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MARINA CARR'S HAUNTINGS: LIMINALITY AND THE
ADDICTIVE SOCIETY ON AND OFF THE STAGE

by

Hillary Jarvis Campos

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

Department of English

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

MARINA CARR'S HAUNTINGS: LIMINALITY AND THE ADDICTIVE SOCIETY ON AND OFF THE STAGE

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Department of English

Master of Arts in English

This thesis is an examination of the trapped lives of Marina Carr's female protagonists and their relevance to contemporary Irish women. In her six plays from *The Mai* to *Woman and Scarecrow*, each of Carr's female protagonists is trapped either in a liminal state, defined by Victor Turner as a phase in a rites of passage process, or in a patriarchal addictive society, defined by Anne Wilson Schaef as a society in which the power is maintained and perpetuated by white males with the help of all members of society including women.

Portia (*Portia Coughlan*), Hester (*By the Bog of Cats*), and Sorrel (*On Raftery's Hill*) are trapped in a liminal state. As liminal characters, each of these women has the ability to discern the destructive nature of the addictive society around them and must therefore decide either to integrate into that society or remain in a liminal state. Since neither option is appealing, Portia and Hester choose to commit suicide rather than to

submit themselves either to continual liminality or to the addictive society. Sorrel, however, chooses liminality, and her life attests to the stagnation accompanying such a choice.

The Mai (*The Mai*), Elaine (*Ariel*), Frances (*Ariel*), and Woman (*Woman and Scarecrow*) choose to integrate into the addictive society. In so doing, they surrender their personal power and submit to the typical feminine roles and addictions of their society. Ultimately their submission to the addictive society leads each of these characters to a destructive end: The Mai commits suicide, Frances dies by Elaine's hand, and Woman lives a stagnant life and dies unfulfilled.

Although Carr's protagonists are fictional, the liminal and addictive states that Carr's women experience mirror the situations that Irish women have encountered and continue to encounter today. Like their fictional counterparts, Irish women are frequently faced with either a liminal position outside of society or traditional women's roles within an addictive society—both of which are destructive options as Carr's protagonists demonstrate through their own lives and deaths. Although Carr's protagonists do not appear to offer any solutions to these problems, her plays do meaningfully illuminate and name these problems that Irish women face.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	
MARINA CARR: COMPLICATED, CONFRONTATIONAL, AND DISTURBING	1
CHAPTER 2	
LIMINALITY AND THE ADDICTIVE SOCIETY	12
CHAPTER 3	
MARINA CARR'S TRILOGY	21
CHAPTER 4	
<i>ON RAFTERY'S HILL, ARIEL, AND WOMAN AND SCARECROW</i>	41
CHAPTER 5	
THE DISCOVERY OF MUTUAL MIRRORING	51

CHAPTER 1

MARINA CARR: COMPLICATED, CONFRONTATIONAL, AND DISTURBING

“Complicated, confrontational and disturbing” (Jordan 243)—Eamonn Jordan could not have chosen three more appropriate words to describe Irish playwright Marina Carr’s works. Replete with violence, incest, ghosts, myths, and death, Carr creates a contemporary Ireland that is difficult but necessary to digest. For within the bleak realms that dominate Carr’s plays lurk truths about Ireland and its people, truths which will be discussed in the course of this thesis.

Marina Carr’s career is split into two distinct phases. The first phase began when Carr was still a student at University College, Dublin (UCD). While finishing her undergraduate degree in English and philosophy and starting her master’s degree focusing on Samuel Beckett, she completed four absurdist plays—*Ullaloo* (1987), *Low in the Dark* (1989), *The Deer’s Surrender* (1990), and *This Love Thing* (1991)—all receiving mixed reviews. Although undoubtedly crucial in helping Carr develop her own voice and enter the world of playwriting, these four early plays have been mostly overlooked by critics and scholars. In fact, three of the four plays—*Ullaloo*, *The Deer’s Surrender*, and *This Love Thing*—are not even in print, naturally pushing the scholarly focus and attention towards the second phase of her career, the focus of my argument as well.

The second and more successful phase of Carr’s career began with the 1994 debut of *The Mai*. Leaving absurdism and Beckett behind, *The Mai* introduced realism and Carr’s striking, new, individual style to the stage. Frequently described as rich, lyrical, and tragic, Carr’s new style also incorporated a distinct Midlands flavor—both in setting and accent—a result of her own adolescent years in Pallas Lake. The setting acts almost

like a character itself; as Carr says, “I’ve always thought that landscape was another character in the work, and if you can get it right, it’ll resonate and enrich the overall piece” (“Interview with Marina Carr”). And the accent is part of what makes Carr’s plays so lyrical and poetic. Carr gives a “slight flavour” of the Midlands accent in the written text, but she admits that the accent “is a lot flatter and rougher and more guttural than the written word allows” (*By the Bog of Cats* Introduction). With its Midlands setting and accent, *The Mai* was an immediate success and was followed by several other Midlands plays: *Portia Coughlan* (1996), *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), *On Raftery’s Hill* (2000), and *Ariel* (2002). Her most recent work, *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006), strays away from the Midlands scenery but retains Carr’s lyric style.

Carr’s first three Midlands plays—*The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, and *By the Bog of Cats*—form a trilogy bound by similarities between the protagonists and the storylines. Each of the protagonists—The Mai, the title character of *The Mai*, Portia Coughlan, the title character of *Portia Coughlan*, and Hester Swane, the leading character of *By the Bog of Cats*—longs for a male counterpart to complete her. The Mai longs for the return of her husband, Robert; although he returns at the beginning of the play after a five-year absence, he soon abandons The Mai again for another woman, leaving her waiting and longing. Portia is married to Raphael, a loyal and loving husband. But unsatisfied with her role as a wife and mother, she longs to be with her dead twin brother Gabriel. And Hester longs for her lover Carthage, who has left Hester and their daughter Josie for his new bride Caroline.

The Mai, Portia, and Hester are also trapped in similar, vicious cycles; they each inherit and perpetuate dysfunction in their families. *The Mai* depicts four generations of

women, from The Mai's Grandma Fraochlan to The Mai's daughter Millie, and mentions a fifth generation, The Mai's great grandmother The Duchess, all of whom have been abandoned or betrayed by men just as The Mai is. Portia comes from a bickering, incestuous, "tinker" (itinerant) family; her relationship with her husband and her brother contain aspects of her tainted family life. Hester is constantly waiting for the return of her mother, who left Hester when she was just a child. And at the end of the play, Hester is faced with a similar decision to leave her daughter and perpetuate the vicious cycle.

Finally, The Mai, Portia, and Hester are connected because eventually they all commit suicide. The Mai believes that she cannot live without Robert; consequently, she drowns herself. Portia, weary of the world and her roles as a wife and mother, drowns herself and joins her brother. Hester decides to commit suicide after she realizes that she cannot win Carthage back, but she does not want to leave her daughter Josie behind the way her mother left her. So she kills Josie and herself with a fishing knife. Collectively, *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, and *By the Bog of Cats* introduce the recurring themes in Carr's works: generational curses, familial conflict, and on-stage deaths.

The next Midlands play, *On Raftery's Hill*, is the story of Sorrel Raftery, a young, innocent, and naïve girl, who lives on Raftery's Hill with her family. Sorrel is engaged to Dara Mood and plans to live a perfect life as his wife. But Sorrel's plans are destroyed when her father, Red, rapes her at the end of the first act. With one vicious action, he destroys her innocence and opens her eyes to the Raftery realities: Red is a brutal, incestuous monster, and Dinah, Sorrel's sister, is also her mother. In the end, Sorrel decides not to marry Dara, and, unlike her predecessors, she also decides not to commit

suicide. Because Sorrel is Carr's first and only protagonist still living at the end of the play, she retains a rare and telling position in the gamut of Carr's works.

The final Midlands play, *Ariel*, is the story of Fermoy Fitzgerald. Fermoy is a power-hungry politician, who makes a pact with God to sacrifice his daughter Ariel in exchange for political success. He does so on the night of Ariel's sixteenth birthday when he drowns Ariel and immediately gains the political power he has been seeking. Eventually, his wife, Frances, discovers the truth about Ariel's death and, in an act of revenge, kills her husband. The play ends with one more death: Elaine, Fermoy and Frances' other daughter, murders her mother for killing her father. *Ariel* is unique among Carr's plays because of its religious focus and male protagonist, but it still shares many thematic similarities to Carr's other works.

Carr's most recent work, *Woman and Scarecrow*, is the deathbed story of Woman and her alter-ego or subconscious Scarecrow. The entire play takes place in Woman's room where Woman lies sick and talks with Scarecrow, Him (her husband), and Auntie Ah (her aunt), while Death waits and watches from the wardrobe. What Woman reveals through her many conversations is that she has only lived a half-life; hiding behind her loveless marriage and eight children, she has marginalized Scarecrow and thereby missed out on many opportunities. The play ends when Scarecrow transforms into Death and takes Woman's life, a sign that Woman's death is ultimately caused by her own inactivity in life.

Through the many characters and plotlines from *The Mai* to *Woman and Scarecrow*, Carr retains her lyrical style and sense of realism. Ironically, however, the realism that began with these plays, Midlands accent and setting aside, does not seem to

coincide with Carr's own experiences. In fact, Marina Carr and her female characters have little in common. On one hand, Marina Carr is a successful playwright. Only 43 and the author of ten plays, Carr has an astounding list of accomplishments. She is the first living woman playwright to have a play performed on the main stage of the Abbey; she has been Ansbacher Writer-in-Association at the Abbey Theatre (1995-1996) and Writer in Residence at Trinity College, Dublin (1998-1999) and Dublin City University (1999-2000); she is a member of Aosdana, a prestigious association for distinguished artists; and she has received numerous awards for her plays, including the E.M. Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Apparently happy with her home life as well—both as a wife and a mother of two—Marina Carr seems to be a symbol for the progress and capacity of contemporary Irish women. As she said herself, “There's been nothing tragic in my life” (“Marina Carr” 152).

On the other hand, Carr's female characters are disastrous and destructive. Capable and bold as they are, they seem unable to overcome or escape their circumstances resulting in chaos and carnage, both for themselves and for those around them. The Mai drowns herself, leaving behind a family of equally self-destructive women; Portia Coughlan, after fifteen years of mourning her twin brother's death, follows him into the Belmont River to her own death; and Hester Swane, abandoned by her mother, kills her own brother, then turns the knife on herself and her daughter. Of Carr's last six plays from *The Mai* to *Woman and Scarecrow*, in fact, five of the six protagonists die, often taking several other characters to the grave with them.

Given the frequent on-stage deaths and the vast difference between Carr's fictional world and her personal life, Carr's works could easily be labeled as gratuitously

violent and as submissive to patriarchy. Like Clare Wallace states, “If the plays are regarded in terms of their capacity to represent contemporary women’s voices they prove somewhat frustrating [...] Carr’s heroines seem to abdicate from a confrontation with patriarchy, or if they do engage they, disappointingly, throw in the towel by committing suicide” (87). While on the surface there may be some truth to these assertions, on the whole, they are simplistic. How then does one explain the curious contradictions between Carr’s life and works?

