to be feared, in that it leads to renewal and fertility. The terror of death is conquered by the carnival grotesque form. As Bakhtin (1965) observes, “death of the individual is only one moment in the triumphant life of the people and of mankind, a moment indispensable for their renewal and improvement” (p. 341). It is no accident that “the entire world is shown as a pregnant and regenerating death” (p. 352). In accordance with laughter, “oaths, curses and various abusive expressions” (p. 352) have considerable importance. “The gay abuses and curses and the mocking of cosmic forces” (p. 352) are the ways of struggling against the fear of superior power in grotesque carnival form. The fear is put inside out and upside down through the acts of grotesque carnival form.

2.3. Language, Place and Landscape

When the plays of Marina Carr are taken into consideration, it can be asserted that this type of grotesque carnivalesque form exercises its function in *By the Bog of Cats*... to the full extent. First of all, Carr's use of the grotesque in the play can be traced by her use of language and space. The language of this specific play is highly accented of Midlands and puts the audience into a dilemma to fully interpret the story. Heavily accented speeches of the characters create no clarity in some points and Carr's use of language becomes "particular and muscular" (Leeney, 2006, p. 509). For Cathy Leeney (2006), "Carr's strategy with dramatic languages changes" (p. 509). In other words, Carr plays with the language in the course of the plays so as to make the Midlands visible on stage and put the audience in an active position to make sense of the messages in the play. In this way, the audience is drawn into a struggle, which indicates the active participation of them during the meaning-making process. She uses the language in order to "place her audience in thrall" (Leeney, 2006, p. 515), which shows the grotesque features of the play. As Ralf Remshardt (2004) indicates "... the mutual inappropriateness (or impropriety) of content and form, a damaged dialectic, is often the sign of the grotesque" (p. 16). With clear stage directions and character description, Carr confronts the audience with the way but leaves them alone. In the beginning, she describes the accent as follows: "Midland. I've given a slight flavour in the text, but the real Midland accent is a lot flatter and rougher and more guttural than the written world allows" (Carr, 1998, p. 3). The connection between the language and actions in the play is purposely disarranged by Carr because "this chaotic interaction symbolises the chaos larger than the personal worlds that Carr uses to draw us in" (Leeney, 2006, p. 516).

As for the place, the use of the landscape of the Midlands creates "a territory that accommodates a kind of Irish heart of darkness" (Leeney, 2006, p. 510). The Midlands is the microcosm of Ireland and plays an important role in Hester Swane because "her identity is deeply rooted in her surroundings" (p. 516). Leeney (2006) approaches the issue: "'Carr's Irish Midlands' as Claudia Harris has said, 'are her passageway into an ancient new imaginative world' (Leeney and McMullan 2003: 217)" (p. 510). M. K. Martinovich (2003), another critic in the field, discusses a similar issue as Leeney does. He puts emphasis on the landscape and states "the landscape of *By the Bog of Cats* ... plays a significant role in understanding the importance of the

Greek model on the Irish re-telling, for the bog can be read as a mythical space” (Martinovich, 2003, p. 116). Hester’s bond to the bog “as a purgatorial space and the tormented longing of Hester for Big Josie, her absent mother” (p. 116) is disclosed: “The purgatorial space of the bog suggests the transitional stage in which Hester finds herself – lingering between this world and the next” (p. 116). This is indicated as follows:

Hester: I was born on the Bog of Cats and on the Bog of Cats I’ll end me days. I’ve as much right to this place as many of yees, more, for it holds me to it in many ways it has never held yees. (Carr, 1988, p. 27)

...

Hester: ... And I watched her walk away from me across the Bog of Cats. And across the Bog of Cats I’ll watch her return. (Carr, 1988, p.33)

Additionally, as the grotesque feature of the play, the bog is “the threshold between the living and the dead, the natural and the unnatural. The bog is “not only a haunted liminal space, but also a psychological space, where layers of Hester’s psyche can unfold” (Bourke, 2003, p. 121). It is “the liminal region” (p. 139) or surreal landscape where Hester exhibits her real self. The bog refers to the incompleteness of Hester with the loss of her mother and Carthage. In Act II, Hester states it obviously:

Hester: (*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. (Carr, 1998, p. 48)

She is the miserable and neglected child in need of love and acceptance. However, the community she belongs to does not fulfil her desire. She holds on the confession in Act III as follows:

Hester: ... Where is she? She said she’d return. I’ve waited so long, I’ve waited so long – Have you come across her where you are? (Carr, 1998, p. 50).

In this respect, the use of ellipsis in the title has a special place because it “welcomes and invites the audience to something incomplete, perhaps a journey that is still in process” (Sayın, 2008, p. 79).

2.4. The Dualities / Subversion of Reality

The main duality is between distinct realities throughout the play. As reality is subjected, created and recreated again and again, Carr makes use of the tension between distinct realities and creates a kind of disorder and turbulence in order to interrogate the established truths, received assumptions and certain convictions of the society. As the language and the landscape of the play collide, scatter and hover around two worlds, the line between them becomes more transparent. Carr “allows her audience to overhear the tumult” (Bourke Introduction xxiv). The tension between word and image opens up possible futures and perceptions for the audience. As Bourke (2003) expresses, *By the Bog of Cats*... “goes beyond the boundaries of grotesque imagery and launches us into the bizarre world of carnival itself” (p. 129). Carr creates “a tumultuous other world which is real while it lasts, but when it ends, is succeeded by order” but she does not offer a neat closure (p. 129). Her strategy is “the blurring of boundaries between the real and the surreal, the natural and the supernatural, the past and the present, and between high and popular cultural influences” (p. 129). In that way, Carr subverts the traditions which she comes from and presents the liminal world of the grotesque, which aims at generating sublime awareness of the audience. She makes the audience to face reality as a “continuously illusionary construction” (Pirandello, 1966, p. 48). Non-linearity subverts fictionality and new meanings create new realities. The way to grasp the reality of the audience broadens in this liminal world of the grotesque, and the former realities based on former data are challenged. In this manner, the play shows how the meaning-making process changes.

