TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Towards a Theory of the Anxiety of Ontology:

Differentiated Working Strategies, Dramaturgical Manipulations
and the Theme of Death in the Work of Marina Carr and Emma Dante

A dissertation presented by

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and that it is entirely my own work.

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Signed,

Brenda Donohue

31 October 2012

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Summary

This thesis provides a feminist and comparative analysis of the unique ontological position of two contemporary female playwrights, Marina Carr and Emma Dante, in the Republic of Ireland and Italy. It interrogates the specificity of their position within a profession that has traditionally been defined in masculine terms, and examines the influence of such a status on their artistic processes as well as their theatrical work. I propose a hypothesis that claims such an influence is manifest within the artists, and their work, in what I term (after Harold Bloom and Gilbert & Gubar) the Anxiety of Ontology. The thesis examines how a background of gender inequality alters the playwrights' work, inspiring them to contest traditional forms and models and propose new feminine exemplars in their work. Harold Bloom's Anxiety of Influence and Gilbert & Gubar's Anxiety of Authorship inform my development of the theory of the Anxiety of Ontology, while Judith Butler's notion of gender as a performative act assist my reading of the ontology of female playwrights as culturally separate and distinct from that of male playwrights and writers of novels, poetry and prose.

The project is divided into six distinct sections, beginning with an introductory section, which situates the work of the two contemporary playwrights within the cultural and historical context of Italian and Irish theatre, as well as an

overview of the situation of women playwrights internationally. Chapter Two examines in detail the working strategies that women playwrights employ in response to gender discrimination and as a manifestation of the Anxiety of Ontology. In response, the playwrights alter their working processes, which are analysed under four separate headings. Chapter Three identifies the manifold ways in which the Anxiety of Ontology may become manifest in the artistic offerings of the playwrights. It considers how Carr and Dante employ both theatrical form and content as sites of contestation and disruption, in an expression of their dissatisfaction with traditional theatre's suitability for their own purposes, which vary from those of male writers. Chapter Four moves towards a consideration of the theme of death in the plays of Dante and Carr as a multiple signifier. In its scrutiny of the suicides of female protagonists in Carr's and Dante's plays, this chapter proposes the concept of "resistant suicide" as a reading through which some represented self-deaths could be seen as a moment of agency, authority and resistance on their behalf. Chapter Five continues this analysis in its contention that the same deaths can be read as mirrors for the playwrights' own anxieties regarding the precarious and unstable nature of their artistic and professional position. In killing off their suicidal characters, specifically their female protagonists, Carr and Dante engage in a process with transformative and liberatory potential that attempts to kill off the author's own Anxiety of Ontology. Finally, Chapter Six summarizes

the links between the playwrights' works, working strategies and the anxiety. It

concludes with a look ahead and a consideration of what the future might hold for

women writers for theatre.

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I would like to thank all the members of the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies at TCD, especially Sarah Smyth and Caitriona Leahy, and in particular, the academic staff at the Italian Department. Special mention is reserved for Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Cormac O Cuilleanáin who chaired my transfer exam and who provided vital advice and much needed encouragement at that critical point in my studies, and to Corinna Salvadori Lonergan, who recommended me for a language teaching course in Italy. I would also like to thank Mary Keating in the Department of Italian for her professional and personal support since I arrived in the office in 2008.

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Sections of this thesis that are already in publication:

"Liminality in Marina Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow* and Emma Dante's *Vita mia*." *Interfaces between Irish and European Theatre.* Ed. Mária Kurdi. *S*pec. issue of *Focus: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies* VIII (2012). Pécs: University of Pécs, Institute of English and American Studies.

"Marina Carr: Writing as a Feminist Act." *Performing Feminisms*. Ed. Lisa Fitzpatrick. Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2013.

Dedication

For my Nana Ryan, who always had a book to hand, my Nanny Donoghue who had a quiet determination, and for Uncle Jimmy and Zio Giovanni who taught me the importance of kindness.

Chapter One - Introduction

> La scrittura drammaturgica è legata ad un gioco sul tempo, di anticipazione e posticipazione di un fatto eclatante come la morte.
>
> Emma Dante[1]
>
> I would like to write a play where I don't have to kill off the heroine. I've killed them all off, so I can go on healthier and freer.
>
> Marina Carr[2]

"There are no Irish Women Playwrights" was the tongue-in-cheek title of Glasshouse Production's two-part festival staged at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin in 1992 and 1993;[3] an undertaking that sought to demonstrate that, contrary to popular opinion, Irish theatrical history provided many examples of women writing for theatre and also aimed to provide a context for the staging of emerging women playwrights' work. The whimsical nature of the festival title concealed a frustration bubbling just below the surface about the persistence of a singularity myth regarding women writing for the theatre. Women, as this myth proposed, had no history of writing for the theatre, but habitually chose other forms in which to express their artistic impulses, and were a rarity even in a modern context. If a woman was known to have written for the theatre historically, she was portrayed as an isolated example; a singularity.

The fortunes of playwrights who are women have fluctuated, waxed and waned over the course of theatre history since the first recorded case of a female playwright at the turn of the first millennium.[4] The pervading impression of the absence of women playwrights in history was roundly challenged by the work of feminist scholars starting in the 1960s, whose recoveries of "lost" female writers and texts sought to redress the gender imbalance in the literary canon.[5] The discoveries made, along with the sheer enthusiasm and energy of these scholars, led to a renewed interest in theatre written by women and, with the help of the wider feminist movement, led to an increased interest in female playwrights in the Western world. As Sara Keating notes, the 1980s and 1990s were decades in which the work of many female playwrights featured on the Irish stage. From the 1980s, the work of Christina Reid[6] and Anne Devlin[7] is worthy of mention, while the 1990s saw the emergence of playwrights such as Marina Carr, Emma Donoghue[8] and Stella Feehily.[9] A similar surge in interest in women writing for theatre was witnessed in Italy in the 1970s, with dramatists such as Dacia Maraini[10] and Franca Rame[11] producing explicitly feminist texts and performances, and later, in the 1990s and the early twenty-first century, the impassioned texts of Barbara Nativi[12] and post-modern landscapes of Letizia Russo[13] drew critical and popular acclaim. In Italy, as in Ireland however, this presence and visibility did not translate into any significant permanency. Today, although some progress has been made, theatre written by women continues to remain largely on the fringes of theatrical discourse, as Melissa Sihra points

out, "Irish women playwrights were and are still the exception" (Sihra *Women in Irish Drama* 158).

In its apparent refusal to secure a central place for women's voices, it would seem that contemporary theatre in Italy and Ireland[14] differs little from the description applied to it by feminist critic, Lynda Hart, in 1989 when she labelled it "the last bastion of male hegemony in the literary arts" (1). Certainly, the elevated focus on female dramatists, which was instigated from the 1970s onwards, has been less effective in redressing the gender balance in theatre than many would have wished. Underscoring these failed efforts at acceptance and recognition was the resurgence, since the 1990s, of the singularity myth; reminding us that the battle for recognition is one that must be constantly fought.

Of course, a scholar who chooses to study two female playwrights from a feminist perspective and who delineates the potential differences between their experiences and those of male playwrights, runs the risk of perpetuating such a singularity myth as I have outlined, rather than dispelling it. This project highlights the work of Marina Carr and Emma Dante, not in an effort to single them out as the only examples of women playwrights in Ireland and Italy, but rather as just two examples of the rich variety of female playwrights writing for the theatre today. In the course of the thesis, a number of women who write for theatre will be discussed, both in historical

and contemporary contexts. The overall aim of the thesis is, by identifying the potential

differences in influence, material circumstances and reception experienced by women

playwrights, that more targeted measures to increase their participation and

appreciation in theatrical writing can be taken.

Ellen Moers contends that writing by women is characterised by protest,

innovation and confrontation (qtd in Showalter "Killing" 209). Writing from a marginal

position on the edges of the dominant discourse, women playwrights are in a unique

position to construct an alternative theatrical narrative to the hegemonic masculine

discourses that have dominated theatre almost since its inception. Women playwrights

may challenge over-arching meta-narratives (Fitzpatrick "Disrupting Metanarratives"),

resist tropic characterisations of female characters by redrawing and reimaging the

representation of "woman" [15] on stage (Leeney "Irish Women Playwrights"[16]), contest

the privileging of the male spectator, and, finally they can defy the androcentric

complexion of drama by shifting the focus to favour a female point of view (Glassberg

Sands 49). As a result of this shift, discourses propagated in theatre are broadened and

challenged, women can think of themselves and other women in new and novel terms,

and plays are free to address and appeal to female desires. Women's voices,

perspectives and desires are necessary to the theatre. If theatre and performance are to

remain relevant to contemporary society, they must work towards a greater facilitation

of women's point of view.

Women playwrights, then, who work in contemporary Italian and Irish theatre, do so in the context of continuing and sometimes increasing gender inequality. What effect does a cultural and social background that fails to value women's contributions and, in some cases discriminates against them, have on their artistic work and theatrical pieces? Echoing a question that feminist literary critics Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar posed in their ground-breaking 1979 book, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, with regard to nineteenth-century women writers,[17] this thesis asks: what does it mean to be a female playwright in a culture whose definitions of the profession are overtly and covertly patriarchal?

Contemporary female playwrights work in a cultural context that defines the art and profession of playwriting in male terms. What playwright Theresa Rebeck described as theatre's "dirty secret," (qtd. in Farfan and Ferris xi) is a commonly held conviction that women are inherently unsuited to writing drama. This misconceived notion is reflected in the low production rates for plays by women. The sheer numerical difference between contemporary male and female playwrights who work professionally, places women into a minority category and relegates them to a marginal position within the artistic field. Added to this is the apparent lack of historical female predecessors in their field, engineered by the gatekeepers of the canon over time, as well as the unique demands the theatre places on playwrights. These factors collude to create an uncomfortable, unstable and marginal position, which female playwrights

must negotiate in order to produce meaningful work. Such a condition creates anxieties,

trepidations and tensions within the playwright, which cannot help but inform her

artistic output.[18] Concentrating on the figure of the female playwright, her problematic

position within the ranks of playwrights and the anxieties arising from such instability,

this study seeks to understand her unique position and to analyse the effects and

consequences that such a precarious situation has on her work. The manifestations of

such a preoccupation - what I will term the Anxiety of Ontology - are evident in

working practices that are differentiated from her male colleagues' and textually,

through resistive strategies that endeavour to subvert established genres and theatrical

conventions, and assert a female presence through the recurrent theme of death. Many

will point out that the theme of death has, for centuries in theatre history, been used as

a polysignifier and an effective theatrical technique. Plays often turn on the death of a

character. The very basis of tragedy is a flaw in the character which leads to their

downfall, and which often features their death. Indeed the deaths of others can also

function as a powerful instigator and motivator for dramatic characters. What would

Hamlet be without the death of the protagonist's father? How could Miller resolve his

Death of a Salesman, if not through the death of Willie Loman? While recognizing the

frequency and prevalence of death as a motif and theatrical technique, this thesis wishes

to home in on one potential reading of the death motif in the theatre of Dante and Carr,

investigating the hypothesis that death can signify the presence of the Anxiety of

Ontology within the work of the selected authors.

According to Sarah Webster Goodwin & Elisabeth Bronfen, every representation

of death is necessarily a misrepresentation, as the nature of death is unknown to us,

therefore any analysis of it must show not only how it claims to represent death, but

also what else it in fact represents, however much that meaning may be suppressed

(20). If this is the case, then in Carr's and Dante's work, death can be considered as a

metaphor for a variety of different meanings, but principally, as a cypher[19] for their own

anxieties regarding their ontology. Ultimately, this thesis will demonstrate that the

theatrical treatment of the theme of death acts as a liberatory process through which the

playwright can assimilate and cast off this anxiety. The act of writing (whether textual

or performative) assumes an emancipatory quality for the playwright.

This thesis will both examine working strategies and interrogate specific works

by playwrights Emma Dante and Marina Carr, in each case taking into account how

their processes and narratives may interact with the Anxiety of Ontology I am

proposing in the context of continuing gender imbalance in Italian and Irish society. It

will identify differing working strategies that may come about as a result of the anxiety

and consider the consequences of such processes for the writers themselves and for

wider society. The textual interventions, subversions and outright challenges to male-

centred theatre history and theatrical culture inherent in the works will be brought to

light through a close analysis of the plays. Finally, the pervading theme of death that saturates many of the plays will be examined as a response to, and manifestation of, the authors' anxiety, and will be considered as a signifier for a transformative process of restoration that takes place on the page and in the scene.

No attempt at a comprehensive overview of all of the works written by Emma Dante and Marina Carr is made in this thesis. Instead, a detailed analysis of four plays is provided: *Carnezzeria* (2002) and *Vita mia* (2004) by Emma Dante, along with *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006) and *Marble* (2009) by Marina Carr. Other works across the playwrights' *oeuvre* that are referred to throughout the work are: *mPalermu* (2000), *Mishelle* [sic] *di Sant'Oliva* (2005), *Il Festino* (2007) and *Le Pulle* (2009) by Dante, and *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996) and *By the Bog of Cats…* (1998) by Carr. This is not to suggest that other works by Carr and Dante are not worthy of consideration, but rather my selection of plays reflects the demands of this particular investigation, which concerns itself with issues of feminism and the theme of death. The organising principle in choosing which works to discuss is based on two defining characteristics; firstly, that the play demonstrates qualities that could be analysed in terms of gender, and secondly, that death is present in a significant way, both thematically and at the level of characterisation. Many of the selected works combine potential feminist meanings with a significant treatment of the theme of death. It is true that some of the playwrights' other works feature death, such as Dante's *Cani di bancata* (2006) and Carr's *Ariel* (2002),

though both offer less in terms of potentially significant feminist readings. Furthermore, no definitive reading of the plays of either playwright is provided in this thesis, rather this study attempts a cautious analysis of their work. Given the on-going development of the playwrights' artistic vision, the paucity of critical writings available, and most significantly, the potential of the playwrights to change their artistic trajectory during the remainder of their lives, any analysis proffered at this point in time must be done so with the utmost caution.

Carr and Dante have produced drama that actively engages with issues surrounding the representation of women in theatre and the presence or absence of their voices on national and international stages. It is also a theatre that dramatizes the author's own confrontation with patriarchal systems evinced through the gradual unfolding of the theme of death. Chapters Two and Three in this thesis identify the manifold ways in which the Anxiety of Ontology may make itself apparent through the playwrights' manner of working, particularly with regard to their relationship with the canon, their approach to collaborative work, and positioning as an artist. In Chapter Three, Dante's and Carr's treatment of traditional theatrical forms and content is shown to be disruptive and resistant; coming as they do from a position that is located on the fringes of the dominant discourse. The following chapter, Chapter Four, against this background of disruptive tactics and strategies, examines how the playwrights' preoccupation with the theme of death betrays an anxiety regarding their position. It

tracks the varying functions that death as a theatrical motif can fulfil, before focussing

on the self-deaths of two female protagonists, which are interpreted as actions of

resistance to the patriarchy. Finally, Chapter Five examines how resistant deaths, in line

with Gilbert & Gubar's reading of the "madwoman" as a double for female writers, can

be read to function as the playwright's own double in the text, dramatizing her inner

struggle with, and eventual resolution of, the Anxiety of Ontology.

The remainder of this introductory chapter provides an outline of the cultural

context as the backdrop against which Emma Dante and Marina Carr produce their

theatre with a female voice, a positioning of the thesis within the bounds of feminist

theatre scholarship in Ireland and Italy, an introduction to both playwrights, a

discussion of the methodological and theoretical framework for the study, and finally a

short summary of the chapters to follow.

Cultural Context: Making Theatre in Italy and Ireland

The following is a brief overview of the cultural conditions affecting women in

Ireland and Italy in the twentieth century, which seeks to contextualise the work of the

playwrights against a backdrop of the social, political and economic factors that have

influenced the material and social conditions of women in both countries. These

changing material conditions, it could be argued, have facilitated the entry of both

playwrights into the profession of their choice. Although historically, it is true to say

that women have written for theatre, Dante and Carr's acceptance into the theatres of Ireland and Italy must have been positively influenced by the gains of the women's movement. This section will chart the changing social roles of women and the legislative changes that have aided in opening up perceptions of women as intellectuals, writers, and as players in the public sphere.

The history of women in Ireland and Italy is a varied, troubled and, until recently, often concealed narrative. This history has been marked by slow progress in the attainment of basic rights accompanied by a rise in expectations, only to find that few of these have been met. After the founding of the new Free State in Ireland in 1922, there was a hope that with a new republic, women's circumstances would improve. But after playing a vital role in the achievement of independence from Britain, Irish women's hopes of an improved social position were to be bitterly disappointed. The fledgling Irish State then willingly subordinated itself to the power and influence of the Catholic Church, identifying and characterising the Irish state "as a Catholic nation" in de Valera's words, and inscribing in law the Catholic Church's concept of female roles in the 1937 Constitution. The 1937 Constitution defined the role of women as that of wife and mother incorporating the "assertion in article 44 that by her life in the home a woman made a contribution to the state without which it could not prosper" (Ferriter 370). In Yvonne Scannell's view, the constitution was "rooted in a patronising and stereotyped view of womanhood" (77), specifically Article 41.2, where "woman" was

conflated with "mother," reflecting de Valera's own vision for Irish women: "that of a full-time wife and mother in an indissoluble marriage, having a preference for 'home duties' and 'natural duties' as a mother" (72). Ferriter points out that in facing restrictive legislation in the areas of employment and contraception, Irish women were not unique but rather shared the experience in common with women in Europe and the United States (420). Indeed, the comparative situation, as we will see, in Italy was not so different at the time. State authorised discrimination continued up until the 1960s when women's groups effected legislative change in the areas of employment and property rights, reproduction and marriage. Perhaps what was unusual about the Irish situation was not so much the conflation of woman and the roles of mother and wife in the 1930s, but the translation of these conservative ideas into law and the persistence of these laws long after they had been removed from the statute books of our European neighbours.

