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Oppression, Repression, and Depression in ‘The Mai’

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Abstract

This research paper presents an extremely pessimistic view of Irish womanhood and the place of women in the contemporary Irish society. Women’s oppression, repression and depression are not a new topic in literature, but in the past it was another factor in the continuation of male dominance and women’s inferiority. This paper explores the hopes and disappointments of four generations of women within one Irish family. Marina Carr’s play *The Mai* explores the oppression, repression, and depression of four generations of women who contempt their mistake. The life of women is full of sorrow because of their husband’s infidelity. They are totally devoted to their husbands. For instance, the protagonist of the play knows that her husband is unfaithful to her, in spite

of that, she loves him and waits for him. This presents an extremely pessimistic view of Irish womanhood and the place of women in the society.

Moreover, this paper uses exploratory research method where it discusses problems and questions. It deals with qualitative research design because it concerns with human nature and behavior.

Keywords

Irish womanhood, contemporary Irish society, women's oppression, The Mai, Marina Carr.

Introduction

The analysis begins with *The Mai* which is a quite realistic play in the Irish literature and first performed in the Peacock Theatre on 5 October 1994. *The Mai* is set in the midlands of Ireland over the span of a year from 1979 to 1980. It explores the hopes and disappointments of four generations of women within one Irish family. This play explores the oppression, repression, and depression of four generations of women who contempt their mistake. There are several books *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte, *The Bell Jar* (1963) by Sylvia Plath, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) by Amy Tan, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) by Nathaniel Hathorne, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Toni Morrison, *Wuthering Heights* (1845-46) by Emily Bronte, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys which deal about oppression, repression, and depression of women.

In this play *The Mai*, Carr adopted a more naturalistic style. It resembles a patchwork quilt. It is collection of various pieces of stories and dialogue, and sewed together with a thread of narrative, by a narrator Millie, a daughter of The Mai. This presents an extremely pessimistic view of Irish womanhood and the place of women in the society. However, McMullan notes, "Carr focuses on those who are marginalized from the success obsessed climate of the Celtic tiger, and confronts us with female difference and deviance" (McMullan 81). Particularly in *The Mai*, Carr shows the most complex characterization of each character. Here we are presented with social issues and drawn into the drama itself while the boundaries between the stage and the audience are completely blurred. *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan* and *By the Bog of Cats* are often considered as a kind of trilogy. In each tragic family drama, Carr analyzes the cruel longing of each female protagonist, revealing diverse dimensions, and makes one think of what has created each longing, which finally ends in self-destruction.

Women's oppression, repression and depression are not a new topic in literature, but in the past it was another factor in the continuation of male dominance and women's inferiority. The cause of the oppression of woman is the women's ignorance. Mary Wollstonecraft calls this, "bondage of ignorance" (Wollstonecraft 752). Moreover, Virginia Woolf also reflects upon women's ignorance as a cause of their own oppression. She believes, "anonymity runs in their blood" and "the desire to be veiled still possesses them" (Woolf 771). She says clearly that women have such a low sense of self-worth; they wish to remain unseen by the world. They are so

habituated to the practice, they actually believe that men are stronger and dominate sex.

The same thing, we can see in *The Mai*. The Mai is a powerful lady but still she is spending her life under her husband, Robert's control. She knows that her husband is unfaithful to her, in spite of that, she loves him and waits for him and says, "He is my husband and he's back and I love him, so don't you freeway in here and tell me it's hopeless" (Carr 132).

This play focuses on the eponymous heroine, a middle-aged mother and school-teacher. She suffers from the infidelity of her husband, Robert for many years. She devotes her whole life to her doomed love for Robert while she knows that her love is unfaithful. She is brave, and intelligent heroine but hopelessly in love of Robert is the most important part of her life. For five years, alone, she dreams of her phantom lover. All the female characters in the play- the Mai, her mother, Grandma Fraochlan, her aunts, her sisters Beck are faithful for their husband but they received infidelity. The Mai has done nothing in the absence but wait for Robert's return. She has only built beautiful home for him at Owl Lake. With his return, The Mai believes that she can live with her husband with happy memories. But her happiness is changed in sorrow when Robert finds a mistress and forgets about The Mai. Carr would argue that the unfaithful nature of men affect the lives of a family of women. The play dramatizes the painful psychological process of female authorship and exposes Carr's struggle with both artistic matrilineage and patriarchal authority.

