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The Evolution of Female Characters From Antiquity to Modernity: An Examination of Marinna Carr's and Carol Lashof's Adaptations of Classical Mythology

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***Abstract*—Literature relies heavily on mythology. Myths are stories of deities, monsters or immortals which are transformed from one generation to the other. In addition to documenting the religious and cultural experiences of a specific community, myths also outline the consequent literary, artistic and dramatic customs. Some Greek myths have survived for thousands of years because they accurately depict historical events, cultural values, and trends. Among the most famous classical myths are the myths of Medusa and Medea. As for the myth of Medusa, the earliest known record was found in Theogony (700BC) by Hesiod (8 th-7th century BC). A later version of the Medusa myth was made by the Roman poet Ovid (43BC –17/18AD), in his "Metamorphoses" (3-8 AD). Then again, *Medea* is a tragedy produced in 431 BC by the Greek playwright Euripides(480–406BC) based on the myth of Jason and Medea. Both Medusa and Medea are among the most fascinating and complex female protagonists in Greek mythology which have captivated many writers and playwrights for ages. In the twentieth century, there were many adaptations of both mythological figures; among these adaptations were those made by contemporary American and Irish women playwrights like Carol Lashof (1956-) and Marinna Carr (1964-). This paper examines the myths of Medusa and Medea and analyses the ways these myths are borrowed, refashioned and exploited in Lashof's *Medusa's Tale* (1991) and Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998). Both playwrights explore hidden dimensions of the traditional myths, combining elements from the old and modern worlds.**

Index Terms*—myth, Medea, Medusa, *Medusa's Tale, By the Bog of Cats

I. Introduction

Tales, as products of people's imagination, have been highly popular since ancient times. In Greece, a specific term was coined for these tales – 'mythos' - and this term was translated from Greek as 'myth'. While myths bring to the fore many facts and events, they do not represent historical reality. Different assumptions and theories have been expressed to explain what is behind myths, such as symbolic theory, allegorical theory, euhemerism, and rationalism (Rose, 2005). Yet the efforts of scholars and researchers to develop a comprehensive theory of the origin and crucial meaning of any myth have failed. Given that there is a lack of consensus on definition of myths, it is more appropriate to view myths from the lens of multidimensionality and change (Dowden & Livingstone, 2011). According to Sanders (2007) every Greek myth should be perceived as a story which has been refashioned and modified many times in the process of its transfer from a generation to generation and from one culture to another culture. In more specific terms, a Greek myth is a narration which is produced as a result of social, but not individual efforts, which cannot be attributed to a specific genre and which focuses on the relationships between gods and mortals (Graf, 1993).

However, a distinct characteristic of Greek mythology is that it exposes the cultural and social identity of Greeks and their ways of life and thinking. Despite the fact that Greek myths narrate everyday events within a supernatural context, they vividly illustrate social reality and gender issues prevalent in the Greek world. The first Greek myths were recited before audiences about two thousand years ago and were orally transferred from one storyteller to another (Bremmer, 2014).

In view of their oral nature, myths were exposed to constant changes to satisfy new tastes and interests of the audience. Moreover, the same myths had different versions, depending on region. Later, Greek myths were written down and were borrowed by the Romans, who used them as a basis on which their literature and art were created (Martin, 2003).

Entering into European culture through the literature produced by Roman poets, Greek myths have been widely used and adapted by writers and playwrights. Two characters of Greek mythology have been especially popular among them – Medusa and Medea. The interest of modern writers and playwrights in these characters is explained by their

ambiguity, inscrutability, and psychological complexity. These Greek female characters stand out from others by their diverse behaviors and inconsistent desires (Lauriolla, 2015). Arkins (2003) elucidates that despite the fact that Greek myths were created within a male-dominated realm, these characters act as rebellious females who tend to "disrupt the male system and can be termed 'female intruders'" (p. 202). Yet Greek mythological characters are infused with new characteristics in modern rewritings to serve different spectators and objectives. The purpose of adapting Greek myths in modern drama is to encourage the audience to look at mythological characters with a fresh eye and from the perspective of modernity (Foster, 2012). Through adaptations, modern playwrights seek to persuade the audience of the need to substitute prior perspectives and simple judgements of mythical figures for a more profound and comprehensive vision. In the process of myth adaptations, modern playwrights preserve close ties with the original Greek myths, whilst simultaneously rewriting dialogues and refashioning the portrayals of characters.