One of the periods of greatest feminist activity in Ireland undoubtedly took place in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Yvonne Galligan's book, *Women and Politics in Contemporary Ireland: From the Margins to the Mainstream (1998)*, the Second Wave movement in Ireland was principally made up of two groups; those which explicitly identified as feminist groups (like the Irish Women's Liberation Movement), and pre-existing women's groups who did not identify as such (like the Irish Housewives Association and the Irish Countrywomen's Association).[20] In Galligan's view, the movement was characterised by three phases; first there was a distinct emphasis on

equality, followed by an exploration of "difference," and later this ceded to a focus on "integrationist" policy (Galligan 48). Important milestones in the history of the movement were the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women in 1970,[21] the publication in 1971 of the booklet, "Chains or Change" by the IWLM,[22] the campaign for the legalisation of contraception, symbolised by the "contraception train" journey in 1971,[23] and the establishment of social organisations like Irish Women's Aid and the Rape Crisis Centre which were set up in 1975 and 1978 respectively to help women affected by violence and sexual abuse. Such radical campaigning, as well as work on a political level, paved the way for the introduction of a raft of legislative changes over the course of the following decades, which were to change forever the status of women in Ireland. Moves towards employment equality in legislative terms made a leap forward with the removal of the marriage bar in 1973. The legalisation of contraception with the 1980 Health (Family Planning) Bill and subsequent legislation made contraception widely available to women and men and gave them control over their own reproduction. Slower progress was made in the area of Family Law, where divorce was introduced after a difficult referendum in 1996. These are just a few of the significant changes that were to prove to transform Irish women's lives.

With the election of Mary Robinson to the role of President of the Irish Republic in 1990, many Irish women gained new hope, believing once again in the possibility of achieving true equality.[24] This led to the growth of a conviction in the 1990s that gender

differences had been overcome, that the battle had been won. Sociologist Pat O'Connor

sees this prevailing impression as an ironic result of the gains made by feminism,

whereby

> "the ability of women to change the parameters of their own social lives
> has generated in some an optimism which fails to recognise the implicit
> male bias in these systems and under under-estimates the strength and
> flexibility of the processes and practices involved in the maintenance of
> patriarchy" (250).

Some commentators, like *Irish Times* journalist John Waters, have gone so far as to

suggest that the balance is tipping the other way and that women's gains necessarily

mean losses for men. During the "Celtic Tiger" years,[25] a period of *laissez-faire* attitudes,

this impression seems to have grown exponentially. Perhaps it was part of the

overriding cultural ideology of success that saturated Ireland in the boom period, but

unfortunately it cannot be said to be representative of the true situation. In reality, the

progress in attaining full equality and other women's rights stalled and, in some cases,

regressed during the economic boom. Today, women continue to be grossly

underrepresented in many areas of Irish life, and they continue to be almost absent in

areas such as politics and the higher echelons of management. The issue of abortion is

another women's issue that successive governments have failed to legislate for[26] and

one that remains unresolved.[27] While there have been many improvements in women's

rights, and consequently in their material circumstances, it seems clear that there are

still many issues that need to be addressed. In the aftermath of the economic crash,[28]

post-2008, many women seem to be coming to terms with the reality that Irish equality

may not be equal at all.

Despite the early separation of Church and State in Italy just after the capture of

Rome in 1870, which marked the end of a lengthy process of unification, the Catholic

Church was nevertheless awarded a special position in the constitution of the new

nation as "the sole religion of the state" (Mack Smith 83).[29] Immediately after

unification, one of the pressing ideological priorities of the new state was the

"invenzione di una tradizione nazionale al femminile" ("the invention of a feminine

national tradition" De Giorgio 6), which first sought to establish the symbolic existence

of "woman" and then recognise her "redeeming" function in society (7). Despite the

separation of Church and State, De Giorgio notes how similar this vision of the Italian

woman was to the Catholic Church's ideal, thus marking a continuum between both

entities' vision and treatment of women. Catholic social policy continued to exert an

immoderate influence on the shaping of Italian legislative policy in the areas of

women's rights, homosexuality and reproduction through the nineteenth and into the

twentieth century.[30]

The forward momentum engendered by the appearance of the "New Woman" in

the early 1900s,[31] and the establishment of an Italian suffrage movement was abruptly

halted by the rise of Fascism and a regressive ideology which advocated "returning women to home and hearth, restoring patriarchal authority, and confining female destiny to bearing babies" (De Grazia 1). Victoria De Grazia in *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (1992) has documented the Fascist regime's deliberate shaping and regulation of gender roles in the 1920s and 30s. Mussolini's regime, according to De Grazia, employed fertility and virility cults, legislation, and image types such as the *donna-crisi* and the *donna-madre* to influence women and men into accepting and conforming to strict gender norms (De Grazia 173). In this way, women were relegated to the private sphere and fashioned into housewives, mothers and nurturers, embodying a fascist ideal of female beauty.[32] The seemingly regressive movement for women's rights was, as De Grazia notes, received with ambivalence by Italian women, as the retrograde steps were introduced alongside new, seemingly progressive roles for women within the Fascist state.

In post-Fascist Italy, women were finally awarded the right to vote in 1946, some 24 years after women in Ireland were granted equal suffrage. The "economic miracle," which lasted from the period after the war years until the late 1960s, transformed Italy from a poor, mainly rural nation into a major industrial power, and marked a period of momentous change in society and culture. This period was characterised by an abundance of expendable income and a concomitant rapid introduction of technology in the realms of home and social life, and consequently the burden of domestic duties

on women was considerably lightened. The tail end of the miracle coincided with the

growth of Second Wave feminist activity, which began in 1969 with the establishment of

Fronte Italiano di Liberazione Femminile ("Italian Front for Women's Liberation") and

the Movimento Per la Liberazione Della Donna ("Movement for Women's Liberty"),

whose aims were the legalisation of divorce and abortion, the dissemination of

information about contraceptives, and the provision of childcare. This period was

marked by intense political activity, developments in Italian feminist critical thinking,

the establishment of feminist presses and theatre groups, as well as a series of

legislative changes. Divorce was legalised in Italy in 1970, as was the use of

contraceptive methods to prevent pregnancy, and in 1978 the government legalised

abortion in many cases. In 1981, the concept of "delitto d'onore" ("honour crime") was

abolished from the Italian statutes.[33] Until 1996, however, rape was classified as a crime

against public morality, not against the individual. Having achieved so many legislative

changes, Italian women must have felt optimistic that the days of male dominance and

female submission were numbered.

The period since the 1980s has seen measurable changes in women's lives and

the nature of gender relations in Italy. These include a shift in the economy towards the

service sector, new equality legislation, and the increase in educated women, which led

to an increase of women in visible, public jobs as well as higher-status positions. While

this change may have all the appearance of a sea-change, the reality of Italian women's

positions is that they are now burdened with the double workload of domestic and professional work, have a significantly lower rate of employment than other European countries, and often do not return to the workforce after childbirth (Ginsborg 34-38).

After an encouraging start following the politics of difference engendered by the Second Wave of feminism in Italy, events began to take a less positive turn in the 1990s. With the election of Silvio Berlusconi as Prime Minister for the first time in 1994, the fight for women's rights was stalled and even regressed over the period of Il Cavaliere's[34] dominance that lasted until 2011. Berlusconi once again institutionalised sexism, building it into the very fabric of the political machine through the use of young, attractive and generally under-qualified women as token female presences in his government.[35] However, perhaps most damaging is the way that the female body in Italy has been objectified, commercialised and sexualised to a new extreme during Berlusconi's tenure: a change that is well documented in Lorella Zanardo's documentary and book, both entitled, *Il corpo delle donne* ("Women's Bodies"), published in 2010. Over the course of the period of Berlusconi's political dominance, Zanardo contends, older women have been erased and rendered invisible in Italian public life. On top of this, the constant presence of mute, semi-clothed, beautiful young women on television screens has reduced the status of women to chattel level in the minds of the general public, and in some cases, women themselves have become convinced that their sexuality holds the only key to their social and economic

advancement. While the landscape of sexism and patriarchal control has changed

beyond recognition in these years, gender imbalance and discrimination persists. The

pieces on the board of gender discrimination may have changed position, but the board

itself remains the same.

Emma Dante was born in 1967, just two years before the Second Wave of Italian

feminism began in earnest, while Marina Carr was born in 1964, just six years before the

First Commission for the Status of Women was convened in Ireland. At that time, Carr's

mother, a married woman, had no right to her property on the death of her husband

and her earnings (if she was allowed to continue in her post[36]) were taxed at a higher

rate than those of her husband. Neither Carr's nor Dante's mother had any right to use

contraception to control the size of her family, the possibility of access to abortion, or

the option of divorce from an unsatisfactory marriage. It would be difficult to state

conclusively to what extent the young Carr and Dante were aware of the inequalities

faced by their mothers and women like them. The feminist campaign for women's

rights took place as both women were growing into adolescence and womanhood. The

countries they grew up in guaranteed far more rights and freedoms than their mother's

generation could ever have expected.

In this climate of a restricted and oppressive past and a sense of the potential and

promising present, Dante and Carr became professional playwrights, something that

few women had achieved in the history of either state. Many women had written for the

theatre, but achieving professional production often posed problems. This dual sense of

past restriction and present/future liberty has created a unique imaginative and

intellectual space for women of Carr's and Dante's generation, who grew up taking the

promises of feminism for granted, but who may recently have come to a reassessment

of the reality of the situation. On an international level, writers such as Camille Paglia

and Katie Roiphe supported and propagated the notion in the 1990s that power was

available to women for the taking, it just needed to be grabbed with both hands. Despite

this, the continuing poor material situation of many women in 2010 prompted Kat

Banyard to write *The Equality Illusion,* a book that delineates the extent of on-going

inequality and discrimination against women in a U.K context,[37] and Caterina Soffici to

write *Ma le donne no: come si vive nel paese più maschilista d'Europa* (2010) which delineates

a series of legislative and material inequities that currently exist in Italy. An analysis of

the contemporary statistics provides us with an insight into the actual state of gender

behaviours in modern Italy and Ireland. The binaries of woman/private sphere

man/public sphere are still very much in operation; women predominantly remain in

the home, while men tend to work and socialize more outside the home. In the Central

Statistics Office's 2011 report, *Women and Men in Ireland*, we see that the employment

rate for women in Ireland (aged 15-64) was 56.7% while in Italy it was 46.1%. Both Italy

and Ireland are below the E.U. average for female employment, which is 58.2%.[38] In

Sicily in 2008, the figure for female employment was between 29.1%, comparing poorly

to the European average (at that time) of 57.2%, and the Italian average of 47.2% (ISTAT).[39] Where women do work outside the home, however, the burden of domestic duties and the care of children, the elderly and infirm, has not been removed from their shoulders or shared with a male partner in an equitable manner. Furthermore, women's presence in the public sphere can also be said to be poor; women accounted for only 21.3% of the parliamentary representatives elected in 2010 in Italy and a disappointing 15.1% in Ireland (CSO).[40] Although women are accessing the labour market in increased numbers, the traditional gender role of woman as the main carers and their expected responsible for the domestic sphere is, nevertheless, maintained. The result is, undoubtedly, an increased workload, and inevitable stress and anxiety.

The comparative situation presents a mixed picture. Although Italy has consistently legislated for important issues regarding women's rights before Ireland,[41] it nevertheless fails to present a picture of a society that is more gender balanced and has been described in Soffici's words as the "paese più maschilista d'Europa"("most sexist country in Europe"). Irish women have a higher rate of employment than Italian women, the gender wage gap in Ireland is lower[42] and Italian women work almost eighty minutes more per day than men, whereas the gap is only approximately twenty minutes in Ireland. Such a mixed statistical picture brings the complex combination of cultural, legislative and material elements that contribute to the creation of a culture of gender discrimination to the fore. Many women of Dante's and Carr's generation have

in recent years come to realise that, despite the hype, the feminist project has not reached all its stated aims and that equality has not (yet) been achieved. These playwrights' work seems to open up an imaginative space, in which Irish and Italian women can explore this cultural reality, analyse women's conditions and imagine potential new futures that resist such inequality.

Why compare two Irish and Italian contemporary playwrights? The comparison of Emma Dante and Marina Carr's work provides fertile ground for the examination of the effects of an adverse social and artistic background on the work of female playwrights. As we have seen, both Irish and Italian societies demonstrate a situation of continuing gender imbalance and discrimination. Both countries share similar legislative and cultural legacies, as well as the immoderate influence of Catholic Church doctrine and social policy. An examination and confrontation of Dante's and Carr's work can be carried out with this background of shared legacy kept in mind and against which the differences in culture, artistic approach and trajectory can be brought more readily into focus. In addition there is the compelling coincidence of the playwrights' island identity, with Carr born and based in Ireland, and Dante's strong rooting in the island of Sicily.

Positioning of this Project within the Academic Field

Despite a plethora of academic scholarship about female novelists and poets,

there has been markedly less written about women playwrights in Ireland and Italy

thus far. Undoubtedly, a surge of interest in women playwrights in an Irish context has

been witnessed since the 1990s (with scholars such as Melissa Sihra, Cathy Leeney and

Anna McMullan, among others, publishing on the subject); however, the same

unfortunately, cannot be said for the Italian context. While some studies have been

published by commentators such as Sharon Wood and Luciana D'Arcangeli, the field of

contemporary women's writing for theatre remains very much a neglected field in

Italian studies.

Emma Dante's theatre, while attracting much critical and press attention, so far

has only been the subject of a small number of academic interventions, in contrast

Marina Carr's work has garnered considerable critical and academic attention. To date,

just one monograph, *Bloody Living: The Loss of Selfhood in the Plays of Marina Carr* (2010),

written by Rhona Trench, has been published on Carr's work. Trench's work reads

Carr's plays from a feminist perspective, applying Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection to

them as a key to understanding the motif of loss. One edited collection devoted solely to

Marina Carr's work, edited by Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan, entitled *The Theatre*

of Marina Carr: 'before rules was made,' was published in 2004 and features a number of articles that analyse her work from a variety of theoretical standpoints, such as feminism and post-colonialism. Melissa Sihra is one of the foremost experts on Carr's work and has published many essays on different aspects of her theatre. Of particular interest to this study are her essays "Birthdays and Deathdays in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett and Marina Carr" (167-182), "The Unbearable Darkness of Being: Marina Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow*" (22-38) and "The House of Woman and the Plays of Marina Carr" (*Women* 201-218).

Emma Dante's theatre has also been the subject of a monograph, *La lingua teatrale di Emma Dante* (2009) by Anna Barsotti. Barsotti takes a two-strand approach to studying Dante's theatre initially using a linguistic framework from which to exact an analysis, and secondly, a performative one in analysing the performances of the texts of the *Trilogia della famiglia siciliana*. An collection of essays and interviews edited by Andrea Porcheddu, *Palermo dentro: il teatro di Emma Dante* (2006) contains an extended interview with Dante and a number of actors from her company Sud Costa Occidentale ("South Coast Westside"), as well as eight critical essays. Porcheddu's collection gives an overview of Dante's work and provides an insight into the playwright's views on and approaches to theatre.[43] However, despite these signs of interest in her work, the number of critical essays available on Dante's work is extremely limited.[44] To my knowledge only two articles in English treat her work, the first is Daniela Cavallaro's

essay on modern representations of *Medea* in Italy, which dedicates just under four pages to Dante's work (195-208); the second is my own publication "Liminality in Marina Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow* and Emma Dante's *Vita mia*"(2012).

A number of interviews with both Dante and Carr have been published as monographs or as part of edited collections, newspapers or theatre journals. Although they are primary materials, which necessarily provide little or no critical engagement with the works, these interviews have proven invaluable as resource material for this project as they provide an insight into each playwright's artistic vision, approach and methods.

On the theme of female playwrights, the two most significant publications in an Irish context are Melissa Sihra's edited collection, *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* (2007) and Cathy Leeney's monograph *Irish Women Playwrights, 1900-1939: Gender & Violence on Stage* (2010). Sihra's collection brings together some authoritative critical voices in what constitutes an important intervention in the process of reclaiming, rediscovering and re-evaluating women's participation in women's theatre, while Leeney focusses on a critical early period during which the reality of an Irish theatre as a distinct entity was developed. There are no similar volumes available on Italian women's contribution to modern theatre, though Maggie Günsberg's *Gender and the Italian Stage: From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (1997)

constitutes an important intervention into the field of women and Italian theatre more generally. Although some recent studies have incorporated female playwrights into their research, then, none of these studies consider their unique ontology in the context of on-going gender imbalance and discrimination, or contemplate the difference inherent in such a position. This thesis aims to provide much needed research in this field; broadening our understanding of female playwrights, increasing our analysis of them and, in so doing, making a contribution to the fields of theatre studies, feminism as well as Irish and Italian cultural studies.

Terminology, its use and misuse, poses a significant difficulty for the academic wishing to write about women in the arts. There is a continuing, at times animated, debate about the deployment of the labels of women/female writer; with many writers who are women objecting to the use of the term. While it is absolutely true to say that neither Dante nor Carr identifies herself as a feminist, or as a woman writer, this position does not however, necessarily preclude a feminist analysis of their work. Janelle Reinelt explores the difficulties of scholars examining plays by women in feminist terms when the playwrights themselves do not identify with (or outright reject) the label "feminist" (Reinelt 17-33). Reinelt conducts a feminist analysis of the work of playwrights such as Caryl Churchill, whose social and political agenda is often to the forefront of her theatrical work, as well as later writers such as Susan Lori-Parker and Sarah Kane. These last two, however, unlike Churchill, do not self-identify as feminist

and this, Reinelt notes, creates an ethical difficulty for the academic scholar, whose

feminist analysis of such writing could be perceived as tantamount to "betrayal" (27).