Carr attempts to show the cause and effect of women driven to anxiety simply by living. The characters struggles in her

plays are compounded by the sins of the father, and the mother. Certainly, the four generations of women in the play make up the matriarchal family, but tragically, by the end of the running narrative, Millie realizes she will not escape; she can only hope she does not pass her legacy on to the next generation. In *The Mai*, the women hold both strength and desperation.

Irish playwright Marina Carr presents oppression, repression, and depression through many Irish myths and motifs in her play. She reflected the role of the myth of Owl Lake in the lives of The Mai and Robert. She also discussed many motifs (swans and Geese) in the myth Owl Lake. The origin of the Owl Lake is produced from "loch cailleach oiche" or Lake of the Night Hag or Pool of the Dark Witch" (Carr 112). The story of this myth is that Coillte, the daughter of the mountain god, Bloom. She loves with Blath, Lord of the Flowers. They are very famous romantic lovers in the Irish myths. Coillte represents the Mai's love relationship with her husband Robert:

One autumn evening 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 was gone. Coillte followed him and found him ensconced in the dark witch's lair. He would not speak to her, look at her, touch her, and heartbroken Coillte lay down outside the dark witch's lair and cried a lake of tears that stretched for miles around. (Carr 147)

In the legend of Owl Lake, one night Coillte was weeping at the shores of the lake and she had cried. The witch did not miss the opportunity and push her into the lake. Finally, she had drowned. After sometime, her lover Blath started to search her but she had dissolved into a lake of tears. In the case of Coillte, Carr defines; she is pushed by the witch and

dissolves, while the Mai willingly walks into the lake, and transforming herself into Owl Lake. The Mai seems to adapt the Coillte story in her own life. Both were drown and are transformed into the same body of water, Coillte's death and transformation was not of her wish. Thus, the Mai inserts the notion of agency into her death. Before the audience is told the legend of Owl Lake, we hear a dream that Robert had of Mai. The cries of the swans and geese are basically related to the legend of Owl Lake. At the close of act two, this will be told by Millie, "Sam Brandy told me that when the gees are restless or the swans suddenly take flight, it's because they hear Blath's pipe among the reeds, still playing for Coillte" (42). Moreover, Carr gives the detail picture of Swans in the Irish folktales. Irish folktales have references to couples who convert into swan and are chained together. For instance, in the story of Children of Lir, the transformed and chained swan-children have finally served the conditions of their curse. In this story, the loving siblings in the form of swans are chained together in much the same way that the Mai explains her relation with Robert. Like the Children of Lir, Mai suffer at the hands of her long curse (of loving an inconstant lover too much, and a deep-seated depression) and dies:

Now it happens that a princess of Munster, Deoca, and (the woman of the South) became betrothed to a Connacht chief named Lairgnen, and begged him as wedding gift to procure for her the four wonderful singing swans whose fame had come to her. He asks them of the hermit, who refuses to give them up, wher-upon the "man of the North" seizes them violently by the silver chains with which the hermit had coupled them, and drags them off to Deoca. This is their trail. Arrived in her presence, an awful transformation befalls them. The swan plumage falls off; and reveals, not, indeed, the radiant forms of the Danaan divinities, but four withered, snowy-haired, and miserable

human being, shrunken in the decrepitude of their vast old age. Lairnien flies from the place in horror, but the hermit prepares to administer baptism at once, as death is rapidly approaching them. "Lay us in one grave, says Fionuala," and place Conn at my right hand and Fiachra at my left, and Hugh before my face, for there they were wont to be when I sheltered them many a winter night upon the seas of Moyle. "And so it was done, and they went to heaven; but the hermit, it is said, sorrowed for them to the end of his earthly days. (Rolleston 141)