The tumult is best experienced in the first scene of the play with the dialogue between the main character and a ghostly figure. Directly in the start, Carr introduces the audience to Hester Swane and Ghost Fancier. The conversation indicates the absurdity and grotesqueness to the full extent as Carr deliberately blurs the line between distinct realities that the play offers or “the boundaries between life and play are intentionally erased” (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 258). As exemplified below:

Hester: Who are you? Haven’t seen you around here before.

Ghost Fancier: I’m a ghost fancier.

Hester: A ghost fancier. Never heard tell of the like.

Ghost Fancier: You never seen ghosts?

Hester: Not exactly, felt what I thought were things form some other world betimes, but nothin' I could grab on to and say, 'That is a ghost.'

Ghost Fancier: Well, there's ghosts there is ghost fanciers.

Hester: That so? So what do you do, Mr Ghost Fancier? Eye up ghosts? Have love affairs with them?

Ghost Fancier: Dependin' on the ghost. I've trailed you a while. What're you doin' draggin' the corpse of a swan behind ya like it was your shadow? (Carr, 1998, p. 7)

Hester reacts to the appearance of the ghost in a usual way as if she comes across a friend. She asks ordinary questions and simplifies the conversation referring to love affairs among ghosts. By this means, the tumult and puzzlement are reflected throughout the course of the play. Besides the absurdity of the dialogue, the use of Midland's accent reveals Carr's strategy of dramatic language change as exemplified below:

Joseph: Who's there?

Catwoman: Go 'way and lave me alone. I'm on me day off.

Joseph: Who are ya? I can't see ya.

Catwoman: I can't see you aither. I'm the Catwoman but I tould ya I'm not talkin' to ghosts today, yees have e heart scalded, hardly got a wink's sleep last night.

Joseph: Please, I haven't spoken to anywan since the night I died. (Carr, 1998, p.35)

The dialogue between two grotesque characters of the play Joseph Swane and Catwoman demonstrates the blurring of these distinct realities generated by the grotesque. At some point, it becomes difficult for the reader and audience to follow the conversation because of the heavily accented language of Catwoman. As the dialogue goes on, the line becomes more interwoven, in that it happens between a ghost and a woman who is half human half cat. Similar is the idea, voiced by Melissa Sihra (2005), is that "Carr brings audiences further into multiple realms of fantasy and the imagination, with the Ghost Fancier, Catwoman, the haunting presence of the absent Big Josie Swane, and the ghost of Joseph" (p. 143). It is a clear "grotesque reflection" (Bourke, 2003, p. 133). The simple conversation can be seen below:

Joseph: The Bog of Cats. Me mother had a song about this place.

Catwoman: Josie Swane was your mother?

Joseph: Ya know her?

Catwoman: Oh aye, I knew her. Then Hester must be your sister?

Joseph: Hester, ya know Hester too?

Catwoman: She lives only down the lane. I never knew Hester had a brother.

Joseph: I doubt she'd be tellin' people about me.

Catwoman: I don't mean to be short with ya, Joseph Swane, but Saturday is me day off. I haven't a minute to meself with yees, so tell me what is it ya want and then be on your way.

Joseph: I want to be alive again. I want to stop walkin'. I want to rest, ate a steak, meet a girl, I want to fish for wild salmon and sow a pike on Bergit's Lake again.

Catwoman: You'll never do them things again, Joseph Swane. (Carr, 1998, p. 35)

They have a word on ordinary things in the liminal space of the play. In doing so, Carr clearly plays with the characters and their distortion of language in order to devastate the conventional perception of reality. As Remshardt (2004) discusses, it is "an attempt to erase/deferral, the reign of abstractions" (p. 255). In that way, Carr breaks the actuality of the play and generates "a lawless realm and endangerment" (p. 258). It is "the theatre that defies the shackles of representation and construction of boundaries" (p. 258).

2.5. Puzzlement

This state of play creates puzzlement for the audience because the boundaries are intentionally erased by Carr to present a different perspective on the norms and ideals of society. In this regard, the play ruptures the established limits of ideal forms of the Midlands. It goes beyond the confines and forms an inversion of standards, which constitutes puzzles to be solved with the active engagement of the audience. It creates gaps and absences to be fulfilled. It dominates the audience to create meaning. Remshardt (2004) debates this issue as follows:

The grotesque undermines these assumptions of truth-production that structure virtually everything we do, casting drastic doubt upon them, for it presents the mind with defective dialectics, bizarre binarities, mangled metaphors, aborted syllogisms, fearful symmetries. I believe that it is this assault on the undergirding of our cognitive and epistemological faculties that makes the grotesque so effective as a shape of refusal, a species of dissonance. (p. 254)

The puzzlement in grotesque plays presents the audience with a greater purpose. Except for shaking the established norms and ideals, the grotesque theatre produces its own knowledge. Remshardt (2004) attests as follows:

... the knowledge the grotesque produces is not primarily practical, didactic, even moral knowledge; its principal aim is not to point out what in reality should not exist but what is possible alongside, underneath, above, and despite our fortifications of morality and logic. (p. 261)

To shatter these fortifications, Carr puts forward puzzlement before the audience and leaves them on their own to make sense of it and see what is possible ahead. In the atmosphere of disorder and turbulence, the audience is left to interpret what is real or what is illusory. However, the boundary between them is translucent, which opens up liminal space for dualities. It is best exemplified with the dialogue between Hester and Joseph as the play draws its conclusion. M K Martinovich (2003) ventures an explanation on the issue: "Dramatist Marina Carr creates 'a kind of uncertainty' as she takes us on her ghostly journey into the liminal realms of the real and the fantastic, the worldly and the spiritual, the corporeal and the intangible" (p. 126). Similarly, Carr (1998) states in the stage direction as follows: "Joseph Swane stands in the flames watching her" (p. 49). The puzzlement occurs here when both characters are in flames, "charred and muddled" (p. 49). It is noted as follows:

Hester: Well, Carthage, ya think them were only idle threats I made? Ya think I can be flung in the 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 roasin'. 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 – Will somewan not come and save me from meself before I go and do worse.

