

**Rewriting Myths through Abjection in Marina Carr's
*The Mai***

Sherine Moustafa El Shoura

Abstract

Contemporary Irish theatre has reflected an identity crisis mixed with a new interest in reconsidering myth and history. The cultural heritage of Irish myth is held responsible for communicating false ideas and misconceptions and creating, as a result, forged identities. Speculating upon the process of identity formation, myth and history are two essential elements that participate in it. If myths inspire the process of identity formation with endless stereotypes, history, which is supposed to give an honest account of past events, authorizes it. However, myth and history alike are subjected to a deliberate distortion and alteration to help privileged groups like males and colonizers to score over minority ones like the females and colonized nations. Altering the past and the present of nations and peoples through the creation of false mythical and historical discourses has become colonizers celebrated method of distorting the real identity of colonized peoples and of justifying colonization as well. Irish female has been stereotyped through a number of myths that depict her as a symbol of land, passive, submissive, unsociable maternal figures. The creation of such myths is meant to empower a male-dominated Irish society. Therefore, society limited men and women by placing them into fixed gender molds that have been greatly influenced by many deceiving gender myths and stereotypes. Though cultural myths are responsible for the creation of misconceptions and false ideas, they remain because people do not analyze or question them. Despite their falsehood, they continue to move from one generation to another and people stop wondering if they are true or not. However, to escape the destructive impact of these myths and those ideas of gender on identity, they need to be critically rethought together with their outcome of gender stereotypes that are equally deceptive and misleading.

(*) Associate Professor at Benha University -Faculty of Arts
Department of English Literature and Language

إعادة كتابة الأساطير من خلال الشخصيات المهمشة في مسرحية مارينا كار " الماي " شيرين مصطفى الشورى الملخص

تعتبر مارينا كار من أبرز كتاب المسرح الذين أهتموا بكثير من القضايا المعاصرة في كتاباتهم ومن أبرز هذه القضايا قضية بناء الشخصية المعاصرة والتي يرون أنها قد تعرضت لكثير من التشويه والتزييف ، وهكذا فقد أستطاعت الأغلبية السائدة تشويه الهوية المعاصرة للأقلية المستضعفة وذلك بالسيطرة علي الركيزة الأساسية لبناء الشخصية وهي الأسطورة ، وذلك لان الأسطورة قد تداولتها الأجيال دون نقاش أو جدال لرسم معالم وسمات الشخصية.

فشلت الأقليات في الإلتزام بما تمليه عليها سمات تلك الهوية الزائفة التي تروج لها هذه الاساطير مما أدي إلي نتائج وخيمة فظهرت نتيجة لذلك ما يعرف بالشخصية المهمشة ، وفي ضوء هذه الخلفية التي أظهرت الدور الجوهري التي لعبته الأسطورة في رسم و تجسيد شخصية الأقليات فإن هذه الدراسة تهدف إلي توضيح هذا الدور للأسطورة كما صورتها مارينا كار وإلقاء الضوء علي بعض الأساطير التي روج لها المستعمر أو المجتمع الذكوري أو غيرهما من الأغلبية السائدة ، ومن أجل الوصول لأفضل النتائج فإن الدراسة لجأت إلي تطبيق منهجاً تحليلياً من مناهج التحليل النفسي التي تعتمد علي تطور الشخصية عند فرويد وعند يانج إلي جانب جوليا كريستيفا ومن أهم هذه النظريات نظرية اللاوعي لفرويد ويانج ونظرية فصل الذات عما يهدد هويتها لكريستيفا ، وبالإضافة إلي ذلك طرحت مارينا منهجاً جديداً لإعادة بناء الأسطورة مستوحى من نظرية كريستيفا وهي أسطورة فصل الذات عن كل ما يهدد فرضيتها مثل الأمومة واللون والطبيعة الذكورية أو الانثوية .

ومن هذا المنطلق نجد الشخصيات في مسرحيات كار تتطلع للعودة إلي الطبيعة ، وتفضل الهروب من الحياة إلي الموت حيث يعيشون حياة أبدية في عالم آخر.

Contemporary Irish theatre has reflected an identity crisis mixed with a new interest in reconsidering myth and history. The cultural heritage of Irish myth is held responsible for communicating false ideas and misconceptions and creating, as a result, forged identities. Speculating upon the process of identity formation, myth and history are two essential elements that participate in it. If myths inspire the process of identity formation with endless stereotypes, history, which is supposed to give an honest account of past events, authorizes it. However, myth and history alike are subjected to a deliberate distortion and alteration to help privileged groups like males and colonizers to score over minority ones like the females and colonized nations. Altering the past and the present of nations and peoples through the creation of false mythical and historical discourses has become colonizers celebrated method of distorting the real identity of colonized peoples and of justifying colonization as well. Irish female has been stereotyped through a number of myths that depict her as a symbol of land, passive, submissive, unsociable maternal figures. The creation of such myths is meant to empower a male-dominated Irish society. Therefore, society limited men and women by placing them into fixed gender molds that have been greatly influenced by many deceiving gender myths and stereotypes. Margret Maltin defines gender stereotypes as “structured beliefs about characteristics of women and men” (258). Such images and beliefs are largely important in changing ideas about gender.