Carr explains the relationship of the swans in the tale, as the Children of Lir are siblings, whereas Mai and Robert are married, but keeps the long-endured curse and chained soul's aspects of the tale. She presents the connection between the swans in the Children of Lir to both the relationship of Blath and Coillte and Mai and Robert. There are so many other motifs discussed in the myth of Owl Lake. The Irish also tells about faeries who are part of the creation of a region and their roles in such creations are not always generous. Faery mounds are still found all over Ireland, and the people of Ireland still have belief that fairies reside in them. Traditionally, it is considered very bad luck to build one's home on a faery mounds. It is the symbol of painful life. The Owl Lake is broadly known in the play after that Mai builds her home. It is on a faery mounds (bad enough luck) of the dark hag witch (even worse luck). Faeries and faery mounds play a significant role in this play and Irish culture. *At the Bottom of the Garden*, Diane Purkiss discusses the connection between mounds and the notion that they are inhabited by fairies/ witches/ dead ancestors. This book also discusses how gender differences affect the telling of these types of stories. Purkiss explains this difference:

Male identity comes from the father; in the Celtic regions, all identity comes from one all-powerful ancestor. The odd formulations of the chief's titles- the MacLeod, the MacDonald- implies that the individual is nothing; his meaning comes from descent. All over the British Isles there are burial mounds and in the Celtic areas, the clan system preserved intact the idea of a powerful, though dead, male ancestor who gives a name and an identity to everyone in the clan. A memory was also preserved of the mounds as places of the dead, places where the powerful dead might impart virtue to the surrounding countryside, long after the name of their original inhabitants were forgotten. Just in this way, the fairies, and particularly those fairies who are in any case recently dead male heroes, end up inhabiting the mounds- also ambiguous, also able to help. (Purkiss 70)

For women in these societies a fairy story is about reaching rock bottom- in that sense, a story about dying- but it is also a story about finding a way out, if only in story. And yet we must not be sentimental about these stories. They are not stories of a kind, acceptant, pastoral world, but brutal, violent, often plain mean stories of mean lives, stories not of warm closeness to a benign earth, but of too much closeness to an earth that cannot give enough food, stories not of community sharing, but of villages hostile and towns unfriendly. They come from hurt Fairies also share many characteristics with the dead; in some stories they are the dead, or the dead are with them, in others it is hard for teller and reader to tell the differences between a ghost or revenant or fairy or witch. This means they can symbolize loss; loss of self particularly. (85-86)

In this play, *The Mai*, Carr invalidates how gender interacts with gender, with the close-knit group of interrelated families' identity coming from the matriarch, as opposed to patriarch. This reversion also explains Mai's connection to the otherworld Owl Lake. Carr asserts the way that identity is given through the male ancestor. The link between the witch hag of Owl Lake and the fairies living in mounds seems

important in that Carr is telling a link not only between Coillte and Mai, but also, an ancestral link between Mai and the hag.

Moreover, the playwright gives a beautiful description of Sam Brady, Druids, and The Curse in this play. The narrator, Millie tells the story of Sam Brandy, their neighbor who always disliked Robert. The first motif within the tale of Sam Brady that matches with Irish folklore is that of using ashes to curse. In ancient Irish society, the druids were responsible for passing binding judgment and enacting penalties for crimes committed. They were belonging to the highest class, often the sole counsel of kings. They were also held a great deal of sway in the society. Brady serves as druid when he passes judgement on Robert's infidelity and abandonment of the Mai and his children with his ashen curse. Some ways, Sam Brady seems to be fulfilling this role of druid. Carr presents the concept of druid in the form postmodern context. Sam Brady helps Mai and grants the plot on Owl Lake. Carr says:

It was Sam Brady who sold the site to The Mai. For years he'd refused all offers, offers from hoteliers, publicans, restaurateurs, rich industrialists. Yank, and then turned around and gave it to The Mai for a song. When asked by irate locals why he'd sold it to The Mai, a blow-in, Sam merely answered, 'Highest bidder!' (Carr 111)

Further, Carr presents the second motif 'destroying cow' which is associated with Sam Brady. The destroying cow motif comes from Tain Bo Cuailgne in which a splendid prized bull The Brown Bull of Cualnge go wild across the countryside after its theft has brought a great war between counties for possession of it. Carr's Billy the Black is not as famous as The Brown Bull of Cualnge, but does seem to be a modification of it, especially as regards the gender of the destroying animal. The

folklore features a bull (male) while Carr presents a destroying cow (female). In this play, she moves away from the power or agency of the male over to the female.