Joseph starts to sing.

Joseph:

By the Bog of Cats I finally learned false from true,

Learned too late that it was you and only you

Let me sore, a heart brimful of rue

By the Bof of Cats in the darkling dew. (p. 49)

It is clear that in the atmosphere of disaster and turbulence, the presence of Joseph Swane in flames produces the illusion and it manifests the liminal space for dualities to be resolved by the audience. In this manner, Carr allows the audience to have much more control over the shaping and experience of the performance. Besides, the song of Joseph Swane belongs to their mother and mentions the dualities both in the beginning and at the end of the play. This brings the audience further along the way liberating from the prevailing point of view of the society. As Pirandello (1966) observes, the flow of life occurs among such opposite poles as “hope and fear, truth and falsehood, beauty and ugliness, right and wrong, and so on” (p. 51). Subsequently, he states as follows: “Nothing is true! True is: the sea, the mountain, a rock, a blade of grass. But man: always wearing a mask, unwillingly, without knowing it, without wanting it, always masked with that thing which he, in good faith, believes to be handsome, good, gracious, generous, unhappy, and so on” (p. 54). What Carr does as a dramatist is to reveal and subvert these opposite poles and to present the audience with an image from a different angle.

2.6. Reflexivity, Play within Play, Foreshadowing

Another grotesque feature of the play is its reflexivity, its play within-play form, which indicates some foreshadowing references to the course of the events and the future of the characters. The reflexivity in the play opens up dilemmas and challenges for the audience because of the lack of knowledge in the beginning. It contains questioning of the established truths and socially based assumptions. Within the context of cause and effect and their circular relationship in the social structure, Carr submits reflexivity to challenge the discipline and subvert the biases of the audience. What is remarkable is the self-awareness in the liminal world of the grotesque. The audience is put in a spot of bother and their basic set of shared values is put into a play. As Frances Connelly (2012) remarks, the grotesque and its “transformative character turn the world upside down” and they “play among broken boundaries” (p. 23). In the play, the use of grotesque and carnivalesque forms serves as “a deliberate travesty of social order” (Bourke, 2003, p. 141).

As for the reflexivity as a grotesque feature, it shows itself within the foreshadowing intentionally put by Carr from the early start. For instance, the play

begins with corpse and blood, which is the indicator of the end because it finishes with corpse (s) and blood as well. At this juncture, the words of Ghost Fancier are important: “What’re you doin’ draggin’ the corpse of swan behind ya like it was your shadow” (Carr, 1998, p. 7). Their conversation goes on in a similar vein:

Ghost Fancier: I’m ghoulin’ for a woman be the name of Hester Swane.

Hester: I’m Hester Swane.

Ghost Fancier: You couldn’t be, you’re alive.

...

Ghost Fancier: Then I’m too previous. I mistook this hour for dusk. A thousand apologies. (Carr, 1998, p. 8)

Ghost Fancier implies that he will take Hester’s life when the time comes. It is an explicit manipulation element of the audience. The chaos is introduced in the very beginning and it goes through many levels until the end. In Act I Scene III, Catwoman touches upon the development of similar chaos and states as follows:

Catwoman: Bet ya aren’t. I had a dream about ya last night.

Hester: Spare me your visions and dreams, enough of me own to deal with.

Catwoman: Dreamt ya were a black trainmotorin’ through the Bog of Catsand, 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’. (Carr, 1998, p. 13)

First Ghost Fancier and then Catwoman put the upcoming chaos and disaster on the line. This distinct foreshadowing technique demonstrates the self-reflexivity of the grotesque carnivalesque form. It is specified in the discussions of Catwoman and she refers to Hester’s last name “swane” as being a derivation of “swan”, which indicates how the play is so embedded. This is instantiated in Catwoman’s lines referring to the missing mother as noted below:

Catwoman: I wouldn’t long for Josie Swane is I was you. Sure the night ya were born she took ya over to the black swan’s lair, auld Black Wing ya’ve just buried there and laid ya in the nest alongside her. And when I axed her why she’d do a thing like that with snow and ice everywhere, ya know what she says, ‘Swane means swan.’ ‘That may be so’, says I, ‘but the child’ll die of pneumonia.’ ‘That child,’ says Josie Swane, ‘will live as long as this black swan, not a day more, not a day less.’ And each night for three nights she left ya in black swan’s lair and each night I snuck ya out of the lair and took ya home with me and brung ya back to the

lair before she'd come back lookin' for ya in the mornin'. That's when I started to turn again' her. (Carr, 1998, p. 15)

Hester implies a similar issue when she talks to the Ghost of Joseph. The black swan kills itself on this day as does Hester in the end. It's pivotal to recall that although she is alive when Ghost Fancier comes to visit her, "Hester is liminal" (Martinovich, 2003, p. 123) as she is clearly in the junction of two worlds which suggests that the dying is the process of living. She says that "Oh I think I know, Joseph, for a long time now I been thinkin' I'm already a ghost" (Carr, 1998, p. 52). It is a distinct foreshadowing of the end of the play. Hester goes further and hints at the disaster she plans to put into practice. During the conversation with Xavier, she expresses as follows:

Hester: ... Don't worry, I'll be lavin' this place tonight, though not the way you or anywan else expects. Ya call me a witch, Cassidy? This is nothin', you just wait and see the real – (Carr, 1998, p. 60)

Viewed from this angle, a complicated self-conscious narrative strategy tumultuates the natural flow of events as Carr aims to achieve. Accordingly, self-reflexivity puts the audience, the characters and the topic into play, open to change and various interpretations.