Though cultural myths are responsible for the creation of misconceptions and false ideas, they remain because people do not analyze or question them. Despite their falsehood, they continue to move from one generation to another and people stop wondering if they are true or not. However, to escape the destructive impact of these myths and those ideas of gender on identity, they need to be critically rethought together with their outcome of gender stereotypes that are equally deceptive and misleading.

The aim of this study is to deal with the psychological dimension of the mythical experience in Marina Carr’s (1964-) drama. It seeks to emphasize the role played by myth in the identity formation process in light of Freud, Jung and Kristeva’s theories of identity development. The study also investigates the way Carr’s

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plays seeks to undermine prevailing Irish myths and misconceptions of gender and motherhood by destroying and removing culturally approved common concepts. It also suggests means of rewriting such myths and misconceptions, stressing the negative myths and stereotypes feed racial prejudice and create false identities.

Myths are long-established beliefs that are uncritically accepted and that influence the way nations and peoples are portrayed and remembered throughout ages. Eyerman argues that “[a]ll nations and groups have founding myths, stories which tell who we are through recounting where we came from. Such narratives---are passed on through traditions, in rituals and ceremonies, public performances which reconnect a group, and wheremembership is confirmed. Within thisprocess, we are remembered and they are excluded” (“The Past in the Present Culture” 162). However, myths are sometimes responsible for communicating false ideas and misconceptions that lead to the creation of fake distorted identities. For example, Colonial societies create myths and stereotypes that justify social agony and oppression. This double nature of myth is best expressed in terms of the Greeks’ two concepts mythos and logos. Balinisteanu proposes that “logos are those types of deceptive discourses through which the more powerful groups are able to overcome their inferiors. Contrary to logos, mythos denotes the valuable truthful discourse of the elite like poets and kings” (27). According to Jung, despite their potential falsehood illustrated by the Greek’s logos, “myths can’t be dispensed with or given up; they are essential for psychic wellbeingand identity formation process (Segal 606). Hence, what is needed is a process of a destruction and reconstruction of myths, a process of reformation rather than removal or exclusion. Myths transform humans into stones-like identities that, though powerful, can be reshaped by imagination. This call for a rewriting myth and misconceptions is a persist one in Carr’s play *The Mai* (1994).

Carr’s model of identity building could be understood within the Jungian context of identity development. “Individualism”, according to Jung is “a process of psychological development that fulfills the individual qualities given; in other words, it is process by which a man becomes the definite, unique being he in fact is” (qtd.in

Stromer 189). It is a psychological process of uniting and bridging the gulf between the conscious and the unconscious while still keeping conscious autonomy. Myths and tales are the medium through which the individual can safely face and gain insight into shadow figures and shadow experiences that might bear some resemblance, in some way, to our conscious life (Drake 125-26). Myth is not only essential for the identity building process but also for the development of human psyche. Jung's theory reveals that there is no psyche without myths. Human psyche is "not of today; its ancestry goes back many millions of years..." (qtd.in Shearer 5). Jung believes that man can't live without a myth, a common belief that connects him with human being everywhere, all over the ages and that links him to the past as well as the present and this calls for the necessity of creating new myths (Kradin 219).

Like Jung, Carr believes that the first step in identity building is that of unfolding the content of the unconscious (the old identity) through myths. She also sets the revision of myth as the second step in her proposed method for identity building process. She highlights the fact that those myths that prove to be sterile and irrelevant call for a process of revision and modification so as to be relevant to modern times. This goes beyond the old identity to be ready to form a new one.

Carr explores that to build its identity, Ireland needs to comprehend the old established identity that exists in the unconscious and can only be revealed through myths and then to move beyond it. Her aim is to bring what is kept unconscious—Irish identity—to conscious state. Thus myth, according to her, functions as a method of gaining insight into Ireland's primal identity that is kept unconscious. Carr's method is not merely to repeat an already written myth but rather to rewrite it with some differences. She resurrects an old myth to draw the reader's attention to some values and misconceptions related to the myth, and she insists on making the reference to myth clear. However, once the reader gets the message, she proposes her revised narration of the myth that has obvious changes and differences from the original one and takes the myth to different directions.

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The first and foremost myth that Carr is preoccupied with is the prevailing myth of femininity and motherhood. Moving towards more patriarchal forms has urged female playwright as Marina Carr to challenge the cultural construct of femininity and maternity and to defy the male rewriting of woman's history. Myths depict woman as passive, obedient, sexless and ideal self-sacrificing mother. According to Freud, everyone is already gendered and the mother is feminine and the infant masculine and no one can love the same gender. Freud argues that it is woman's destiny to have a different biological nature from man that categorizes her as a passive recipient and forces her to accept her inferior state waiting for a baby that symbolizes the penis. As Leff sums it up: "In the classical Freudian view, femininity hinges on the little girl converting her inescapable penis envy into a passive acceptance of her castrated state, and the promise of a future baby as a substitute for and symbol of the unobtainable penis, as well as a compensation for her physical defeat" (13). Thus, the female Oedipus complex is closely related to feminine development. As a girl senses that she is sexually inferior to her male counterpart, she seeks a sort of compensation by having a child from father and unfetter herself from her oppressing mother who is in a state of castration. She fears to be as castrated as her mother. The mother is thus held responsible for her daughter's lack of a penis (Leff 14). The girl is an incomplete little man until desire for a child by her father turns her into a woman, whose desire is to overcome the defeat, to become complete, to be one whole thing. Therefore, Freud has bound the feminine to the maternal.