However, it should be taken into account that adaptations do not just borrow specific elements from original texts, but also contribute to the creation of meanings (Hutcheon, 2006). Following this line of argument, adaptations are intended to deepen understanding of myths rather than to produce new stories and new meanings. In light of this, Van Weyenberg specifies that adaptation should be viewed as "an ongoing and mutual process, rather than a one-directional line of influence" (2013, p. 21). Drawing on this perspective, adaptation tends to change original texts and, in view of their two-way relationships, original texts and adaptations appear equal to each other, despite the fact that adaptation juxtaposes new and old components.

This paper aims to shed light on modern representations and refashioning of myths of Medusa and Medea produced by an American playwright, Carol Lashof (1956-) and a modern Irish playwright, Marina Carr (1964-), and, in their works *Medusa's Tale* (1991) and *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) respectively. While critics have paid sufficient attention to the analysis of both works, parallels between Lashof's and Carr's use of myths have not been drawn. The paper attempts to fill this gap and provide a comparative analysis of Lashof and Carr, hypothesizing that both playwrights employ the method of remythologization in their plays to present mythological figures from the female perspective and thus "radically reclaim patriarchal mythologies" (Sihra, 2018, p. 271) of Medusa and Medea. As the paper implies, the integration of the female perspective into the rewriting of such mythological female characters as Medusa and Medea stems from desire to produce "a woman-centered 'herstory'" (Johnston E., 2017, p. 184) and thus depict female characters as victims of a culture which reinforces female subjugation.

II. Analyzing the Representations of Medusa and Medea in the Myths of Ovid (43 BC – 17 AD) and Euripides (480 – 406 BC).

The first mention of Medusa was discovered in the poem "Theogony" by Hesiod (8-7 BC), yet this literary work provides only a few details of Medusa's birth and death. Hesiod's myth of Medusa was borrowed by the Roman poet, Ovid, who in his epic poem "Metamorphoses" depicted a beautiful, powerful, and dangerous maiden, a daughter of a sea god, capable of turning people into stones with her gaze. The version of Medusa's myth produced by Ovid was the one most widely used by further generations of poets and writers (Wilk, 2000).

What is evident from Ovid's work is that for ancient Greeks and Romans, Medusa was the embodiment of terror and beauty, murder and redemption (Dumoulie, 2016). Once a beautiful woman with astonishing hair, Medusa is punished by Athena for being raped by Poseidon in her virgin temple and is transformed into a dangerous monster with snakes on her head and a deadly gaze. Yet when Perseus beheads Medusa, he uses her head to gain victory over his enemies. In this regard, Medusa's head fulfils the role of an amulet that protects a person from evil. In view of this ambiguous portrayal of Medusa, Ovid implies that it is difficult to distinguish between a monster and a victim. Instead of applying this distinction to Medusa, Ovid presents different manifestations of this female character (Walker, 1998). At first, the poet depicts Medusa as an object of men's sexual desires, accentuating her physical beauty, especially hair and eyes. Further, she appears in the image of a monster who both attracts and frightens men, and finally she becomes a weapon used by a man to prove his power.

What becomes clear from all these manifestations is that Ovid's Medusa echoes the wishes of other figures in the story. The poet does not provide any evidence of the desires of Medusa. Hence, Ovid's portrayal of the female character reveals ancient Greeks' and Romans' fear of women, and of the threat which women might pose to patriarchal authority. As a beautiful woman, Medusa is a seducer who may easily deprive a god of his control and make him follow his sexual instincts. As a revenge, Poseidon not only rapes Medusa, but also plays an implicit role in her transformation into a monster. It is his particular action that results in Athena's rage and punishment. Such an act of punishment is in accordance with the ancient Greek thinking that the victim of rape should be punished for the rape. However, even as a monster, Medusa continues to threaten men. She is beheaded by a man who wants to prove his power over a dangerous female creature, yet Perseus uses her head to triumph over others. Simultaneously, by enslaving Medusa, Perseus preserves his masculinity and contributes to maintaining "rape culture" (Johnston E., 2017, p. 185). In such culture, it is natural for gods and men to rape and dishonor women, simultaneously putting the blame for rape on them (Johnston E., 2017).