2.7. The Grotesque Characters

By the Bog of Cats... can be considered as a grotesque play when the characters are taken into consideration. Carr creates a liminal world specific to the play and puts the audience "into the bizarre world of carnival itself" (Bourke, 2003, p. 129). One indicator of the grotesque play is the spirit of Bakhtin's carnival in this sense, and it is explained by Bourke (2003) as follows:

... the spirit of carnival is alive in the work of Marina Carr, where grotesque and carnivalesque elements produce a drama of subversion, that celebrates the incongruous and the alternative ... Hers is a drama that takes traditions and conventions and subverts them. The 'topsy-turvydom' of carnival is in evidence throughout her work as she mixes genres, attaching equal value to each, while re-writing myths to suit her contemporary disjointed vision. (p. 129)

Such characters as Catwoman, the Ghost Fancier, the Ghost of Joseph Swane and missing Big Josie Swane are the prominent grotesque features of the play. Catwoman is a half-human and half-cat figure who is in 'fifties, lives on the bog' as

Carr describes in the beginning. Essentially, she is “the blind seer Teiresias, eats mice, has mouse fur growing out of her teeth” (Bourke, 2003, p. 129). She is a liminal character “between legendary and the real” (Martinovich, 2003, p. 120). The Ghost Fancier is in the manner of “the Greek messenger” (Bourke, 2003, p. 129). In addition, he is “an Irish Grim Reaper” (Martinovich, 2003, p. 121) and a common figure in Irish dramatic tradition. He informs Hester Swane about her upcoming death in the beginning and waits for her in flames in the end. As for the Ghost of Joseph Swane, he is the reminder of Hester’s dark and gloomy past. With this character, Carr blurs the distinctions between past, present and future. As Bourke (2003) touches upon a similar issue, the presence of two ghosts is important because they become “liminal beings occupying many roles” (p. xxiv) and function as “liminal realms of the real and the fantastic, the worldly and the spiritual, the corporeal and the intangible” (p. xxiv). Through these ghost images, Carr asserts “the complicated interweavings of the living and the dead, the present and the past (Martinovich, 2003, p. 122). To present this duality, the play starts with the Ghost Fancier, black swan and Hester Swane “for the real/unreal environs” (p. 126). His arrival suggests “the dead living among us, mainstay of Irish folk tradition” (p. 121). Subsequently, Martinovich (2003) remarks on the importance of ghostly images in Irish tradition as noted:

Ghosts and ghost stories have a long history in Irish folk culture, but they also have a presence in the Irish dramatic tradition, from W.B. Yeats’ *Purgatory* to Conor McPherson’s *The Weir*. Carr uses the theatrical convention of a ghost and a ‘ghost fancier’ to tell her tragic story of a despairing, heartbroken and sorrowful individual. (p. 126)

Herein, the grotesque realism and Bakhtin’s grotesque conception of the body are important to be noted. According to him, the grotesque body demonstrates “excessiveness, superabundance, the tendency to transgress all limits, endless enumerations, and accumulations of synonyms” (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 306). Additionally, Catwoman is an appropriate example of the grotesque theatre because “the grotesque character of the transformation of the human element into an animal one; the combination of human and animal traits is, as we know, one of the most ancient grotesque forms” (p. 316). Carr (1998) describes Catwoman as follows: “... stained a streaky brown from the bog, a coat of cat fur that reaches to the ground, studded with cats’ eyes and cats’ paws. She is blind and carries a stick” (p. 12). She is a strange mystical figure with supernatural powers who foresees future events and communicates with the ghosts. She turns out the liminal subject between the legendary

and the real as does Big Josie Swane. Big Josie is not present throughout the play but the audience feels both her absence and presence with the dialogues of Hester and Catwoman. Hester's longing for her mother and desire to prove herself become one of the reasons for her insistence on staying on the bog and facing her own disaster. She even kills her brother because of "jealousy and spite" (Martinovich, 2003, p. 120). Similar is the assertion, voiced by Martinovich (2003), is that "[t]he haunting memory of Big Josie, reconstructed by the recollected stories of her by the Catwoman and Monica Murray, plagues Hester until her own death in the final moments of the play" (p. 120). In this way, the absent mother figure turns out to be shadowy, illusionary and unreal.

Along with the grotesque characters, there are other characters both grotesque and carnivalesque features. Father Willow and Mrs. Killbride are one of those with their tragicomic and subversive traits during the events. Primarily, Father Willow is a parody of the Catholic Church. While he seems to be neat and full of wisdom, he seems to be the opposite as noted in the dialogue between Monica and Xavier:

Monica: – And Father Willow seems to have lost the run of himself entirely

Xavier: They should put him down, he's eighty if he's a day.

Monica: The state of him with his hat on all durin' the Mass and the vestments inside out and his pyjamas peepin' out from under his trousers.

Xavier: Did you hear he's started keepin' a gun in the tabernacle?

Monica: I did, aye.

Xavier: For all them robbers, is it?