Another contemporary playwright Frank McGuinness gives a partial answer: “Marina Carr is a writer haunted by memories she could not possibly possess, but they seem determined to possess her” (“Masks” 78). Like McGuinness describes here, Carr’s day-to-day life does not play a part in her works. Rather, the overt violence and female oppression in her plays is proof of the memories that haunt and possess Carr—memories not of her own making. What McGuinness does not explain, however, is what exactly those memories are and what they mean.

Irish theatre scholars continue to debate the origin and meaning of Carr’s haunted memories. Melissa Sihra, one prominent Carr scholar, argues that Carr’s haunted memories stem from Irish women’s limitations historically and culturally. Sihra’s dissertation and many of her subsequent articles have focused on how Carr’s representations of landscape, language, and myth reflect these limiting ideologies for women. Sihra’s most recent article discussing Carr’s hauntings, “The House of Woman and the Plays of Marina Carr,” follows in this same vein by showing how Carr’s plays emphasize the limiting nature of the “house” or the woman’s sphere. After laying a foundation for a discussion of womanhood using Carr’s early plays (*Ullaloo*, *This Love*

Thing, and *Low in the Dark*), Sihra shows how Carr's trilogy—*The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, *By the Bog of Cats*—and *On Raftery's Hill* portray women who are oppressed or exiled in the home (traditionally the woman's sphere). Sihra argues that Carr's violation of traditional views of women is necessary. As Sihra states, "In a society where historical processes of female oppression have only begun to be seriously acknowledged in the social, political and academic fora of the last decade or so, painful narratives need to be addressed before transformations can occur" (214).

Perhaps the most comprehensive study of Carr's works to date can be found in the only collection of articles to be published exclusively on the theatre of Marina Carr: *The Theatre of Marina Carr: 'Before Rules Was Made'* co-edited by Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan. In this work, many of the leading Carr scholars come together to discuss the context and implications of Carr's plays, including Anthony Roche and Claudia Harris, who specifically focus on Carr's haunted memories. Anthony Roche, similar to Sihra, argues that Carr's haunting memories reflect the tradition of oppressed women, specifically the depiction of such oppression on the stage. Using J.M. Synge's *The Shadow of the Glen* and Teresa Deevy's *Katie Roche* as backdrops to Carr's *The Mai*, Roche shows women on the stage "poised" throughout history "on the threshold between an inner security never experienced and an outer freedom never fully within reach" (41). Claudia Harris uses the American premiere of *On Raftery's Hill* at an Irish arts festival as the backdrop to her discussion about Carr's haunted memories. Harris comments on the many hauntings in *On Raftery's Hill*, such as taboos and animalism, that make it such a complicated play to digest—especially as a representation of Ireland at an American Irish

arts festival. Ultimately, Harris argues that Carr's hauntings, as dark as they are, are "a crucial component" of Ireland's "cumulative, cultural story" (232).

Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy, a book co-edited by Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton, reveals another frequently discussed source of Carr's hauntings: Greek myths. Marianne McDonald opens the discussion about Greek myths by describing the "power of Greek tragedy" in a variety of contemporary Irish plays (McDonald 80). Eamonn Jordan then focuses the discussion specifically on Marina Carr in his article "Unmasking the Myths? Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*... and *On Raftery's Hill*." In this article, Jordan describes *Medea* and Zeus and Hera's influences on *By the Bog of Cats* and *On Raftery's Hill* respectively. By showing the similarities and differences between the original Greek myths and Carr's adaptations, Jordan highlights the Greek intensity that haunts Carr and "reaffirms the ritualism of theatre" (Jordan 243).

Thorough and credible as they are, what the many analyses of Carr's hauntings lack is a holistic discussion of Carr's works. Scholars have generally focused on one or two plays in their analyses, discussing the hauntings specific to those particular works. What I am proposing to do, however, is a broader and more in-depth study of Carr's haunted memories and how those memories specifically affect women on and off the stage. What has continually haunted Carr in each of her plays, and what do those memories mean for contemporary Irish women?

I believe that Carr's hauntings essentially come down to the liminal spaces between Greek elements and contemporary society, between family and individuality, between the dead and the living, between creation and destruction, and between the past

and the future. Carr's female characters live in liminality; they seem to be constantly trapped in between, in a state Carr describes as "being alive and not being there" ("Marina Carr in Conversation with Melissa Sihra" 60). Connecting those liminal spaces, plowing a path from *The Mai* through *Woman and Scarecrow* can show Carr's achievement and message for contemporary Irish women as "a kind of re-familiarisation with the needs and concerns haunting the Irish female sensibility on its way to a fuller self-recognition" (Kurdi 71). Carr's plays are not about happy endings; they do not show the triumph of women over a patriarchal society the way Wallace would like. But that is not the point. As Carr states and as her plays demonstrate, "It's about the journey, rather than the event itself" ("Marina Carr" 151). And the journey, the liminal—not the beginning or the end—is what makes her plays so daring and different.

In the following chapters, I will explore the idea of liminality as it pertains to Carr's fictional female characters and then to Ireland's contemporary women. In Chapter Two, I will identify two different types of liminality using Victor Turner's definitions in *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. The first type of liminality is an ancient, ritual liminality, the second of three phases in a rites of passage process that helps define and perpetuate societal obligations and rules. The second type of liminality, called "liminoid phenomena" by Turner, is a modern shadow of ritual liminality that is used to critique and change societal rules and standards. Both of these liminalities are present in Carr's work; the ritual liminality affects Carr's fictional women while the "liminoid phenomena" affect Ireland's contemporary women. I will also identify the "addictive society" that Carr's women live in using Anne Wilson Schaefer's definition from *When Society Becomes An Addict*. Schaefer defines an addictive society or system as

a “system that calls forth addictive behaviors” in its members (25); she also identifies several elements that accompany an addictive society such as surrender of personal power, lack of feeling, repeated mistakes, and unfulfilled promises.

In Chapter Three, I will apply Turner’s ancient, ritual definition of liminality and Schaefer’s definition of the addictive system to Carr’s trilogy: *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, and *By the Bog of Cats*. I will show how The Mai, Portia, and Hester are liminal figures poised on the outskirts of society. From their outside vantage point, these three protagonists are able to see the destructive nature of the addictive society that imprisons their neighbors (and sometimes themselves) and robs them of personal power. Although The Mai understands the addictive society’s destructive nature, she is drawn to it. Her suicide is a result of her own addiction to the system. Portia and Hester, on the other hand, understand the effects of the addictive system and consequently do not want to integrate into that system. Their suicides are a result of their trapped state. All three suicides, however, point to the complications that accompany being alive and being there when “there” is an addictive society.

In Chapter Four, I will show how the female protagonists in Carr’s final three works deal with the forces of the addictive society. Instead of committing suicide, Sorrel (*On Raftery’s Hill*), Elaine and Frances (*Ariel*), and Woman (*Woman and Scarecrow*) choose to live, but their lives are incomplete and unfulfilling. Sorrel chooses a liminal life of “being alive and not being there” (“Marina Carr in Conversation” 60); she succumbs to her surroundings instead of fighting against them. Elaine and Frances initially accept the addictive society in their lives, each clinging to her own personal addiction; but when they realize how deficient their lives are, they exact punishment on

others, specifically the people they blame for their addicted lives. Woman cleaves to the addictive society, hiding behind its false promises and mediocrity; she only realizes her mistakes on her deathbed when it is too late to make any changes. Individually, *On Raftery's Hill*, *Ariel*, and *Woman and Scarecrow* each show the detrimental effects of eternal liminality and the addictive society. But analyzing these three plays as a series magnifies the destruction and pain that accompany living without “being there.”

Chapter Five will show how Carr's female protagonists mirror the lives of contemporary Irish women and vice versa. Using Richard Schechner's model for social and aesthetic dramas, I will show how this mutual mirroring illuminates the trapped position that Irish women have faced for centuries and continue to face today. While Carr's works do not offer any solutions to Irish women's trapped conditions, they do clearly name the problems that Irish women face—a naming which Schaefer recognizes as the first essential step in solving the problem. Thus, complicated, confrontational, and disturbing as Carr's works are, holistically they accomplish a necessary goal: “a kind of re-familiarisation with the needs and concerns haunting the Irish female sensibility on its way to a fuller self-recognition” (Kurdi 71).

CHAPTER 2

LIMINALITY AND THE ADDICTIVE SOCIETY

The theater is a natural stage for liminality. With every performance, audience and actors alike suspend reality and enter a sphere in between the real and the pretend—a “heightened realism” as Carr describes it (“Marina Carr in Conversation” 60). But in Carr’s works, liminality—both liminality as commonly used in scholarly circles today and an ancient, lost meaning of liminality—is present before actors even take the stage. Liminality is, in fact, one of the driving forces of Carr’s characters and themes, and, as such, requires definition before it can be applied to Carr’s works.

According to Victor Turner, there are two types of liminality: ritual liminality, a phase in ancient rites of passage processes, and “liminoid phenomena,” a modern shadow of ritual liminality. The first type of liminality, ritual liminality, is the second of three phases in the rites of passage process of “tribal and early agrarian societies” (Turner 53). The first phase of this ritual process is separation: the point at which the subject detaches or separates him/herself from conventional society and his/her previous social structure. Incorporation is the third phase of this process: a welcoming back of the subject to his/her new, stable, advanced position in society. Liminality, the second stage, is an in-between stage: “a sort of social limbo which has few [...] of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states” (Turner 24).

Even though liminality is a slippery, ambiguous state in between two definite positions or phases in society, the liminal stage actually includes many distinct characteristics: “passage of space” or “geographical movement from once place to another” (Turner 25); “physical separation of the ritual subjects from the rest of society” (Turner 26); “close connection with non-social or asocial powers of life and death”

creating a “frequent comparison of the novices with, on the one hand, ghosts, gods, or ancestors, and, on the other, with animals or birds” (Turner 27); liberation from societal and “structural obligations” (Turner 27); weakness, since the subjects “have no rights over others” (Turner 27); and existence in a moment “when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun” (Turner 44).

Ultimately, the goal of the rites of passage process is to induce the novices “to think, and think hard, about cultural experiences they had hitherto taken for granted” (Turner 42). As Turner states, “beneath the surface structure of custom was a deep structure, whose rules [the novices] had to learn” in order to fully appreciate and participate in society (42). Most of this learning occurs in the liminal stage when societal obligations and rules are lifted, leaving the subjects free to explore and experience society from a different point of view. Once the subjects have uncovered the deep structure of society—the motives and meanings behind society—and completed the liminal phase, they rejoin society, wiser and more advanced from their rites of passage process.

The second type of liminality is a shadow of the first type of liminality. Turner calls this type of liminality “liminoid phenomena.” A liminoid stage, like a liminal stage, is an in-between stage or social limbo but without the seriousness and ritual aspects of liminality. Liminoid phenomena are modern and usually manifest themselves in plays, books, films, paintings, or other types of social critique. Like liminal phenomena, liminoid phenomena are meant to make the subjects think about cultural experiences, but instead of uncovering the rules of society, liminoid phenomena expose the injustices of those rules and require the subject to challenge, rethink, and even change those rules.