Reinelt resolves this issue, in terms of her own analysis, by noting that while "these

plays seem to lack the overt marks of explicitly feminist commitment, they are informed

by, and filtered through, the perspectives of women who have been familiar with, and

lived in relation to, second-wave feminism" (31). Thus, given that the women involved

have been raised in a society marked by the political and social concerns of feminism, it

is possible to detect and analyse themes, concerns and motifs linked to feminism in their

work.[45]

Marina Carr has rejected the label of woman writer in the past stating: "I don't

think it matters a damn if the voice is male or female; it's what the voice is saying"

(Kilroy), and Dante echoes these sentiments in her assertion that it "ce n'est pas le sexe

qui détermine la croissance d'un être humain, pas plus que celle d'un artiste" ("is not

gender that determines the development of a human being, no more than that of an

artist" "Un art fondé sur le doute" 161).[46] There is a somewhat justified fear that the

label of "woman writer," instead of drawing attention to a specific category of writer,

may lead to marginalization and tokenism. In this scenario, the "woman writer" is

treated as a separate entity to mainstream writers and this distinction, in a field where

hierarchical structures are still the order of the day, could imply subordination and

inferiority. Therefore, in recognizing their marginal status through the use of the term

"woman writer," many playwrights may feel there is the danger that such marginality

will be reinforced and perpetuated.

Having stated and recognized this danger, the academic who wishes to examine

the material differences between male and female writers in a society that is still

marked by gender imbalance is left with the difficulty of how to refer to women-who-

are-writers without labouring the point unnecessarily. In this thesis, therefore, I will

refer to such writers using terms such as "female playwright," "woman writer" and

"woman playwright" to indicate a group of writers who are women and, as such, may

experience similar cultural and material conditions in the production of their work. The

term should in no way be taken to indicate a singular female literary aesthetic, nor does

it seek to construct a marginalised category of writers. Rather, the aim is to analyse the

conditions that may be experienced by some female writers, but, by no means intends

to refer to all writers-who-are-female as an inclusive and homogenous group. When

referring to playwrights who are male, I will use the term "male playwright" and the

term "playwright" to simply designate playwrights of both genders when the context is

clear. Despite the difficulties inherent in the naming process, in finding and deploying

terms and language that are acceptable and inclusive as possible to all interested

parties, this investigation appears all the more necessary and urgent when seen in the

context of female playwrights who are currently attempting to carve out – and maintain

– an artistic space within the theatrical and intellectual community for in which they can work freely.

Introducing Emma Dante

Emma Dante, born in 1967 in Palermo, Sicily, is one of the most important theatre practitioners and writers in contemporary Italy. As well as working on adaptations of existing writings, Dante has written ten original plays to date, six of which are published. Her plays deal mainly with the family unit, in its varied modern forms. They are characterised by the use of Sicilian dialect, a focus on the family and social concerns, an iconoclastic use of Christian symbols and rituals, as well as an intense exploration of the boundaries of the actor's physicality. Her work displays a varied use of heightened realism and absurdism, coupled with elements of *commedia dell'arte*, a carnival sensibility, and elements of the grotesque. Her approach is violent, brash and unforgiving, tempered by moments of tenderness and humour. Such themes as sexual and gender roles, love, loss, power and social marginality predominate.

Born in Palermo, Emma Dante lived and attended school in Catania from the age of six until she began attending *scuola superiore* ("secondary school"). Dante had no background in the theatre and so it was a surprise when she chose to pursue it as a career.[47] Encouraged by her mother, she began her formal education in theatre at the Accademia Silvio d'Amico School in Rome,[48] graduating in 1990. Her training in Rome

transformed her personally and professionally, exposing her to forms of theatre she had never previously encountered, changing her from a naïve, sheltered young Sicilian to a woman well equipped to pursue her artistic ambitions. Her work as a professional actress began in Brecht's *Turandot* with Gruppo della Rocca in Turin, a group in which she would later become a member from 1993 to 1995.[49] 1995 also saw her working on a show entitled *Canto per Torino* ("Song for Turin") with Gabriele Vacis - this was to prove an important encounter for Dante as she was to learn much from Vacis about directing and actor training.[50] In the same year, her brother died tragically in a car accident. The death had a devastating effect on the young actress and marked the beginning of her preoccupation with the theme of death.

In 1997, in a decision provoked by a gruelling tour with Tennessee Williams' *The Rose Tattoo* also directed by Vacis, Dante abandoned the theatre and moved to Catania. In 1999, due to her mother's illness she returned to Palermo, and began working with actors in a workshop space lent to her by local artist, Beatrice Monroy.[51] This return to Palermo was to prove important in the writer's development; the city was to form the setting for many of the plays she would go on to write. It was also at this point that she made the transition from performer to playwright. Among the many participants in the workshop were Sabino Civilleri, Manuela Lo Sicco and Italia Carroccio,[52] with whom she would go on to form the professional theatre company, Sud Costa Occidentale in August 1999; the company that would later produce and promote Emma Dante's work,

touring it in Italy and abroad. In the year 2000, five years after her brother's death, her

mother also died. Dante's preoccupation with death became a constant theme in her

work after this point.

Sud Costa Occidentale and Dante were finally provided with a national platform

on winning first place in the Scenario prize competition in 2001 with the first play in the

Trilogia della famiglia siciliana ("Trilogy of the Sicilian Family"),[53] called *mPalermu*

("Inside Palermo").[54] Their entry into the competition represented a desire on Dante's

behalf to widen once again her frame of reference beyond the island of Sicily, so that

"quei corpi, quella lingua, quella storia fossero visti anche da altri, anche dagli

stranieri" ("those bodies, that language, that story would be seen by others, by

foreigners" "La strada scomoda" 55).[55] This play highlighted Dante's talent for staging

humour and oblique social criticism through the presentation of absurd situations.

Many hailed the work as ground-breaking and promising for the future, with Goffredo

Fofi calling it "il capolavoro del teatro siciliano da anni anni anni anni" ("the best piece

of Sicilian theatre for years and years and years" qtd in Dante *Carnezzeria*). The family

remained the focus for the next two plays in the trilogy, *Carnezzeria* ("The Butcher's"[56])

produced in 2002 and *Vita mia* ("My Flesh and Blood"[57]) in 2004. Described by eminent

theatre critic Franco Quadri as a piece of life that is "a un tempo poesia e coscienza

polemica" ("all at once poetry and conflicted awareness") that leaves the audience both

"ammaliati e esterrefatti" ("enchanted and appalled" "Festa di nozze con cadavere"). In

its depiction of familial violence, *Carnezzeria* abandoned the playful tone that *mPalermu* radiated, leading the company's work down a more shadowy path. *Vita mia* somehow fuses a similar dark, sorrowful tone with a sense of fun and abandonment in its depiction of a mother's loss on the death of her youngest son.

The national, and indeed, international success of the trilogy boosted Dante's profile and allowed her to experiment with different forms and roles; something that is characteristic of her artistic approach even today.[58] She produced two separate pieces in the intervals between the trilogy plays' productions, most notably a collaboration with Teatro Mercadante in Naples in which she directed and adapted Euripides' *Medea*.[59] The work that followed on from the trilogy showed an interest in interrogating masculinities and representing LGBTQ characters onstage,[60] beginning with *Mishelle di Sant'Oliva* ("Mishelle from Sant'Oliva Square") first presented as a work in progress at the Garofano Verde festival in 2004,[61] continuing with *Le Pulle* ("The Whores") in 2009 and, most recently, with a work in progress entitled *Principe di nome e Azzurro di cognome* ("Name: Prince. Surname: Charming"), as part of Palermo Pride 2012.[62] Dante's concern with masculinities, gender norms, roles and proscribed behaviours in Sicilian and Italian society is given expression in these plays; constituting a serious contestation of the normative behaviours hegemonic society seeks to enforce, partly concealed by an atmosphere of mischievous and Rabelaisian playfulness. This challenge relates to the failure of Italian society to accept alternative forms of masculinity, LGBTQ individuals

and choices, particularly in Sicily where, according to the playwright

"l'omosessualità … è ancora una novità" ("homosexuality … is still something new"

"La strada scomoda" 62).[63]

Other works by Dante deal either with socially marginalised groups, such as the

plays in the *Trilogia degli occhiali* ("Eyeglasses Trilogy"), published in 2011, and *Il Festino*

("The Party" 2007[64]), which according to Dante, examines "tre categorie che fanno fatica

a trovare una conessione con questa società. I vecchi, i malati e i poveri" ("three groups

that have difficulty making a connection with this society: the elderly, the ill and the

poor" "Intervista con Titti De Simone" 99). Social concerns permeate Dante's work,

though they are generally disguised beneath the strategic use of humour and irony. Her

theatre is a commentary on the deeply unequal nature of Sicilian society, where

economic difficulties compound the culturally marginalised status of any individual or

group that does not conform to the hegemonic norm, be they disabled, LGBTQ, elderly,

poor or female.

To date, Emma Dante and Sud Costa Occidentale have premiered twenty works,

adaptations, collaborations and dramas for young people, including site-specific pieces

(for example *Strada senza uscita* ["Dead End"] performed in 2008 in memory of the mafia

victim and magistrate, Paolo Borsellino who was killed in July 1992[65]), adaptations of

classical and prose texts (for example the 2003 version of *Medea*, which radically

reimagined the myth situating a pregnant Medea in a sterile Corinth, and *La Scimia* ["The Monkey" 2004], which was freely adapted from Tommaso Landolfi's novel *Le due zitelle*), creative collaborations in opera (for example Dante's direction of Bizet's *Carmen* at La Scala, Milan in 2009 and later *La muette de Portici* at the Opéra Comique in Paris [2012], with actors from Sud Costa Occidentale playing a prominent role in both productions), and a series of "favole" ("fairy-tales") for children (for example the wonderfully amusing *Anastasia, Genoveffa e Cenerentola: Favola per Bambini e Adulti* ["Anastasia, Genevieve and Cinderella: A Fairy-tale for Children and Adults"]).[66]

Neither Emma Dante nor Sud Costa Occidentale receives any funding from Italian state bodies or institutions. Their productions are self-funded or produced as part of co-productions with companies such as Centro di Ricerca per il Teatro (CRT)[67] and Teatro Stabile Mercadante in Naples, among others, who provide them with consistent financial support and backing.[68] Through the establishment of their own premises called La Vicaria on the outskirts of Palermo, the company has generated income from a series of open *laboratori* ("workshops") for actors given in this space. La Vicaria has become a space that is open to the citizens of Palermo for discussion of social issues, performance and theatrical training.[69] Dante's work is well regarded critically and has received prestigious awards in Italy, beginning with the Scenario prize in 2001, the Lo straniero prize (2001), on two occasions the Ubu prize (2002, 2003), and later the Gassman prize for Best Italian Director (2004), the Sinopoli prize (2010), as

well as other Italian national awards for directing. Sud Costa Occidentale have toured

their work internationally and currently enjoy more success and a higher profile in

continental countries such as France, Belgium and Germany than in the Anglophone

world.

Emma Dante is very much a Sicilian, rather than an Italian artist. Her work is

firmly rooted, geographically, linguistically and culturally in Sicily and specifically in

her home city of Palermo. It must be noted that Sicily presents a cultural and material

reality that differs considerably from other realities found on the mainland and North

of Italy. It is a region conspicuous for its depressed economy and high unemployment, a

society marked by the impotence and indifference of institutions and the proliferation

of organised crime, and in many cases an island characterised by a history of decline,

corruption and neglect.[70] Emma Dante's imaginative creations, feature characters who

generally speak in the dialect of Palermo,[71] whose settings are often the homes of

Sicilians, and whose themes are often pertinent to life in Sicily, challenging the status

quo of the island region by raising uncomfortable questions about the status of some of

its marginalised citizens. Andrea Porcheddu has claimed that Dante's appearance on

the Italian theatrical scene has galvanised what has been termed the new Sicilian

theatre,[72] defining her as "la boa attorno la quale ha 'virato' il teatro siciliano" ("*the*

reference point for Sicilian theatre" "Da una costa" 22).

Introducing Marina Carr

Marina Carr is one of Ireland's foremost contemporary playwrights. Her work has been widely lauded and performed on the Irish National Stage as well as in productions in America, France, Holland, Italy[73] and Canada. To date she has written sixteen plays, ten of which are published. Carr's work deals primarily with themes such as explorations of identity, uncertain subjectivities, the difficulty of communication, and the complexities of male/female relationships. Her plays demonstrate an intense focus on female characters, a mixing of the modern with mythological and classical references, irreverent humour, unflinching brutality and the ever-present shadow of death.

Born in Tullamore, Co. Offaly in 1964, Carr spent the first ten years of her life in Gortnamona and later, Pallas Lake. The locations of her childhood and adolescence would subsequently provide the settings for her dramatic work, though perhaps not the characters and storylines - Carr has always insisted that her work is in no way autobiographical. Marina's mother was the principal of the local school, while her father was a playwright whose plays have been produced in the Abbey, Peacock and Gate theatres, as well as in London and New York. Carr has acknowledged that his work had "a certain influence" on her writing ("Interview with Mike Murphy" 45). Another significant early influence must certainly have been her experience of childhood play. Throughout her childhood, Carr and her five siblings wrote,

improvised and performed plays in their shed. Carr recalls their stories as being bloody

and brutal (Carr *Plays* ix-x).

At age seventeen her mother died; Carr remembers this as being a traumatic

experience for her and her siblings. This loss almost certainly had an influence on Carr's

view of death and its symbolic meaning. While studying English and Philosophy at

University College Dublin, Carr discovered and developed a passion for Beckett; a

passion that is generally accepted to have strongly influenced her early absurdist

plays.[74] While at UCD she wrote her first play, *Ullaloo*. It was given a rehearsed reading

at the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1989 and produced in the Peacock in March 1991. Her

play, *Low in the Dark*, produced by Crooked Sixpence Theatre Company, premiered in

the Project Arts Centre on 24th October 1989.[75] She wrote two other plays in this period,

This Love Thing and *The Deer's Surrender*. She retrospectively considered both of these

plays to be "absolute disasters" ("Interview with Seàn Rocks").

The arc of Carr's writing career can be described in terms of three distinct phases

thus far; an early absurdist phase (which includes plays such as *Ullaloo*, *This Love Thing*,

The Deer's Surrender and *Low in the Dark*), described by Rhona Trench as being

characterised by "fragmented plot, non-linear narrative and symbolic characterisation"

(Trench 5), a middle, more naturalistic phase (with plays such as *The Mai* [1994], *Portia

Coughlan* [1996], *By the Bog of Cats…* [1998], *On Raftery's Hill* [2000] and *Ariel* [2002]),

which was nevertheless "framed by other-worlds of myth, dreams and fantasy,"

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(Trench 5) and a later, more experimental phase (including plays such as *Woman and Scarecrow* [2006], *The Cordelia Dream* [2008], *Marble* [2009], *16 Possible Glimpses* [2011] *Phaedra Backwards* [2011]), in which Carr "brings together the real and the non-real theatrical elements" with more maturity (Trench 6).[76]

Carr's work came to national attention with the staging of *The Mai* in the Peacock Theatre in 1994 as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, for which she was awarded the festivals' Best New Play award. This play, and the two that followed, *Portia Coughlan* and *By the Bog of Cats…* in 1996 and 1998 respectively, dramatized conflict within heterosexual relationships, staging the female protagonist's interrogation of her own role and her (sometimes desperate) search for a way to live on her own terms within the world. All three plays featured the death of the protagonist, and for this reason they have often been characterised as gloomy and dark plays, despite Carr's liberal peppering of satirical black humour throughout the pieces.

On Raftery's Hill and *Ariel* followed, proving to be even bleaker than the previous plays, perhaps due to a significant reduction in Carr's characteristic playful humour. Both plays bring violence, oppression and death to the stage in proportions and intensity reminiscent of Greek tragedy. The concerns of these plays relate to topical issues of familial violence and the dangers of those who desire power for power's sake. Against a cultural background of a state where the primacy of the family was enshrined in the constitution often to the detriment of the welfare of children, and where the worst

excesses of the Celtic Tiger witnessed politicians and businesspeople who pursued

wealth and power relentlessly and with no regard for the consequences, these plays

were particularly relevant.[77] In both plays, the locus of power is occupied by the father

of the family, the patriarchal head, who exploits the others as a means to achieving

power, status and sexual gratification.

The threshold that demarcates and separates the realms of the living and the

dead, the natural and the supernatural, the conscious and the unconscious, and dream

from reality, while already permeable in plays like *Portia Coughlan* and *By the Bog of*

Cats… is further destabilised in the subsequent plays; *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006), *The*

Cordelia Dream (2008) and *Marble* (2009). Carr's investigations are now firmly framed in

this super-naturalistic mode, where the fixed realities of life are unhinged and made

fluid. Within this framework, uncoupled from the limitations of material reality, Carr is

free to execute a deeper, more profound exploration of the existential questions that

haunt our existence. All three plays examine the personal, emotional and intellectual

sacrifices that women make to maintain relationships with men (whether they are

partners or relatives) and dramatize the high cost implicit in such renunciation. Carr's

most recent productions *16 Possible Glimpses* (2011) and *Phaedra Backwards* (2011) seem

to mark yet another departure in Carr's development, with the first play being a

treatment of the life of Russian dramatist Anton Chekhov and the second a radical

reworking of the Phaedra myth.