Unlike Freud, Lacan regards language as responsible for building the individual's identity. This happens when the child is painfully separated for the first time, from his mother and the pre-Oedipal association between them, a period termed by Lacan "the imaginary" comes to an end. This period of the entry into language known as "the Law of the Father and the loss of the mother or the Symbolic Order" (Sayin 78). The pre-Oedipal stage is when the child thinks itself and the mother as one inseparable entity. The Oedipal crisis signifies the beginning of the entrance into symbolic order wherein the father is held responsible for the forced split between the child and the mother as he disrupts the inseparable unit and allows

no further contact between child and mother. The child has therefore to inhibit and restrain his craving for the imaginary or the reunion with the mother (79). Lacan argues that society as a whole including its code and dominated by what he calls the symbolic order. Being incapable of living in human society marks the beginning of the concept of selfhood. Lacan's mirror stage is a period when the child sees an external image of his body in a mirror, or reflected to him through the mother or something else. This produces a psychic response that starts the mental representation of an "I". Thus, comes the concept of selfhood.

Unlike Freud and Lacan, Kristeva is concerned with the earliest stage of subjectivity development, preceding Freud's Oedipal state or Lacan's mirror stage; she focuses rather on the pre-Oedipal moments of subjectivity. Kristeva distinguishes between two stages of identity development: "the semiotic, the pre-Oedipal or pre-representational stage which takes place before the acquisition of language, and the post-Oedipal or symbolic stage which is the stage of the acquisition of language (Trench 2). The semiotic "is a stage of protection, closeness and intimacy wherein the child takes refuge into the mother who guards him against all surrounding threats and both are but one entity and have one identity". On the other hand, "Kristeva's symbolic order refers to a man's world" (Ann Jones 58). It is the world of order, regulations, laws, and language. Kristeva assumes that woman faces two fundamental choices; she has either to identify with mother or with her father. Identifying with the mother means to live in a marginal state in the symbolic order, whereas identifying with the father renders her a woman who acquires her identity from the same symbolic order. Therefore femininity, in "Kristeva's theory is not related to the pre-Oedipal stage, its construction depends on a choice made by woman between identification either with the identification either with the father or with the mother" (Moi 162). Therefore, to Kristeva, identity building is a process that needs a combination of both the semiotic and the symbolic and woman has to conform to the rules and principles of the symbolic to create a healthy identity. Analyzing Kristeva's theory, Pam Morris says: "By rejecting the symbolic order which sustains social identity a woman leaves herself unprotected and

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opens to the full force of unconscious desire, or which the most powerful is always the death desire. A desire to return to the mother can become a desire for loss identity, for dissolution of self in M/Other-for death" (qtd.in Sayin 79).

Kristeva seeks to rewrite psychoanalytic theory by developing her notion of abjection and the abject in relation to maternity. According to her, abjection highlights the motherly function and its significance in the progress of subjectivity. One of the main goals of Kristeva's abjection theory is to show how the maternal and pre-Oedipal constitute female subjectivity. She regards abjection as an unconscious defense mechanism that keeps the borders of the self and defends one's subjectivity. Therefore, abjection is stimulated by "what disturbs identity, system, order. What doesn't respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 4). A simple example of Kristeva's abjection is that of a newborn child that must identify itself as separate from the mother. The distinction between the new born child and the abject, the maternal body, allows the formation of individual identity. One must abject the maternal, the entity which has created body, in order to build an identity. According to Kristeva, suffering separation from the mother is the beginning of the construction of the subject and the building of the ego. She writes:

It seems to be the first authentic feeling of a subject in the process of constituting itself as such, as it emerges out of its jail and goes to meet what will become, but only later, objects. Abjection of self: the first approach to a self that would otherwise be walled in. abjection of others, of the other, of the analyst, the only violent link to the world (47).

Thus, child's becoming separate from the mother is its becoming fully a subject. What helps the desired process of subjectivity after the child's separation from the maternal is being identified with a third group that might be the father. As children grow, they come across situations that defy their sense of subjectivity, stimulating the unconscious mechanism of abjection. The moments that motivate abjection are those that threaten identity, system, order. Thus, in the symbolic, when something troubles identity and order, the subject

becomes in danger of going back to maternal (Kristeva "The Abject" 152). Kristeva defines the subject/abject relationship as one of repel and yearning at one and the same time.

Inspired with Kristeva's desired femininity and maternity myths, Carr suggests the creation of a myth that subvert the image of the mother as the abject and identifies the maternal figure instead with the subject while keeping the representation of the maternal container as the abject. This is effected through the recurrent portrayal of child birth that in Kristevian terms signifies the abjection of the maternal container. Hence, all mother figures in Carr's plays are to be read as subject figures that are aggressive, obsessive and violent. Whereas, female figures in her plays, on the other hand, are always identified with the abject. This helps to set the maternal figure as distinguished from the feminine as well as from the mother as a maternal container. As a result, images of mothers abject their motherhood are recurrent in Carr's plays to suggest a need for a myth that itself abject maternity as a role. This desire is articulated by Carr as she says: "I was tired of the sentimental portrayal of mothers... We have this blessed Virgin myth imbedded in us,.... They like to talk about childbirth, which is beautiful but there is another side of it where it is mystery" (qtd. in Sihra, "House of Woman" 203).