Although there are many similarities between liminal and liminoid phenomena, Turner identifies five main differences between the two. First, liminal phenomena are ancient rituals, usually occurring in “tribal or early agrarian societies”; liminoid phenomena are modern mimics of liminality mainly occurring in the post-industrial revolution era (Turner 53). Second, “liminal phenomena tend to be collective” and generally occur at “natural disjunctions in the flow of natural and social processes”; liminoid phenomena are generally “continuously generated” “individual products” (Turner 54). Third, liminal phenomena are part of the net social process; liminoid phenomena are created on the margins of society (Turner 54). Fourth, liminal phenomena are “collective representations”; liminoid phenomena are often created by specific schools or individuals who must “compete with one another for general recognition” (Turner 54). And fifth, liminal phenomena are “ultimately eufunctional,” meaning they work towards the greater good in society (Turner 54). Even though the subjects engage in inersive and erratic behavior while in the liminal stage, their return to society in the incorporation stage actually reinforces societal standards and laws. “Liminoid phenomena, on the other hand, are often parts of social critiques or even revolutionary manifestos—books, plays, paintings, films, etc., exposing the injustices, inefficiencies, and immoralities of the mainstream economic and political structures and organizations” (Turner 54-55).

This list of differences between liminoid and liminal phenomena can ultimately be reduced to a matter of play and work, best described by Turner himself: “Optation pervades the liminoid phenomena, obligation the liminal. One is all play and choice, an entertainment, the other is a matter of deep seriousness, even dread, it is demanding,

compulsory” (43). In other words, liminality is a necessary, unavoidable, and sometimes frightening aspect of ancient societies; as part of the rites of passage process, it is a serious obligation that helps maintain order in a community. Liminoid phenomena, however, contain no sense of obligation. Instead, liminoid phenomena are matters of choice and entertainment; they contain serious implications and critiques of society, but ultimately they are playful.

How do these two types of liminality affect my examination of Carr’s works?

Two types of liminality mean two different ways of examining Carr’s works. On one level, Carr’s works are liminoid phenomena or entertainment. Created by an individual and competing for general recognition in a world of other liminoid phenomena, Carr’s works become works of “play”: entertaining (if brutal) social critiques that seek to expose the immoralities of contemporary Irish society. Like the liminal phenomena that liminoid works mimic, Carr’s characters and audiences enter the Midlands—literally and figuratively—in hopes of critiquing and changing contemporary Ireland. Although Carr’s plays contain many liminoid elements and allow for a broad range of social critiques, one of Carr’s main venues for social critique actually stems from the second type of liminality—a ritualistic liminality—in Carr’s works.

The ritualistic liminality in Carr’s works may seem hard to identify given the inherent liminoid nature of her plays. But like Frank McGuinness describes in his program note to *By the Bog of Cats*, Marina Carr “writes in Greek” (“Writing in Greek” 88). Whether her plays are specifically based on Greek stories—like *By the Bog of Cats* is on *Medea* or *Ariel* is on *Iphigenia at Aulis*—or whether her plays are loosely based on ancient rituals or myths—like *On Raftery’s Hill* and the relationship between Zeus and

Hera—Carr’s works resonate with antiquity. And that antiquated resonance also brings with it the ancient elements of rites of passage and specifically the stage of liminality.

The ritual rites of passage process, unlike the liminoid phenomena, exists only in the characters’ world, though the repercussions of this ritual affect Carr’s characters and countrymen alike; in other words, the ritual elements in Carr’s plays in part create the social critique or liminoid elements of Carr’s plays. In the span of Carr’s plays, these ritual elements mainly affect Carr’s protagonists and are one way of explaining and interpreting the pervading violence in Carr’s plays.

In the rites of passage process, Carr’s protagonists—having separated themselves from the “tribe” or town through either physical or emotional means—are proceeding through the liminal stage of their journey. According to Turner’s description of this phase, the violent and erratic behavior of Carr’s protagonists—generally viewed as brutal or extreme—actually makes sense. As subjects in rites of passage, these characters are obligated to assume the inherent characteristics of liminality. Most of the protagonists are physically separated from society; for example, *The Mai*, *Hester*, and the *Rafterys* live outside of town. Many of the protagonists are compared to or associated with “non-social or asocial powers of life and death” (Turner 27); for example, *Portia* communes with her brother *Gabriel*’s ghost and *Hester* converses with the *Ghost Fancier*, her brother’s ghost, and a mystical, animalistic character named *Catwoman*. And most of the protagonists are simultaneously liberated from “structural obligations” and weakened “since they have no rights over others” (Turner 27). For example, *Portia* defies all traditional and societal expectations of a mother; *Hester* attends a wedding dressed as a

bride and destroys her lover's farm and animals, since she cannot control his leaving her; and the Rafterys participate in incestuous behavior.

Anciently, like Turner states, this liminal state was meant to teach the subjects that "beneath the surface structure of custom was a deep structure, whose rules they had to learn," ultimately helping the subjects understand, appreciate, and even more fully integrate into society (42). But the application of this ancient ritual to Carr's fictional contemporary Ireland has almost the opposite effect. Instead of appreciating and understanding their societies, Carr's women are appalled by their societies and resist the roles of wife and mother that the incorporation stage of the rites of passage process encourages them to accept. Ultimately, what each of Carr's women realizes is that their societies are what Anne Wilson Schaeff describes as an "addictive system," and they want no part in it.

Schaeff defines an addictive system as a "system that calls forth addictive behaviors" in its members (25). These addictive behaviors, as Schaeff describes, take control of us, "causing us to do and think things that are inconsistent with our personal values and leading us to become progressively more compulsive and obsessive" (18). In Carr's plays, these addictive behaviors primarily manifest themselves in a patriarchal addictive system which Schaeff defines as a system in which "the power and influence" are maintained and "perpetuated by white males—with the help of all of us" (7). Schaeff describes several defining characteristics of this type of addictive system, the four most prominent of which can be seen in the fictional, though somewhat true to life, contemporary Ireland of Carr's plays. First, an addictive system requires the participants to surrender their "personal power in order to gain a modicum of acceptance" (Schaeff 8).

All of the women in The Mai's family experience this as they each seek social acceptance at the cost of their careers, hopes, and dreams; perhaps her sister Beck best sums it up when she says to The Mai: "You've always been somebody's favourite or somebody's star pupil or somebody's wife, or somebody's mother or somebody's teacher" (Carr, *The Mai* 30). Beck thinks that being somebody's something is what life should be, but what it actually represents is a surrender of personal power in order to gain acceptance.

Second, an addictive system "keeps us unaware of what is going on inside us. We do not have to deal with our anger, pain, depression, confusion, or even our joy and love, because we do not feel them, or we feel them only vaguely" (Schaefer 18). The overflow of emotion that Carr's protagonists—the liminal women—feel only accentuates this lack of feeling amongst the other characters in the addictive system. The relationships between Hester and Carthage or Portia and Raphael attest to this.

Third, an addictive system has a "selective and distorted memory" (Schaefer 71). Essentially, one is doomed to repeat the past in an addictive system because one cannot remember the mistakes he/she made in the past. All of Carr's women attest to this aspect of an addictive system as generation after generation relives the same mistakes over and over again. As Grandma Froachlan from *The Mai* says, "We can't help repeatin' [...] we repeah an' we repeah, th'orchestration may be different but tha tune is allas tha same" (Carr 23).

Fourth, an addictive system thrives on what Schaefer calls the "process of the promise" (100). According to Schaefer, "the promise of the Addictive System is that *it is possible to have everything* we want and need as long as we accept and conform to the system. We grow up believing that any of us can be wealthy, win the lottery, or be

president someday. We keep trusting the system to take care of us” (101). Furthermore, the addictive system promises us that “*things are going to get better*” (Schaeff 101). All of Carr’s women believe in the false promises of the addictive system. For example, Hester believes that someday her mother will return to her. But in reality, as Hester realizes at the end of the play, her mother will never return.

Together these four elements define the patriarchal and limited addictive society roles of wife and mother that Carr’s women face. Although the roles of wife and mother are not inherently damaging, the addictive society transforms these roles into limiting, powerless, subservient, and destructive positions. Based on Schaeff’s description of these roles, completing the rites of passage ritual and returning to such a society is not desirable. And, according to Turner, “many passage rites are irreversible,” meaning that even if Carr’s characters wanted to return to a previous societal state that would not be an option either (25). And so Carr’s women are trapped until the addictive system, sooner or later, kills them. As Schaeff describes, the addictive system ultimately allows for one of three options. “One can (1) choose not to live and (2) choose to die. The result is usually either suicide or eventual death from addiction. [...] One can (1) choose not to die and (2) choose to live. The result would be a system change. [...] Or] one can (1) choose not to die and (2) choose not to live. The result is total adjustment to and acceptance of the Addictive System” (Schaeff 16-17). Ideally, of course, one would choose to live and change the addictive system. But changing the addictive system is not that simple, and so Carr’s women usually take one of the other two routes.

My next two chapters will be an exploration of these trapped women—their liminal states and the addictive society around them—and which of these routes they

ultimately choose. Chapter Three will explore the liminality of The Mai from *The Mai*, Portia Coughlan from *Portia Coughlan*, and Hester Swane from *By the Bog of Cats*—the protagonists of Carr’s trilogy—who decide to end their liminal state by committing suicide. Chapter Four will explore the liminality of Sorrel from *On Raftery’s Hill*, Frances and Elaine from *Ariel*, and Woman from *Woman and Scarecrow* who choose other, perhaps less desirable, options than suicide. But ultimately, no matter what choice Carr’s women make in the end, their liminal lives all continue to point towards one liminoid social critique and one of Carr’s goals in writing her plays: “a kind of refamiliarisation with the needs and concerns haunting the Irish female sensibility on its way to a fuller self-recognition” (Kurdi 71).

CHAPTER 3

MARINA CARR'S TRILOGY

"I'm trapped" (Carr, *The Mai* 54). The Mai's words resonate throughout Marina Carr's trilogy as The Mai, Portia, and Hester each face the truth about their liminal situations. Caught on the outskirts of society, these women face the decision to complete their rites of passage and integrate into an addictive society or to dwell in a state of eternal liminality, though neither choice seems very appealing. The Mai, Portia, and Hester are distinctly different women. But in the end, as they "think, and think hard, about cultural experiences they had hitherto taken for granted" (Turner 42), they understand that they do not want to be part of the addictive society. And eventually, they all come to the same conclusion as a way to end their trapped existence: suicide.

The Mai, roughly based on Sophocles' *Electra*, is the story of The Mai—her relationship with and abandonment by her husband Robert and the consequences of his absence in The Mai's life. Although the play primarily revolves around The Mai's life with and without Robert, the play also weaves into the storyline the lives of three other generations of women, stretching from The Mai's Grandma Fraochlan to The Mai's daughter Millie, all of whom are trapped in their circumstances, unable to escape.