Medea is another complex female character who is mentioned in many ancient Greek sources, though these have been preserved only in small fragments. Luke Roman and Monica Roman, renowned authors noted for their comprehensive work in the field of classical studies, "Encyclopedia of Greek and Roman Mythology,"(2010) claim that

the fascination of ancient Greeks with the image of Medea is evident in Euripides's choice of this female character for his tragedy of the same name, despite the fact that this particular choice was not readily supported by Euripides's contemporaries. This lack of support is, to a great extent, explained by the playwright's interest in dark sides of a human being, the shift of focus from male heroes to a highly ambiguous female character, and the address of controversial moral questions. Medea is portrayed by Euripides as a sorceress, the bride of Jason, and a killer of her own brother and children. Most significantly, in Euripides's portrayal, Medea is a woman who cannot control her inner demons, and who turns to revenge because of the humiliation she experiences after Jason's betrayal. Although Medea expresses tenderness to her children, she nevertheless decides to "be ruthless toward her enemies" (Roman & Roman, 2010, p. 307). Instead of acting on her maternal instincts and save her children, Medea puts her desire for revenge above her love for children as well as her powerful emotions above reason and forgiveness. Hence, through the image of Medea, Euripides exposes the ancient conflicts between genders, and, in more specific terms, the fears of ancient Greeks of violent and uncontrollable femininity (Johnston S., 1997). Even in cases when Euripides depicts Medea in the role of a 'helper-maiden', the playwright implies that Medea's magic is a dangerous thing which may threaten men's lives and well-being. As the play progresses and Medea changes into a vengeful woman, it becomes evident that "the wicked woman always lurked within the helper-maiden" (Johnston S., 1997, p. 6).

On the other hand, by depicting Medea as both a helper and murder, Euripides makes an attempt to avoid an easy categorization of this female character. In some instances, she evokes sympathy, while others she evokes horror. In some cases, this female character is so proud that she refuses to accept authority of the king or her husband, while in others she is ready to do everything to retain her husband. Likewise, Medea's struggle with the patriarchal society stems from her struggle with her inner self. Emma Griffiths in her *Medea* (2006) sheds light on previously overlooked aspects of the Medea myth and asserts that such an ambiguous portrayal of Medea suggests that Euripides wants to express the attitude, shared by many ancient Greeks, that a woman should not be trusted, even if she projects an image of a lovable and good female. In ancient Greece deceit was viewed as one of the major characteristics of women.

At the end of Euripides's play, Medea is transformed from a human being into a semi-divine creature who punishes Jason's failure to venerate the authority of eros and the sacredness of marriage oaths. Hence, as is obvious from both Ovid's and Euripides's works, ancient Greeks tended to "figure women as 'the other'" (Griffiths, 2006, p. 61) and attribute negative stereotypes to them. By dehumanizing women through the depiction of their violence, Ovid and Euripides justify their further punishment.

In the modern West, Greek myths, according to Emma Griffiths, have mainly been analyzed by male researchers and critics, and have thus been explored through the male perspective (Griffiths, 2006). Taking into account this male perspective, it becomes obvious why the emphasis in the majority of readings has been placed on Medusa's and Medea's violence against men, and on their issues of negotiating identity. With regard to the latter aspect, both Medea and Medusa possess male and female features. In light of this, their identities are highly distorted. To achieve the balance in perspectives, it is necessary to scrutinize the female perspective to retellings of Greek myths.

III. Refashioning the Characters of Medusa and Medea by Lashof and Carr

Since the 1970s, writers and playwrights have turned their attention to Greek myths and mythological characters in an attempt to meet diverse intellectual and aesthetic demands of the audience and to revive "dramatic forms through a close engagement with the classical text" (Ioannidou, 2017, p. 131).Yet new lens are used for analyzing mythological characters, and new approaches have been developed for portraying familiar characters in a modern light. Through the refashioning of mythological characters, writers and playwrights uncover hidden aspects of characters' personalities and reinforce the audience's understanding of controversial mythological figures. This is just the case with regard to such Greek mythological characters as Medusa and Medea in their modern transformations by Lashof and Carr. Both playwrights share a similar vision on Medusa and Medea, presenting them not as evil, but as victims of gods or people whom they trusted and loved. By exchanging images of them as monsters with portrayals of victims of either sexual or psychological abuse, Lashof and Carr depict them as women who are in need of protection. Such resonances between Lashof and Carr exemplify attempts of modern playwrights to penetrate deep into a woman's dark side and find out what transforms a woman into a murderer and monster. Yet while Lashof rewrites the character of Medusa, Carr draws implicit parallels between Medea and her principal female character, Hester, living in modern Ireland (Sihra, 2018). In this regard, Carr situates an ancient Greek character within contemporary Irish culture and intensifies her tragedy by adding various painful details of the character's past.