Monica: No, apparently it's for any of us that's late for Mass. (Carr, 1998, p. 39)

It is the tragicomic description of Father Willow, on the basis of his clothing and his useless gun. Furthermore, when there is a 'real' argument between Xavier and Hester on Hester's insistence on staying, he makes a mockery of confession in the Christian tradition:

Hester: I can't lave – Ya see me mother said she'd come back here. Father Willow tell them what they're doin' is wrong. They'll listen to you.

Father Willow: They've never listened to me, sure they even lie in the Confession box. Ya know what I do? I wear ear-plugs. (Carr, 1998, p. 48)

Upon Hester's outburst, his answer is nonsense and ridiculous. He teases the discussion of both and reverses the situation into something pointless. He is quite the opposite of what he represents as a spiritual character. Arguably, he is visualised as the travesty of shared cultural values. This purely carnivalesque character goes on the mockery reduplicatively when he makes a speech on the wedding of Carthage and Caroline:

Father Willow gets up. All stand and bless themselves for the grace.

Father Willow: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, it may or may not surprise yees all if I tould yees I was almost a groom meself wance. Her name was Elizabeth Kennedy, no that was me mother's name, her name was – it'll come to me, anyway it wasn't to be, in the end we fell over a duch egg on a walkin' holiday by the Shannon, what was her name at all? Helen? No.

Mrs. Killbride: Would ya say the grace, Father Willow, and be –

Father Willow: The grace, yes, how does it go again?

Mrs. Killbride: Bless us, oh Lord, and these thy gifts which of –

Father Willow: Rowena. That was it. Rowena Phelan. I should never have ate that duck egg – no – (*Stands there lost in thought.*) (Carr, 1998, p.44)

It is obvious that Christian morality is subverted by Carr deliberately with the character of Father Willow, and “[t]he ambivalent laughter reaches its climax when the priest cannot remember the grace” (Bourke, 2003, p. 143). Carr blurs the distinctions between what is real and what is fantastic and “introduces a wonderful clash of incompatibles” (p. 142) putting Father Willow and Catwoman in a close friendship, ‘linking arm-in-arm’ (p. 142). At this point, the audience is presented with an image of two opposite traditions, “Catholic and pagan, arm in arm, and planning a holiday in the sun together” (p. 142):

The Catwoman and Father Willow have entered, linking arms, both with their sticks. Father Willow has his snuff on hand, pyjamas showing from under his shirt and trousers, hat on, adores the Catwoman. (Carr, 1998, p. 40)

The clash of Pagan and Catholic dualities shows the subversive intention of Carr. What she presents is the mockery of Christian tradition itself, where the Father is ridiculed. Bourke (2003) observes the issue and states as follows:

The ambivalent laughter of carnival which is gay and triumphant, and at the same time mocking and deriding can accommodate the spectacle of a Catholic priest, whose adoration is directed not at the God of his church, but at the blind pagan prophetess” (p. 142).

He is degraded by his clothing imagery as well because he is not supposed to be in a festive costume and pyjamas but in “[t]he ecclesiastical uniform – black suit and clerical collar” (Bourke, 2003, p. 142). His clothing can also be taken as a disguise or a carnival mask. The following conversation between these two is a proper example to demonstrate how far the nonsense proceeds:

Father Willow: I’m tellin’ ya now, Catwoman, ya’ll have to cut back on the mice, they’ll be death of ya.

Catwoman: And you’ll have to cut back on the snuff.

Father Willow: Try snails instead, far better for ya, the French ate them with garlic and tons of butter and Burgundy wine. I tried them wance meself and I in Avalon. Delicious.

Catwoman: We should go on holiday, you and me, Father Willow.

Father Willow: Ah, ya say that every winter and come the summer I can’t budge ya.

Catwoman: I’ll go away with ya next summer and that’s a promise.

Father Willow: Well, where do ya want to go and I’ll book the tickets in the mornin’? (Carr, 1998, p. 40)

It is no accident that Father Willow enables Carr to hint at the depravedness of Christian morality in society. Carr’s priest is not a great character for the people on the bog. Conversely, he represents the exact opposite. He is not a reliable priest, cannot guide society or talk about grace. Rather, he is the representative of a carnivalesque character who deliberately subverts and abuses a “cultic character” (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 352). Further, the wedding ceremony of Caroline and Carthage is another carnivalesque scene as Bourke (2003) discusses the issue:

The subversive intention is further exposed with the entrance of the bride and groom, and Caroline’s uneasy admission that they have ‘done the wrong thing’ (p.303). Carr does not simply present a carnival festival, which the folk unthinkingly embrace and partake in. What she offers is a travesty of the tradition itself, where the ‘true’ bride Caroline is trapped in a parody of a marriage, which bears no relation to the fantasy of ‘a big ballroom with a fountain of mermaids in the middle’ (p. 336). Defeated, she admits to the pretence, resolving to endure the day, which should have been the happiest in her life. (p. 142)

Within this perspective, carnival laughter is darkened by this unmatched couple and is defined beyond the established limits of ideals on purpose. Caroline tells: “Get through today, I suppose, pretend it’s the best day of our lives ... Nothin’, only I feel like I’m walkin’ one somewan’s grave” (Carr, 1998, p. 38). As Ralf Remshardt (2004) states, the idea of carnival in the play “finds its support in their reversal a play on their inherent ambiguity” (p. 45). It indicates ‘world upside down’ in a microcosm. The ceremony is travestied with the implications for bride and groom. The feast is reversed more with the arrival of Mrs. Killbride, another grotesque character, “enacting her very surname by usurping the role of the ‘bride’ ... disguised as the ‘bride’” (Bourke, 2003, p. 142). She pretends to have the central role in the ceremony and to be the bride next to the groom as it is noted below:

Enter Mrs. Killbride in what looks extremely like a wedding dress, white, a white hat, with a bit of a veil trailing off it, white shoes, tights, bag, etc.