The Mai is the only one of Carr's plays to be set in the past. The action of the play occurs in the years 1979 and 1980 with Millie, the narrator, straddling both the past action and her present narration. The play begins with Robert's homecoming after a five-year absence, during which time The Mai has done nothing but wait for Robert's return; the best example of this waiting is the house she built for him at Owl Lake. With his return, The Mai believes that she can finally be happy. But her happiness is thwarted when in less than a year Robert finds a mistress and forgets about The Mai. This second

abandonment is more than The Mai is able to stand, and consequently, she drowns herself in Owl Lake.

As the first play in the trilogy and as the only play set in the past, *The Mai* serves a unique purpose: it defines, through The Mai's rites of passage experiences, the addictive society that Millie, Portia (*Portia Coughlan*), and Hester (*By the Bog of Cats*) fight against. *The Mai* actually shows two rites of passage sequences for The Mai. The first occurs when Robert leaves The Mai the first time. With his separation, The Mai is thrown into a liminal state. She is physically separated from Robert. She is physically separated from society and considered an outsider when she builds her house at Owl Lake. She is constantly living in a moment when "the past is momentarily negated [...] and the future has not yet begun" since she is always waiting for Robert to come home (Turner 44). And she is connected with mythical and ghostly powers through Owl Lake, which is haunted by the Irish legend of Coillte and Blath. The mythical connection with the legend of Coillte and Blath is especially revealing about The Mai's life since that tale is one of lovers mirroring her own relationship with Robert. Blath, like Robert, leaves Coillte and promises to return again in the spring. Coillte, like The Mai, searches for Blath, and when she finds him, he will not speak to, look at, or touch Coillte. In the end, Coillte disappears in a lake of her own tears, just like The Mai who commits suicide because Robert abandons her.

When Robert returns to The Mai and she reintegrates into society, The Mai chooses to support the addictive system. The Mai seems to confess that she has bought into the system—that she has re-integrated into an addictive system and given her power to Robert (a white male)—when she describes her feelings about Robert's return to

Grandma Fraochlan: “You don’t realize how awful it’s been these last few years, and now I have the chance of being happy again and I can’t bear anyone to say anything that’ll take that away” (Carr, *The Mai* 18). The Mai honestly believes that her only chance of living happily is with Robert, and because she has accepted the addictive system in her life, she cannot see that, as Grandma Fraochlan says, she is “strong” (Carr 18).

In relinquishing her personal power, The Mai also adopts all of the other aspects of the addictive system in her life. She is “unaware of what is going on inside” of her (Schaefer 18). Although all of her relatives warn her that Robert’s return is temporary, she ignores any negative or analytical comments about Robert and her relationship with him and clings to the idea that “He’s my husband and he’s back and I love him” (Carr, *The Mai* 31). She is doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. As Grandma Fraochlan tells her, “Ya’re th’image a Ellen [The Mai’s mother], God rest her”—perhaps a compliment to The Mai, but ultimately an indication that The Mai, like the generations before her, is doomed to flounder in the addictive society (Carr 18). And she believes in the “process of the promise” —essentially the idea that “*it is possible to have everything we want and need as long as we accept and conform to the [addictive] system*” (Schaefer 100-101).

Although Grandma Fraochlan tries to show The Mai that she is strong, she is in part responsible for The Mai’s belief in the addictive system’s process of the promise. As The Mai describes, “She [Grandma Fraochlan] filled us with hope—too much hope maybe—in things to come. And her stories made us long for something extraordinary to happen in our lives. I wanted my life to be huge and heroic and pure as in the days of yore. I wanted to march through the world up and up, my prince at my side, and together we’d

leave our mark on it” (Carr 55). Like The Mai states here, Grandma Fraochlan encouraged The Mai and her sisters to believe in princes and fairy tale endings. And because The Mai embraces these ideas and surrenders her personal power, she believes that she can only be happy with Robert.

One year later when Robert leaves the Mai again, she once again finds herself in a liminal state. She is still haunted by Owl Lake, still separated as an outsider, re-separated from Robert, and still waiting for his return. But this time in her liminal state, she is able to see the addictive society for what it truly is. She realizes that she has given up all of her power, and the addictive society has left her broken, just like it left her mother. And yet, even in her moment of realization, she is still trapped in that addictive society, which she confesses in a conversation with Connie.

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 54)

The Mai knows, after years of waiting for Robert and hoping for a better life, that her better life will never come. But she cannot move on and “be all right” either (Carr, *The Mai* 54). She is too invested in the addictive system and its lies to escape; like she tells Connie, she is “trapped” (Carr, *The Mai* 54). Perhaps Carr describes this aspect of her character The Mai best: “Even when [The Mai is] fighting [Robert] she wants him, which is the whole point of the play. She doesn’t leave him. She can’t. In every other way

she's independent, successful. She's created this life. She's built this beautiful house. But she's done it all for him. If it weren't for him, she'd be fine, but she believes in princes" ("Marina Carr" 151).

The final moments of the play and The Mai's final moments of life only accentuate The Mai's trapped life. In a conversation with her daughter Millie, she reveals exactly how immersed in the addictive society she is.

THE MAI: I don't think anyone will ever understand, not you, not my family, not even Robert, no one will ever understand how completely and utterly Robert is mine and I am his, no one—People think I've no pride, no dignity, to stay in a situation like this, but I can't think of one reason for going on without him.

MILLIE: Mom, you've never tried.

THE MAI: I don't want to. (Carr 72)

Because The Mai does not even want to try living without Robert, she succumbs to the addictive society. And because, as Schaefer says, "Addictions of any type *do* kill, sooner or later" (Schaefer 16), The Mai commits suicide. Essentially her death is a "death from addiction" (Schaefer 16).

The Mai not only shows the perpetuation of the addictive system through The Mai's life and death but also through the three generations of women that precede The Mai. The Mai's great grandma, The Duchess, was abandoned by her husband and spent her days waiting for his return, an abandonment that affected both The Duchess and Grandma Fraochlan just as Robert's abandonment affected The Mai and her children. As Grandma Fraochlan describes, I "watched an tha cliffs ever'day for tha Sultan a Spain

[Grandma Fraochlan's father]. An' ah th'end a every summer tha Sultan would noh've arrived an' ah th'end a every summer Tha Duchess'd say, ih musta bin next summer he meant" (Carr, *The Mai* 59-60). When Grandma Fraochlan married, her life also revolved around her husband. She put "all her energy" into her husband, and when he died, "she was so unhappy" (Carr, *The Mai* 39-40). As Julie (The Mai's aunt) describes Grandma Fraochlan, "She couldn't live without the nine-fingered fisherman [her husband]" (Carr, *The Mai* 40). Grandma Fraochlan's daughter and The Mai's mother, Ellen, also suffered under the pressure of the addictive system. When Ellen got pregnant, Grandma Fraochlan made Ellen get married; and (Ellen's sister) Julie's description of Ellen's husband is less than complimentary: "He married her and then left her on Fraochlan to rot. Came home every summer, left her with another pregnancy" (Carr, *The Mai* 40). After years of abandonment, pregnancies, and lost dreams, Ellen died: "her spirit was broken" by the addictive society she lived in (Carr, *The Mai* 40). Unsurprisingly, The Mai succumbed to and died from the addictive system as well.

While The Mai and her predecessors perpetuate the addictive system through their lives, Millie, like Portia and Hester, recognizes the danger of an addictive society and tries to escape it and find "something for [herself] that [doesn't] stink of Owl Lake" (Carr, *The Mai* 56). As Carr describes, "[Millie's] the first one of them that's beginning to put the pieces together. Not in any kind of complete way, but she's beginning to ask questions that the other women in the family accepted or took for granted. I'm not saying she's right, but she's beginning to ask" ("Marina Carr" 149). Because, as Carr explains, Millie is beginning to ask questions and put the pieces together, she is able to begin distancing herself from the addictive system like Portia and Hester. Thus, Millie is a

liminal figure like Portia and Hester; she “teeter[s] along the fringe of the world with halting gait, reeking of Owl Lake at every turn” –a liminality which she most clearly represents through her participation in the past action of the play and her present narration (Carr, *The Mai* 70).

The Mai is not Millie’s story and does not give many details of her liminal life or how her story ends. But the play indicates that her future is far from bright. She is constantly fighting her past; as she describes, “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” (Carr, *The Mai* 70-71). For Millie, life is an endless struggle against the legacy of Owl Lake. And even though her son Joseph “has never been to Owl Lake,” he is inheriting that legacy too (Carr, *The Mai* 56). He is already growing up without a father just as Millie did, he “expects far too little of [Millie],” and he does not know that his father is a married man who will not acknowledge Joseph as his son (Carr, *The Mai* 56). His future is already tainted; like the generations before him, his life will be an endless struggle against the past and against the addictive society.

Though Carr may not show how Millie and Joseph’s lives end, Portia and Hester’s lives end in suicide, though not the suicide of addiction that kills *The Mai*. Portia and Hester’s suicides, rather, show their aversion to moving beyond liminality and living in an addictive society.

Portia Coughlan is the story of Portia’s haunted half-life. Married to Raphael, a man she does not love, and perpetually haunted by Gabriel, the ghost of her twin brother, Portia skulks through Belmont Valley “like a savage in the woods” (“Marina Carr” 152).

She defies all traditional feminine roles: she repeatedly cheats on Raphael; she cannot love her children and frequently leaves them with either her husband or her friends; and she does not run her household or clean her house like a typical wife. The play begins on Portia's thirtieth birthday. The action of the play occurs over the course of two days and shows Portia defying her wifedom and motherhood with every thought, word, and action. And when she is not defying her feminine roles, her thoughts are focused on her dead brother and their complicated relationship.

From the beginning of the play, Portia is in a liminal state. She is closely connected with ghosts through her relationship with her dead brother Gabriel; she hears him singing and talks to him. And they even "mirror one another's posture and movements in an odd way" (Carr, *Portia Coughlan* 11). As she tells Sly, her father, about Gabriel, "He's everywhere, Daddy. Everywhere. There's not a corner of any of your forty fields that don't remind me of Gabriel. His name is in the mouths of the starlin's that swoops over Belmont hill, the cows bellow for him from the barn on frosty winter nights. The very river tells me that once he was here and now he's gone" (Carr, *Portia* 30). Portia is also connected with the mythical world because she is already a ghost of sorts. Not only does she wander around Belmont Valley only half alive, but according to her grandmother, she and Gabriel were born that way. At Portia's funeral, Blaize, Portia's grandmother, makes a toast to her that describes her haunted soul: "To Portia in the murky clay of Belmont graveyard where she was headin' from the day she was born, because when you breed animals with humans you can only bring forth haunted monsters who've no sense of God or man. Portia and Gabriel" (Carr 45).