In her play Medusa's Tale, Lashof reconsiders the portrayal of Medusa as a monster, and presents her as an innocent victim who is betrayed, rejected and punished by cruel gods Athena and Poseidon. As is clearly evident from Lashof's play, a man easily rejects a woman whom he raped when she is changed into an ugly creature. Likewise, the goddess turns away from a devoted girl to conceal her own failure:

> Medusa: She was my guardian, too. I loved her once.
>
> Perseus: (Pleading) Athena is wise and just. She would not punish someone who was virtuous.
>
> Medusa: She failed me. And she punishes me for having seen her failure". (*Medusa's Tale*, I, p. 282)

This particular dialogue demonstrates that Lashof presents Medusa not only as a helpless woman, but also as "the voice of feminist rage" (Currie, 2011, p. 170). In contrast to Ovid's play, Medusa is not a soundless victim, but a victim

who accuses her torturers and who wants Perseus to hear the true story of her tragedy. The very fact that Lashof endows Medusa with an opportunity to give her version of events leading to her transformation into a monster signifies that the playwright empowers her female character. Instead of killing Medusa at once, Perseus allows her to take his sword and speak to him:

> Medusa: I want to tell you a bedtime story.
> Perseus: Where's my sword?
> Medusa: It's safe. You can have it back when the story's over. Listen closely so you may judge for yourself what the love of the gods is worth". (*Medusa's Tale,* I. p. 245)

As becomes obvious from Medusa's story, Poseidon does nothing to protect the woman who he raped. The god, similar to men, is ready to satisfy his sexual desires with a beautiful woman, but easily betrays her and does not want to bear responsibility for his rape when Athena punishes her.

What is absent in the ancient myth on Medea, but is present in Carr's version in *By the Bog of Cats,* is that the character's desire for revenge stems not only from her husband's betrayal and marriage of another woman, but also from the mother's abandonment of her at the age of seven at the *Bog of Cats*. Like Medea, Hester experiences powerful emotions because of her lover's marriage, but the roots of Hester's anger and hate can be found in her lonely childhood and in her sense of displacement. In Carr's play, modern Medea is represented as a woman whose sufferings and struggle are a reflection of personal and cultural problems. As an abandoned child, Hester avenges not only her husband, but her mother as well. With the progression of the play, it becomes evident that she kills her half-brother because she cannot withstand her brother's closeness to her mother. Yet Carr penetrates deeper in her portrayal of Hester by accentuating not only her abandonment, but also her rejection in society in which she lives. The Irish settled society rejects her mother and Hester for their belonging to a community of travelers. Despite the fact that Hester's father is a settler and that she spends her whole life at the bog, local people refuse to accept her as a member of their community. As Mrs. Kilbride says to Hester: "I've had the measure of you this long time, the lazy shiftless blood in ya, that savage tinker eye ya turn on people to frighten them" (*By the Bog of Cats*, II, p. 55).

While there are obvious parallels between Greek Medea and Hester in that they are both outsiders in the realms in which they live, Greek Medea "exerts a masculine power" (Griffiths, 2006, p. 59). However, while Euripides's Medea kills her children for revenge against her husband, Carr's Hester decides to kill her daughter because she does not want her to live without a mother. In view of ghost's prediction of her upcoming death, Hester "kills her child in a desperate act of love" (Sihra, 2018, p. 120). Hester loves her daughter so much that she does not want her to suffer as she suffered in her own childhood.

In this regard, Carr's character is more emotionally complex than Euripides's Medea. The trauma which Hester undergoes as a child continues to haunt her through the rest of her life and brings about the tragic end for her and her daughter. Hester refuses to leave the place where her mother abandons her, and in a state of despair cuts the throat of her daughter and further commits suicide. Hence, what significantly complicates Carr's character is early separation from the attachment figure. Recalling the moment of mother's leaving, Hester specifies, "And she says, 'No Hetty. You wait here, I'll be back in a while'… And I watched her walk away from me across the Bog of Cats. And across the Bog of Cats, I'll watch her return" (*By the Bog of Cats,* p. 297). It is this separation from the mother that makes Hester experience a sense of loss and become obsessed with the idea of possession. She prefers to kill her daughter rather than to give other people an opportunity to possess her own child. Likewise, Hester prefers to destroy her home rather than to give it to her lover and his new wife: "Carthage Kilbride is mine for always or until I say he is no longer mine. I'm the one who chooses and discards, not him, and certainly not any of yees" (*By the Bog of Cats,* I, I, p. 17).

In such instances, Carr's character significantly resembles Euripides's Medea, as both characters are determined to protect what they consider to belong to them. However, in addition to determination, the desire to possess someone or something by all means signifies the inner emotional turmoil of Carr's Hester and Euripides's Medea.