Thus far, Marina Carr has premiered sixteen original works, including pieces that were the fruit of collaborative processes (for example *Low in the Dark*), adaptations of classical texts (for example *By the Bog of Cats…*, which Carr based on Euripides' *Medea*,[78] *Ariel*, which drew heavily on the plot of Aeschylus' *The Oresteia*, and *The Cordelia Dream*, which was influenced by the heroine of Shakepeare's *King Lear*), and theatre pieces for young people (for example *Meat and Salt* [2003] and the tremendously popular and fantastical *The Giant Blue Hand*, which was performed in The Ark[79] in 2009).

Carr has been Ansbacher Writer-in-Association at the Abbey Theatre (1995-1996), Writer in Residence at Trinity College, Dublin (1998-1999) and Dublin City University (1999-2000). She served as Heimbold Professor of Irish Studies at Villanova University in 2003, was awarded the McCauley Fellowship and the AIF literary award. She is a member of the *Aosdána.*[80] She currently teaches playwriting in Trinity College Dublin. Carr's plays have toured internationally and are often revived by companies around Ireland and abroad.

If, as Susan Bassnett asserts, comparative studies "involves the study of texts across cultures," (1) then this thesis attempts to read Marina Carr and Emma Dante's works together, against the background of Irish and Sicilian cultures and societies. Despite Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce's objections to comparative studies as a field of study, decrying as he did that "there is no study more arid than researches of this sort," (qtd in Bassnett 2) the comparison of approaches, concerns, themes and

motifs across cultures can offer surprising insights, not only into the artistic pieces

studied, but also into the mechanics and norms of both societies. It would further seem

that the aims of this thesis, and those of comparative studies, coincide in what Bassnet

terms the "new comparative literature" which, like this thesis, performs a task of

revision by "calling into question the canon of great European masters" - a process that

is also inherent in many feminist interventions (9).

The task of comparing two female playwrights, one Italian the other Irish,

presents further layers of complexity when we consider Carr's and Dante's diverging

approaches to creating theatre. Carr is what we could consider, in keeping with the

tradition of Irish theatre, a "literary" playwright; working alone and creating a drama

by a process of writing and rewriting text. [81] The text is then taken up by a director and

transformed into a theatrical production.[82] Dante, on the other hand, creates theatre

through an active process of workshopping with actors in the rehearsal room, in which

she extrapolates words and scenarios which are later formalised into textual form. The

development of the text and the mise en scène, "sono due cose che camminano insieme,

quasi sempre scrivo i testi mentre faccio la regia" ("are two things that go hand in hand.

I almost always write the text while I am directing" Dante "Conversando" 47). This

mode of working is not unlike Dario Fo and Franca Rame's devising practice. Though

Dante produces a written script, the text remains flexible, fluid and malleable even as

the production tours.

Despite the evident differences in their artistic approach, I nevertheless apply the term "playwright" to designate both Dante's and Carr's professional and artistic status. This use of the term "playwright" is differentiated from the traditional strict definition of a playwright as one who produces a written text for performance in the theatre. Etymologically, the suffix "-wright" is linked both to the idea of "maker" as well as that of "worker" and it is in this sense that I intend the use of the word "playwright." [83] Within this framework, the word connotes an artisan, a craft worker; one who fashions and moulds a play from material created through their chosen method. In Sue Ellen Case's words "a playwright is a *maker* of plays, not necessarily a *writer* of plays (Case *Feminism* 29).[84] The deployment of the term in this way emphasizes the similarities inherent in both acts (writing and devising) while playing down the differences in process.

Differences in process there may be, but what *is* compelling about Dante's and Carr's work are the points of convergence. Commenting on Arthur Hatto's study of a literary motif found across cultures and social classes, S.S. Prawer suggests that works that contain similar themes may be explicable by "typological analogies:"

> *social* (two societies may have reached a similar stage of development or find themselves faced with similar problems); *literary* (at certain stages of their development a given genre may develop a dynamic of its own and lead to similar development which then may, or may not, be strengthened by direct contact with foreign models); *psychological* (the human mind has common ways of responding to common experience; two authors may have a similar cast of mind) (Prawer 56).

It is under the first and last of these categories that I will analyse Dante's and Carr's work, looking firstly at the societal conditions of gender inequality that may give rise to similar textual reactions in both playwrights, and then at the psychological impact of such social factors.

The initial impetus for this comparative study was the striking recurrence of the theme of death in both Carr's and Dante's plays. Death overshadows and lies beneath all actions in the plays. This coincidence of images has long been noted in comparative studies, which often concerns itself with "the investigation of strikingly similar images and image-complexes that turn up in the work of poets who had no contact with one another" (Prawer 55). This project is an attempt to dig beneath the surface of the motif to discover if perhaps a common stimulus present in the playwrights may have urged them to employ the death motif with such marked frequency.

Methodology

Practical Concerns

The research methodology that underpins this study consists of two intertwining modes. The first concerns practical issues of accessing written sources and visual information about the playwrights, play texts and productions of their plays. The second, the theoretical mode, concerns the application of theoretical matter to the

sourced material. Pursuing the practical mode of research involved sourcing and

consulting archival material and newspaper content, viewing live performances, and

conducting interviews. Of Emma Dante's productions, I have seen *Vita mia*, *Cani di*

bancata ("Scavenger Dogs") and *Le Pulle* live, and viewed recorded versions of

mPalermu, *Carnezzeria* and *Mishelle di Sant'Oliva*. Of Carr's works, I have seen a revival

production of *Woman and Scarecrow*, viewed recorded versions of the original

productions of all plays produced in the Abbey Theatre, and seen the original

productions of *Marble* and *16 Possible Glimpses*. The Abbey archive has proved a rich

resource in terms of visual resources and production histories. Unfortunately, no such

parallel resource exists for my research on Emma Dante and I have relied much on the

author's own generosity and patience in making materials such as scripts and

recordings of performances available to me.

The study of contemporary playwrights and their theatrical work presents a

number of problems that scholars dealing with historical material rarely have to

grapple with; there is a marked lack of academic research available on individual

authors' biographies and their works, and resources such as papers, private

correspondence and the like are not yet accessible to scholars or the public. Thus, such a

study must contend with a distinct lack of traditional materials. In an effort to

compensate for these lacunae in knowledge and available materials, I have conducted

interviews with Emma Dante herself, as well as with a number of female dramatists,

analysed newspaper resources such as theatre reviews and features, and accessed a

number of published interviews with Marina Carr. For the second, theoretical mode, I

have drawn on several discursive frameworks to support my argument. The principal

theoretical dialogue in my thesis is between feminist literary theory and theatre studies,

this strong central axis is reinforced by references to literary theory and comparative

studies.[85]

Theoretical Approach – Anxiety of Ontology

Anxieties of Influence and Authority

The exclusion or marginalisation of Marina Carr and Emma Dante from the

discourse perpetuated on national stages in Italy and Ireland demands urgent attention

and any investigation purporting to probe the issues surrounding this exclusion

requires a substantial theoretical standpoint from which to conduct its analysis.

Feminist literary theory, particularly Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's "Infection in

the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship," published in *The*

Madwoman in the Attic in 1979, provides a solid theoretical backdrop for my thesis. In

the attempt to understand and frame Dante's and Carr's experience, one must identify

and determine the particular pressures, circumstances, demands and obstacles faced by

female playwrights. Gilbert & Gubar's book examines and unfolds the tension between

female writers and patriarchal society, tracing the manifestation of such a discord

throughout the pages of nineteenth-century novels penned by women.

Gilbert & Gubar's theory adopted and adapted Harold Bloom's theories on

literary genealogies to the case of female writers. Bloom, in his work *The Anxiety of*

Influence: A Theory of Poetry (1973), examines the relationships poets have with what he

terms their "precursors"; the poets who have gone before. He argues that poets must

overcome the anxiety they feel about measuring up to the canonical standard through a

process of wrestling with their predecessors, "even to the death" (*Anxiety* 5). Only

through such an exigent struggle can a writer produce original and convincing work,

what Bloom terms "strong" work, of his own, while failure to engage in such a

confrontation will result in the production of earnest, but aesthetically weak work.

It may seem strange to begin a thesis that is a feminist analysis of the

manifestations of adverse cultural conditions in women playwrights' work with a

theory developed by a scholar who was antagonistic to cultural criticism, even at times

holding it in contempt. Bloom felt that such criticism "devalues all imaginative

literature" (*Anxiety* xvi), that the politicization of research was responsible for the

destruction of literary study and worried that it "may yet destroy learning itself" (xvi).

A firm believer in the established distinction between high and low culture, art and

literature, Bloom would go on to write an impassioned defence of the Western Canon in

his book, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (1994).[86] However, it is

precisely because of this position as the gatekeeper of the reified canon that Bloom is of

interest to this study. As a critic who is heavily invested in the notion of a single,

untouchable canon of literary work based solely on aesthetic values, Bloom is perhaps

in the best position from which to explain the dynamics of the traditional canon, with

which women must grapple.

Though he would later deny it in his preface to a new edition of *The Anxiety of*

Influence published in 1997, and later in *The Anatomy of Influence* (2011),[87] Bloom fashions

an explicit father-son relationship model between canonical, dead poets and younger

poets struggling to find originality of expression and style. In this Freudian model, the

son must kill the father in order to take his place. Bloom sees the contest between dead

predecessors and the living poet as a

> [b]attle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites, Laius and
> Oedipus at the crossroads; only this is my subject here, though some of the
> fathers, as will be seen are composite figures (*Anxiety* 11).

This particular quote illustrates clearly how Bloom's theory, despite his protestations to

the contrary, readily lends itself to a reading in Freudian terms, given how closely it

mirrors Freud's model of the Oedipus Complex.

What is interesting in Bloom's later clarifications on his original theory[88] is his

insistence that the anxiety he outlined was not a mere psychological phenomenon

contained within the writer, but rather a manifestation that can be detected within the

work of art itself. Taking my lead from Bloom, then, this project attempts no

deconstruction of the playwrights' psyche, but rather seeks out traces of anxiety *in* the

work,[89] and also in the writers' methods and modes of creating. Thus, the anxiety may

be a conscious or unconscious condition, it may be internalized or it may remain

external to the writer, but it is always present and manifest in the text.

Bloom's work has correctly been identified by Gilbert & Gubar as gendered, due

to its exclusion of female writers from its considerations. For them, Bloom's theory

functioned as a starting point, in order to "distinguish the anxieties and achievements of

female writers from those of male writers" (Gilbert & Gubar 48). In Gilbert & Gubar's

modified theory, the female writer engages in a confrontation with the canon only to be

faced with predecessors who are almost exclusively male and "therefore significantly

different" to her; as a result an "anxiety of authorship" is provoked. This anxiety is "a

radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor' the

act of writing will isolate or destroy her" (49). This anxiety surrounding authority

comes about as a result of an encounter with a canon that fails to represent women

writers adequately and proposes female characters that often fail to rise above the mere

reproduction of well-rehearsed tropes, such as the angel/witch binary that they outline

in the first chapter (3-45). Like Bloom, Gilbert & Gubar argue that this anxiety does not

remain within the woman writer, but is expressed in her work through the search for

female models, strategies of concealment and mimicry, the disruption of form, as well

as recurring themes of confinement and escape, disease and madness. Their book

examines the works of a swathe of nineteenth-century female writers such as Jane

Austen (1775 - 1817), the Brontë sisters[90] and George Eliot (1819 - 1880) to list a few, and

finds manifestations of this anxiety both in the work practices of the writers and the

themes employed in their work. This basic framework, of an anxiety that is provoked

by circumstances and manifested within the text, provides the structural basis for my

investigation into the presence of anxiety within female playwrights, Emma Dante and

Marina Carr.

While insightful, incisive and thought-provoking, Gilbert & Gubar's analysis is

very much of its time and, as such, is discursively limited in its potential application to

contemporary writers and contexts. Two primary difficulties emerge on closer scrutiny;

firstly, their uncritical use of the universal "woman" and, secondly, the attempt to trace

a single, all-encompassing female literary aesthetic. Writing on the crest of the Second

Wave of feminism and at the genesis of feminist literary criticism, Gilbert & Gubar are

guilty of an error committed by many feminists of the time in confounding their own

specific cultural, social and ethnic positions (or that of the writers studied) with that of

all women. In their writing, the terms "woman," "women" and "the woman writer" are

used as signifiers for all women, anywhere and in any social group, thus failing to

consider and incorporate the many different and variegated experiences of women. Post

deconstruction, scholars are now aware that the very category of "woman" must be treated with caution.[91] Beginning in the 1980s, feminist studies worked to both expand the definition of "woman," to include groups that had previously been ignored, and to deconstruct the very notion of gender. Interventions from writers such as Adrienne Rich on lesbian feminism,[92] bell hooks on the interaction between race, class and gender,[93] and Judith Butler on very categories of sex and gender have led feminists to expand their own concepts of what "woman" might connote and, in so doing, have rendered the use of the universal "woman" redundant.

Secondly, there is a sense that where Harold Bloom tries to trace a singular, Westernised, male poetic tradition through the canon, Gilbert & Gubar echo that trajectory somewhat in their attempts to trace a single female poetic aesthetic. Elaine Showalter had previously suggested the existence of a female literary tradition in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) and Gilbert & Gubar similarly assume the existence of a single female history with "its own distinctive literary traditions" (Gilbert & Gubar 50). This position is only one step away from ideas of difference formalised in Hélène Cixous' theory of *l'écriture feminine* which, according to Jill Dolan, "proposes that biologically based differences in female sexuality give rise to a form of female textuality that can subvert male signification" (*The Feminist Spectator as Critic* 8).[94] The move towards such a definition could run the risk of a return to essentialist terms and makes the crucial mistake of denying women's heterogeneous

experiences, varying cultural contexts and modes of expression. It elides difference as a category, ignores alternative, separate cultural realities and risks reproducing a cultural hegemony that feminists have criticised in the traditional canon. This project, then, seeks to avoid the traps of over-generalisation by focussing on two women playwrights, from two predominantly Catholic cultural contexts and similarly advantaged financial backgrounds. I do not claim that this theory will be universally applicable to the category of "woman", but imagine that, as a study of the effects and manifestations of social and cultural marginalisation, its conclusions may be applicable to women in similar contexts and perhaps adapted to other groups in differing circumstances.

As a modern scholar who favours a materialist feminist standpoint, the theoretical approach, adopted in this project, and which is considered to offer much in terms of interpretation and analysis, is to read Gilbert & Gubar's theory through the lens of Materialist feminism and particularly focussing on Judith Butler's analysis of gender and sex. Materialist feminism developed from traditional Marxist feminism and is characterised, in terms of theatrical criticism, by a "deconstruction of the mythic subject Woman to look at women as a class oppressed by material conditions and social relations" and the rejection of gender polarization as "a social construct oppressive to both women and men" (*The Feminist Spectator* 10). Materialist feminists view gender as a cultural construct and consequently, see it as something that is fluid and unfixed.

Judith Butler's reflections on the complexities of gender and identity in society

have been widely influential and have effected a transformation in our understanding

of gender and sexuality. Butler contends that rather than an innate, biological category

gender is unnatural, a cultural construction which is imposed upon an identity which is

also discursively constituted. Through the lens of Butler's theory, gender becomes a

performative intervention which is nonetheless contained within the bounds of

available cultural choices (*Gender Trouble* 25).[95] Though gender is performative and

constructed, that is not to "assert its illusoriness or artificiality" (45), it must not be

conflated "with voluntarism or individualism […] and in no way presupposes a

choosing subject" (*Bodies that Matter* xxiii).

Judith Butler's definition of the concepts of gender and sex constituted a

significant departure in feminist thinking on the issues of gender, sexuality, sex and

desire. Her position on the issues of gender and sex can be better understood by

comparison with that of one of the great historical thinkers in feminism, Simone de

Beauvoir. De Beauvoir's perhaps most famous quote, "One is not born, but rather

becomes, a woman," drew a distinction between biological sex attributed at birth

(female) and the development of gender (woman), which is acquired gradually later in

life. This distinction and division between sex and gender proved vital to the feminist

project that sought to sever the long-standing link between anatomy and the

individual's destiny. Within de Beauvoir's reading, sex is materially distinct, immutable

and fixed, while gender instead, describes the cultural meaning and forms that are inscribed on the sexed body through varying modes and processes of acculturation. Gender can then be understood as the mapping of cultural, social and historical meanings onto anatomical differences. For de Beauvoir, this cultural assignment allowed for women to be constructed as "Other" and went some way towards explaining their subjugation. The distinction and separation of sex and gender, "nature" and "culture" was of vital importance to the development of feminist thinking on the subject, paving the way for later post-structuralist and post-modern feminist analysis of the categories of gender and sex. By the 1980s, the idea of gender as a social construct was a central idea in feminist thought.

Butler's views on the subject of gender and sex are strongly influenced by de Beauvoir's thinking. Butler reads de Beauvoir to mean that gender is simultaneously both an individual project and a cultural and social construct ("Sex and Gender" 37), and goes further to read her interpretation of the body, of sex, as "a choice, a mode of enacting and re-enacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh" (48). Butler developed her ideas on gender and sex further in *Gender Trouble* (1990). In this book, Butler notes subsequent developments in theories on sex and gender advanced by theorists such as Wittig, Irigarary and Kristeva, underlining how these frameworks are all founded on pre-discursive assumptions. In contrast, Butler's theory proposes that categories such as sex and gender are all constructed discursively.