Portia's most distinctive liminal characteristic is her absence from her social obligations as a mother, wife, and community member. Portia separates herself from her social obligations as a mother in three ways. First, she denounces her role as a mother; as she tells Raphael, "I never wanted sons nor daughters and I never pretended otherwise to ya; told ya from the start" (Carr, *Portia* 37). Second, she confesses her inability to love her children; again in a conversation with Raphael, she states, "I can't love [my sons], Raphael. I'm just not able to" (Carr 37). And finally, Portia openly discusses her negative and harmful thoughts about her children with Raphael: "When I look at me sons, Raphael, I see knives and accidents and terrible mutilations. Their toys is weapons for me to hurt them with, givin' them a bath is a place where I could drown them" (Carr 49). Portia removes herself from her social obligations as a wife by declaring her loathing for Raphael and refusing to accomplish traditional wifely tasks (like cooking and cleaning). As she tells Raphael, "I despise you, Raphael Coughlan, with your limp and your cheap suits and your slow ways" (Carr 38). And when Raphael mentions to Portia that "there's dishes in the kitchen as hasn't seen a drop of water this week nor more," Portia replies with a one-word answer, "So"—a further demonstration of her defiance of wifedom (Carr 11). Portia separates herself from her social obligations as a community member by defying society's rules. She drinks at all hours of the day; in the first scene, Raphael finds Portia "at it already" at ten o'clock in the morning (Carr 11). And she has an "on and off" again relationship with her lover Damus Halion in broad daylight, even though she is married; her adulterous relationship is so public, in fact, that her own father sees her with Damus and tells her to "put a halter on that wayward arse of yours" (Carr 30). All in all, her rejection of societal obligations can best be summed up in one declaration:

“I just want [my children] not to want anythin’ from me” (Carr 50)—a statement which could also be applied to anyone in Portia’s life.

From her liminal state, Portia is able to understand and analyze the addictive society around her in a way that society cannot. As Carr states, “[Portia] can’t get her act together, but she has a sharper intelligence than the rest of them. She has a much finer sensibility than they have, than they’re aware of” (“Marina Carr” 153). Portia hints at this “finer sensibility” herself when she tells her mother, “I read subtext [...] words dropped be accident, phrases covered over, sentences unfinished,” implying that Portia’s detached position from society really does allow her to understand the unspoken laws and motives of society (Carr, *Portia* 27). From this vantage point, Portia is able to distinguish the truths about the addictive society that no one else can see.

The first truth that Portia can see about the addictive system is that the generations of women before her have had to surrender their “personal power in order to gain a modicum of acceptance” (Schaefer 8). When Portia looks at her grandmother Blaize, she sees a brazen old woman; but for “the first eighty years of [her] life,” Blaize was forced to sacrifice her personal power by “holdin’ [her] tongue, fuckin’ and blindin’ into the pillow” (Carr, *Portia* 28). When Portia looks at her mother Marianne, all she sees is a “fierce weak” woman (Carr 17). But Maggie May, Marianne’s sister, explains that “she wasn’t always [that way]. Me and her had great times together, we’d paint the town regular. Between your father and his auld mother they beat everythin’ worth beatin’ out of her” (Carr 17). The result of Marianne’s beating is her submission to the addictive system and the surrendering of her personal power to that system—an action that ultimately transforms Marianne into a “normal woman” who fulfills traditional roles as a

mother and wife (Carr, *Portia* 28). Portia's realization that generations of women before her have had to sacrifice their personal power also leads to a second truth about the addictive system—it has a “selective and distorted memory” and is doomed to repeat itself generation after generation (Schaefer 71).

The third truth that Portia can see about the addictive system is that it “keeps us unaware of what is going on inside us. We do not have to deal with our anger, pain, depression, confusion, or even our joy and love, because we do not feel them, or we feel them only vaguely” (Schaefer 18). Portia depicts this emotionless world when she describes her relationship with Raphael: “These days I look at Raphael sittin’ opposite me in the armchair. He’s always tired, his bad leg up on a stool, addin’ up the books from the factory, lost in himself, and I think the pair of us might as well be dead for all the joy we knock out of one another” (Carr, *Portia* 24). Portia recognizes the lack of feeling in her relationship with her husband, even when he cannot see it himself.

As a liminal figure, Portia is continually battered and pressured to join the addictive system. Her father initially forces her into the addictive society when he compels her to marry Raphael. As Portia tells Maggie May, “I was going to college, had me place and all, but Daddy says no, marry Raphael” (Carr 16). Thus like her mother, The Mai, and the generations of women before them, Portia is obliged to give up her dreams and goals to assume her position in society as a “normal woman” (Carr, *Portia* 28). And Marianne continues to try to force Portia to stay in the addictive society. Marianne's first entrance on-stage exemplifies not only her own participation in the addictive system but also her desire for Portia to do the same: “The state of the place!

Look at it! [...] You'd swear you were never taught how to Hoover a room or dust a mantel; bloody disgrace, that's what ya are" (Carr 26).

On some level, Portia does want to be part of society. She admits as much when she confesses her thoughts and feelings about first seeing Raphael: "I says to meself, if Raphael Coughlan notices me I will have a chance to enter the world an stay in it, which has always been the battle for me" (Carr, *Portia* 69). And even though the majority of the play depicts Portia in a liminal state, the play also depicts moments of Portia's "battle" to stay in the world. In the final scene, for example, Portia tries to be a "normal woman" (Carr, *Portia* 28); as she tells Raphael, "I cooked your dinner, I poured your wine, I bathed Quintin [their son], read him a story and all," all actions that a traditional wife and mother should perform (Carr 67). But because Portia can also see the damage that the addictive society has inflicted on her grandparents, her parents, and herself, she cannot permanently sustain any actions that will lead her further into the confines of the addictive society.

Since Portia has a "sharper intelligence" and realizes that she does not want to be part of the addictive society that surrounds her, she is looking for a way out. But after years of liminality, she has discovered that she has nowhere to go, a truth which she admits to Damus Halion.

DAMUS: Why don't ya leave [Raphael] like ya used to say you'd do?

PORTIA: Used I say I'd leave him?

DAMUS: Aye.

PORTIA: Where did I think I was goin'?' (Carr 53)

Because she does not want to cross the threshold and join the addictive society, Portia realizes that she is trapped. And eventually, Portia's trapped life leads her to one conclusion: suicide. In her mind, death is better than integrating into and supporting the addictive society.

When Portia is found dead, Marianne asks, "What have she [Portia] gone and done?" (Carr, *Portia* 41). But what Marianne doesn't realize is that Portia is not the only culprit in her own death. Rather, Portia was killed by the addictive society, just like her brother. As Portia tells Sly after he accuses her of killing Gabriel (because she was present when Gabriel died): "I didn't kill your precious Gabriel! We all did" (Carr 66). And Portia's death is just the same, a death caused by the collective "we" of the addictive society.

By the Bog of Cats, based on the Greek play *Medea*, is the story of Hester Swane. Abandoned by her mother, Josie Swane, at a young age and later abandoned by her lover, Carthage Kilbride (Jason), Hester (Medea) is left to pick up the pieces of her life with her daughter Josie. All of the action in the play occurs in one day, Carthage's wedding day. Throughout the course of the play, Hester repeatedly tries to win Carthage back, even going so far as to come to his wedding dressed as a bride. When she is unsuccessful, she burns down his house and kills his animals. Abandoned by her lover, hated by the townspeople, and tired of waiting for her mother's return, Hester kills her daughter Josie in an act of compassion. Hester does not want Josie waiting for her to return the way Hester waited for her mom to come back her whole life. Then Hester follows her to the grave.

From before the play even begins, Hester is a liminal figure. She is physically separated from the town because she lives on the bog and comes from tinker blood; as she explains, “I’ve never felt at home” in a house (Carr, *By the Bog of Cats* 14). And she is physically separated from her mother—perhaps the very event that forced her into liminality. She is connected with ghosts and animals in four ways. First, Hester is intimately connected with Black Wing—the black swan whose death opens the play. For the first three nights of Hester’s life, Hester’s mother, Josie, laid Hester in the nest alongside the swan claiming that Hester “will live as long as this black swan, not a day more, not a day less”—a curse which actually comes to fruition during the course of the play (Carr, *By the Bog* 22). Second, Hester talks to and interacts with two ghosts throughout the course of the play: the Ghost Fancier and her brother Joseph. Third, Hester interacts with Catwoman, a mythical half-cat, half-human figure. And fourth, Hester is practically a ghost herself. When Joseph warns Hester about the misery of being a ghost, Hester replies, “Oh I think I know, Joseph, and I this years an apprentice ghost” (Carr 63). Hester also has no rights over others: she cannot win Carthage back, and she cannot bring her mother back. She pays no heed to societal obligations; she burns down Carthage’s home, kills his animals, and comes to his wedding dressed as a bride. And she lives in a moment “when the past is momentarily negated [...] and the future has not yet begun” because she is always waiting for her mother to come home (Turner 44).

Hester’s liminality allows her to sense and understand the addictive society around her in a way that the other characters cannot. As Hester describes in her own words, her tinker blood (or liminality) “gives me an edge over all of yeas around her,

allows me see yeas for the inbred, underbred, bog-brained shower yeas are” (Carr, *By the Bog* 35). Although Hester’s words here are harsh and exaggerated, the meaning behind the words is sound: Hester, like Portia, is able to distinguish the damaging truths of the addictive system in the lives of those around her. First, Hester can see that the women around her, in particular Carthage’s mother Mrs. Kilbride, Hester’s neighbor Monica Murray, and Carthage’s wife Caroline Cassidy, have surrendered their “personal power in order to gain a modicum of acceptance” (Schaef 8). Mrs. Kilbride openly admits her surrender of personal power; she is proud to be a woman who has “always lived be the rules” of the addictive society (Carr, *By the Bog* 55). From the time she was seven, she was acting the part of a normal woman in the addictive society: “I was cookin’ dinners for a houseful of men, I was thinnin’ turnips twelve hour a day, I was birthin’ calves, sowin’ corn, stookin’ hay, ladin’ a bull be his nose” (Carr 24).

Monica Murray expresses a similar surrender of personal power when she explains why she could not defend Hester against the townspeople’s assaults at the wedding. As Monica tells Hester, “I stood up for ya as best I could, I’ve to live round here, Hester. I had to pay me respects to the Cassidys. Sure Xavier and meself used walk to school together” (Carr 64). As Monica explains here, her first obligations are to the town. She is more concerned about keeping her respected position in the addictive society than she is about asserting herself and standing up for Hester—a sign that she has resigned her personal power in exchange for acceptance. Caroline Cassidy shows her surrender of personal power through her weakness. Hester describes that weakness to Caroline: “You’re only a little china bit of a girl. I could break ya aisy as a tay cup or a wine glass. But I won’t [...] No need to break ya, you were broke a long while back”

(Carr 76). Hester's remark to Caroline indicates that, like Mrs. Kilbride and Monica, Caroline is powerless in the addictive community. And ultimately, like Hester tells Monica, their powerlessness will lead them to "die of niceness" (Carr 64). Hester, however, is a direct contrast to these weak women; she stands up for herself to Xavier Cassidy (Carthage's father-in-law), one of the most powerful and wealthy men in the town: "I'm stronger than ya and ya'll take nothin' from me I don't choose to give ya" (Carr 70). And she proves her strength by refusing to submit to social pressures.