This emotional complexity is also evident in Lashof's Medusa when the playwright gives voice to the female character. The chief message is that this female character is emotionally and mentally destroyed by the unfair attitudes of Gods to her. The same destruction can be seen in Carr's protagonist. In both Carr's and Lashof's plays, the separation of Hester and Medusa from an attachment figure evokes anger and aggression. These emotions finally destroy them and, in the case of Hester, the members of her family. As Hester admits in her talk with her brother's ghost:

> Hester: Ya think I slit your throat for the few auld pound me father left me?
> Joseph: Then why?
> Hester: Should've been with her for always and would have only for you". (*By the Bog of Cats*, III, p. 62)

Both Carr and Lashof justify violent actions of their female characters by highlighting their pain from the loss of people to whom they were sincerely attached. However, while Hester turns to violence as a result of a complex inner struggle and the failure to gain victory in this struggle, in Lashof's play Medusa is deprived of any choice. Hester is turned into a destructive person under the impact of life circumstances and people surrounding her, but Medusa is turned into a violent creature by the will of gods and she is neither able to suppress her violent nature nor to avoid death from the hand of Perseus. In this regard, Carr and Lashof approach the ancient mythological figures from slightly different perspectives. Lashof's Medusa is destroyed by those who have power, while Carr's Hester is destroyed by her inability to cope with her own demons. Despite the fact that Perseus hesitates whether to kill Medusa after her life story,

he finally slays her to conform his fame as a hero, and Medusa's infamy as a monster: "I must kill you. Or else I am nothing" (*Medusa's Tale*, I, 282).

Hence, in their retellings of Greek myths, Lashof and Carr endow their female characters with weakness and vulnerability. Neither Medusa nor Hester is able to defend herself and save her own life. Both female characters know their destinies and accept them. Lashof's Medusa is aware of Perseus's arrival and passively waits for him. With regard to Hester, she is passive in waiting for her mother for many years and is reluctant to admit her loss and lead a normal life. As such, while in Ovid's and Euripides's myths the female characters demonstrate "the traits of both genders to an extreme" (Griffiths, 2006, p. 75), in Lashof's and Carr's retellings the female characters reveal more feminine traits than masculine traits. As a result of these modern transformations, Lashof's and Carr's female characters are not as strong and powerful as their ancient counterparts. Euripides's Medea flees to Athens after her revenge, and Carr's Hester dies after killing her daughter. Hence, in contrast to Euripides's myth in which Medea triumphs, the modern version depicts the destruction of a woman who commits a crime against her daughter. Moreover, Euripides's Medea kills her sons as if avenging all men for the betrayal of her husband (Hall, 2017). In this regard, Medea's killing of sons is highly symbolic. Carr changes sons for a daughter in her retelling of a Greek myth, thus implying that Hester has other motives behind the filicide.

Delving deeper into Carr's adaptation of the Greek myth, it becomes apparent that by killing her daughter and by committing a suicide, Hester makes an attempt to preserve "the mother-daughter relationship in the Other World, as a reaction to being pressured to leave her daughter to the father and his new bride and give up all her rights for the property and the child (O'Brien & David Fellow, 2012). By contrast, in Euripides's myth, Medea's killing of sons signifies the destruction of ties between the father and sons. The disruption of the ties between mother and child is also evident in Lashof's refashioning of Medusa's myth:

> Medusa: I never knew my mother. She died when I was born.
> Poseidon: You're old enough to be a mother yourself.
> Medusa: I don't want children. That's why I follow Athena". (*Medusa's Tale*, I, p. 278)

In this regard, both Lashof's and Carr's female characters suffer from the disrupted relationships with their mothers. Hester is abandoned by her mother at the age of seven, and later gives birth to a girl, unlike Medusa who does not want to be a mother. Hence, despite similar traumas received in childhood, Lashof's and Carr's characters have different understanding of the roles of a woman. Even before the rape and her transformation into an ugly monster, Medusa intends to dedicate her life to worshipping Athena. She does not aspire to be a mother or wife, and keeps her chastity for Athena:

> Athena: The dark one is Medusa… She's been conducting a faithful pilgrimage to all my temples. She blesses me for protecting her chastity, the wellspring of her freedom.
> Poseidon: Chastity! The emptiest of all empty virtues.
> Athena: She loves me with a girl's pure virtuous love.
> Poseidon: Ah, but if she knew the love of a real god…
> Athena: She would spurn you. And your brutish love". (*Medusa's Tale*, I, p. 276)