Carr's *The Mai* is a play that reflects an identity building problem. It echoes Freud and Jung's view that myth shouldn't be passed on from one generation to another and that everyone has to create new myths. The play portrays the story of four generations of women from the Mai's Grandma Fraochlan to Mai's daughter Millie. The play also mentions a fifth generation, the Mai's great grandmother, a hundred years old woman who spoils the lives of female offspring by telling them fake myths and stories about love, marriage and man-woman relationship that have nothing to do with reality. The grandma's stories are so promising and hopeful that the Mai and her sisters follow blindly and consequently destroyed. They find nothing of what they expect and they have been deceived and misled by these stories. *The Mai* is mainly about the story of Grandma's granddaughter Mai who has been abandoned by her husband Robert to raise their four children alone. She builds a lovely

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home for Robert on Owl Lake in the hopes that will someday return to her. However, their relationship eventually deteriorates and he leaves her for another woman. Realizing that their marriage is beyond repair and that she cannot go on without him, the Mai commits suicide.

Following Jung's identity building model, in *The Mai*, Carr revisits some myths that best reflect Irish identity, speculates upon their destructive aspect on identity and revises them to offer a prospective for identity building. One of those myths is the legend of Owl Lake or the myth of Persephone that restores back the long established concept of Irish femininity and Irish motherhood. The original myth reflects the concept of the self-denying mother; it depicts a mother who is caring, devoted and who saves no effort to rescue her daughter, an idea that Carr destabilizes in her version of the myth. In the original myth, Persephone, daughter of Demeter, goddess of the earth, is stolen while picking flowers by Hades, who comes out of an earth crack. Demeter looks for her daughter and stops caring for the fertility of the land that consequently turns sterile. Hades, as a result and due to the mother's trick, has to set Persephone free. But before setting her free, Hades ensures that Persephone will come back to the underworld for four months a year, during winter when earthly creatures hideaway or disappear, by making her eat Pomegranates seeds against her will (Balinisteanu 103-5).

However, following the second step in her identity building model, Carr's *The Mai* proposes a different version of the legend of Owl Lake that is described in details by Millie:

... The legend goes that Coillte, daughter of the mountain god, Bloom, fell in love with Blath, Lord of all the flowers... And so they lived freely through the spring and summer... One evening approaching autumn Blath told Coillte that soon he must go and live with the dark witch of the bog; that he would return in the spring, and the next morning he was gone. Coillte followed him ... He would not speak to her, look at her, and heartbroken Coillte lay down outside the dark witch's lair and cried a lake of tears that stretched for miles around. (147)

Carr's version ends with Coillte's drowning in Owl Lake which is eventually formed by her tears. In her revision of the myth, Carr plays with gender; she creates a male character, Blath in place of Persephone, and replaces Demeter (a mother) with the desperate Coillte (a lover). Carr's revision of the myth disturbs the stereotypical concept of motherhood reflected by the myth. She dispenses with mother figure in the myth and uses instead a lover. In doing so, Carr destabilizes accepted notions of motherhood that show mothers as self-denying and caring. In addition, she makes a man rather than a woman vulnerable to a supernatural power.

On another level, beside the literal reference to the myth, *The Mai* as a whole is a further revision of the myth. Like Coillte, The Mai falls in love with Robert, who is fond of absence and who comes back just to leave once more. The Mai built her own house on the Owl Lake to get Robert back to her. He leaves for five years and when he comes he makes The Mai feel "like a bride all over again" (116). However, he spends just one year with her and leaves again. But this time his departure is more painful as it goes beyond the physical absence to the emotional one when he says to her before going: "I discovered I don't give a damn about you anymore!" (176). As in the myth, Robert will not speak to, look at or touch The Mai. This version of the Owl Lake myth juxtaposes and subverts, at one and the same time, the mythical image of love perpetuated by Grandma Fraochlan.

The Mai also repeats the Greek myth of Leander who drowned as he used to swim every night across the Hellespont to see his lover Hero. The impossible to attain love concept symbolized by the myth is repeated in the stories told by the grandmother that depicts her lover in an unrealistic exaggerated manner that makes him a hero of a romantic romance. Like Leander, being worried about his wife upon delivering their third baby, Grandma Fraochlan's husband Tom the fisherman jumped into the freezing sea to go back to her. He consequently lost a finger of his left hand (Funahashi 44). He kept the cut finger and showed it to people as a sign of his genuine love since "people never tire a great love stories" (*The Mai* 182).

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Carr destabilizes the myth by highlighting the great gap between the lived experience of the characters of the play, on the one hand, and the myth of love, on the other hand. The Mai's whole life seems to be ruined by a mythical love concept. She says, "You make our men seem like nothing" (143). The myth of Leander, for example, results in feeling of resentment and fury inside The Mai because her husband Robert didn't even collect her "from the hospital when Stephan was born", fourteen years before (178). Affected by Grandma's stories, The Mai dreams of a fairy love story with a "dark-haired prince [who] would come across the waves on the wings of an albatross and take me away to a beautiful land never seen or heard of before and...love me as no girl had ever been loved" (162). The Mai and her sisters have been deceived by their grandmother Fraochlan's stories about things that never come true like her talk about her nine-fingered fisherman that inspired the Mai, Beck and Connie's idea of the vehicle carrying their romantic lover:

Beck: My prince had a white horse.