Mrs. Killbride: (*flushed, excited, neurotic*) Oh the love birds! The love birds! There yees are, off hidin’. Carthage, I want a photo of yees. Would you take it, Caroline?

Carthage: She wants wan of herself.

Mrs. Killbride: Shush now, Carthage, and stand up straight.

They pose like a bride and groom, Carthage glaring at Mrs. Killbride. (Carr, 1998, p. 38)

It is clear that she refers her son as her husband. She also mentions that they used to sleep together: “When his father died he used to come into the bed to sleep beside me for fear I would be lonely. Often I woke from a deep slumber and his two arms would be around me, a small leg thrown over me in sleep –” (Carr, 1998, p. 43). She loses the logical plot and subverts the general notion of the mother-son relationship and suggests an Oedipal bond. It is connected to the grotesque because the travesty of figures, ideas and conventions are prominent elements of it. Additionally, “[o]utrageous and grotesque, such reversals sit comfortably within the carnival tradition” as Bourke (2003) observes (p. 142). These kinds of actions pave the way for “ambivalent laughter of carnival which is gay and triumphant, and at the same time mocking and deriding” (p. 142). Consequently, the ceremony is supposed to be a familiar banquet, but turns out to be ‘a moment of crisis’ as Bakhtin (1965) describes the feast:

[T]hrough all the stages of historic development feasts were linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man. Moments of death and revival, of change and renewal always led to a festive perception of the world. These moments, expressed in concrete form, created the peculiar character of the feasts. (p. 9).

The crisis starts in the beginning of the ceremony and Hester's coming becomes the breaking point for the death and revival as Bakhtin suggests. Upon her arrival, the feast goes out of control. The confines between the carnival and "everyday official realms" (Bourke, 2003, p. 143) are revealed. The inversion of Hester provides an illusionary space until she kills Josie and herself. She represents the social subversion in carnival tradition in which the world is upside down. More precisely, she becomes the indicator of 'renewal of culture' on the bog. When considered from this point of view, Hester Swane can be conceived as a suitable character for the theme of death-renewal-fertility in the grotesque and carnivalesque form. She is the basis of fertility and death, lingering between two worlds. This two-world condition is "outside the officialdom" (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 6). However, Hester's arrival foreshadows the upcoming diffusion for all. For Bourke (2003), Hester becomes a prominent representative of "a people who are continually growing, decaying and being renewed" (p. 131). She turns into the source of the degradation because she subverts the actual hierarchy on the bog and provides a realm in which the grotesque can prosper. With the help of this character, the grotesque impulse of Marina Carr becomes more visible. Put another way, Carr subverts and demolishes "the very tradition that she belongs to [and] refuses to be confined by rules, and demands the freedom to operate unencumbered and in defiance of accepted norms, which are in variably subverted in her plays" (p. 134). As Bourke (2003) continues the discussion and remarks that "Carr has taken the grotesque possibilities in the fool /outsider figure to a new and powerfully subversive level" (p. 137). Hester's insistence on staying and killings in the end is "the carnivalesque enactment of its opposite, representing renewal in a return to the great nurturing womb of nature, giver of life, death and continuity" (p. 139). Furthermore, her savage nature is revealed and clearly and never hidden in some points. The opening scene with Hester and the black swan, leaving blood on white snow, prefaces "the flesh- ripping violence with which the play will close" (p. 140). Hester herself puts it into words as noted below:

Hester: ... Listen to me now, Caroline, there's two Hester Swanes, one that is decent and very fond of ya despite your callow treatment of me. And the other Hester, well, she could slide a

knife down your face, carve ya up and not bat an eyelid. (*Grabs her hair suddenly and viciously.*)

Caroline: Ow! Lave go!

Hester: Listen to me now, Caroline. Carthage Killbride is mine and only mine. He's been mine since he was sixteen. You think you can take him from me? Wrong. All wrong. (*Lets go of her.*) Now get out of my sight. (Carr, 1998, p. 23)

As it is clear above, Hester never hides her savage nature. She has enough courage to warn Caroline of her two opposite poles. Her savagery results from the lack of love in her life. First, her brother Joseph takes the love of her mother and then Caroline takes the love of Carthage. Before the violence, in the end, Carthage threatens her to tear Josie off. Because of the lack, she becomes more savage and brutal. Her final act of violence is prompted by Carthage's decision as Bourke (2003) explains: "The killing of her child, by far the most controversial aspect of the play, is ironically perpetrated without overt violence, but with love. Carr has subverted the very notion of violence itself, by couching it in gentle, protective, motherly terms" (p. 141). Therefore, it is obvious that Hester is one of the main grotesque characters in the play. As the play draws to an end, the death of Josie and Hester is presented as the death dance with the arrival of the Ghost Fancier. Carr's description of the final scene is tough and powerful. In addition, the dualities occur most in the final part as follows:

Josie: I came to say goodbye, we'll be goin' soon. (*Kisses Hester.*)

Hester: Goodbye, sweetheart – Josie, ya won't see me again now.

Hester walks around demented with Josie. Enter Carthage running.

Carthage: What is it, Catwoman? Hester? What's wrong with Josie? There's blood all over her.