Second, Hester realizes that her neighbors are "unaware of what is going on inside" of them (Schaf 18). Hester's neighbors all have dark, secretive pasts, and in an effort to eradicate their repulsive pasts, they block or deny the truth about themselves and their actions; essentially they dull their senses and feelings and replace them with "sugar plum platitudes" (Carr, *By the Bog* 21). Xavier Cassidy exemplifies this blockade of the past by insisting that he did not kill his son. As he tells Hester after she accuses him of murdering his son, "Fabrications! Fabrications of a mind unhinged! My son died in a tragic accident of no wan's makin'. That's what the inquest said. My conscience is clear" (Carr, *By the Bog* 70). Hester, however, sees the truth—both in herself and others. Like she tells Xavier, "I can tell the darkness in you, ya know how? Because it mirrors me own" (Carr, *By the Bog* 70). Although Xavier and the townspeople deny their pasts and their feelings, Hester's liminal state allows her to see the truth.

Finally, Hester experiences the false promises of the addictive system. Because of Carthage's influence, Hester trusts "the [addictive] system to take care of [her]" (Schaf 101); she believes his promises about their relationship and their lives together only to be disappointed in the end. As she tells Carthage, "Ya promised me things! Ya

built that house for me. Ya wanted me to see how normal people lived. And I went along with ya again' me better judgement" (Carr, *By the Bog* 73). She reproaches Carthage for convincing her to assume a "normal" life with unfulfilled promises. But at the same time because she is a liminal figure, she is able to recognize that she allowed herself to believe in the promises. She is partially at fault for succumbing to the addictive society's snares—an experience she does not want to repeat.

Even though she is separated from society as a liminal figure, Hester is being pressured on every side to integrate into the addictive society. In spite of her pleading to be left in her liminal space—"Don't make me lave this place or somethin' terrible'll happen. Don't" (Carr, *By the Bog* 57)—Caroline Cassidy (Carthage's wife), Xavier Cassidy (Carthage's father-in-law), and Carthage all try to force Hester to move into town and live a "normal" life so that they can have her land. Even Hester's neighbor, Monica, tells Hester that she needs "to pull [her]self together" and "put [her] life back together again" (Carr 15). While Hester is being heckled by the Cassidys to live a "normal" life, Mrs. Kilbride tries to force the addictive society on Hester's daughter Josie. As she tells Josie, "I'll break your spirit yet and then glue ya back the way I want ya" (Carr, *By the Bog* 25)—an action of the addictive society that has manifest itself in each of Carr's previous plays.

Although the pressure to integrate into the addictive system is strong, Hester resists because she understands the harmful nature of the addictive system. Twice during the play, she describes the addictive system in its true damaging nature. First, when Monica tells Hester that she needs "to pull [her]self together" and "put [her] life back together again," Hester replies, "Wasn't me a pulled it asunder" (Carr 15). Here Hester

recognizes that her temporary belief in the promises of the addictive system led to her personal ruin. Second, Hester's conversation with Mrs. Kilbride and Xavier at Carthage's wedding reveals both the inability of the townspeople to recognize the destructive nature of the addictive system and the brutality Hester has faced because of the addictive system.

HESTER: Have you ever been discarded, Elsie Kilbride?—the way I've been dis—

MRS. KILBRIDE: No, I've never been discarded, Hester Swane! Ya know why? Because I've never overstepped meself. I've always lived be the rules.

HESTER: Ah rules! What rules are they? Teach them to me and I'll live by them. Yees don't know what it's like, to be flung on the ashpit and you still alive—

XAVIER: No wan's flingin' ya anywhere! We done everythin' proper by you—

HESTER: Proper! Yees have taken everythin' from me. I've done nothin' again' any of yees. I'm just bein' who I am. (Carr 55)

As members of the addictive society, Mrs. Kilbride and Xavier live in a deceptive world. They believe that their treatment of Hester has been “proper” and justified. But in her liminality, Hester recognizes the townspeople's “proper” actions for what they truly are: destructive. Her use of forceful verbs such as “flingin'” and “discarded” testifies to the addictive society's damaging nature in her life.

As the play comes to a close, Hester realizes that she is left with little choice. She does not want to move to town and join the addictive society; however, she has nowhere else to go. So she decides to commit suicide. But just as she is raising the knife to her neck, Josie enters the scene. Hester tries to tell Josie goodbye; she evades Josie's questions and tries to convince Josie to stay with Carthage: "Don't ya want to be with your Daddy and grow up big and lovely and full of advantages they tell me I have not the power to give ya" (Carr 78). But Josie, perhaps already developing the same liminal awareness that Hester has, replies, "Mam, I'd be watchin' for ya all the time 'long the Bog of Cats. I'd be hopin' and waitin' and prayin' for ya to return" (Carr 78). Hester and Josie's statements combined show that Josie is already advancing towards the same trapped position Hester is in. If Josie stays with Carthage, she will be forced to integrate into the addictive system. If Josie stays on the bog, she will spend her life waiting, just like Hester did. Because Hester realizes that Josie is destined to be trapped, just as she has been her whole life, she agrees to bring Josie with her in death. As she tells Josie just before she kills her: "I'll take ya with me, I won't have ya as I was, waitin' a lifetime for somewan to return, because they don't, Josie, they don't" (Carr, *By the Bog* 78). Though brutal, Hester's infanticide is an act of compassion and a means of ending the haunted, liminal states of the women in Hester's family.

Although all of Carr's protagonists share similar characteristics, what makes her trilogy unique is how each protagonist's liminal characteristics and the violence of each protagonist's death become more pronounced with each play, as if to emphasize the increasing prominence of the addictive society in the fictional and real worlds of Ireland. But while death is one way to avoid a destructive society, ultimately it does not help the

situation. The challenge, as Carr describes it, is still “trying to live in the present” (“Marina Carr” 151) without furthering the destruction of the addictive society—a challenge that is approached quite differently, though perhaps equally unsuccessfully, by the protagonists in Carr’s next three plays: *On Raftery’s Hill*, *Ariel*, and *Woman and Scarecrow*.

CHAPTER 4

ON RAFTERY'S HILL, ARIEL, AND WOMAN AND SCARECROW

After examining the addictive society around them, The Mai, Portia, and Hester ultimately choose death rather than a trapped life as part of that society. But the female protagonists in Carr's final three plays, Sorrel, Frances, Elaine, and Woman, choose not to die—at least not by their own hand. However, like Schaefer describes, “choosing not to die is not the same as choosing to live,” a truth which these women demonstrate through their stagnant and unfulfilling lives (16). Living either eternal liminal lives or lives engulfed by the addictive society, Sorrel, Frances, Elaine, and Woman demonstrate the destruction and carnage that accompanies “being alive and not being there” (“Marina Carr in Conversation” 60).

On Raftery's Hill is the story of Red Raftery, his children, Dinah, Sorrel, and Ded, and his mother Shalome. As Shalome says, the Rafterys are “strange creatures” (Carr, *On Raftery's Hill* 36). Red is brutal, a monster in action and word. Dinah is tired of life on the hill. Ded is animal-like and lives in the barn. Shalome is always trying to leave Raftery's Hill but never seems to go anywhere. Sorrel is the most normal of the Rafterys, but throughout the play, even she succumbs to the strangeness—the liminality—of Raftery's Hill.

The Raftery's story takes place in the present on the Raftery's farm. The action occurs in two acts. The first act introduces the audience to the strange, liminal world of Raftery's Hill and ends with Red raping Sorrel. The second act blatantly reveals the monstrosities that the first act only hints at: Sorrel's realization that Dinah is her sister and her mother, Ded's nightmares about Dinah's delivery of Sorrel, Sorrel's refusal to

marry Dara and leave Raftery's Hill, and Red and Dinah's continuing incestuous relationship.

Instead of just one liminal character, *On Raftery's Hill* is the story of a liminal family. The Raftery's home, Raftery Hill, is physically separated from society. The Rafterys are frequently compared with animals; in Act I, Dinah states that the Rafterys are "gorillas in clothes pretendin to be human" (Carr 21), a comparison which Sorrel echoes in Act II, "We're a band a gorillas swingin from the trees" (Carr 41). And to prove their animal nature even more, Ded lives in the shed like an animal. And finally, the Rafterys are separated from societal obligations. As Red states, describing himself in a past life but also exactly describing his current character, "We were big loose monsters [...] hurlin through the air wud carnage in our hearts and blood under our nails, and no stupid laws houldin us down or back or in" (Carr 22). As if to prove how monstrous he is, Red strangles seven baby rabbits, cuts the udders off his cows, and repeatedly engages in incestuous behavior—all signs of his liminality.

Sorrel is the only exception—at least initially—to the Raftery's liminality. Innocent, naïve, and young, Sorrel has a perfect life planned out with her fiancé, Dara Mood: marriage, a safe house with Dara, and eventually purchasing Red's lands so they can "live, brathe, and enjiy" themselves (Carr, *On Raftery's* 24). She believes in the addictive system's promise that "*it is possible to have everything* we want and need as long as we accept and conform to the system" (Schaefer 101). In every aspect of her life, Sorrel embodies Red's definition of what it means to be young: "Manes your slate is clane, manes the muck on your boots stays on your boots and don't sape up to your unploughed soul. Manes ya know fuck all abouh the dirty world, how and why men and

women fall” (Carr, *On Raftery’s* 16). With her clean slate and her wild dreams, Sorrel really is, as Dara says, “way too innocent” (Carr 24).

Ironically enough, Red is the one who teaches Sorrel “about the dirty world” and “how and why men and women fall” when he rapes her (Carr, *On Raftery’s* 16). With one vicious action, Red tears Sorrel from her position as “the wan perfect thing in [the] house” (Carr, *On Raftery’s* 32) and exposes her simultaneously to the Raftery’s liminal life and the rules of the addictive society. In one moment, Sorrel realizes what she “allas knew” (Carr, *On Raftery’s* 27): her sister, Dinah, is also her mother and her father is an incestuous monster. Equally as distressing, Sorrel also realizes that her perfect life with Dara is not so perfect after all. Dara just wants to lock her up “under me own roof, in wan piece, perfect, the way God made ya” (Carr 23); in other words, Dara wants Sorrel to become part of the addictive society that he lives in, meaning that Sorrel is trapped no matter where she turns.

When the perfect world of her youth is replaced by the realities of liminality, Sorrel isn’t brave enough to face them. She contradicts herself, both defending and fighting with Red and Dara throughout the remainder of the play. And ultimately she realizes that she does not have the strength or the gumption to do anything but become one more liminal, stagnant character on Raftery’s Hill. As Sorrel tells Dara, “I don’t know anythin anymore... The world’s gone ouh like a ligh and I can’t see righ abouh anything anymore”—a final exclamation of Sorrel’s defeat (Carr, *On Raftery’s* 39).