Connie: Mine had a chariot with golden bells that could sing my name.

The Mai: My God, we were some eejits.

Beck: Too much listenin' to Grandma Fraochlan and her wild stories.

The Mai: She doesn't prepare us at all.

Connie: She did her best.

The Mai: She 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 to march through the world...my prince at my side and together we'd leave our mark on it. (163)

However, contrary to Grandma's myth that echoes the Greek myth of Leader, The Mai and her sisters find love either ruinous as in Ellen, The Mai and Millie's case or mysterious as in Beck's case's, a dull routine as in Connie's case or fantastic as in Grandma Fraochlan's that never begets happiness. The wild gap between hopes the stories of Grandmother carry, on the one hand, and facing actual reality, on the other, is very disastrous.

The Mai also alludes to Hans Christian Andersen's tale of *The Red Shoes*, a tale that replicates the myth of the devoted, faithful, self-denying wife. The story is about the fate of a little girl whose desire for a pair of red shoes almost dooms her to dance forever until her feet are cut off. Thus, the tale refers to the consuming passion for art of any woman who violates her family as well as culture's rule not to follow art. It reflects the punishment a woman is bound to receive if she ever tries to express her talents and creativity. Pursuing her passion for art makes woman less appealing to men who are more interested in women that can perform their assigned role from nursing to doing the household. The stories also include a further punishment which is personal punishment and self-destructive impulse (Hancock 22).

Keeping up with the concept of the self-denying wife, The Mai and her sisters obey what they learn from their grandma's story leaving their academic life for love and marriage's sake thinking that they will find emotional compensation. The Mai says that because of marriage she has to "let go of all the beautiful things in [her] life" (163). Ellen leaves her study of medicine when she is obliged to marry the father of her child. Carr destabilizes the myth by underlying the fact that cultural residue that calls for the silencing of woman creativity that moves from grandmothers to their daughters is responsible for restriction, frustration, madness and suicide. Women are fated with a social punishment inflicted upon them if they ever release their creative forces yet they are destined to go mad if they restrict them. In *The Mai* Carr reflects the same idea when Beck describes the Mai's family as "that house of proud mad women" (170). Instead of going on living with false hopes, women in *The Mai* yields themselves to self-destructiveness and suicide. Hence comes the nihilism in Carr's plays which is best seen mostly in the suicide of her characters.

In order to rewrite this myth *The Mai*, Carr adds a new prospect woman/mother's identity that is never admitted by males. The play proposes the fact that woman develops herself intellectually, a quality regarded by the symbolic as a male privilege. Woman may be well-educated, cultured and well acquainted with refined arts; she can also possess a critical and philosophical point of

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view. Listing some of the tasks she performs during the weekend, *The Mai* says to Robert, "I collected the children from their schools, I did twelve loads of laundry, I prepared eight meals, I dropped the children back to their schools, and I read Plato and Aristotle on education, because education is my business, and do you know the differences between their philosophies? No, I didn't think you would" (155).

The Mai rewrites those myths underlying Irish femininity and motherhood by restoring the pre-Oedipal concept of motherhood which supposes that a mother has the potentiality for violence as well as for kindness and compassion. In Kristevan terms, she introduces female who abject the maternal function and who are described by Frank McGuinness as "theatre's most powerful and unself pitying women" (Leeney & Anna McMullan, *Theatre xx*). This concept of maternity is made clear in Julie's words to her mother: "You're the same, still the same, a dagger in one hand, a flower in the other-well it doesn't wash with me anymore" (144). To reinforce the concept of the destructive mother that is part of the pre-Oedipal concept of motherhood, Carr derives the name, *The Mai*, from an Irish myth of a woman who destroyed her young (Sihra, "Nature Noble" 136). Therefore, *The Mai* represents a guilty motherhood that is responsible for the destruction of following generations and the process is cyclic. Ellen, *The Mai*'s mother, for example, has been destroyed by Grandma Fraochlan who forced her to marry against her will, caused her to hate her husband and kept on telling her daughter deceiving promising thoughts and wishes that can never come true. According to Julie her mother is responsible for killing Ellen by telling her stories; she is killed by her mother's deception since "Ellen adored her and looked up to her and believed everything she said, and that's what killed her, not childbirth, no, her spirit was broken" (*The Mai* 146). Grandma Fraochlan herself has been and by the stories told to her by her mother to avoid telling her that she is illegitimate child. Grandma Fraochlan says:

I came into the world without a father-born to an absolute
nut---And she wouldn't let me her Mother, no, The
Duchess, that's what I had to call her---And The Duchess
told me father was the Sultan of Spain and --- in the

summer he was goin' to come in a yacht and take us away to his palace in Spain. And I believed her and watched on the cliffs every day for the Sultan of Spain. (169)

To further highlight the pre-Oedipal concept of motherhood, the play connects motherhood to the two acts of mythmaking and storytelling. It reflects how mothers who belong to different generations manage only to destroy their daughters simply by process of mythmaking and passing stories and myths from the past to the present. Carr reflects the destructive consequences of blindly following myths that leads women in *The Mai* to replicate the faults of their mothers and grandmothers "like the sleepwalkers along a precipice" (148). For example, The Mai and her mother's lives in a fictional world and are destroyed when reality doesn't match up to their expectations. Their children are subjected to the same myths that their mothers suffered from as mothers don't prevent themselves from giving their children the same heritage of poisonous ideas exemplified in myths. After The Mai's suicide, Millie says, "None of The Mai and Robert's children are very strong. We teeter along the fringe of the world with halting gait, reeking of Owl Lake at every turn" (184).