She seeks to question and deconstruct the assumption that sex is a material, fixed and unvaried constant, inviting us to see sex as historically and culturally constituted. For Butler, the category of sex has an authority that performs a normative function; it is a regulatory framework which works to exclude those bodies that lie outside the anatomical description of male or female. Thus, the assumed link between sex and gender is severed; gender's origin is no longer bodily, but is now culturally and socially constituted. Butler contests the traditional logic regarding the categories in question and contends that gender produces sex. Gender becomes a constitutive act. Here, sex is always already gender.

Although her writing addresses philosophical concepts, such as the questions of sex, gender, sexuality and desire, she is careful to always link them to the lived experience of these categories. She focuses on the idea of cultural intelligibility as a key to understanding the impact abstract ideas like the categorising of sex and gender can have on people's material lives. As sex is used as a regulatory frame through which an individual's life can be understood, those lying outside that matrix are not considered as viable subjects. Consequently, their lives can be "illegible, unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate" (*Gender Trouble* viii).

On the issue of the possibility of a gender ontology, Butler refutes that any such ontology on which to construct a politics of gender could exist. For Butler, a gender

ontology is what she describes as a "normative injunction," a system that seeks to control, exclude and define what gender and sex are, and significantly for Butler's discussion, are not. This idea of injunction relates to Butler's belief that bodies are inscribed with gendered meanings, and that the gendered subject is constructed through a series of repeated actions and gestures. This concern is to the forefront of Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (1994), where she pursues the question of how sex differences manifest different effects in the lived life. She investigates the reasons why some body types matter more than others and why some of them are given legitimate recognition while others are denied the same recognition.

Seen from this perspective, any notions that Gilbert & Gubar may have had about a true and essential female literary aesthetic must be treated with suspicion. If we accept, as Materialist feminism proposes, that gender and sex are cultural constructions, there can be no essential "female" mode of writing.

It is not the body that signifies "femaleness" as we understand it in our society, but rather cultural readings of bodies that interpret women's bodies in a particular way. Connotations associated with female bodies vary from culture to culture. In Butler's words "the cultural interpretation of sexual attributes is distinguished from the facticity or simple existence of these attributes" ("Sex and Gender" 35), and therefore the material reality of the body, perceived as female, lies *outside* the readings that culture

imposes on it. Thus, "woman" cannot be understood to signify a single group that shares universal values, but rather as various groups whose bodies are read culturally by varying patriarchal systems to carry similar meanings. The tension between material reality, individual subjectivity and cultural meanings cannot yet be fully resolved, but as a woman, one is conditioned by these readings on a quotidian basis, whether one resists or seeks to conform to them.

While I intend to follow a firmly materialist approach in my study, I must acknowledge the contribution of other forms of feminist activity and thought to the development of modern feminism and feminist theory. The Second Wave of feminist activity was a key moment in the history of feminism, and its reverberations are still felt by women today. Essentialist ways of thinking were historically vital in allowing and encouraging women to think about and value their own experiences as women. Essentialist thinking placed an attention that had never been previously awarded to singular aspects of women's experience such as that of maternity and interactions between men and women in sexual relationships. Historically it provided a space to explore, define and appreciate what was particular to the experience of being a woman. Ideas raised in such contexts were to prove to change society's way of thinking about women and issues around gender and sexuality. However, from a modern standpoint, I believe that essentialism, while doubtless having historical value, has been superseded in usefulness, and is best used cautiously in combination with other approaches. Thus, I

have chosen to apply a materialist approach as potentially the most fruitful for the analysis of two contemporary female playwrights. As theatre studies is the principal area of my studies and I cannot profess to be an expert in the fields of post-structuralism or philosophy, I will cautiously adopt Butler's theory of performativity, as it speaks to the relevant questions facing feminism today, and combined with Gilbert & Gubar's theories on anxiety and authorship, apply it to the work of Emma Dante and Marina Carr in the hope that it will prise open for scrutiny areas of interest.

Anxiety of Ontology

Moving forward from Bloom and Gilbert & Gubar's theories on author anxieties, I propose a theory of ontological anxiety as a useful hypothesis from which the exploration of the experiences, anxieties and material circumstances of the playwrights can be considered. Bloom theorises that male authors experience an Anxiety of Influence when faced with great poetic forerunners, while Gilbert and Gubar propose that a female author can experience an Anxiety of Authorship as a result of her exceptional status within literary history and the canon. Following these assertions and taking Emma Dante and Marina Carr's experiences as a springboard, I suggest that the female playwright's precarious ontology, her exceptional status within theatre history and the modern theatre, as well as a unique set of contemporary challenges she must overcome, give rise to an anxiety regarding the tenability of her position. I call this the

Anxiety of Ontology. This anxiety may be applied to women who are playwrights, though it should not be seen as a universal description of all female playwrights. As women live in circumstances that can differ significantly from one another, this theory eschews any universalising tendencies and should be considered a useful hypothesis that takes into account potential social and cultural differences affecting male and females and applies them to the act of creating for theatre. Unlike the Anxiety of Authorship which refers to a fear associated with the process of artistic creation, the Anxiety of Ontology, where present, may occur in the period after the initial creative process has ended. The playwright may experience an anxiety regarding the potential fate of her artistic works. This thesis argues that because of the presence of gender discrimination and imbalance in general, intellectual and artistic society, the female playwright's position may be experienced as insecure and untenable. This sensation induces a series of anxieties; she may fear that her work will not receive the critical reception it deserves, that it will be judged unfairly, that her plays will fail to be produced and reproduced in the future, and that her artistic works will have no permanency. This anxiety, as I will later go on to argue, may become manifest in the writer's plays and through alterations to her modes and methods of working. The Anxiety of Ontology should be regarded as a useful postulation, one which permits the scholar to tease out the intricacies of female playwrights' unique position, understand the impact such an ontology can potentially have on the writers' working practices, and

imagine how its effects can resonate within the work itself. In itself, the Anxiety of

Ontology is unlikely to explain in its entirety the complexities of a situation whereby so

few women playwrights' work reaches the production stage, indeed this thesis does not

seek to provide such a comprehensive and all-encompassing account. Rather, the

Anxiety of Ontology is put forward as a compelling beginning, a point of departure for

such musings.

Ontology is, however, an unwieldy term, one that has a long history in the field

of metaphysics. The general aim of ontology is to articulate a theory of being, becoming

and existence; it concerns itself with what there is. The primary problems addressed in

ontology are questions of the possible existence of a god, whether universals can be said

to exist, and problems surrounding the most general features and relations of entities

which can be said to exist. To have an ontology is to have undertaken a particular view

of what exists, as inhabitants of the world, as well as a particular organization of them.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the etymology of the word "ontology"

derives from the Greek "ōn, ont" meaning "being" and the word can be defined in the

following terms as "[t]he science or study of being; that branch of metaphysics

concerned with the nature or essence of being or existence" (*OED*). Beginning with

Parmenides of Elea,[96] philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, pursued their

investigation of ontology through the assumption that things that could be said to exist

had an "essence."[97] René Descartes (1596–1650), French mathematician and philosopher, was influential in the development of ideas on ontology. His views on the ontological reality of an individual emerged from the interaction between the individual and thought. If thought cannot be separated from the individual, as Descartes believed, the individual can therefore be said to exist. This concept was neatly encapsulated by the phrase cogito ergo sum ("I think, therefore I am."), which has since become perhaps "the most celebrated philosophical dictum of all time" (Cottingham 1). Descartes forwarded the notion that the only indubitable knowledge is that one is a thinking thing, "thought is the only thing he knows to be part of his essence" (Markie 142). This essence, in Cartesian philosophy is inextricably linked with the presence of a "perfect, nondeceiving God (8).

Descartes' thoughts on the nature of the mind and the body, often referred to as Cartesian dualism, were to become central ideas in philosophy. In his *A Discourse on Method*, Descartes linked ontology to the mind or soul; "this 'I' by which I am what I am is entirely distinct from the body and could exist without it" (115). In Cartesian terms, the mind, or soul was essentially incorporeal and non-material, while the body's properties were material. Although the body could occasionally exert influence over the mind, it was the mind that for the greater part controlled the body.

Descartes' reasoning on the nature of the being has attracted considerable criticism from feminist commentators. Although he did not address the issue of gender in his writing directly, Descartes' theories have been criticised by feminists "for formulating metaphysical and epistemological views that both expressed and consolidated a construction of gender that privileges males" (Clarke 82). In Cartesian logic the body and mind are defined in opposition to one another, and in the comparison the body is devalued. According to feminist philosopher Susan Bordo, this insistence on dualism and opposition coincided with a traditional association between nature (the body) and the feminine, and knowledge (the mind) and the masculine. The turn towards Cartesian thought in history represented a "separation from the maternal – the immanent realms of earth, nature, the authority of the body – and a compensatory turning toward the paternal for legitimization through external regulation, transcendent values, and the authority of law" (Bordo 62).

If Descartes' explanations of ontology give an account of existence as relying on an external divine entity and define such an existence in terms that lend themselves to gendered readings, perhaps we would be advised to seek out other accounts of ontology which move away from reliance of notions of innate and unchanging essence. Philosophers such as Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) moved away from an emphasis on the importance of essence in ontological terms to an emphasis on the description of existence. In the

centuries between Descartes on the one hand, and these three philosophers on the other, faith in the primacy of human reason began to decline, corresponding with the loss of religious belief in the West around the eighteenth-century. Husserl was responsible for the founding of phenomenology, a field of philosophy primarily concerned with the systematic reflection on, and study of the structures of experience or consciousness. In phenomenology, our experience is directed to things only through particular concepts, thoughts, ideas or images. It is these elements that make up the meaning or content of a given experience, and are distinct from the things they present or mean. Husserl's phenomenology therefore takes as its starting-point a level anterior to thought: "feeling." Before "I think, therefore I am," comes an awareness, a perception of the world which cannot yet be crystallised in thought: before I think, I feel. Thus, in the move towards phenomenology, being and ontology can be seen as moving away from a concern with God, transcendence or essence, and towards the concept of being as experience. The move can be traced through French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1908-1961) notion, developed in response and contrast to Descartes' *ego cogito*, the *ego percipio*. In Merleau-Ponty's reading, the ego (mind) is necessarily an incarnate subject. Whereas *ego cogito* is inextricably linked to ideas of immutability and true essence, *ego percipio* places such certainty and potential for universality,

> [i]f two people say 'I perceive' at the same time, we already know that they are not perceiving the same things. Each has his own perspective (deriving from his *situation* in space). The subject of perception is individuated; he looks out from *here* (Descombes 62-63).

If perception is individualised and subjective, no longer associated with posited and assumed "universals," then perhaps a vision of ontology linked to phenomenological principles would better fit the needs of a feminist analysis. It would seem that the epistemological centrality of experience to phenomenology, and the subjective and mutable nature of such experience, lends itself to the discussion of ontology at play in this thesis.

For the reasons discussed above, any feminist concept of ontology must necessarily reject Cartesian dualism and concomitant system based on a series of binary oppositions. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise in *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology* (1983), argue that a feminist concept of the "self" must conceive of it "as relationally and interactionally composed, its construction being historically, culturally and contextually specific and also subtly changing in different interactional circumstances" (195). Stanley & Wise describe themselves as constructionists and reject any attempts to essentialize women's experience and being. As an alternative feminist way of understanding the dualisms posited in masculinist Cartesian ontology, the binaries of individual/collectivity and self/other, they propose to treat these "not as

oppositions but rather as co-operative endeavours for constructing selves – both selves

– through collective relational systems of action and interaction" (195).

The use of "ontology" in this thesis will, rejecting the notion of an immutable

essence in Cartesian terms and borrowing from phenomenology's ideas of perception

and mutability, denote a "self" referred to by Stanley & Wise as contingent on historical,

cultural and individual specificities, subject to change and whose composition is

dependent on relation and interaction with such contexts. It will foreground the

playwrights' own perception of the cultural, social and intellectual situations in which

they find themselves. "Ontology" in the context of this study encompasses a notion of

being as unfixed, changing, contingent to external specificity and constructed. This

concept of a feminist and phenomenological ontology will be used to refer to Carr's and

Dante's personal, professional and artistic selves in the contemporary cultural context

of Italian and Irish societies.

At this point, it would be pertinent to ask how this notion of ontology can relate

to Marina Carr's and Emma Dante's creative work and their participation in public

cultural spheres. How can an anxiety about the writers' ontology as playwrights impact

materially their lives and work? It is my contention that in their attempts to understand

their own "being" as playwrights, Dante and Carr are impeded and blocked by the

mechanisms of a theatrical tradition that is patriarchal in its traditions and expectations.

How, in such a context, do these female playwrights known that they are playwrights, if general definitions of the role are masculine and do not consider the possibility of their existence? Both writers' initial contact with the theatre was through the experience of performance, only gradually did they arrive at the role of playwright. At this point in time, the playwrights have developed a sense of their capacity as writers for the theatre,[98] this sense is supported by the participation of actors, directors, producers and theatre administrations in their work, by the attention the critical press lend to their productions and the interest scholars show in their oeuvre. Their ontology as playwrights can be drawn into question, however, by negative attention or indeed indifference from the critical press and academics, and the refusal of the apparatus of theatrical production to engage with their work, or to engage with it only on the theatre's own terms.

Working to create a piece of theatre is an activity that follows distinct processes, procedures and methodologies when compared to that of writing in the forms of prose or poetry. Patrice Pavis' Dictionary of Theatre (1998) provides a useful set of terms from which we can extrapolate a process of theatrical creation. Collective creation and collaboration are a defining feature of theatrical composition. Collaboration mainly takes place after the playwright has created an advanced draft of the play text. In this scenario, the actors and director experiment with the text provided and some adjustments may be made. In some cases, the playwright may choose to participate in a

staged reading of the text before returning to work on further drafts. Collective creation, instead, works on the principle that "theatre, as it is realised onstage, is a collective art par excellence, in which different techniques and languages are brought together" (Pavis 63). It relies on the creation of a theatrical piece through processes of improvisation by the actor and indeed the entire theatrical company (62). The staging, or mise-en-scène, of a created piece marks another significant divergence of theatrical creation when compared to the writing of novels or poetry. Pavis describes this step in the process as "the transformation or […] the concretization of the text, using actors and the stage space, into a duration that is experienced by the spectators" (364). It is the director's role here to ensure the coherence of the spatial, somatic and design choices. If done well, the staging process ensures "the meaning of the theatrical meaning will emerge" (364). Finally, there is the question of reception in a theatrical context. Pavis divides "reception" into two categories; the first is the study of the reception of a play by groups and audiences in a particular context, and secondly, the reception or interpretation of a play by the spectator (304).In the case of the spectator, Pavis outlines a number of considerations that must be taken into account when considering issues of reception, touching on Brecht's notion of "spectator art, concepts of "reception codes," and discusses the potential for developing an aesthetics of reception. Reception in the theatre involves the playwright in a public exposure of their work, something that writers of prose or poetry generally do not have to contend with.

Working within such unique constraints, Carr and Dante must work to maintain their sense of their own ontology as playwrights. As I will go on to argue in this thesis, they do so through a negotiation of patriarchal tradition in theatre; cultural and theatrical positioning and an appropriation and transformation of character, form and convention in their texts.

Female Playwrights

Literary criticism displays a marked tendency to overlook the unique ontological situation of the playwright by uncritically categorising them alongside poets and novelists and this becomes problematic when we come to consider female playwrights. The unique ontologies of male playwrights, but especially that of female playwrights, demands a more extensive consideration than it has received to date. Both Bloom and Gilbert & Gubar's studies neglect a consideration of the ontology of the playwright; Bloom, a bardolater of the highest ranks, surprisingly categorizes Shakespeare unproblematically alongside other writers as diverse as Dante Alighieri (1265 - 1321), Lucretius (c.99 BC – c.55 BC) and Walt Whitman (1819 – 1892), while Gilbert & Gubar fail to recognise the unique ontology of playwrights by eliding the differences between poets like Emily Dickinson (1830 - 1886) and playwrights like Aphra Behn (1640 - 1689).[99] As the limited number of studies that do consider the playwright's unique situation tend to refer to them in a gendered manner as male, the woman who writes

for the theatre is twice neglected – the category she writes in is subsumed and ignored and her presence within the grouping is not recognised. Playwrights are incorrectly categorised alongside other writers, and female playwrights are incorrectly assumed to have the same ontology as male playwrights. The female playwright's difference is, then, doubled because not only is she dissimilar from other writers (in the same way that male playwrights are) but she is also different from other female writers. Contemporary female playwrights are shaped by a number of unique difficulties and these accumulate to distinguish their circumstances from that of other women writers and male playwrights. These challenges must be considered together in order to understand the anxiety brought about by this unique ontology.

Marina Carr, in her Foreword to Melissa Sihra's edited collection, *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* (2007) speculates on the reasons why women are so notably underrepresented within the theatre, and especially in the profession of playwright:

> Why is this? I think there are several reasons. There is the structure of the Theatre, the collaborative nature of actually getting a play on, all the disparate voices, opinions, inputs that go into the producing of a play. There is the very public exposure of rehearsal and performance which goes against the nature of how women have been traditionally perceived. And sometimes against how women see themselves. There is the domestic factor. If you are childbearing, cooking, cleaning, night-feeding, how much time do you actually have to devote to the theatre regardless of desire to do so. The Theatre is a demanding art form. It sucks up time like no other form. And this factor, as much as anything I believe, has kept women away in their droves. (*Women in Irish Drama* xi).

Carr, as a female playwright herself, identifies the collaborative nature of the theatre, the necessity of negotiation with the public sphere and, particularly, time management and domesticity as obstacles to becoming, or continuing, existence as female playwrights. These are the factors that will frame the analysis we are about to embark on.