So, we find that there are several similarities between Carr's cow and the folktale's bull. Both animals are famous for their widespread reputation and are able to exact wanton destruction upon the landscape, and upon the innocents along with the guilty. Carr compares her cow to the bull. Through the cow and bull, Carr presents the power of male over to the female. The needle and thread motif play important role in the play and wends its way through the entirety of the play. It is most evident in Millie's recollections of movements when Mai was breaking down at the time of Robert's departures.

Thus, the playwright discusses the four generations of women's individual situations and their relationship with men. The female voices are the core of this family drama. In this play, it is not only Millie that tells her story. Eventually, the stage is filled with voices and conversations of women. There are several colourful episodes told by each female character. As Anthony Roche summarizes, "Contemporary Irish drama has all often been an exclusive men's club" (Roche 147). Carr challenges such a tradition in Irish theatre. She stages seven women of four generations: Grandma Fraochlan, The Mai's 100-years old grandmother; her two aunts, Julie and Agnes; The Mai and her two sisters, Connie and Beck; and her daughter, Millie. The stage becomes a forum for women. Grandma Fraochlan's stories of her beloved late husband, the nine-fingered fisherman are of special vivacity in the oral tradition of storytelling. She is the aggressive hundred year

old and opium-smoking head of the family. Her daughters, Julie and Agnes, represent a conservative Ireland of the 1920-30s and the third generation- The Mai and her sisters, Connie and Beck is trapped between their desire for self-rule and fulfillment and the mores and expectations of the previous generation. Grandma Fraochlan and the other female characters in the *The Mai* are not motivated by the social constraints. She lives in a separate world from the other in this play and exists in a dream-like state that is centered on the past. She never apologizes for her addiction to opium or alcohol. Drink is a distinct part of her character as Millie observes, "Grandma Fraochlan became a little sentimental after a few glasses of mulberry wine, and after a few more she began to call up ghosts and would wrestle with them until sleep overtook her" (Carr 120). Murray calls Grandma, "a mixture of the naturalistic and the *cailleach* from folklore: her stories of love and fidelity carry a mythic power and yet she remains a Falstaffian rogue" (Murray 237). Millie explains that Grandma Fraochlan's belief that she is the daughter of a Sultan of Spain. Later, the narrator reveals that Grandma Fraochlan's mother likely had a brief affair with:

The name alone evokes a thousand memories in me. She was known as the Spanish beauty though she was born and bred on Inis Fraochlan, north of Bofin. She was the result of a brief tryst between an ageing island spinster and a Spanish or Moroccan sailor- no one is quite sure- who was never heard of or seen since the night of her conception. There were many stories about him as there are about those who appear briefly in our lives and change them forever. Whoever he was, he left Grandma Fraochlan his dark skin and a yearning for all that was exotic and unattainable. (Carr 116)

In this play, She explains herself as a useless mother and she continue speaks of the "nine-fingered fisherman," the love of her life. Her love and affection for him showered on her last daughter Ellen, the mother of The Mai, is considered extreme and unbalanced. Julie is her seventy-five years old eldest daughter but still bears a grudge against her mother, says in her report, "You didn't bring me up at all. I brought myself up and all the others. You were at the window pinin' for the nine-fingered fisherman!" (37). There are two most emotional speeches in the play which reveals her relationship with her mother and with her husband. She tells of how her mother made Grandma call her The Duchess. The Grandma Fraochlan's mother told her every year that her father was the Sultan of Spain who would return for them next summer. Fraochlan expresses her pain in a pathetic way, "And I don't know which of us believed that story more- her nor me. I was tha only bastard on Fraochlan in living memory and tha stigma must've been terrible for her. I don't know, but I'm not over the dismantlin' of that dream yet. Even still, every summer, I expect somethin' momentous to happen" (169).