The Mai underlines the role played by myth in identity building process. It propounds the view that people follow myths blindly and with utter submission as if manipulated with a certain spell; this, undoubtedly leads to the creation of repeated stereotypes. Escaping the net of myths that ensnares the four generations in *The Mai* seems impossible. Myths inevitably manipulate the lives of all the family members. They are all vulnerable to the wounds of myth making but they unconsciously follow the same path like their mothers. According to Millie, they are controlled by a greater power, Owl Lake myth, which they involuntarily follow. Every member of the family has to play his part of the myth. Millie describes the inevitability of following myths in spite of all their destructiveness. She says: "A tremor runs through me when I recall the legend of Owl Lake. I knew that story as a child. So did The Mai and Robert. But we were unaffected by it and in our blindness moved along it like sleepwalkers along a precipice and all around gods and mortals

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called out for us to change our course, and not listening, we walked on and on" (148). Though Millie herself tries to escape this path, still she is obsessed with her memories at Owl Lake and a dream of drowning. Though Millie has no tendency to commit suicide, still she is a self-destructive character who is deprived of mental stability because she is haunted with the history of her predecessors.

To secure the restoration of the concept of a threatening maternity, Carr reflects the characters yearning for separate subjectivity that is threatened by monstrous abject mother. She identifies the maternal body with the abject who threatens the subject's subjectivity. Millie says:

I dream of water all the time. I'm floundering off the shore, or bursting towards the surface for air, or wrestling with a black swan trying to drag me under. I have not yet emerged triumphant from those lakes of the night. Sometimes I think I wear Owl Lake like a caul around my chest to protect me from all that is good and hopeful and worth pursuing. And on a confident day when I am considering a first shaky step towards something within my grasp, the caul constricts and I am back at Owl Lake. (184)

Millie's dream symbolized a typical subject/abject relationship. The abject mother disturbs the subject's life and hinders her moves to the symbolic, an idea that lies deep in Millie's unconscious. The water that surrounds her evokes to mind the mother's womb where the fetus is surrounded with the water before abjection takes place. Millie can never make a successful move to the symbolic where she can build her identity because she is dragged back by mother (a black swan). Millie struggles to break free from her mother's body in order to construct her own identity but, at the same time, the mother is reluctant to release her hold because the child is the way she conforms herself. Ellen's mother threatens her daughter's subjectivity and hence, she breaks away from the concept of a devoted mother. On the other hand, Ellen- the subject- is obsessively attracted to her mother; she yearns to become a child once again. The Mai says: "Once, I said to her, 'wouldn't you love to be somewhere else, Mom?' 'Yes', she said. 'Where would you like to be a child again, 'she said'" (183). Ellen longs for anything that connect her to the abject, her mother.

Building on Kristeva's theory of abjection, Carr suggests the building of a myth of abject maternity. She depicts mothers who abject their maternal function and whose love hinders their motherhood. Carr depicts female figures deserting their assigned roles as mothers and investing their efforts in other activities like storytelling, relating myths or dreams. This constructs a myth of abjection that portrays mothers as careless and self-centered and that give them heartbreak than in the love and happiness of the offspring. This is made clear in the way Grandma Fraochlan talks about her husband, the nine-fingered fisherman that destroys and subverts the myth of the devoted mother and deter her offspring's identity development. Grandma Fraochlan confesses, "I would gladly have hurled all seven of ye down the slopes of hell for one night more with the nine-fingered fisherman" (182). Julie says, "I'm seventy-five years of age, Mai, and I'm still not over my childhood" (146). In addition, describing the way her mother as a young woman abjects maternal function, Julie says, "She had little or no time for her children except to tear strips off us when we got in her way. All her energy went into her my father and he thought she was an angel" (145). Similarly, The Mai's daughter, Millie, painfully describes her own experience as a daughter deprived of her mother's love since the mother was far more concerned with her love to Robert, Millie's father, than with her maternal duties.

Carr also creates a further myth of abjection that depicts men and women alike adjecting their gender function to be seen as human being rather than as males and females. In so doing, Carr subverts male and female roles and activities and worn out conceptions related to gender. For example, she makes her female protagonist, The Mai central figure to show that woman, rather than man, occupies a larger space in society. In Kristevian terms, by making The Mai the owner of the house, she challenges the symbolic by challenging prevailing customs of ownership in Ireland wherein proprieties are owned by males. A further subversion of roles is reflected in The Mai's words to Robert that set the female provider and the one who supports her children financially. The Mai says, "So you want to reduce the conversation to money. Right! Let's talk about money! Add this up! What it costs to feed, clothe, educate four

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children for five years. Do you know what that cost?" (156). When *The Mai* died, the father becomes the surrogate mother. However he succeeded in playing neither of the two roles.

Carr's play overtly exposes the myths underlying female identity while revealing their irrelevancy. It suggests the creation of a myth of abjection that depicts femininity and motherhood as separated from feminine and maternal functions. However, the play never refers to the fact that this needed myth is actually built; this is why *The Mai* ends up rather by committing suicide and abjection her own self.