Conversely, Hester wants to have a husband and a daughter, and she puts much effort into defending her right to be a wife and mother. Hester is so closely tied to her mother that she cannot destroy these ties even though people who knew her mother warned Hester of vain hopes to reunite with her. As one of the characters tells Hester, "Ya were lucky she left ya. Just forget about her and lave this place now or you never will" (*By the Bog of Cats*, I, iii, p. 24). Despite the fact that, as the play progresses, Hester becomes aware of the negative recollections of people about her mother, she is unable to betray her as she did, although she is not ready to justify her abandonment of her. However, the following words vividly illustrate a strange attitude of the mother to the daughter: "Sure the night ya were born she took ya over to the black swan's lair, auld Black Wing ya've just buried there, and laid ya in the nest alongside her" (*By the Bog of Cats*, I, iii, p. 23).

In this regard, the attitude of Hester's mother to her resembles the attitude of Athena to Medusa in Lashof's play. Neither Hester's mother nor Athena is capable of love, yet Athena expects her priestess to love her and be loyal to her under all circumstances. This desire to be loved by others is expressed in Athena's dialogue with Poseidon:

> Athena: You're jealous of the love these mortals bear for me.
> Poseidon: Love! You're are far too icy-hearted to know anything about love". (*Medusa's Tale*, I, p. 276)

It is their lack of love for others that makes Hester's mother and Athena turn away from Medusa and Hester. Furthermore, Athena not only allows Perseus to behead Medusa, but also endows him with knowledge of how to destroy Medusa and become a hero. However, while Lashof's Medusa realises Athena's betrayal of her and has a negative image of the goddess, Hester does not want to accept the negative image of her mother and continues to wait for her lost mother. This inability to accept the truth about her mother significantly aggravates the inner conflicts of Hester, unlike her mythological counterpart Medea. Despite the fact that both Carr and Lashof depict that Hester's and Medusa's behaviors and actions are influenced by the figures of those to whom they are psychologically attached, Carr's female character differs from Lashof's female character in that Hester is unable to substitute her image of an ideal mother for the real images. However, this image of an ideal mother helps Hester to become a caring and loving mother herself. When the ghost comes to Hester and hints at her death, she cries: "Come back! – I can't die – I have a

daughter" (*By the Bog of Cats*, I, I, p. 15). As is evident from these words, Hester's initial thought is about her daughter. She is so afraid of leaving her that she pleads the ghost to return to somehow prevent her death. Yet, as the play progresses, Hester understands that she has to kill her daughter to save her. Hester's daughter is of the same age as Hester was when her mother left her, and she greatly resembles her mother:

Hester: Ya have her eyes.
Josie: Whose eyes – whose eyes, Mam?
Hester: Josie Swane's me mother.
Josie: Did ya like her, Josie Swane?
Hester: More than anythin' in this cold white world. (*By the Bog of Cats*, I, vi, p. 42)

Hester names her daughter after her mother, but nevertheless she cannot find solace in her daughter and forget her own mother's abandonment. As a victim of her mother's betrayal, Hester decides to do everything to prevent her own child from becoming similarly abandoned. Unquestionably, the motives for infanticide in Carr's adaptation differ from the motives of Euripides's Medea for killing her children. This difference is especially vivid in the final dialogue between Hester and her daughter:

Hester: Would ya let go!
Josie: No, Mam. Please!
Hester: Alright, alright! Shhh! It's alright, I'll take ya with me, I won't have ya as I was, waitin' a lifetime for some wan to return, because they don't, Josie, the don't. It's alright. Close your eyes.
Josie closes her eyes.
Hester: Are they closed?
Josie: Yes. *(By the Bog of Cats*, III, pp. 76-77)
Hester cuts Josie's throat in one savage moment.

IV. Modern Retellings of Classical Myth

As is evident from the above section, Lashof's and Carr's retellings of Greek myths expose the attempts of the female playwrights to carry out "self-conscious investigations" and destroy the conventional categorizations of mythical characters (Sanders, 2007, p. 65). By deviating from the negative stereotypes on women shared in ancient Greece, Lashof and Carr produce images of women who, despite their violence, fury or aggression, cannot be perceived as threatening or frightening. Hence, in contrast to Ovid's and Euripides's versions of myths, which bring to the fore a rather restricted stance on Medea and Medusa, the modern playwrights reinterpret the myths in such a way as to provide more complete stories of the characters' tragedies. Through their adjustments, Lashof and Carr attribute new meanings to the characters' feelings and actions, and thus challenge oversimplification of the female psyche. Simultaneously, the refashioned myths bring about a shift of focus, from narrating male dominance and male betrayal, to highlighting the issues and consequences of female victimization.