Hester: (*brandishing knife*) Lave off, you. Lave off. I warned ya and I tould ya, would ya listen, what've I done, what've I done? (Carr, 1998, p. 65)

Hester is in a state of dualities, not aware of her actions but sure about her decisions all at the same time. She kills Josie with the same knife that she killed Joseph years ago. Hester states that "Yees all thought I was goin' to walk away and lave her at yeer mercy. I almost did. But she's mine and I wouldn't have her waster her life dreamin' about me and yees thwartin' her with black stories against me" (Carr, 1998, p. 65). With the entrance of the Ghost Fancier, the scene becomes ritualistically grotesque and carnivalesque, in that the specific play is "the one which most obviously

employs the strategy of carnival to generate a deliberate travesty of social order” (Bourke, 2003, p. 141). With her wedding dress on, Hester subverts the very ideal of mother and wife imagery. She starts another death dance, now for her own death:

Enter the Ghost Fancier. Hester sees him, the others don't. He picks up the fishing knife.

Hester: You're late, ya came too late.

Carthage: What's she sayin'? What? Give her to me, come on now. *(Take Josie off Hester.)*

Hester: Ya won't forgive me now, Carthage, and when all of is over or half remembered and you think you've almost forgotten me again, take a walk along the Bog of Cats and wait for a purlin' wind through your hair or a soft breath be your ear or a rustle behind ya. That'll be me and Josie ghostin' ya. *(She walks towards the Ghost Fancier.)* Take me away, take me away from here.

Ghost Fancier: Alright, my lovely.

They go into a death dance with the fishing knife, which ends plunged into Hester's heart. She falls to the ground. Exit Ghost Fancier with knife. (Carr, 1998, p. 66)

Within this context, Bakhtin's idea of wisdom and madness ambivalence can be discussed because Hester's action in the end is the indicator of both wisdom and madness as a main theme of the grotesque and carnivalesque play. She foresees what the future brings for her, Josie and Carthage and takes lives in carnivalesque imagery in the death dance with longing. Wisdom is disguised as madness in the character of Hester Swane and what takes her to the violence and blood – in the opening and closing scenes – is this wisdom. Although society does not take her life physically, it turns out to be the main reason “by banishing her from the source of her very being, the bog, on which she was born, and where she is predestined to die (Bourke, 2003, p. 144). Bourke (2003) clarifies the issue:

The carnival ends with her suicide, but Carr, unwilling to embrace a neat closure, suggests that the restored order will not bring happiness to the surviving community which has been irreparably damaged by the events leading to this extremity ... Carr's ending represents a victory over fear, and concurs with Bakhtin's theories of carnival by subverting official authority – religious and secular – and by proposing the possibility of renewal and continuity through nature. (p. 144)

CONCLUSION

As a consequence, the 1990s witnessed a revolutionary and innovative atmosphere for the contemporary literature, especially for drama, of the decade because of past and present influences of the time. After experiencing cultural, political and social turmoil, the contemporary writers and playwrights became inescapably influenced by the change: “Over the last sixty years or so, as theatre companies, directors, designers, actors and playwrights gained significant international reputations, recognition and renown” (Cronin & Jordan, 2016, p. 1), the Irish theatre has removed the traces of the conventional distinction between traditional theatre practices of the past and “the fringe or avant-garde” (p. 2) practices of the present. In this decade, innovative and experimental forms of expression came out, and “contemporary Irish society has undergone radical shifts since the 1990s ... before being hit and transformed again by the global economic crisis” (Etienne & Dubost, 2017, p. 1). The sense of social and political crisis and the changing nature of aesthetics created a new kind of desire in the field of drama, erasing the importance of nationalism in the works of art and opening the way to the postmodern techniques of the contemporary period in order to be more and more inquisitive. One of these techniques appears to be the re-utilisation of the grotesque as an interdisciplinary art technique and dramatic concept. It is a term originally used in art and architecture history and theory. Originally, the grotesque derived from the Italian word *grotto*, which means cave, after the discovery of some ancient cave paintings in Ancient Rome. These paintings and ornamental designs on the walls of the caves included mixtures of human and animal creatures, and they had no resemblance to the art and architecture of the contemporary time. They were against the notion of art and architecture of the period, which respected mainly order and regularity. After these ornamental designs were unearthed, other countries other than Italy adopted the term grotesque with the type of art it created. Therefore, “the first instance of such usage in

the German language refers to the monstrous fusion of human and nonhuman elements as the most typical feature of the grotesque style” (Kayser, 1963, p. 24). Although it is difficult to make a precise definition of it, the grotesque generally means ‘peculiar, odd, bizarre, macabre, depraved, and degenerate’. Today, it is used “as an adjective to describe anything that is ugly, distorted, weird, or hideous” (Genca, 2018, p. 121). However, it is important to note that apart from just being “bizarre but extremely engaging”, the grotesque has to be interpreted as what it does to the viewer. Its main aim is explained as “leaving the beholder puzzled” (Pilny, 2016, p. 1). The grotesque is difficult to define, because anything against the norm in a period or culture can be attributed as the grotesque. Its main function has already been to take a stand against established, accepted norms of the culture, in which it was born. In other words, the grotesque is best interpreted within the specific historical and cultural context, in which it is situated, because its meaning totally depends on the society in which it is located. The meaning of the grotesque is shaped by the norms of that society. Therefore, one should acknowledge that the grotesque has been in a state of flux up until now, in other words, it is in a state of change.