To build subjectivity, Kristeva calls for the intertextuality between both the semiotic and the symbolic. Carr's *The Mai* highlights the coherence existing between form and content that is reflected in the in an equivalent intertextuality among different techniques, grammar, music, language and tone. Subversion is a key word to understand Carr's play, therefore the technique of subversion is performed through a variety of other devices starting from repetition and revision, rest and spell, elements of metatheatre, to grotesque and carnival. Carr's play is distinctive for incorporating different genres and techniques that might sit uncomfortably together on the stage. Throughout her play, Carr breaks with conventional modes of dramatic forms; her plays reflect a resistance to realism and a fondness of depicting ghosts, dreams, Irish folklore and myth. *The Mai* stands as a perfect example of the playwright's use of a wide range of theatrical forms that seem to be at odd with each other. The play is a two-act lyrical memory of the character Millie. The play interrupts the conventions of realism through Carr's non-linear chronology and the use of a narrator, The Mai's daughter Millie. Ryan regards the move between realism and surrealism in *The Mai* as a "prerequisite to honestly rendering a picture of a rapidly changing Ireland that has become the country of contradictions" ("The Bardic Imperative in the Drama of Marina Carr" 18).

Language in Carr's *The Mai* plays an important role. Carr uses grotesque language that is distinguished with the utilization of all elements of oral tradition (Gilbert & Tompkins 85). Her language is both poetic and humorous. According to Fouere, "There is an innate humour too in her language-even in the throes of tragedies

there's a wonderful sort of Beckettian humour and wild exultation in it" (161-62). Carr's speech patterns belong to a form of mock abuse that is part of the carnival and the discourse of grotesque humiliation. In *The Mai*, Beck says, "Everything I touch turns to shit!" (133). This type of humorous discourse provokes mockery and ridicule and makes everybody laugh since "carnival laughter of all people---this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives" (qtd. in Ryan 39).

To connect more with the audience, Carr's language of subversion is enhanced with other elements of the theatre of cruelty like lighting and sound imagery. They affect the desired mode and reveal the characters' states of mind in order to symbolize either the semiotic or the symbolic. *The Mai* has sounds of nature like cries of the swans and geese and sounds of swans keen their mates described by Millie as "a high haunting sounds that sings the once-living out of this world. It is a sound you hope never to hear again and it's a sound you know you will" (158). These scary sounds described by the sounds of Robert's cello are always heard throughout the play to symbolize the semiotic, the stage that precedes the abjection process or rather The Mai's suicide. This is made clear as the cello's case is identified with mother earth's womb as it becomes in Robert's dream, The Mai's coffin.

Carr's language throughout the play is language of grotesque. It's based on Harpham's percept that deformation is essential for reformation. Harpham proposes that the presentation of intentionally distorted figures is a fundamental initial procedure for effecting a positive change (12). This view of Harpham fits well with Carr's rewriting strategy which is built upon destroying as well as a building process; she destroys to build and deforms to reform. Deformation is the way Carr suggests the deconstruction of the taken-for granted myths and the reconstruction of a myth of abjection that demands the abjection of everything hindering subjectivity like gender and maternity. In *The Mai*, Grandma Fraochlan tells the story of grotesque figure, 'the nine-fingered fisherman'. Relating with pleasure, the details of the cause of the amputation of his finger, Grandma Fraochlan says: "His skin...a

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livid purple from the freezin' sea" (182). The amputated finger afterward is put "like a trophy" around the neck of the fisherman. The severed figure becomes an object of fascination throughout the community: "Boats would row up alongside his boat and ax to see his hand and ax to tell how he had come to lose that finger though they'd heard that story a hundred times already because people never tire of great love stories" (182).

Carr depicts life as a cycle of revolutionary changes in the individual's state and form. The most prominent transformation process in Carr's *The Mai* is that of Death. Cathy leeny and Anna McMullan describe death in her play as "a continuity between worlds, between earth and womb, between past, present and future" (xxiii). Carr's characters are entrapped in a cycle of the extremes. It is a cycle of death and rebirth, separation and reunion and the human and the supernatural. In *The Mai* act one closes with the image of The Mai lying dead in Robert's arms. However, she is resurrected in act two in the first of her metamorphoses. Millie foretells The Mai's death when she narrates the myth of Coillte, who was abandoned by her lover and dissolves into lake, a story which prepare us to the fact that The Mai too is going to meet the same fate. The Mai's second metamorphosis, her death, occurs at the end of the play where she too dissolves into Owl Lake. The repeated transformation and the cyclic move between life and death are best illustrated in The Mai dream which she relates to Robert:

I dreamt it was the end of the world and before my eyes
an old woman puts a knife through your heart and you die
on the grey pavement, and for some reason I find this
hilarious. Then the scene changes and I'm a child walking
up a golden river and everything is bright and startling.
At the bend in the river I see you coming towards
me...you're a child too-and as you come nearer I smile
and wave, so happy to see you, and you pass me saying,
'Not yet, not yet, not for thousands and thousands of
years. 'And I turned to look after you and you're gone
and the river is gone and away in the distance I see a
black caravan and I know it leads to nowhere and I start
walking that way because I know I'll find you there.
(126)