In Ovid's myth, Medusa is killed to assert male dominance over a woman. In this regard, the transformation and beheading of Medusa signify the attempts of the ancient Greeks to deny the woman's power. What Ovid's myth clearly demonstrates is that Medusa's head may become dangerous and powerful only in the hands of Perseus. In Lashof's version of the myth, Medusa is killed to provide the male character with an opportunity to fulfil his destiny as a hero. In Euripides's myth, Medea turns to murder to avenge her husband for betrayal, whilst in Carr's version of the myth the betrayal of the lover is closely intertwined with the childhood trauma of abandonment and separation from the mother.

Hence, in the process of refashioning Greek myths, Carr and Lashof deviate from the Greeks' dehumanization of women, and instead explore women's anger and violence as part of their feminine nature. Yet this re-envisioning does not simplify Carr's and Lashof's female characters. They remain as complex as ancient Medea and Medusa, using diverse forms of resistance to injustice inflicted on them by people and gods (O'Brien & David Fellow, 2012). Lashof's Medusa questions and opposes the gods' unjust actions towards a weak and powerless woman; in the case of Hester, her resistance reflects the long history of Ireland's cultural conflicts, on the one hand, and the inability to come to terms with inner demons, on the other hand. Hester's suicide can be viewed as the character's attempt to resolve cultural and personal conflicts, but also as the desire to stay forever in the place where she has spent her life and where she has lived with her lover and daughter. This desire is vividly illustrated in the following words:

Ya won't forget me now, Carthage, and when all this is over or half remembered and ya think ya've almost forgotten me again, take a walk along the Bog of Cats and wait for a purlin' wind through your hair or a soft breath be your ear or a rustle behind ya. That's l; be me and Josie ghostin' ya (*By the Bog of Cats*, III, p. 78).

What these particular words demonstrate is that, in the modern retelling of the myth, the female protagonist escapes this world to reunite with the daughter in a realm which is free from the patriarchal system, social and cultural stereotypes, male betrayal, and injustice. In this regard, Carr's version significantly differs from Euripides's version: mythological Medea opposes patriarchal authority without destroying herself. Unlike Hester's escape into the Other World, Medea's escape into Athens after the revenge implies that the female character does not view herself primarily as a wife and mother. She continues to live even after the loss of her husband and sons. As is implied in Lashof's refashioning of the Greek myth, Medusa will continue to experience male subjugation after her beheading. Yet, in their adaptations, both Carr and Lashof firmly reject the notion that women should be blamed for being raped or for being

betrayed by men. While Euripides's and Ovid's myth address controversial questions as to whether the female characters' aggression and violence may be justified, without providing definite answers, Carr and Lashoff resolve the moral dilemma and justify Hester's and Medusa's behaviours and actions. By bringing to light the conflict between an individual and patriarchal society, between the dominant and subordinate, the playwrights give an insight into injustice with which women collide and into their ways to resist injustice and oppression.

In this respect, through the refashioning of the Greek myths, Carr and Lashof succeed in exposing certain social and cultural concerns with regard to the place of a woman in society. In observing the parallels between Carr's and Lashof's plays, it becomes obvious that women occupy inferior positions to men in both the Irish and Greek realms. Yet, while Ovid and Euripides tend to distance themselves from penetrating too deep into the conditions and experiences of their female characters, Carr and Lashof view the characters' traumas and subjugation as a personal concern. As such, adaptations of the Greek myths by Carr and Lashof represent the desire of the playwrights to intentionally dramatize inner and social conflicts with of women since ancient times, and to bring the attention of the audience to the inability of a woman to be simultaneously in peace with her inner self and the world which surrounds her. Richard Buxton, a distinguished figure in the field of Classics in his work "Imaginary Greece: The Contexts of Mythology" (1994) argues that while many Greek myths touch upon conflicts and tensions, they often lack the intricate exploration of these conflicts, especially in terms of their potential resolution by female characters. Moreover, Greek myths avoid "assigning unqualified approval or condemnation" (Anderson, 2005, p. 124) of their characters' behaviors and actions. By contrast, in their adaptations of the Greek myths, Carr and Lashof express their support and their understanding of the characters' violence. Moreover, both playwrights tend to privilege these complex and subjugated female characters over the characters who fully conform to the social and cultural norms of patriarchal societies.