The first of the categories which Carr suggests is the negotiation with the public sphere. The public nature of the theatre contrasts dramatically with the generally private creation and reception of novels and poetry. Traditional gender roles have long confined women to the private sphere within the home. The theatre, however, is a very public forum for art. The female playwright must make a dramatic leap, from her conditioning and historical confinement to the private sphere, into the public space of the theatre: this constitutes a very real challenge. At the very birth of democracy in the Greek city states, clear delineations were drawn along gendered lines. Space was marked out into the female *oikos*, which denoted the home and private sphere, and the male *polis*, which referred to shared public areas and the public sphere. From the very outset of democracy, which forms the basis of many of our modern societies, women were conditioned and confined to the private sphere.[100] This was to continue for centuries. When women's writing began to emerge then, it is no coincidence that it did so predominantly in mediums that were more compatible with the home and domesticity. As Elaine Showalter notes, the first professional activities of Victorian

women "either were based in the home or were extensions of the feminine role as teacher, helper and mother of mankind" (M. Eagleton 16). Women's writing then, often emerged in the form of prose or poetry – forms which allowed for a minimum of contact with the public sphere.

As an art form based on live public performance, playwrighting however, cannot remain in the privacy of the home.[101] As Gayle Austin notes, drama is a more challenging form for a woman to write in as it "requires mastering to some degree a male-dominated, public production machinery" (2). The act of creating for the theatre means taking part in the public discourse and stepping out of the security and privacy of the home, into the public sphere. While it is true that in some cases the initial writing process may remain private, in order to bring a play to production, a playwright must enter the public sphere and its concomitant discourses by submitting the text to a theatre for acceptance or rejection, participating in a casting process, and attending rehearsals in which the work is discussed. Finally, the piece is presented in the public theatre, reacted to by the audience during the play as well as during the intervals, and later, discussed and criticised in public fora such as newspaper reviews. In short, female playwrights are required to abandon the anonymity of the private sphere and move deftly into the public sphere; something that women are still socially and culturally speaking poorly equipped for, and a task which only notably few women have successfully accomplished in theatre history.

In addition to the negotiation of the public nature of the theatre, audience and critical expectations must also be managed. Conditioned for centuries to expect a certain kind of play, audiences and critics sometimes react negatively to work that deviates from the hegemonic discourse and fails to conform to the established mould. This is an issue that British playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker,[102] in her contribution to the first issue of *State of Play* which was dedicated to playwrights and playwriting, picks up on, contending that modern audiences tend to identify solely on a superficial level with the characters represented. This observation leads her to wonder "if part of the problem is that audiences haven't yet been trained to see a contemporary woman on a stage and actually identify with her" (75). She also links the reception of plays written by women to a privileging in the Western Theatre of Aristotelian form – a form female writers have long tried to disrupt, in a Woolfian attempt to break the sequence (Woolf 106). A dramatic clash can often be the outcome of such a tension when the female playwright's creative desires differ from audience expectations, and this sometimes unfortunately results in a negative assessment of the work. The fear of undeserved overcritical reviews must weigh particularly on the shoulders of female playwrights.

Theatre is, by its very nature, a collaborative medium. Depending on the process a playwright favours, she/he could find her/himself working with artistic directors, directors, actors, designers as well as other technical staff. As American playwright Stuart Spencer puts it, "in a sense, you will be collaborating with everyone from the

box-office manager to the producer to the lighting designer" (Spencer 317). Some

playwrights appreciate and value this collaborative process, such as Tom Stoppard[103]

who attends every rehearsal (284), Sam Shepard,[104] who uses actors to highlight

potential flaws in his writing (340) and Sarah Daniels[105] who believes "[t]he playwright

has to learn to 'let go' to enable the process to happen"(qtd. in Roberts 14). Other

playwrights, however, like Samuel Beckett who was famously wary of others' input

into his work, dislike the collaborative demands of theatre. Female playwrights must

often work with a predominantly male artistic team to ensure their work comes to

production. Spencer has identified the central relationship in such collaborations as that

between the playwright and the director.[106] The specificities of this relationship, he

argues, can determine the potential success or failure of a production.[107] How then does

such a dynamic change if the relationship is between a female playwright and a male

director? Jill Dolan, in her book *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1991) outlines the

difficulties faced by Marsha Norman in getting her play *'night, Mother* (1983) to

production. Dolan contends that the female focus of the play was not understood by the

male artistic director and the director of the piece, and as a result its central focus was

altered.[108] The eventual outcome of this lack of shared vision was "a performance text

that diverged from the written text" producing meanings it seems the playwright had

never intended, and "these new meanings ultimately influenced critics' and spectators'

responses" (22).[109] Dolan traces the unfolding of a process that leads to the corruption of

the central vision of the female playwright's play, whereby its text or semiotics are

altered during collaboration, but the final product is nevertheless attributed to the

playwright as "her" text (23). This risk of corruption renders the collaborative nature of

the theatre a risk and danger female playwrights, as it potentially could result in the

distortion of her artistic vision.

Time management was identified by Carr as another stumbling block for female

playwrights. Whereas the individual and largely private creation of prose and verse

provides a certain flexibility in terms of time, the demands of theatre are often

determined by the needs of a substantial number of technicians, creatives and

performers. The theatre, not the playwright, decides the working hours. It has already

been established that time, or the lack of it, can be a significant hindrance for women

writers. Women tend to be overloaded with domestic tasks having less time to dedicate

to the activity of writing. The weight of domesticity has been recently quantified in an

OECD[110] survey which found that Italian men enjoyed 80 minutes of free time more per

day than an Italian woman (13), [111] time which Caterina Soffici speculates men can fill

with a variety of activities (191-195). Kate Wilhelm[112] describes how traditional female

roles leave no space for the time needed for writing "there were so many pressures to

force me into giving up writing again, to become mother, housewife etc." (qtd in Russ

9). Many women are still unevenly burdened with childcare and domestic

responsibilities, and the demands of the theatre marry less well with these roles. Unlike

female poets or novelists who can co-ordinate their writing activities with the rhythms

of domestic tasks, playwrights must keep the hours the theatre and its staff require. This

constitutes a significant challenge for women playwrights who must juggle the

conflicting time demands of domestic work and theatrical schedules.[113]

These unique challenges that confront female playwrights mark their ontology

out as separate from that of other female writers. I propose that these obstacles remind

women playwrights that they do not necessarily fit in to the public system in which

they choose to work. A sense of alienation is augmented by a feeling of isolation and

exceptionality which characterises their relationship with the male-dominated theatrical

tradition. These sentiments radically destabilise the female playwrights' ontology and

create a sense of unease and precariousness. Trying to do battle with elements that

simply do not seem to pose any difficulties for male colleagues, many female

playwrights cannot help but feel that their position is continuously under threat.

Women playwrights, like women novelists and poets, have been excluded from

the canon. [114] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "canon" as "a general law, rule,

principle, or criterion by which something is judged" and as "a list of literary works

considered to be permanently established as being of the highest quality." It is the

blending of these two definitions that has proved divisive to scholars. In the past, the

traditional measure by which works were accepted into the canon was that only "the

greatest of the greats" could make the grade (Casement xiii). Universal truths and

values as well as a sense of humanity's overarching unity were thought to be illustrated

in these great works. A major problem in defining the canon lies in the fact that the

criteria for admission or exclusion "are nowhere codified: they are neither set down in a

single place, nor are they absolutely uniform" (Robinson 83). Criteria for inclusion or

exclusion in the canon are contingent and are dependent on the values - and prejudices

- held by the dominant group in society and those of the individual anthology editor.

Dr Charles W. Eliot's *Harvard Classics*, first published in 1909, sought to catalogue the

universally relevant canonical works of the Western world. The selection of texts, for

the most part, excluded female writers and marginalised groups, and in so doing,

promoted an ethnocentric, masculine, middle-class view of the world. Like this early

attempt at anthologization of the canon, so many attempts that followed would repeat

the same exclusionary policy and process

    Kerry Powell in her insightful book, *Women and Victorian Theatre* (1997) argues

that the absence of women playwrights in traditional theatre and literary history "has

effectively meant the suppression of a tradition of women's playwrighting" (78). There

is evidence to suggest that there was a systemic suppression of the tradition of female

playwrighting, beginning in the Victorian period, which left the lasting impression that

there were simply no female playwrights in the history of the theatre. As already

mentioned, this myth continued until relatively recently when feminists following on

the Second Wave, uncovered a historic wealth of women playwrights.[115]

Joanna Russ, in her book, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983),takes a more

general look at the fates of women writers across genres in the canon, categorically

deconstructing the historical popular myth that there simply were not any women

writers. She critically examines the processes by which women's writing has been

suppressed and excluded from the canon over centuries. Russ argues that the

suppression has occurred in five major ways; through the denial of agency, pollution of

agency, double standard of content, false categorizing and explanations of isolation. The

mechanisms of this exclusionary process are most clearly illustrated by the cases of

female playwrights, Aphra Behn[116] and Hrotsvit von Gandersheim (935 - 1000). Behn, a

Restoration writer, was "the first woman in England to earn her living as a professional

writer" (Aston 26), and yet she was written out of the canon during the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries with the advent of Victorian sensibilities and the growth of what

Morgan & Lyons term "the 'cult' of femininity" (Lyons & Morgan xi). Canonical models

are vital in the professional growth of writers. Hrotsvit von Gandersheim was the first

known female playwright; Sue Ellen Case argues that Gandersheim was denied the

chance to set that all-important precedent which could have established a "standard of

comparison within the theatrical canon for future women playwrights" ("Re-viewing

Hrotsvit" 534). Russ highlights how the exclusion or non-inclusion of female writers in

the canon, and the resulting lack of female models, leads each generation of women writers to believe "itself to be faced with the burden of doing everything for the first time" (93).

What differentiates the suppression of women's writing for the theatre from the generalised exclusion of women from the canon is its link to the ideology of a specific time period. Studies show that a few women wrote for the theatre, but that when they attempted to do so, their progression was blocked by social mores and conventions, as well as the dominant ideological perspective of normative gender roles and behaviour. Sue Ellen Case's study seems to suggest that the prejudice against women playwrights may have been less strong in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when with the example of Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre's success before them, women were responsible for a number of plays staged ("Re-viewing Hrotsvit"). However, with the advent of stringent Victorian morality, women writing for the theatre came to be seen as an aberration – one that violently clashed with the vision of woman as the "Angel in the House" and the moral barometer for the family and society. Playwrighting was perceived as a profession that required the combination of the perceived male qualities of respectability, dramatic skill and an analytical mind. The idea of a woman who, not only took on these apparently male qualities, but was also willing to boldly step into the public sphere, was perceived as threatening to the very fabric of Victorian society. While there were some professional female playwrights,

such as Pearl Craigie, Mrs. Musgrave, and Madeline Ryley, at the end of the nineteenth century, they were distinctly in the minority, the quality of their work was rarely recognised, they were poorly recompensed for it, and typically had their work relegated to regional theatres.[117] The perceived ideological threat these women and their predecessors posed to the stability of Victorian society led to the suppression of the female playwrighting tradition. Lyons & Morgan attribute Aphra Behn's disappearance from the canon to just such "a cult of 'femininity'" that grew up in this period (ix).[118] Suppressions like this created an absence in the canon which propagated what was to prove a long-lasting impression that women had no history in dramatic writing and that they were somehow innately unsuited to the form.

The reverberations of such an active suppression of playwrighting by women are felt still in contemporary times, as female playwrights fail to find models in the canon that reflect their creative experience and ontology. This lack, as Gilbert and Gubar have illustrated, brings about an anxiety of authorship. I argue that it also induces a significant anxiety surrounding the female playwright's ontology. Feeling that one has no predecessors must necessarily comment on the unusual status of your ontology. In short, if nobody has done it before you, then why would you be allowed to do it? If the works of female playwrights have been rejected and buried by the mechanisms of the canon, then what will become of your artistic works? Such an anxiety makes any success the female playwright has seem singular and puzzling.

Women writing for theatre is not a new phenomenon, and it is clear that today there are more female playwrights who receive an increasing amount critical and public attention. But while women writers gradually gain more acceptance in the theatre, recent statistics show that they are still drastically in the minority. Janelle Reinelt reports that in a study of off-Broadway productions in the USA between 2001 and 2002, it was found that only 16 % of dramas produced were written by women and a marginally better 17 % of shows were directed by women (21). Unfortunately, no seismic shifts have occurred since that time; commenting on the prestigious Tony Awards for theatre, Jill Dolan, in her online blog notes:

> Since 2000, of the 48 titles nominated for Best Play, only six have been written by women, and only one has won—*God of Carnage*, by Yasmina Reza, in 2009. In other words, no American woman playwright has won Best Play since the turn of the 21st century and only 12% of those nominated have been written by women (*The Feminist Spectator*)

In contemporary times, the female playwright remains an exception -exceptional in her choice to write for theatre and not other artistic forms that show a higher rate of female representation.

Alienation, the sense of being an outsider or of being isolated in one's own place, is a common sentiment among female writers. Cathy Leeney begins her essay comparing Teresa Deevy and Marina Carr by quoting Cixous: "[a]ll women are exiles,"

in an attempt to convey the sense of alienation and isolation that women writers have borne over the centuries ("Ireland's 'Exiled' Women Playwrights" 150). This general feeling of separation, we could argue, is reflected in women's minority status within the categories of poet, writer and playwright. The culmination of all the factors discussed above, leads female playwrights to feel they are in quite a precarious position. With so many elements to contest, when a playwright like Carr or Dante manages to reach the exceptional status of being a successful professional female playwright, the ontology cannot help but seem to be precarious, unstable, shifting and unfixed. If so many other female playwrights have failed to have their work produced, or received negative reviews from the critics, or been buried by the canon selectors, how can they imagine that their work will continue to be produced, to receive acceptable reviews, to attract an audience and to have some sort of permanence after the initial production? I will go on now to argue that these anxieties are expressed in Dante's and Carr's plays through differentiated work strategies and a recurrent preoccupation with the theme of death and dying.

It is my contention that this anxiety is present in female writers who experience societal and cultural discrimination linked to their gender. This theory would resist interpretation in essentialist terms. The anxiety I identify should not be read as the result of an innate feminine difference, but rather the as consequence of a coming together of a variety of cultural and societal factors. This study is an examination of two

writers working in two societies that are linked by many factors, but significantly by a continuing gender imbalance. In line with my materialist feminist stance, I would not expect to find this anxiety in societies where there is no significant gender imbalance. A good foil to this argument could be the case of Finnish theatre, where many of its leading playwrights have historically been women.[119] Finnish society is markedly more gender-equal than either Irish or Italian society, and the differing cultural context could be interpreted to mean that female playwrights are not as susceptible to the Anxiety of Ontology, though more research would be needed to state this conclusively.[120]

Transforming Bloom's theory on the Anxiety of Influence, Gilbert and Gubar wrote about the Anxiety of Authorship. I wish to extend and remodel this to propose a theory of Anxiety of Ontology as a hypothesis which would allow a more profound investigation of the playwrights' ontology. Not only are female playwrights subject to the Anxiety of Authorship but it is reinforced and augmented by an anxiety about their precarious ontology. While Gilbert & Gubar identified how the Anxiety of Authorship was expressed in the work of nineteenth century women writers of prose and poetry through their adoption of male pseudonyms and styles of writing, as well as a preoccupation with themes such as confinement and escape, madness and disease; it is my contention that the anxiety of position, linked to a precarious ontological status, is manifest in Dante's and Carr's work primarily in the theme of death.

Interactions between Ontologies

It would be wise at this point to pause to consider the relationship between the Anxiety of Authorship and the theory of the Anxiety of Ontology that this thesis proposes. Gilbert & Gubar make a persuasive argument for the presence of an anxiety regarding creation and authority within women writers. Following their theory then, I accept that women writers experience an Anxiety of Authorship. Whereas Gilbert & Gubar's anxiety relates to the act of creation (or its impossibility), the Anxiety of Ontology relates to a playwright's own precarious position and its effects on the fate of her artistic creations. The Anxiety of Authorship is a fear within the author that she cannot create, that the act of creation will destroy or isolate her. Instead, the Anxiety of Ontology is a fear that the playwright's creations will not gain their deserved recognition and that, consequently, her position as a playwright is untenable. This begs the question; can women playwrights experience both the Anxiety of Authorship and the Anxiety of Ontology? I contend that the Anxiety of Ontology may co-exist within the playwright *alongside,* and contemporaneous to, the Anxiety of Authorship. At moments one or both may be manifest through working strategies and within recurring themes.

Thesis Structure: Outlines of Further Chapters

Chapter Two

Chapter Two examines in detail the working strategies that women playwrights may employ in response to gender discrimination and as a manifestation of the Anxiety of Ontology. If such an anxiety is present, then the playwright must alter her way of working and interacting with other professionals, and adopt a specific location as an artist - both in geographical and intellectual terms – in order to adapt to the presence of such a preoccupation. Under four separate headings; precursors, collaboration, positioning and centre/periphery, this chapter considers how female playwrights work differently in an attempt to consolidate the anxiety with the demands of their roles as authors.

Gilbert & Gubar suggested that women writers often embarked upon a search for models of female authors in history. Complicated by the suppression of women's writing by gatekeepers of the literary canon and hegemonic culture, they argue that this search rarely bears the fruits that the writers had wished for. Where precedents are found, the author is rewarded with a model to work off or against, but as Gilbert & Gubar warn, the result is just as likely to be negative as it is to be positive. This chapter, then, considers the steps that playwrights Carr and Dante have taken to seek out female canonical models and asks what the result of such a search can be. Carr, it will be

argued, develops a negotiated and qualified relationship with poetic precursors on her own, distinctly female terms. Dante, unable to find adequate reflections of her own femaleness in the Italian national canon, chooses to categorically reject the weight and importance of the tradition, looking elsewhere for inspiration and examples of artistic models. This rejection, it is claimed, leads her towards a transformative anti-theatrical stance in her practice.