The memory of her father is the result of the tales that is told by her mother "The Duchess". Grandma Fraochlan or her mother, who insisted on calling herself the Duchess, fabricated the man who was the father of Grandma Fraochlan. She says, "Me greah grandfather was Tunisian! I'm on'y quarter Tunisian, half Moroccan an'half Spanish!" was ridiculed and dismissed by Julie, "That makes five quarters! How many quarters in a whole?" (37). These stories explain her father's continued absence.

These lines show the thread of anxiety in the life of women. Grandma says that social stigma was ruined her mother's life. Her mother forced her own daughter Ellen to marry when Ellen conceived out of wedlock. Clare Wallace says clearly about Grandma Fraochlan, "the master key to the family's intricate and unfortunate history of (self) deception" (441). Grandma Fraochlan is a unique character in this play and presents the shocking nontraditional viewpoints. Moreover, she states that she took on the same longing for the perfect love that her mother felt, but, gradually, her mother controls her wishes and stop to miss her father.

Grandma presents an unfamiliar choice in Irish history. The surrounding stories of Grandma Fraochlan's past, Carr seems to be drawing on these fantastic tales of "humans taking faery lovers," suggesting that Grandma Fraochlan's mother (The Duchess) is a mortal woman, and her father belongs to the otherworld (Spain). Fraochlan's father's absence might point to some taboo the Duchess transgressed. Just as Fraochlan suffer a mental and physical decline for her lost Nine-fingered Fisherman, her mother The Duchess dreams of the Sultan's promised return each summer and passes this dream to Fraochlan.

However, we have to see at the social and legislative oppression forced upon women at that time. As Melissa Sihra annotations, "For Carr the family is central to the drama and it is from this microcosm that implications for culture and nation are cited" (Sihra 257). Marina Carr allots each female character with a probable position and fate according to each personality and social circumstances. The physical and mental declination of women continues run through the four

generations of women. The first one is Fraochlan's hope for the return of her father and her unending love of the long gone Nine fingered Fisherman, to The Mai's unreasonable love of the wandering and changeable Robert, and finally to Millie and her revealed future. After long physical and mental depression, the four generation of women are faithful for the life partners and watch the way when they return. Such as, Fraochlan explains the uncontrollable feeling of love for the Nine-fingered Fisherman in a monologue with Julie. She took Nine- fingered Fisherman's side and fights with The Mai and Julie.

Grandma Fraochlan clarifies when her daughter Julie challenges her on the reason for his departure, "He didn't leave me. He was taken from me. He was given to me and he was taken from me" (143). Grandma's affair with the Nine-fingered Fisherman was paramount in her life. She describes how it came to be that her husband, Tomas, became 'the Nine-fingered Fisherman'. Tomas was a salmon fisherman when she was delivering her third baby. He wants journey of the sea for some purpose. When he asked the skipper to turn the boat around, the skipper refused. Tomas jump into the icy sea and began the swim home, but the skipper, who was worried for his safety, helped him back into the boat and brought him home. Nine is a number that appears literally hundreds of time in Irish folklore. It is consider a magical number. There are nine hazel trees that grow over the Irish Well of Wisdom, the Cauldron at the Head of Hades whose fire was blown into flame by the breath of nine young women, as well as the holy nine-day long Celtic week and the nine muses of memory. Carr seems to use Grandma Fraochlan, her

past, and her connection to the nine-fingered fisherman to establish The Mai's family as faery- blood.