What the grotesque does is to turn the familiar and normal into alien and unexpected, intermingling the entities that normally have to be apart. That is what makes the grotesque controversial. Its use of alienation, provocation, ugliness, distortion, weirdness or hideousness has a purpose, which is to confound the norms and “to pull us beyond the boundaries of the world we know” (Connelly, 2012, p. 1). It is “in direct opposition to the norm, it is more like a catalyst, opening the boundaries of two disparate entities” (p. 8). Accordingly, Pilny (2016) states the grotesque “challenges accepted norms” (p. 5). That is the reason for its interpretation as being offensive, aggressive and dangerous, and “it may cause destruction” for those who are exposed to it (p. 5). Indeed, the grotesque is puzzling. As a result, the responsibility to make sense of it depends on the beholder, in that the grotesque “opens a room to play” where meaning is created by the beholder” (p. 3), which indicates that the grotesque in contemporary Irish drama comes into existence by active engagement of the audience. To elaborate, in the association of the disparate realities, there occurs a junction point, which is coined as ‘contested space’ by Frances S. Connelly (2012), where the grotesque creates its own meaning. Consequently, the audience becomes the one and only who has to make the connections of those *disparate entities*, and form

the meaning out of them. What the audience has to do is “rework the frame of his perceptions and the dynamism of his effects” (p. 5). The grotesque “springs from its maker’s free imagination” (Connelly, 2012, p. 152). This causes ambiguity and conflict, which supports the distinctive features of the grotesque because the audience is required to get a closer look at the established realities and come up with new perceptions. For that reason, although the grotesque “courts with ambiguity and flux, it is remarkably consistent in its operations” (p. 14).

Within the above context, the grotesque is one of these postmodern tools that the Irish playwrights make use of. When its function in society is taken into consideration, the grotesque becomes a prominent form suitable for the changing nature of aesthetics in the Irish theatre after the sense of social and political changes on the island mentioned earlier. Therefore, contemporary Irish playwrights have dealt with new forms and contents with an influence from worldwide postmodern thinking and politics. On the basis of postmodernism as a main stream movement in literature, contemporary Irish playwrights rest against the grotesque in their works. Marina Carr is one of them. She is an exceptional playwright on the Irish drama stages, and is described “as the most visionary playwright of her generation ... marked by huge creativity, restless courage and epic ambition” (Leeney, 2006, p. 509). As Bourke (2003) mentions, “At the beginning of the twenty- first century, Carr ’s reputation has gained an international dimension, with many productions of the plays in Europe and the US” (p. xix). Carr’s presence as a prominent playwright is important because “the governing of gender, sexuality and the female body, in particular, as encoded by both the Catholic Church and the Irish Constitution, has had a huge impact on woman’s status and rights in the twentieth century ...” (Sihra, 2007, p.1).

In the shade of these social pressures and constraints built up over the years, Carr achieved worldwide success with her innovative plays. Her witty playfulness with the form, content and language of the plays makes her resist the shadows, burdens and impossibilities of the world around her. Although “women have been marginalized from Irish theatre history and practice” (Sihra, 2007, p. 12), Carr finds a proper place for her success. In her plays, a new Irish woman emerges who subverts the conventional role of the woman as an ideal mother or wife and creates a liminal world to freely perform her new role. In this respect, the grotesque form becomes an essential tool for Carr as Carr’s use of the grotesque ruptures the coded conventions and norms.

It is the grotesque that gives a chance to Carr in order to immerse the audience into the performance causing their perception to change. She opens a path for the audience to be challenged by the limits of art, in which they face with the unknown and are rejected in an alarming way. When exposed to her plays, the audience is forced to question and challenge their viewpoint and the realities in which they are immersed. Carr creates gaps and liminal world for the audience in the course of the plays. This is a kind of gap, which renders the audience bridge and complete (Connelly, 2012, p. 12). She becomes the “manipulative creator of the plays” (Pilny, 2016, p. 17).

The choice of *The Mai* and *By the Bog of Cats...* aims at articulating how Carr improves the form, content and language of her plays with the grotesque components. The grotesque theory of Geoffrey Galt Harpham is important for interpreting the transformation and metamorphosis of *The Mai*, who eludes her motherly roles imposed by the society in the course of the play. She is the entrapped character in a love and addiction to nowhere. However, she shows enough courage to challenge the position in which she is locked by means of killing herself at the end of both acts. The audience expects *The Mai*’s narrative to be silenced in the second act, but she appears on the stage in her own grotesque way. She subverts the accepted narrative in this manner, which indicates Harpham’s theory of formation, deformation and reformation process of the previous data by the grotesque. Additionally, resurrection of *The Mai* demonstrates her position against the abjection of her identity and body by the society surrounding her. Herein, Julia Kristeva’s abjection theory becomes essential in understanding how Carr’s strategies operate in *The Mai* with the contribution of the grotesque theory because the processes of the abjection are similar to that of the grotesque’s, which indicates the process of the subverting former data and generating distinct meanings based on new point of views. With two suicides, *The Mai* resists the prevailing roles in her relationship.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the grotesque enables us to interpret how Carr presents the theme of death, rebirth and fertility by means of the lead character Hester Swane. *By the Bog of Cats...* is a reconstructed and reconsidered version of *Medea* by Euripides. Carr shifts the focus of the myth and reconstructs it with a different perspective. Besides, she provides the audience with the idea of world upside down on the basis of carnivalesque atmosphere through the use of some specific grotesque characters such as the Ghost of Fancier, the Ghost of Joseph Swane, Catwoman and

Father Willow. Unlike Medea, Hester is presented more freedom, and the bog becomes her elbowroom. She is not willing to release her lover Carthage and her daughter Josie. She does not want to leave the bog either which is deeply attached to. In this sense, Hester is the image of anger and violence to rupture traditionally imposed female roles as mother and wife. With the use of the bog as the landscape, the dualities generated by distinct realities, puzzlement of the audience and foreshadowing technique, the play becomes highly grotesque and carnivalesque, generating a deliberate travesty of social order. Consequently, building on the theory of the grotesque, both *The Mai* and *By the Bog of Cats*... demonstrate the motivation of Marina Carr as a contemporary dramatic innovator within the possibilities of a postmodern world.



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