The collaborative process is one of the defining features of theatrical production. Unlike other art forms, such as novels, poetry, and visual art, a play demands an unusual commitment to collaboration on the playwright's behalf, in order to reach production. Chapter Two considers the risks inherent in these working processes for female playwrights, and particularly the danger that the intrinsic artistic vision of the piece might be distorted by the male-dominated machinery of production. This risk is managed by female playwrights in varying and sometimes contrasting ways; Carr, it seems, has avoided collaborative textual creation since a series of early experiments, which saw her working with actors on the text, while Dante, conversely, makes group creation the very foundation of and inspiration for her creative process.

In this increasingly digital age, where image, appearance and public personae play a vital role in establishing one's place in society, Chapter Two examines how Dante and Carr position themselves as playwrights who are women within the community of

artists and in media terms. The thorny question of the application of the label "feminist" is grasped, as both authors' position in relation to a new and vibrant feminist movement is considered. While Dante and Carr express attitudes and opinions on women's issues that are clearly derivative of feminist ideas, neither wishes to be identified as a feminist and this chapter explores the reasons for such a disassociation.

Finally, the choice of geographical and cultural location for an artist is put under scrutiny. An artist's choice of location can have a fundamental impact on the audience they attract as well as the reception and success or failure of their work. Using Immanuel Wallerstein's theories on the centre/periphery divide in a cultural rather than an economic context, this chapter examines the ramifications for each author of such a choice of positioning. It is proposed that Emma Dante, as part of a general strategy of distancing and isolation, has adopted a peripheral placement in both geographical and cultural terms. Working in Palermo, Sicily, her physical location distances her from the primary cultural centres in Italy, linguistically speaking she works in a little understood Sicilian dialect and she also eschews any possibility of state funding. These choices limit the reach of her work, while simultaneously guaranteeing more artistic freedom. Carr's position, conversely, is set firmly in a central location; physically, in that most of her work is produced in the cultural and economic capital of Ireland, Dublin, and culturally in that her work is funded by the *Aosdána,* and her plays are often commissioned by major prominent theatres such as the Irish National Theatre, The Abbey, and companies

like the Royal Shakespeare Company. The benefits of such a central siting are evident; the artist is offered financial security and networking opportunities, the negative aspects, however are more difficult to uncover, but may include restrictions and limitations on artistic freedom.

Chapter Three

If, as I argue, the Anxiety of Ontology can effect change in the manner in which female playwrights like Dante and Carr go about their work, then the following chapter identifies the manifold ways in which the anxiety is present in the work. This chapter homes in on the dual aspects of theatrical form and content in an attempt to identify diverging strategies of anxiety management. It is argued that Carr and Dante disrupt traditional theatrical forms as an expression of their dissatisfaction with its suitability for their own purposes, which are distinct from those of male writers.

However, it is in the realm of content that the most notable and significant interventions take place. Unhappy and dissatisfied with traditional representations of tropic gendered characters, the playwrights undermine these portrayals and propose their own subversive and resistant characterisations. Within the sphere of female characterisation, Carr intervenes to create complex and complicated women, the likes of whom have rarely been seen on the Irish national stage. Rejecting unrealistic notions of the ideal, dreamt up by the writers of Catholic social policy, of a submissive, pure, passive and selfless woman, Carr draws feisty and determined women characters. Her

Mais, Portias, Hesters, and Catherines enact inversions of the self-sacrificing mother and the submissive wife tropes. By presenting new and novel character types, Carr transforms the presentation of Irish womanhood on the Irish stage, and in the process facilitates a reimaging of Irish women. Though it cannot be said that Emma Dante performs a similar action in an Italian context presenting an alternative and fresh perspective on female characters, that is not to say that her intervention is in any way less profound. While Dante's female characters do not often diverge wildly from the stock types found in Italian theatre history, they must be set against the general background of Dante's theatre, which challenges the very foundations of the gender hierarchy of many societies. Dante undermines the seemingly solid foundations of gender discrimination by attacking the binary concepts of male and female. In her earlier plays, characters living at the extremes of the spectrum of gendered behaviour are presented; men whose dominance and power is based on the imminent threat of violence, and women without agency whose submission is manifest in domestic and sexual slavery. The later plays, such as *Mishelle di Sant'Oliva* and *Le Pulle*, will be seen to put forward an alternative gender framework to this rigidly structured (and cruelly enforced) patriarchal binary structure. In presenting alternative sexualities, identities and lifestyles, Dante challenges heteronormativity and patriarchal hierarchies.

The history of theatre and theatrical texts has been dominated by the male perspective, and it should be no surprise then, that the themes central to such a

movement overwhelmingly reflect male concerns and display an androcentric bias.

Carr's and Dante's work attempts to shift this gender imbalance by placing female

concerns firmly at the centre of their work, and by challenging stock notions around

traditional themes such as the family. An insistent focus on the themes of maternity and

heterosexual relationships on Carr's behalf, seeks to subvert the male perspective by

articulating a female standpoint on these issues. In her treatment of the sacrosanct

concept of maternity, Carr fights notions of self-sacrificing mothers whose energies are

entirely devoted to the welfare and well-being of her offspring. Inadequate, distracted

and destructive mothers proliferate in her middle-phase plays only to be replaced by

women who approach motherhood within an economy of possession, and as secondary

to their own personal and emotional needs. The glow that emanates from traditional

depictions of the ideal Catholic mother, the Virgin Mary, is dimmed and sometimes

extinguished in the face of Carr's idiosyncratic maternal figures. She will no longer

allow us to imagine "mother" in idealised and saccharine modes. Similarly, marriage;

its challenges and rewards, have been the subject of many major plays in theatre

history, though traditionally the focus has been on the husband's experience. Carr seeks

to reframe the pattern of this discourse by awarding the wife's role, experiences, and

perspective the central position. In line with Carr's nuanced rendering of women's

behaviour and motivations, she deconstructs her female characters' interaction with the

patriarchal institution of marriage and heterosexual coupling. Like ordinary women

who, conditioned by tales of romantic love, everyday seek to navigate the sometimes treacherous waters of relationships within patriarchal society in an attempt to find a suitable partner, her protagonists stumble through the minefield of amorous entanglements with varying degrees of success. Carr's female protagonists, the Mai, Portia Coughlan and Woman (*Woman and Scarecrow*) are sketches of women whose attachment to their (generally unimpressive) other half are strongly informed by cultural constructions and fantasy, which fail to tally with the disappointing reality. A change and transformation is effected, however, with *Marble*'s protagonist, Catherine, who on realising the miserable truth of her own marriage seeks to remedy the situation by embarking on a search for her own self. This search necessitates not only a breaking of her ties to her husband, but also to her children.

Dante's intervention in this strategy is a considered and calculated attack on the institution that is central to Italian cultural, economic and political life – the nuclear family. Leonardo Sciascia's[121] character in his well-known detective novel, *Il giorno della civetta*, comments that for Sicilians, the family is their state (94). The inordinate importance of familial bonds and duties was also (somewhat clumsily) theorised by Edward C. Banfield[122] as "amoral familism"; the tendency of Italians in the South to prioritise above all else the exigency of the family. Although Banfield's theory has many flaws, his theory is interesting in so far as he attempts to characterise the Italian obsession with family as something other than a wholly positive phenomenon.[123] Dante

treads this same ground in her unflattering portrait of a series of families whose

patriarchal structures are enforced by violence (or the threat of it), as sites of

oppression, pain and suffocation. Seen from the point of view of the women and other

characters who occupy a lower rung on the ladder of patriarchal hierarchy, Dante's

families do not remotely resemble the oft-mythologised family as site of harmony,

collective effort and love. In proposing such a contrasting vision of the family, Dante

subverts and contests traditional representations.

Chapter Four

This chapter moves away from a consideration of how the Anxiety of Ontology

may manifest in the playwrights' working strategies and towards a tighter focus on

textual matters. The theme of death is shown to recur with frequency throughout the

plays of Dante and Carr and the significance of such an emphasis on death, dying and

the dead is examined. Initially, death is unveiled as a recurrent motif that fulfils a

variety of functions. I assert that within the work of Carr and Dante the signifier of

death is observed as an exploration of the influence the dead have on the living (and

consequently the relationship between the past and the present), and as a post-Catholic

secular investigation of the rituals, ceremonies and attitudes associated with death in

Ireland and Italy in contemporary society. These functions combine to achieve an

important result – the restoration of the discourse of death into the public realm, from

which, according to thanatologist Phillipe Ariès, it has long been banished.

The latter part of the chapter focusses on one feature in particular; the protagonist's suicide. In a number of Marina Carr's plays, as well as one of Emma Dante's, the female protagonist commits suicide in response to a series of events that she finds unsupportable. Considering the historic negative attitudes associated with suicide that prevail even today, this chapter asks if feminist critics can interpret theatrically represented female suicide in any way other than as an entirely negative statement. Noting the readings of critics such as Anna McMullan and Clare Wallace to the fate of Carr's protagonist as pessimistic and defeatist, the argument is forwarded that in some cases, suicides by female characters can be interpreted in terms that are not wholly negative. Feminist critics and commentators struggle to resolve the tension between feminism's traditional emphasis on "choice" and the right of an individual to choose to end one's life. There is a clear tendency for feminist critics to interpret literary suicide in negative terms, variously as a sign that the woman is being punished by the society she rebelled against, as a signifier for her defeat and resignation, or as an expression of the female writer's own desire to die. While acknowledging the validity of these readings, the argument is made that another, additional reading is possible. It proposes the concept of "resistant suicide" as a reading through which some represented self-deaths could be seen as a moment of agency, authority and resistance on behalf of the female protagonist. Using theories formulated by Margaret Higonnet and Elisabeth Bronfen, the deaths of Emma Dante's Nina in *Carnezzeria* and Woman in

Woman and Scarecrow are interpreted as resistant deaths; as acts that are marked by choice and agency.

Chapter Five

If the deaths of Carr's and Dante's female protagonists can be read as acts of opposition to the constraints imposed by patriarchy upon their emotional, sexual and professional lives, then Chapter Five goes a step further to read the same deaths as mirrors for the playwrights' own anxieties regarding the precarious and unstable nature of their artistic and professional position. The repeated death motif signals a reflection of the playwrights' own concerns around bereavement and the philosophical meaning of life and death. William Shakespeare's Malcolm in *Macbeth* encourages his sorrowful political ally Macduff to speak on receiving news of his family's death:

> Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak
> Whispers the o'er fraught heart, and bids it break. (IV.iii)

I propose that Emma Dante, who experienced and suffered the deaths of her mother and brother while still in her twenties, utilises the theatre to "give sorrow words," to expose, manage and share her bereavement not only with the actors and performers, but also with the general public represented in the form of the theatre audience. The anxiety of her grief is manifest in the text, and unlike Shakespeare's character who urged revenge as the best medicine to "cure this deadly grief" (IV.iii),

Dante chooses to externalise her sorrow and sadness through the process of scenic writing. Both Carr and Dante demonstrate a preoccupation with the significance that death can have for the lives of the living. These playwrights delve into the depths of what could be said to be the greatest mystery of life and humanity and help us come to an understanding of what significance death carries into our lives. Echoing E.M. Forster's assertion that "Death destroys a man: the idea of Death saves him," (237) both Dante's and Carr's approaches are marked by a heightened awareness of the imminence of death and the transformative effect such knowledge can have. An awareness of the close proximity of death can save a person from a life of unbearable mediocrity by encouraging them to live a fuller, more meaningful life. Death, in this way, becomes a supreme signifier and, instead of a destroyer becomes a site of possibility and change.

The remainder of the chapter examines how self-death has traditionally been interpreted in negative terms by critics, spectators and feminists alike. The reasons for such readings are examined, and it is proposed that such negative readings may, in part, be attributable to a perceived relation between depicted suicides and the real-life desire of the author to die. This link is illustrated in the examples of writers such as Sarah Kane and Sylvia Plath, who have written texts that foreshadowed their own deaths by suicide. It proposes that, like writers such as Marsha Norman and Kate Chopin who have written female suicides without demonstrating suicidal behaviours themselves, Carr's and Dante's employment of the motif does not relate a desire to die,

but rather points to other meanings. In line with Gilbert & Gubar's readings of the

"madwoman" as the double of their author, in Carr's and Dante's work, I read the

figures of female suicides as doubles for the playwrights' anxieties. The doubling may

function as an expression of the writers' Anxiety of Ontology; in their battle with the

forces of patriarchal authority and regulation, the protagonists mirror the playwrights'

struggle to establish and maintain their own professional position in a cultural context

that has traditionally defined their role as male. Arguing that the ultimate expression of

the Anxiety of Ontology is the fear of creative death, this penultimate chapter explores

how the playwrights' process of creation may perhaps constitute a sort of purification

and release from the anxiety. In killing off their suicidal characters, specifically their

female protagonists, Carr and Dante may engage in a process with transformative and

liberatory potential that attempts to kill off the author's own Anxiety of Ontology. The

playwrights' instrumentalization of the heroine's self-death may be seen to function as a

catalyst for a process of confrontation with, externalisation and reconciliation of their

own anxieties. Thus, in clear contrast to Gilbert & Gubar's pathologizing tendencies in

the use of the language of disease and illness with regard to the Anxiety of Authorship,

this thesis emphasizes the transformative potential of "playwrighting" in its role as

exorcist of anxieties induced by the oppression of patriarchal systems and culture.

The concluding chapter reviews and once again makes explicit the links between

the playwrights' works, working strategies and the anxiety. Throughout this thesis, I

consistently highlight the impact of the Anxiety of Ontology may have on playwrights

Carr and Dante.

Why this Thesis? Why Now?

Why write a thesis on two female playwrights at this point in time, when many

believe that the aims of Second Wave feminism have been achieved and we are only

one inevitable step away from complete and full equality?[124] Why the focus on female

dramatists and why now?

Dario Fo has said that a "theatre, a literature, an artistic expression that does not

speak for its own time has no relevance" ("Nobel Lecture"), and it is my belief that both

Marina Carr and Emma Dante's plays contain messages of vital importance to those

living in this time of uncertainty, this epoch of crisis, this era of renewal. Following on

from the period of stasis and stagnation that came on the heels of the greatest moment

of feminist activity that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, a new feminist sensibility has

begun to sprout in Italy, Ireland and many other countries. This new energy began to

ferment among young women around 2008 and has led to the formation of movements

such as the Irish Feminist Network (IFN) in Ireland and Se non ora, quando (SNOQ) in

Italy. There has been an explosion in feminist activity over the last four years, with

young women taking on issues such as the right to abortion in Ireland, and women like

Lorella Zanardo tackling the pornographic portrayal of women on everyday Italian

television and media. On the occasion of the launch of a new feminist magazine entitled *Siren*, held in Trinity College Dublin on the 5th March 2012, Senator Katherine Zappone identified a "new breed of feminism brewing in Ireland" and declared that a fourth wave of feminism was just beginning ("Launch Speech"). Similar indications that women were awakening to the realities of inequality were demonstrated in Italy on 13th February 2011 when hundreds of thousands of individuals took to the streets in cities all over Italy to protest. Prompted by disgust at the then premier, Silvio Berlusconi's sexual misconduct, the protest transformed from this single-issue march into a wider movement that objected to the subjugated condition of women in Italy today.

Women are once again beginning to wake up to the reality of their repression and oppression within Italian and Irish societies. This rediscovered sensibility has led to the questioning and re-evaluation of many areas of life; be they public, private, intellectual, cultural or professional. Dante and Carr have a part to play in this reawakening. As women who have broken the mould and entered into a profession and artistic role that has traditionally been understood in masculine terms, these playwrights provide a vital model for women who would like to follow in their footsteps. In their depictions of women and gender onstage, they facilitate an engaged critical reflection on women's conditions and experiences. My project then, forms part of this wider project to reassert women's rights in the context of contemporary society.

Both Emma Dante and Marina Carr are unusual and exceptional in their field. Critics such as Victoria White have hailed Carr's work as important for the authentication of women's experience by bringing them to the mainstream and institutional stage. Carr has, according to White, "recreated the Abbey stage as a national space, and fearlessly put women at the centre of it" ("Women Writers"). The significance and uniqueness of both Dante's and Carr's position as female playwrights that garner national and international attention and criticism cannot be underestimated or ignored. Of the four new plays presented on the Abbey Stage in 2009, only one – Marina Carr's *Marble* – was written by a woman. Of all eleven full productions in the Abbey in the same year, *Marble* was again the only one written by a woman.[125] Emma Dante occupies a lonely position as a female playwright and theatre practitioner on the Italian national theatrical scene, with the only other contemporary female playwright of note being Letizia Russo. In Andrea Porcheddu's analysis of significant voices in Sicilian theatre over the last twenty years, of the fifteen practitioners listed only one woman, Sabrina Petyx, is mentioned ("Da una costa" 23).