Therefore, Grandma Fraochlan presents the cultural repression and the dysfunctional relationship in this play. Thus, *The Mai* depicts, "modern marriage, but 'this love thing' now both defines and is the Achilles heel of the woman's role" (Murray 237). Her daughters are the victims of destiny. Julie, seventy-five, and Agnes, sixty-one, are Grandma's two surviving daughters. Now, they see to the morality of the family, such as trying to prevent their niece Beck's divorce and distributing leaflets about premarital sex to the children. They have been described as, "parodies of traditional Abbey types, as well as women with very specific views on marriage and divorce" (Carr 237). So, we can say that they are culturally repressed. Furthermore, Julie is considered an argumentative daughter while Agnes plays a peacemaker role in the play. On the other hand, Julie holds strong feeling of bitterness for Grandma Fraochlan's failure in the role mother. After a big particular fight with Grandma, Julie tells The Mai about some of the reason she holds such a feeling of resentment against her mother. Julie states clearly that Grandma is not responsible mother. So, Julie expresses her pain to *The Mai*.

In this passage, Julie continues to explain Grandma Fraochlan's interference with the youngest child, Ellen. Ellen was The Mai's mother who died in youth. She was doing medicine in Dublin University. She was a good-looking, brilliant college student until she became pregnant. She had no choice for her to get married, to cover up the scandal in Grandma Fraochlan. Ellen was pushed by her own mother to marry a husband, who left her alone in the dark world. It is

more poignant that Ellen did not want to marry the man who begot her child. Julie discloses, an episode that Ellen came to her home a few nights before her marriage and ask to persuade Grandma Fraochlan that, "she didn't not have to marry him" (36). Ellen's husband never mentioned anywhere in the play. He must have been working in Britain, as a worker in the construction sites. This explains his long absence from family. It is the most common jobs for Irishmen at that time. He came back every summer. Then, Grandma began to belittle the husband to Ellen. In this generation, the effects of Grandma Fraochlan's unfulfilled life manifested in her daughters lives in two ways as Ellen is considered as romantic and Julie as realistic. Finally, it is fact that their life became hell. Both have destructive life.

The Mai's generation is presented by her sisters, Beck, and Connie. The same oppression passes on the other generation that of The Mai and her sisters, Connie and Beck. Connie starts happy married life, but in one scene she fantasizes about the ability to have a bed of her own and the freedom of the Connie to go pick up a strange man and take him to a hotel room. All female characters are exploited by strange man in this play. The Mai, despite her ability to criticize her dream of emotional dependency on 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). So, The Mai calls herself and her sisters, "some eejits" (163). While, Grandma Fraochlan was one of the, "lucky few" to "partake of that most rare and sublime love" with the nine- fingered fisherman (143). Unfortunately, her granddaughters exhibit

disappointment in the institution of marriage. The Mai and her sisters blame their female caregiver, Grandma Fraochlan, for their unhappy dreams. Marina Carr presents a grateful exchange between the three sisters:

The Mai: *They sure are. Little did I think as I played around the cliffs of Fraochlan that I would ever be like this. I used to dream that a dark-haired prince would come across the waves on the wings of an albatross and he'd take me away to a beautiful land never seen or heard of before and he'd love me as no girl had ever been loved.*

Beck: *My price 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 didn'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 my life to be huge and heroic and pure as in the days of yore. (162-63)*

The stories Grandma Fraochlan tells cause Back, Connie, and The Mai to harbour unrealistic expectations. While primary expectation is romantic, which is told by Grandma Fraochlan? She continues describes her romance with her nine-fingered fisherman. The Mai, Beck, and Connie think that their ideal mate will arrive with vehicles at their home to marry them but the women never quite achieve. In The Mai's case, marriage to Robert means ruined everything or she describes it, she has to "let go of all the beautiful things in her life" (163). Similarly, Grandma Fraochlan's daughter Ellen has to give up her study

of medicine when she becomes pregnant and is forced by Fraochlan to marry the father of her child. Although, the four generation of women are taught through story that they should advantage marriage over academics, over independence, and over art, the women find themselves despairing because love-whether it is disastrous (Ellen, The Mai and Millie), elusive (Beck), mundane (Connie), or wonderful (Grandma Fraochlan) never results in happiness.