Neither Hester nor Lashof's Medusa wants to accept these norms. While in Ovid's and Euripides's myths the female characters turn to violence to hurt men, in Carr's and Lashof's refashioning of the myths the female characters hurt themselves more than male characters (Salis, 2010). In the playwrights' adaptations, Medusa and Hester are so fractured and so weak, on the one hand, and are so rebellious and so reluctant to conform to the imposed patriarchal norms, on the other hand, that they cannot but destroy themselves. The only difference is that Hester commits suicide, while Medusa allows the man to behead her. In light of this re-envisioning of female characters, Carr's Hester and Lashof's Medusa are not the embodiment of something that men should fear. They are tragic heroines who are guided by their powerful passions and inner conflicts instead of rational thinking, and who suffer because of their traumas and distorted identities. Their tragic end is the result of their failure to reconcile their inner turmoil with the socially acceptable behaviors. Existing in male-dominated realms, Lashof's Medusa and Carr's Hester engage in the struggle with the patriarchy and with their own demons, but do not win in this struggle. Far from being obedient women, Hester and Medusa struggle as long as they can and finally choose deaths for the possibility of changing their conditions and positions in after-life. By the end of the plays, both Hester and Medusa realize that their efforts to protect themselves from pressures and unjust actions of people and gods are vain.

V. Discussion and Conclusion

As the paper reveals, Carr and Lashof refashion famous Greek myths of Medusa and Medea to oppose the preconceived vision on famous mythical figures and make the audience look at them through new angles and modern stances. By choosing well-recognized mythical characters for their plays, Carr and Lashof reshape the myths in such a way as to bring to the fore the age-old issues and concerns which have been neglected in prior readings of Greek myths, on the one hand, and which reflect the contemporary realm, on the other hand. Although the playwrights use different approaches to adapting myths in their dramas, they share the view that Medusa and Medea should not be perceived as evil and monsters, but as victims of circumstances, people, gods, and inner demons. However, these victims do not keep silence; instead, they are presented by Carr and Lashof as female characters with distinct voices. Although changed from victims into victimizers as the narration progresses, both Medusa and Hester invoke sympathy in the audience due to their complex identities and inner sufferings. Moreover, by substituting the male perspective for the female perspective, the playwrights shine important light on the consequences of subjugating a woman and on the reasons of her transformation into a fierce and violent creature.

Yet the evidence acquired in the present analysis suggests that there are some contrasts in Carr's and Lashof's adaptations of myths in dramas. Carr uses a free manner to adapt the classical myth and Lashof tends to be closer to Euripides's tragedy. While Lashof's female character is positioned within the familiar ancient realm, Carr's female character is placed within the modern Irish realm. By adding unique cultural elements into the play, Carr juxtaposes ancient and modern and thus dramatizes the reality in which her female character exists. The socio-cultural perspective taken by Carr also provides the playwright with an opportunity to uncover the position of a woman in a contemporary society. The playwright uses implicit parallels with ancient Medea and endows her character with complex cultural and personal problems which she fails to resolve. The aspect that is unique to Carr's adaptation is the bond between the mother and daughter. As is clearly shown in the play, the destruction of this bond reinforces the destruction of the female character and finally brings about her death. Yet it is in death that Carr's female character acquires freedom and re-unity with her daughter. Lashof's Medusa is deprived of the opportunity to find freedom after Perseus's beheading of her.

What, however, is common to Lashof's and Carr's plays is the prevalence of gender tensions within the depicted cultures. While these tensions are evident in the myths of Ovid and Euripides, Lashof and Carr go further by dramatizing the vain attempts of female characters to resist oppressive and unjust forces. On the other hand, as the received evidence demonstrates, with their re-envisioning of the myths, the playwrights succeed in undermining the misogynist vision on Medusa and Medea. Simultaneously, acting as revisionists, Lashof and Carr do not confine their female characters to the binary classification of good/bad. Both Medusa and Hester are presented as characters who have dark sides, but they cannot be classified as femme fatale who destroy others to satisfy their ego. Rather, the playwrights create characters who express rage and anger in response to injustice or abuse, and defend themselves by specifying the details of their destruction. In this regard, Lashof's and Carr's refashioning of myths makes female characters more humane in contrast to their ancient counterparts. By accentuating the motives behind the characters' violence, Lashof and Carr aver that female characters' violent and aggressive behavior may be at least understood, if not approved or viewed as morally right. As such, the questions which Ovid and Euripides raise in their myths find resolution in the adaptations of Carr and Lashof.

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