While the audience focuses on Sorrel’s fall from innocence into liminality and despair, the defeat that Sorrel experiences is actually an ubiquitous feeling on Raftery’s Hill. Stretching back at least to Sorrel’s grandmother Shalome and possibly beyond, each

of the female Raftery's has fallen from innocence into a similar state of despair and defeat. Shalome falls into a liminal state when she and her son Red engage in incestuous behavior. Although she is constantly trying to leave Raftery's Hill and her past behind, she never actually escapes to Kinneygar (her destination). Her futile attempts to escape liminality for something more are perhaps best represented by her own unanswered question: "Kinneygar, will I ever get back there?" (Carr, *On Raftery's* 33). Dinah's mother, once a "lady" who hosted "musical evenings, card parties" and "dancing", dies of stagnation after Red "put[s] a stop" to her social evenings and traps her in the Raftery liminality (Carr, *On Raftery's* 9). And at the age of twelve, Dinah, once innocent like her sister/daughter Sorrel, is introduced to the Raftery liminality when her mother sends her in to sleep with her father (Carr, *On Raftery's* 40). In her liminality, she and Red engage in incestuous behavior from "time to time"; she claims that they "want ud to stop," but somehow they never do (Carr, *On Raftery's* 41).

What Shalome, Dinah, and Sorrel's lives all point to is the catch-22 of living. In a world where the only choices are the addictive society or eternal liminality, living—being alive and being there—becomes an impossible prospect, which Shalome and Dinah best describe in the following conversation:

SHALOME: All my life I've waited for my life to start. Somehow it never has.

DINAH: I know, I know, Granny. (Carr 11)

Like The Mai, Portia, and Hester, Sorrel joins the host of Carr's women who have nowhere to go. Neither the addictive society nor liminality has anything to offer these women who are waiting for their lives to start, and so they die either by their own hand,

like *The Mai*, *Portia*, and *Hester*, or through stagnation, like *Sorrel*, *Dinah*, *Dinah's* mother, and *Shalome*.

Carr's final Midlands play, *Ariel*, is based on Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*. *Ariel* is the story of rising politician Fermoy Fitzgerald. Obsessed with power and advancing his career, Fermoy makes a pact with God to sacrifice his daughter Ariel in exchange for political success. His sacrifice—drowning Ariel in Cuura Lake—does indeed bring him the success he desires but also eventually causes his own death when his wife, Frances, finds out about his sacrifice of their daughter and murders him for revenge. The play ends with yet another death when Elaine, Fermoy and Frances' other daughter, avenges her father's death by killing her mother.

Ariel takes place in three acts, each of which ends with one of these deaths. The first act takes place in the present on the night of Ariel's sixteenth birthday and ends with an allusion to Ariel's death. The second act takes place ten years later and ends with Fermoy's death. The third act takes place two months after the second act and ends with Frances' death. While the deaths are perhaps the most memorable moments of the play, the play also deals with several major issues and themes: religion, politics, family, power, past, and destiny. It is unique among Carr's later plays for its religious focus and male protagonist.

Because of its unique elements, *Ariel* initially seems like a departure from Carr's previous plays, but on closer examination, *Ariel* actually blends in seamlessly with Carr's other work. Like *On Raftery's Hill*, *Ariel* presents a collection of stagnant characters. But unlike the characters in *On Raftery's Hill*, who are trapped in a liminal state, the characters in *Ariel* are trapped in the addictive society. As a farewell to the Midlands and

as Carr's only play to project into the future, *Ariel* shows the destiny of the Midlands should they stay in their current, addictive course. As such, each character in *Ariel* is deeply entrenched in the Addictive System "actively participating in [...] nonaliveness" through his/her personal addictions (Schaefer 17). Fermoy, Frances, and Elaine in particular demonstrate this "nonaliveness" as they sacrifice their personal power and responsibility over their lives in exchange for an addiction to cling to.

Fermoy is addicted to power. As Frances says to Fermoy after she discovers that he murdered Ariel, "Ya done ud for power, didn't ya, some voodoo swap in the dark for power. You laid my daughter on an altar for power. You've flourished these ten years since Ariel. You've flourished on her white throat. You swapped her to advance" (Carr, *Ariel* 58). Fermoy's response to Frances' accusations is simple: "Yes, I did. Yes, I did. I had to" (Carr 58). In answering this way, Fermoy affirms that he did sacrifice his daughter—"Yes, I did"—and that he blames his addiction for his actions—"I had to." Fermoy can admit his addiction; like he says in his TV interview, "I love power" (Carr 41). But he is unable to escape his addiction and live a fulfilling life.

Frances is addicted to grief. She is constantly mourning her dead first husband and child; she even wears a locket with their pictures in it, a reminder of her sorrow. And Ariel's death only encourages her grief-stricken mind, giving her one more dead body to dwell on. Although Fermoy and Frances' marriage dwindles throughout the play, Fermoy identifies Frances' addiction as the reason they are still together. In a conversation with Frances, he states, "Ya seen a man that could do away wud your children and ya ran towards him, noh away from him. That's whah drew ya the first time and that's what kapes ya swirlin round me. Tombstones, headstones, graveyard

excitement and the promise of funerals to come” (Carr, *Ariel* 59). Elaine echoes Fermoy’s statement about Frances when she says to her, “Sorrow’s an addiction like no other. You won’t be full till you’ve buried us all” (Carr 52). Drowning in sorrow, Frances is unable to escape her addiction to grief.

Elaine is addicted to her father, Fermoy. She grows up to become his assistant and spends so much time with him that Frances remarks, “You and your father, swear ya were married to him” (Carr, *Ariel* 53). After his death, she maniacally defends his honor and his grave against her brother’s and mother’s accusations and insults. When her brother insists that people only came to his funeral to “have a gawk,” Elaine defends her father’s memory in heroic terms: “They cem because they loved him. You never seen Daddy in hees element. You never seen him the way he seen himself, the way he was born to be seen, the way he could work a room, the way he held himself when he spoke, the big mellifluous vice” (Carr 63). Elaine even goes so far as to justify Fermoy’s decision to sacrifice Ariel, claiming it was an act with “the grandeur of God in ud” (Carr 64). In Elaine’s eyes, Fermoy is epic.

As Fermoy, Frances, and Elaine become more and more fixed in their addictions, they increasingly lose a sense of responsibility for their own lives and actions, for like Schaef says, “An addiction absolves us from having to take responsibility for our lives” (19). They begin to blame others for their problems and their actions. Like Frances says to Fermoy when they are discussing his sacrifice of Ariel, “Blem God, blem the world, anywan bar yourself” (Carr, *Ariel* 58). Eventually their continual blame game leads them to take fatal actions against those they hold responsible for their own addicted and lifeless lives. Frances, who blames Fermoy for her continual grief, kills him. And Elaine, who

blames Frances for her ruined life and the loss of her father, kills Frances. The only character who seems to escape these addictions is Ariel, though her fate is no better than either Fermoy's or Frances' fates. And so *Ariel* acts as a warning of the powerless, barbaric, and fatal destiny that awaits an addictive society.

Woman and Scarecrow is Woman's death-bed lament to her alter-ego or subconscious, Scarecrow. The entire play takes place in Woman's room where Woman lies sick and talks with Scarecrow while Death (in the form of a crow) waits and watches from her wardrobe. The action is limited to death-bed visits from Scarecrow, Him, Auntie Ah, and eventually Death, but the lack of action actually serves the play's greater purpose: to show how living in an addictive system eventually kills. For as Auntie Ah says, "How we die says it all about how we have lived" (Carr, *Woman and Scarecrow* 48).

Woman's life and death can best be described as "being alive and not being there" ("Marina Carr in Conversation" 60). Because Woman "stop[s] seeking" in life (Carr, *Woman* 74), she succumbs to the addictive system; as Scarecrow describes, she "surrendered before [she was] out of nappies," leaving the rest of her life to be filled with a loveless marriage and eight children (Carr 18). She gives up her personal power and ignores her feelings, both signs of the addictive system at work. And in doing so, Woman alienates part of herself—Scarecrow—banishing Scarecrow to a liminal, stagnant state.

With Scarecrow banished to liminality, Woman never has any hope for a happy and fulfilling life. Stagnant, like Sorrel, Scarecrow is unable to help Woman achieve anything beyond mediocrity. Woman "never asked enough of [Scarecrow]" (Carr,

Woman 55) and never “considered [Scarecrow’s] opinion” (Carr, *Woman* 26), which means that *Woman* never amounts to anything. Even in the end, *Woman* is unable to shirk the lies and unfulfilled promises that the addictive system fed her throughout her life. In her last moments of life when Scarecrow asks *Woman*, “Why did you not flee when love had flown?” *Woman* answers, “But it hasn’t flown” (Carr 74). In spite of the fact that *Him* is still visiting his mistress in between visits to *Woman* on her death-bed, *Woman* cannot let go of the illusion of love that the addictive system has created around her.

Like Carr’s other plays, *Woman and Scarecrow* also shows how the addictive system infects generations. *Woman* and Scarecrow’s final discussion attests to this:

SCARECROW: And the children, admit it, they were your shield to beat the world away?

WOMAN: Yes, they were.

SCARECROW: You hid behind the nappies and the bottles?

WOMAN: The mountainous bellies and the cut knees, the broken arms, the temperatures, the uniforms, the football, the music, the washing machine, the three square meals, yes I hid behind it all. Yes, I used them. They were my little soldiers. I was the fortress. And how they protected me from terrors imagined and terrors real, my soothers, my buffers to fortune. And I’m sure I’ve damaged them in some vital, irreparable way, but I have also loved them with a hopeless, enchanted love. (Carr 75)

Woman may have loved her children, but more importantly, she also left them to die in the addictive system just as she did. Unlike Carr’s other plays, the audience does not

witness the tainted generations that came before and after Woman, but Woman's words assure us that they are still there, just as addicted and un-alive as she is.

In the end, Scarecrow transforms into Death, a perfect visual representation of what the addictive system actually does. Woman ignored and gave up Scarecrow—the symbol of her personal power, her feelings, and her identity. And after Scarecrow gives up on Woman in return, she uses Woman's own cast-aside inner power to transform into the beast that ends Woman's life. Like Schaeff describes, because Woman did not take control of her own life, the “addiction [took] control of the individual” (Schaeff 18), causing “eventual death from addiction”—just like The Mai's death (Schaeff 16).

Woman and Scarecrow is a blatant and terrifying display of the addictive system. What Carr's other plays only hint at, *Woman and Scarecrow* displays in an urgent and universal way. The anonymity of the characters—Woman and Him could be any couple— and the setting—“Now” instead of “The Present” like in Carr's other plays— extends Carr's fictional addictive system to the real world. The characters and the action are no longer just play; *Woman and Scarecrow* crosses over into reality.

In my final chapter, I will discuss how Carr's fictional addictive system crosses over into reality through an examination of the similarities between Carr's female protagonists and contemporary Irish women. Although Carr's protagonists are extreme and fictional, their trapped lives mirror the situations of Irish women and enlighten audiences about the problems Irish women face. Carr's works do not provide any answers, but they do name the problem. And like Schaeff says, “Naming our reality is essential to recovery” (Schaeff 144).