Furthermore, Beck is contrast with Connie and resigns herself to living out her days alone because she cannot seem to have a healthy honest relationship. She breaks from cultural conventions by having premarital affairs. Finally, she marries a handsome person but it is unsuccessful marriage because her husband discovers she lied about her age and education. She explains the situation about unsuccessful marriage, "Don't get me wrong, he was kind, kind enough until one night I got a little drunk and believed myself to be a lot closer to him than I actually was I told him I wasn't thirty-one and that I wasn't in fact a qualified teacher but a low-down waitress" (131). As a result, she sees The Mai's situation with an unfaithful husband as a better one than her lonely state. Both Connie and Beck heard stories by Grandma Fraochlan, and admits that each used to have her own prince. Connie was not wholly satisfied with her married life. The Mai, now facing her married life with Robert in crisis, and thinks herself "trapped".

Marina Carr says clearly that The Mai is the most tragic victim of the cycle of devastation and depression. All the time, she thinks about her unhappy marriage with Robert. She admits that their marriage goes wrong. After that, she has little happiness in the face of her failing marriage, "The Mai lives

and dies with all the dramatic intensity of a tragic heroine, but her restless yearning reflects an emotional reality common to all women who are waiting, as it were, for their prince to come" (Upton 78). The Mai says honestly that her chance of living happily is with Robert. Now, she is spending her life without him, while Robert is with other woman. Although, her relatives and friends warn that Robert's return is temporary, she ignores any unenthusiastic or critical comments about Robert and her relationship with him. Even, she knows that Robert and her better life will never come. But she cannot move on it and say that everything will be all right. Beck hurts The Mai with, "No point in actin' the martyr" (Carr 44). Connie suggests, "Just get up and walk, or kick him out" (55). The Mai is totally against her both sisters and says, "he is still my husband [...]. I have the children to think of" (53). The Mai is cared and loved by these women on her mother's side, but Carr says that such affection is not enough for The Mai. Robert holds the key of her life. In this critical situation, only Grandma Fraochlan tries to show The Mai that she is strong and she can handle all types of situation. 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" (67).

The Mai expresses the sensuality that lies at the heart of her romanticism by playing her body with Robert's cello bow. She fights violently with her husband, saying, "Tell me Robert- tell me, it is that faraway pussies are greener or is it your mother

crowin' on your cock" (156). Conceivably, Carr describes The Mai's character 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" (151). Still, she says strongly that they are meant to be together, as she explains her feeling with her daughter, Millie before her suicide:

The Mai: *No Millie, he does, he loves me in his own high damaged way. Maybe it's just a phase he's going through and in a few years he'll come back to me- What do you think, Millie"*

Millie: *I don't know.*

The Mai: *Millie, 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. (73)*

The most common thing in these sisters is that they all required their own form of happiness through independence or education but got lost somewhere along the way. They are similar in their life struggles. They do have successful relationship:

Connie: *Way back before we discovered men. You know I spent my twenties thinkin' I have to get a man, I have to get a man-*

The Mai: *So, did I*

Connie: *Now that I have one, what's the big deal I'd like to know. Sometimes I'd love to be on my own again.*

Beck: *Ara go on outa that. You wouldn't last a day. You've never been without a man as long as I can remember.*

The Mai: *Four engagements before Derek.*

Connie: *And I never slept with any of them* **The Mai:** *Anyway it's great to see you again- reminds me of – the old days. If I could turn the clock back.*

Beck: *Don't be ridiculous. Sex for the sake of it is just sex for the sake of it.*

The Mai: *Have you slept with a lot of men, Beck?*

Beck: *Put it this way, I've lost count... the pair of ye don't know how lucky ye are. (159-60)*

Persistently, three sisters are talking with the Mai's open acknowledgement of Robert's infidelity though she appears on the outside untouched by his actions. Her both sisters express an unfavorable opinion of how Robert humiliates The Mai in front of the entire society. On some level, the Mai does know, how Robert has disgraced her and this denial of reality will help contribute to her suicide. In his study of contemporary Irish music, Kieran Keohane remarks, "Irish women's culture has historically been a culture of abandonment, inspired by loss and destitution, a culture of being left behind minding the house" (Keohane 105).