Discussing the technique of metamorphosis in *The Mai*, Hill argues that “the potential of performativity and rematerialization offers a means of subversion for The Mai through her metamorphic body” (50). The Mai believes that she cannot live without Robert; consequently, she drowns herself. Her suicide and metamorphosis, as Hill believes, are means of empowering herself and of transcending the limitation of her female body. The Mai is, thus, shown as liberating herself and having full control over her body (45). The performativity of The Mai’s dead body disturbs the stereotype of the tragic dead female body as poor victim to reveal a prospective for creative resurrection. Her dead body restates her subjection and silence as an objectified individual. According to Butler, metamorphosis has a liberating power that liberates the individual of ready-made culture and inherited impulses and gives a hope for a new future (Hill 49). It helps to show woman as able to control her own fate. Instead of accepting the role of a sacrifice victim, woman changes her destiny by being able to change death into rebirth. Carr’s female characters seek to reunite with nature that is to go back to mother’s womb.

Carr’s *The Mai* draws heavily upon elements of metatheatre, a technique that proves to be the most relevant framework for the representation of the past. The term metatheatre was first coined by Lionel Abel. The two concepts underlying Abel’s idea of metatheatre are: “The world is a stage; life is a dream (Rani 496). There are many elements of metatheatre as the play within the play structure, role playing within the role, frequent means of intentional allusion to real life, dramatic rules and literary works, disturbing the dramatic mood, highlighting the effect of dramatic performance and making the audience conscious of the two fold nature of theatrical experience (Swan 82). Many of these elements of metatheatre like storytelling, rehearsal and costumes are always present in Carr’s play.

The Mai manifests a distinctive use of storytelling which is significant points to the necessity of a common myth that unites people together. *The Mai*, for instance, has a hidden theme which is women’s quest for a story or rather a myth, a magical thread that would link them together. Millie is the central storyteller who tells

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the personal history of her family especially her mother. Storytelling empowers her as it identifies her with land and history. Like Millie, Grandmother Fraochlan is a major character as well as a storyteller who tells the young generation fake stories that destroy their lives. Her stories symbolize the destructive aspect of storytelling. What makes storytelling more complicated in Carr's play is the fact that the storytellers are also characters who have a role to play.

Role-playing is a further metatheatrical device highlighted through the use of complementary elements like costumes and rehearsals. Anita K. Stoll argues that both techniques of role-playing within the role and the play within the play provide a break time wherein the audience is suddenly taken away from the atmosphere of the main drama to a different atmosphere and a different role. This makes the audience aware of the fact that the original role is rather fictional and illusory just as the second one. Depicting more than one identity for the same player puts the issue of identity as a whole into question and calls upon the audience to reconsider it (1344). In *The Mai*, the wedding costume signifies the move to a state of marginalization and more precisely to be submitted more to rules of patriarchal society by becoming a wife. White costume represents the end woman's romantic. Academic and professional aspirations and her initiation into the stereotypical wife or mother figure are ideas that is at the core of *The Mai*.

Repetition is another element that Carr uses in *The Mai*. According to Carr, repetition is meant to universalize the characters' experience and shake it off its individuality highlighting it as a universal state that might occur and reoccur like nature's phenomena. Furthermore, it is a defense strategy by means of which the individual seeks to be distanced from facing the painful fact of being an abject figure by giving themselves to an endless process of repetition of actions and events. Repetition is meant to avoid the subject's eternal submerging into mother's identity. However, repetition, on a deeper level can lead to perceiving identity by highlighting differences since a repeated action or behavior should inevitably have something different from the original one so that no event can exactly copy another event. In *The Mai* the characters repeat old patterns of behavior and follow myths like sleepwalkers.

For example, The Mai's story is in fact Millie's story. Act two of *The Mai* whose actions are supposed to take place a year later, repeats the actions of Act one in some differences. This is further emphasized by other devices such as Millie's narration of the events of the two summers and of the legend of Owl Lake and Grandma Fraochlan's memories. To highlight repetition, Carr builds her play upon a set of dual characters: two sisters, two aunts, a daughter and a hundred-year-old grandmother.

Carr echoes Jung's argument about that individuation and that requires a myth to live in. in line with Jung's identity building model, Carr believes that one can't live without a common myth that connects him/her with human being. Hence, Carr's play is preoccupied with revising already myths that prove to be misleading by rendering some changes to the original myths that help to weaken them. Her play suggests a rewriting of taken-for granted myths to suit the present situation through what Kristeva terms as abjection. Thus, Carr offers a means of building Irish identity.

This study posed and answered the question whether Carr actually renders new methods of conceptualizing identity and if she manages to offer a method of rewriting myth and history. It came to the conclusion that, building on psychoanalytic theories of identity development, Carr offers to rewrite myth as well as Irish identity through the medium of subversion. Subversion in Carr's play is performed on different levels not only on cultural levels but also on psychoanalytic one. On a psychoanalytic level, Carr subverts association between woman and the less civilized stage (the semiotic) and man and the more civilized stage (the symbolic). This is meant to destabilize a patriarchal society with its related oppressive codes that strip woman of her rights. Carr appeals to the mind as well as the psyche of her reader. Carr digs out the content of the reader's unconscious while rewriting his conscious concepts. This makes Carr's drama a drama of subversion that is meant to weaken rules and tradition.

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