CHAPTER 5

THE DISCOVERY OF MUTUAL MIRRORING

Carr's Midlands plays show the development of an addictive society, the marginalization of Carr's liminal women, and the emptiness that accompanies being part of the addictive society. *The Mai* introduces both the addictive society and liminality through The Mai's and her daughter Millie's lives respectively. Although capable and strong, The Mai believes that she is unable to live and function without Robert in her life. Trapped by an addictive society and abandoned by Robert, The Mai eventually commits suicide. As a liminal figure, Millie is able to identify the disastrous effects of the addictive society in her mother's life, and although she hopes to escape the addicted fate of her mother, her liminal position seems equally unpromising.

Portia Coughlan and *By the Bog of Cats* characterize even more clearly the liminality that Millie faces. Portia and Hester, as liminal figures, are able to distinguish the destructive and vicious society that surrounds them. Although both Portia and Hester are being pressured to join the addictive society, they realize that they do not want to be part of that society. Trapped outside society yet unwilling to join it, Portia and Hester ultimately commit suicide. And Hester, reluctant to leave her daughter Josie in liminality, kills Josie as well.

While The Mai, Portia, and Hester choose suicide as a way to end their trapped states, *On Raftery's Hill* shows Sorrel deciding on an alternative to death. Sorrel originally intends to join the addictive society through her marriage to Dara but falls instead into a stagnant, liminal state when her father rapes her. Rather than seek an escape from her liminal state, Sorrel remains an eternal liminal character, like the generations before her, trapped in a state of non-aliveness.

Ariel, Carr's final Midlands play, then illuminates the emptiness that accompanies the addictive society. As Carr's only play to be set in the future, *Ariel* shows the impending destruction of society if it remains on its addicted course. As willing participants in the addictive society, Frances and Elaine cling to their personal addictions, a cover for their empty lives and the wake of carnage that they leave behind them. Eventually, Frances kills Fermoy and Elaine kills Frances, clearly emphasizing the destructive nature of the addictive society.

From *The Mai* to *Ariel*, Carr's plays become increasingly violent, thus highlighting the increasing prominence of the addictive society. Carr's final play, *Woman and Scarecrow*, adds to this prominence by crossing over into reality. *Woman and Scarecrow* shows Woman's empty and meaningless life. After banishing her alter-ego or unconscious Scarecrow to liminality, Woman hides behind her marriage and children until her own non-aliveness eventually kills her.

From the introduction of liminality and the addictive society in *The Mai* to the urgent and overriding display of liminality and the addictive society in *Woman and Scarecrow*, Carr's plays build on one another, holistically demonstrating what Carr describes as "being alive and not being there" through her protagonists' trapped positions ("Marina Carr in Conversation" 60). Although each of Carr's female protagonists is unique, collectively they face the same limited choices—suicide, eternal liminality, or joining the addictive society—over and over again. As such, the actors and actresses seem not to be the only ones filling roles on the stage; Carr's characters are also forced to fill the static roles of liminality and the addictive society.

While the actors and actresses on stage act out the liminal and addictive society roles that Carr's characters inhabit, Irish women are acting out these same roles in their daily lives. Either assuming the addictive society's circumscribed interpretation of the roles of mother and wife mandated by centuries of repression and Catholicism or assuming marginal roles as single women, lesbians, atheists, etc. outside of the addictive society, Irish women are trapped like the characters in Carr's plays. Although assuming the roles of wife and mother are not inherently damaging, the oppressive nature of Ireland's addictive society has warped the roles of wife and mother into subservient and secondary roles, thereby stripping women of personal power and identity. Breda Gray, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of Limerick, demonstrates the limited, addictive society roles that Irish women occupy through interviewing several Irish women in her book *Women and the Irish Diaspora*. Maeve, representative of all of Gray's interviewees and of Irish women in general, describes her mother's generation as a generation of women who have been forced to act out women's roles at the cost of personal identity. Maeve describes Irish women's sense of self and personal power: "I see that side of Irish women being stolen in a sense...*by keeping up these appearances* to be the defenders of this faith and the defenders of this family and not asking at what cost to themselves and to the families" (Gray 40). For Maeve, the responsibility of Irish women has always been that of "keeping up appearances" which leaves "women's 'potential selves'" "unrealized and thwarted by the gendered requirements of Irish belonging" (Gray 41).

Maeve, like Carr's liminal characters, is able to identify the harm that comes from the narrow definition of "Irish women" which has dominated Ireland for centuries, and

consequently, she is unwilling to sacrifice herself to keep up appearances. But also like Carr's liminal characters, Maeve is therefore marginalized. As Maeve describes her own position and the position of other women like her, "I feel a certain...frustration about the aspects of Irish identity that are so strongly allied with being Catholic and being Catholic Irish or nationalist Irish...there's a lack of recognition that there are Irish feminists, that there are Irish atheists, that there are Irish Jews...a wider range of people who are Irish...and are so cut off" (Gray 40). As Maeve's description and as Carr's liminal characters attest to, Irish identity allows women to fill only certain roles. Those who choose not to fill those roles, like Maeve, are isolated.

Maeve's story about her mother and herself reflects the overall trend in Irish women's lives over the last few decades. Certainly, women have made significant progress in breaking down women's roles. Birth control, though still prohibited by Catholicism, became available to women over 18 for the first time in 1985. Lesbian women who lived in fear of violence and death for their sexual orientation were liberated with the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1993. The marriage ban that prevented married women from working in public service was eliminated in 1975. And women who seemed to be perpetually trapped in abusive or unhappy relationships were provided more options with the legalization of divorce in 1995. With positive legal changes, Ireland is beginning to break down women's restrictive roles.

But these positive changes are still limited; legally, women's roles are still circumscribed in many ways. Contraceptives are legal, but family planning advice is scarce, and some doctors still refuse to prescribe birth control pills (Hill 193). Women now constitute a significant portion of the workforce, but "women's salaries are still less

than those of men doing comparable jobs” (Hill 210). Divorce is now an option, but it is expensive, and “the conditions on which it [is] granted [are] stringent, involving a four-year period of separation to ensure that a couple [has] the opportunity to fully consider the implications of their actions” (Hill 191). In almost every facet of life, women are still limited legally.

More restricting than the legal limitations, however, are the limitations that women face from the deeply ingrained cultural notions of women’s roles. Like Maeve says, “[Irish identity has] changed...in some ways,” specifically legally, but “without any real depth to it” (Gray 40). All of the positive legal changes, limited as they may be, have as yet only scraped the surface of the possibilities for Irish women’s identity, which still remains firmly grounded in the home. Article 41 of the Constitution perhaps most clearly demonstrates these deeply ingrained ideologies through the interchangeable use of the words “woman” and “mother” (Sihra 211):

1. In particular the State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.
2. The State shall therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. (Department of the Taoiseach)

Although the wording in this article is now under review, the idea behind the words is clearly still in force: women are expected to act out roles as wives and mothers, just like Carr’s female protagonists.

Ultimately what Irish women like Maeve and Carr's characters demonstrate is a "mutual mirroring, life by art, art by life" (Turner 108). Carr's women as actresses in a stage drama and Irish women as actresses in an aesthetic drama occupy Richard Schechner's model for the intimate relationship between social dramas and aesthetic dramas pictured below.

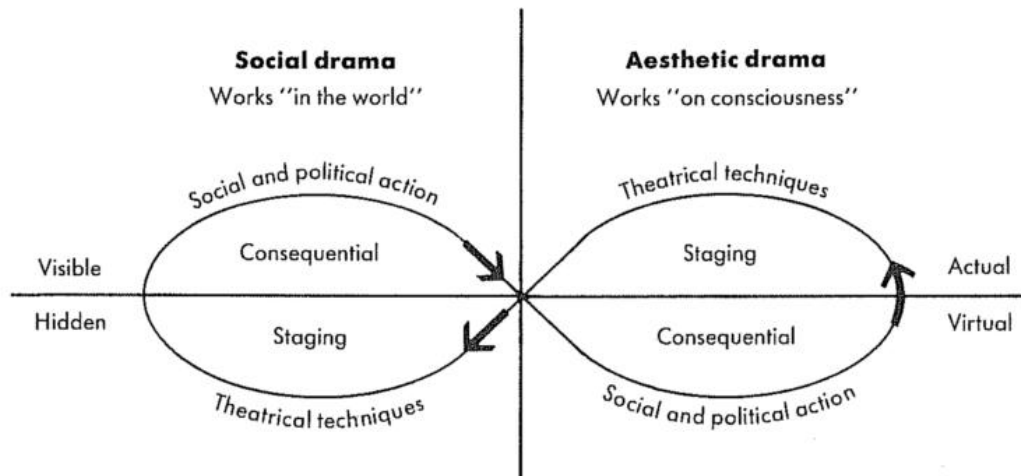


Fig. 1. Infinity Loop from Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 190.

Schechner's model assumes the form of a horizontal figure eight bisected through both loops. Each loop represents a type of drama; the left loop represents social drama—the acting that Irish women engage in—and the right loop represents aesthetic drama—the acting that makes up Carr's plays. The line separates manifest performances—Carr's plays and Irish women's daily life—from implicit social structures or processes—liminality and the addictive society. By following the course of the arrows, it becomes clear that "the 'infinity loop' depicts dynamic positive feedback. Social dramas affect aesthetic dramas, aesthetic dramas affect social dramas" (Schechner 190). As such, Irish women's lives are influenced by the underlying dominance of the addictive society and

liminality in Carr's fictional realm (Schechner 190). And in return, Carr's plays are haunted by the trapped position of Irish women throughout history.

Although this "mutual mirroring" seems to be leading Irish women and their stage counterparts in a never-ending circle of non-aliveness, applying the Schechnarian model clearly demonstrates the inseparable intimacy between Carr's protagonists and Irish women and helps foster a recognition and naming of the trapped state that Irish women have faced for centuries and continue to face today. Like Turner argues concerning Schechner's "infinity loop," "Human beings learn through experience [...] *not* through social drama, or stage drama [...] *alone*, but in the circulatory or oscillatory process of their mutual and incessant modification" (108). Through the constant flow—"back and forth, up and down" (Schechner 190)—between Carr's stage drama and Irish women's social drama, Irish women learn more about their needs, their concerns, and their identity.

The constant flow between Carr's stage drama and Irish women's social drama has not yet led to a clear solution to Irish women's trapped existence; after all, Carr's plays do not end happily and Irish women still face the lingering ideologies of women's roles. But what it has led to is a wider recognition and naming of the plight that Irish women face, which, as Schaefer says, is the first step towards resolution: "It is only when we *name* our situation that we become ready and able to do something about it" (144).

Just as Carr's works holistically represent a journey that shows the destructive nature of eternal liminality and the addictive society, so the mirroring between social drama and stage drama is a journey that leads toward a greater recognition and understanding of Irish female identity. Overall, Carr's plays may be violent, mystical,

and extreme, but her characters are “ordinary people” (“Marina of the Midlands”) who represent the position of Irish women in a very real way.

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