The Mai's devotion to her husband corresponds to the life of the swans on Owl Lake. The swans associate her with the natural world, further emphasizing the sensuality in the representation of her as the cello. The swans and the cello have link in the Celtic mythology. The swan holds a major place in the ancient legends. Most notably, The Mai becomes the pair of birds, described by Millie in her account.

The Mai connects with both the male and the female; she mourns the loss of her husband as the female swan mourns

her life-mate. The concluding character in Carr's generational tragedy is the Mai's daughter Millie. She is the single representative of the fourth generation who is always on the stage throughout the whole play. Her character presents aloofness while explaining her emotional connection with the Mai, although she has an emotional reaction to her mother's drowning which surfaces as an angry clash with her father, Robert. She is considered the most underdeveloped character due to her voyeuristic role as narrator throughout the play. We receive the revelation of something secret to her feelings while she explains the Mai's emotional reactions to situation but not her own.

Though Carr does not offer Millie a happy ending, she does offer Millie a history and this counts as something because there is the slightest possibility that she can someday emerge triumphant from those lakes. So, the circle of oppression, repression, and depression is passed down from mothers to daughters. Carr tells a tale of four generations of women who live without the love from their men that they deserved. They are continuously haunted by the ghost of the past that no one can seem to shake. As we mentioned earlier, Carr's characters do not find any reaffirmation or healing from their past. The thread of lunacy and calamity is weaved into every generation.

Finally, we can say that the consciousness of the four generations of women who gather at Owl Lake are not haunted by guilt based in dogma, but guilt based on the decisions made in their past. Though the range of generations represented in *The Mai*, Carr's women characters embody a different side of each generation. Therefore, the multi-generational storyline presents an important evolutionary

stage of the Irish woman. Grandma Fraochlan provides more insight into the historically silenced female. She gives a beautiful description about her own mother to her granddaughter, Beck. The memory consists of her not being able to refer to her as "mother", but as "The Duchess." The Duchess deceived her daughter by remaining steadfast to the idea that every summer her husband would return to take them both away. Years later, Grandma Fraochlan is haunted by self made believe story and says, "I'm not over the dismantlin' of that dream yet...even still, every summer, I expect somethin' momentous to happen" (169). Early in the play, she perpetuates her own make-believe dream of waiting for the nine-fingered fisherman, proving the proverb, "we repeat and we repeat, the orchestration may be different but the tune is always the same" (123).

Deception plays a major role in the life of four generations women. The female characters find impossible to overcome but this memory is part of a larger cultural deception. Carr presents no positive hope for Robert's return to Owl Lake. He is neither returning to seek forgiveness for leaving, nor has he found that his love for the Mai is too strong to stay away. In the last pages of the play, the Mai's life is like a hell only because of Robert's deception. The ending of the play show the Mai's incessant desire to hold on the illusion that Robert loves her, eventhough he has once again left her. In spite of that, she admits, "he loves me in his own high damaged way. May be it's just a phase he's going through and in a few years he'll come back to me" (185). Millie says that all the time her mother waited for Robert that was never going to happen in her life. The sadness memory haunts her current life as she

elucidates, "The Mai at the window, Grandma Fraochlan's oar, The Mai at the window again. The Mai at the window again, and it goes on and on till I succumb and linger among them there in the dead silent world that tore our hearts out for a song" (184). The narrator of the play, Millie remembers her mother holding on to the illusion that Robert would return:

***The Mai:** Robert is mine and I am his- 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. (185)*

Conclusion

In the end of the paper, we can say that the main plot of the play is a just an ordinary story about ordinary women who are exploited by men. The life of women is full of sorrow because of their husband's infidelity. They are totally devoted to their husbands. For instance, in the absence of Robert, The Mai loves him whole heartly and waits for his return while he has affair with a local woman. When her sisters suggest that just get up and walk, or kick him out. The Mai replies that he is my husband and we have children. In this play, all women are the patient of infidelity of their husband's. Still they are continuenng running their relationship with them. Their's patners are not ready to understand the value of true love and their devotion.

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