In this context, then, it is of the utmost importance that studies such as this are carried out to draw attention to their work, to ascertain the peculiarities of their position and to suggest transformative possibilities. Women's voices have often gone unheard in the history of the theatre auditorium; this study aims to listen to those voices and decipher their words

Chapter Two- Differentiated Working Strategies

In the previous chapter, I outlined the existence of what I term the Anxiety of

Ontology, following on after theories of authorial anxieties, previously outlined by

Harold Bloom and Gilbert & Gubar. I argued that the Anxiety of Ontology may be

present in many female playwrights, given the precarious nature of their professional

and creative ontology. In closing, I mentioned that this anxiety may become manifest in

playwrights' work through differentiated working strategies and in the recurrent theme

of death. This chapter and the one that follows, then, set about delineating the first of

those categories; the working strategies that playwrights may adopt in reaction to the

Anxiety of Ontology. In approaching this subject, I will initially outline the strategies

that Gilbert & Gubar proposed in relation to nineteenth-century female writers; these

will then be updated and applied to contemporary female playwrights Emma Dante

and Marina Carr. I will term "working strategies," solutions, modes and methods of

working that writers may deploy in the context of their professional and artistic lives in

response to the Anxiety of Ontology. For ease of classification, the strategies are

grouped together under the headings of process, positioning and textual manipulation.

This chapter will examine the categories of process and positioning in detail, while the

next chapter will deal with strategies of textual manipulation. Both chapters will relate

each strategy to contemporary playwrights, Dante and Carr, drawing a line that links

the strategies to the Anxiety of Ontology.

As in the preceding chapter, this section of my thesis draws heavily on Gilbert &

Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* and particularly the chapter, "Infection in the

Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship." The working strategies

outlined in *The Madwoman in the Attic* suggest a critical framework which could be used

effectively as a point of departure from which I can investigate similar solutions utilised

by female playwrights. However, Gilbert & Gubar's framework is limited in its

application to my particular subject of study for three reasons: firstly, as noted in the

previous chapter, it concerns itself primarily with poets and novelists; secondly, their

period of study was primarily the nineteenth century - a historical period which

presents a marked difference in social and cultural practices, beliefs and attitudes when

compared with contemporary society; and finally, their theory relates to a fear around

the process of creation. This project deals specifically with contemporary playwrights,

their fear relating to their precarious position, and an anxiety regarding the fate of their

creations expressed in the Anxiety of Ontology. Thus Gilbert & Gubar's framework is

adapted and updated to reflect the shift in focus from the act of creation in the Anxiety

of Authority to the unstable position of the artist in the Anxiety of Ontology.

Before we continue, however, one clarification should be made in regard to Gilbert & Gubar's framing of the problem of anxieties. In their presentation of the subject of the Anxiety of Authorship, the authors couch their argument in pathological terminology. The very title of the piece "Infection in the Sentence," sets the tone, with the writers using the language of contagion and disease to describe the anxiety. Words such as "debilitating," "disease" and "illness" abound within their analysis, framing the writers' experience in distinctly negative terms. Undoubtedly, Gilbert & Gubar's analysis focuses on a period in which the outcomes and consequences for women writers were, for the most part negative. Though they convincingly make the point that patriarchy can make women physically and mentally ill, in a modern context, where outcomes are often less drastic for women it is unhelpful to apply this terminology and framework to the field of Western contemporary women's creativity. I note this tendency towards negative outcomes for women writers in the past, while asserting that today's women writers can expect more positive results. The propagation of Gilbert & Gubar's pathological discourse could potentially marginalize women writers even more, by marking them out as ill or diseased: thus "othering" them further. The medical terminology of disease therefore, has been rejected in a concerted move towards more positive language, which seeks to frame women writers' experiences differently, and to introduce the possibility of transformation.

Identifying Differentiated Working Strategies

Through a detailed and scrupulous analysis of a number of nineteenth-century writers' texts, Gilbert and Gubar were in a position not only to outline the existence of the Anxiety of Authorship, but also to identify and explicate the manifestations of such a preoccupation. They argued that women writers adopted multiple strategies in response to the anxiety, ranging from the search for female predecessors and revision of canonical texts, to strategies of concealment (such as the taking on of a male pseudonym), and the recurrent employment of themes such as confinement, disease and escape. The female writer manifested the anxiety through a number of *modi operandi* which, I will consider under the following headings; the process of writing, their positioning as artists in society and textual manipulations. This chapter will concern itself with issues of process and positioning, while the following chapter will address the problem of textual manipulation. Inevitably, some of the working strategies traced in Gilbert & Gubar's project are now rarely adopted by contemporary writers (such as the use of a male pseudonym) and others simply do not suit the purposes of this study. The adapted critical framework now analyses the writers' work under the same broad categories outlined in Gilbert & Gubar, but with revised subcategories.

Consequently, the updated working strategies I have identified are; 1) the search for female precursors, 2) collaboration, 3) negotiation of the "feminist" label, 4) revision

of traditional genres in terms of form and content, and finally, 5) the employment of specific themes.[126] The strategies I am about to outline are in no way exclusive to women playwrights. Any one of them may be used separately, or simultaneously, by male and female writers in reaction to differing circumstances. The presence of any one of these strategies in isolation should *not* be read as evidence of such an anxiety. Rather, it is in the intersection and combination a number of working strategies that we can find evidence emerges of the presence of the Anxiety of Ontology.

Process – Searching and Collaborating?

We will first turn our attentions to the strategies we can gather together under the heading of processes. "Process" relates to the alterations made by writers to the practice of writing in reaction to the anxiety. Gilbert & Gubar identified two main strategies, which pertain to this heading and they are; male mimicry, and the search for female models. From their point of view, the uncritical use of male genres, themes, plots and tropes by female writers can be interpreted as a form of male mimicry and they cite Elizabeth Barrett Browning's (1806 - 1861) *An Essay on Mind* (1826) and Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor* (1857) as examples of such "copy" works (70). In a modern context, women playwrights are unlikely to utilise the features of genres in an uncritical fashion. They do not experience the extreme hostility that women such as Browning and Brontë had to endure as writers - an opposition so fierce that they felt they had no

choice but to conceal their sex either through the use of a male penname or through the

mimicking of literary style and content. It is my contention that modern women writers

tend towards interrogating literary genres through a series of textual manipulations.

This revisionary strategy will be investigated in detail in the next chapter. Given this

change, for the purposes of this chapter I will disregard the idea of male mimicry and

adapt the critical framework, considering only Gilbert & Gubar's search for models.

Female Models: "There's a longing in me for her that won't quell the whole time"[127]

In their confrontation with the canon, Gilbert & Gubar argue that women writers

experience an anxiety related to their inability to take the place of their predominantly

male precursors. Later, they argue that women writers seek to temper this anxiety

through a search for female precursors. This search is attributable to a desire to

"legitimize her own rebellious endeavors" (50). Feminist scholar Joanna Russ has also

identified this strategy in women writers' processes; the desire to seek out other women

who have written to serve as a model to work which one can write towards or against.

Gilbert & Gubar are cautious about this project, however, warning that when seeking

female foremothers, "the woman writer may find only infection, debilitation" (52). They

emphasize the negative potential of such a search for women writers and also suggest

that the discovery of female precursors can never replicate the male writer's experience

of the canon. Nevertheless, they argue that women will continue to search for models,

regardless of the potentially negative consequences. This search for models should be considered as distinct from a desire on the writer's behalf to take part in or conform to a female literary aesthetic. Women writers may search for models of women before them who have managed to become writers as source of encouragement; they are proof that it is possible to be both a writer and a woman. This is not to say, however, that the later writer will necessarily be particularly inspired or influenced by their predecessor's literary output. Furthermore, this search for female predecessors does not indicate a negation on the female playwright's behalf of male theatrical and literary precursors. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Three, both Carr and Dante have drawn on the work of historical male playwrights, poets and novelists in their artistic processes. Notably, both playwrights seem to have been heavily influenced by the playwrights of Greek Tragedy, with Dante producing her own nuanced version of Euripides' *Medea*, and Carr who used the structure of the same play as the base of her *By the Bog of Cats…*. Emma Dante has also been influenced by writers such as Tommaso Landolfi and Gabriel García Márquez, while Carr draws inspiration from poets like John Keats.

Even today, playwrights look to the past to find examples of women who wrote, and they produce work in the hope of emulating them, or perhaps rivalling them. We will now turn our attention to the motivations behind, the mechanisms and the results of this search. As the quest for models and precedents is inextricably linked with the canon(s) and discourses surrounding them, it would be pertinent to return to a

consideration of the very notion of the canon. The canon is, as Lillian S. Robinson states,

something that "we are hardly aware of […] until we come into conflict with it" (83).

The masculine and ethnocentric nature of the traditional canon was established in

Chapter One, along with its insistence on the presence of universals within the works.

In theory, a collection of written works, critically analysed, and then held up as

exemplary texts that we could all learn from, is a worthy idea. The concept of a text

containing "universal truths" and a sense of unity in humanity is, however, much more

problematic. The very existence of universals has been undermined by

deconstructionist criticism, which observes that much of what has historically been held

to signify "universal" expresses simply the experience of only a small, elite group. This

group has historically excluded, for the most part, women writers and other groups

who lie outside the bounds of dominant culture. Following on the Second Wave of

feminist activities, feminists began to tackle the canon in various ways. Gayle Austin in

her chapter "Paying Attention to Women" outlines three stances feminists adopt when

dealing with the canon. An early approach, according to Austin, was "working within

the canon: examining images of women" (17) thus, rereading canonical material in an

alternative way;[128] a second approach was that of "expanding the canon: focussing on

women writers" (17). [129] The third approach outlined by Austin is "exploding the canon:

questioning underlying assumptions of an entire field of study, including canon

formation" (17). [130] The importance of the third approach from a feminist point of view

cannot not be underestimated, because without it, our work in examining and

reformulating the canon, runs the risk of simply reifying a new, revised, gender-

balanced canon that continues nevertheless to exclude alternative experiences, groups

and points of view.

The canon is transmitted, in great part, by curricula and anthologies. That older

anthologies excluded marginalised groups is well established, [131] but even modern

anthologies have been criticised for their failure to include and consider the work of

female writers. The Irish canon is poor in models of canonical female writers and even

poorer when it comes to female playwrights[132]. Writers that are generally considered

canonical in Irish theatre are William Butler Yeats,[133] Augusta Gregory,[134] John

Millington Synge,[135] Seán O'Casey, [136] Samuel Beckett,[137] Brian Friel,[138] Tom Murphy[139]

and Frank McGuinness.[140] *The Field Day Anthology*, published in three volumes in 1991,

has been roundly criticised for its neglect of women authors. Kim McMullan's article,

"Decolonizing Rosaleen: Some Feminist, Nationalist, and Post-colonialist Discourses in

Irish Studies," considers the under-representation of women in the *Field Day Anthology*

(1991). McMullan underlines how the failure of the compilers of the anthology to "take

adequate account of gender as a constitutive element of cultural construction" (33),

mirrors the tendency of the culturally dominant group, historically, to exclude

narratives that were not considered as representative of the nation. She further

emphasises how women have historically been seen as a symbol for the nation, simply a

repository for Irish identity: "Ireland-as-woman, silent object of patriotic desire" (36).

Drawing on an idea of Eavan Boland's, Cathy Leeney echoes this sentiment, stating that

traditionally "woman has been the icon, and not the iconmaker" ("Ireland's 'Exiled'

Women Playwrights" 162). On foot of clamorous objections to the underrepresentation

in the original anthology, another two volumes were later published in 2002, dedicated

exclusively to women's writing, with the aim of correcting the previous neglect of

women writers. Brecken Rose Hancock, nevertheless, interprets the "gendered

segregation" of the anthology as a demonstration that "the struggles for women writers

are ongoing" (20). The entire controversy marked a turning point in Irish literary

history, laying down a marker that women's roles in Irish literature were no longer to

be overlooked.

The Italian canon displays a more severe gender imbalance.[141] Canonical

theatrical practitioners include Ludovico Ariosto,[142] Niccolò Machiavelli,[143] Ruzante,[144]

Carlo Goldoni,[145] Giovanni Verga,[146] Luigi Pirandello[147] and Dario Fo.[148] The only female

theatre practitioner who may, at a stretch, be considered canonical is Franca Rame,

although her contribution to Fo's work continues to be overshadowed, with many of

their collaborations listed as exclusively her husband's work. In Joseph Farrell and

Paolo Puppa's *A History of Italian Theatre* (2006), we find two final chapters

summarizing the contemporary theatrical scene in Italy. Sharon Wood writes a chapter

on contemporary women's theatre, dealing only with female practitioners, while Puppa

in his contribution "The Contemporary Scene," writes about principally male

practitioners, with a little over a page dedicated to female dramatists. These choices are

equivocal and somewhat puzzling, as they communicate conflicting messages about the

importance (or otherwise) of women playwrights and theatre practitioners. The

decision to include Wood's chapter seems a positive attempt to include women's

experience in the history of theatre in Italy, while Puppa's brief consideration of women

writers separately to male writers is suggestive of tokenism, replicating on a smaller

scale the gendered segregation of the *Field Day Anthology* referred to above.

Unfortunately, it is also a choice that reflects the confused nature of the debate in Italy

at the present time. In the edition *Dentro/Fuori, Sopra/Sotto: Critica femminista e canone*

letterario negli studi di italianistica (2007), a number of authors tackle the question of the

broader Italian literary canon from a feminist point of view. The editors note in their

Introduction, that Italy lags behind the English speaking academic world in its attempts

to review the canon, stating that "le letterate che lavorano in Italia fanno di solito più

fatica ad esercitare un'azione incisiva all'interno di quei luoghi «ufficiali» di produzione

culturale rispetto a molte loro colleghe europee e americane" ("female scholars working

in Italy generally experience more difficulty than their European and American

colleagues exercising influence within 'official' cultural institutions" 6).[149] Feminist

scholar Maria Serena Sapegno defines the Italian canon as it is currently taught in the

universities, as still bearing the "impronta risorgimentale" ("imprint of the

Risorgimento"),[150] meaning it is still heavily influenced by ideas that originated in the 1860s (16). She highlights the lack of impact that theory has had on literary studies in Italian universities and notes how feminist thought on the canon has been marginalised from discursive and academic study. Rebecca West, in her piece, "Who's in, Who's Out?" discusses the treatment of female poets in the Italian Lyric Poetry tradition, noting that "the way in which gender plays a role in the choices of poets, schools and kinds of poetry that received validation by being included" in anthologies is rarely acknowledged (25-39).[151] This argument seems to be particularly relevant when we consider the continuing absence of women from the contemporary Italian theatrical canon.

Neither the Italian or Irish national canon offers a wealth of female models. Joanna Russ highlights a secondary consequence of the exclusion or non-inclusion of female writers in the canon, and the resulting lack of female models, which leads each generation of women writers to believe that they must attempt the task for the first time (93). This notion seems to be confirmed by the experiences of modern women writers. Adrienne Rich describes the frustration of the female author who, in searching for her own image and presence in the writing of men, finds all the expected tropes but "precisely what she does not find is that absorbed, drudging, puzzling, sometimes inspiring creature, herself, who sits at a desk trying to put words together" ("When We Dead" 21).

We could think of these absent female models as "foremothers," in the same way that we talk of literary "forefathers." The Anxiety of Authorship theory tells us that the woman writer's connection with the canonical forefathers is equivocal, due to the impossibility of the woman taking up the "son" position in the oedipal relationship with the "father" canonical writer.[152] It is possible to surmise that the female playwright therefore feels a break in the link with the male precursor -she cannot see him as a father. If the father-figure is not present and the mother, for all the reasons just explored, is absent from the canon, our contemporary women playwrights can then be considered, in some ways, literary orphans. This condition of orphanhood is conveyed in Emma Dante and Marina Carr's work through the medium of absent parents, especially absent mothers, which recurs throughout their *oeuvre.* There are no parents in Dante's *Carnezzeria,* which features three cruel brothers and one vulnerable sister, or in *mPalermu*, where the family is made up of an eclectic mix of blood and non-blood relations. Although *Mishelle di Sant'Oliva* features a father; both he and his son live in the shadow of a long absent mother. Carr's the Mai pines for her mother who died in her childhood, in *By the Bog of Cats…* Hester yearns to see her mother again after she abandoned her in the bog as a child,[153] and Woman in *Woman and Scarecrow* nurtures the idealised memory of a mother who died after childbirth. I argue that these figures are symbolic of another absence – the absence of adequate literary parents.

Cathy Leeney has identified the theme of the absent mother in Carr's work. She defines *By the Bog of Cats...* "as an enactment of mourning for the absent mother," linking Hester's mother to "the mother absent from so many important Irish plays" ("Ireland's 'Exiled' Women Playwrights" 160). Leeney's analysis inspires one to think that, by extension, the absent mother could also be seen to represent the absent literary foremothers from the Irish theatrical canon. The absent mothers in Carr's work are wondered about, yearned for, sought out; they are desired subjects. The female characters seem to want to know from whom and whence they came. If Carr's characters look to their own maternal lineage with desire, could we not argue that in a meta-theatrical sense, the plays comment on the playwright's own desire for a theatrical matrilineage? If, as Gilbert & Gubar and Joanna Russ contend, female writers seek out examples of women writers who have successfully written in the past, then perhaps the absent and desired mothers figured in Carr's plays could be read as symbols for the lost and sought-after female literary and theatrical predecessors. In this case, the absent mother represented within the economy of the play takes the place of the literary or theatrical female predecessor that Gilbert & Gubar contend female writers seek. Indeed, under this reading, the plays could be seen as a commentary on historical theatrical precedent in Irish theatre, whereby the "fathers" of theatre are well established and celebrated (here figures such as Yeats and Synge come immediately to mind), but the "mothers" (such as well-known figures such as Augusta Gregory or other lesser-known

writers such as Teresa Deevy) are lost, absent and overlooked. Carr's lost mothers are always looked on nostalgically and desired in the remembering. Hester Swane, who is now a mother herself, pines for the figure of her own mother, Big Josie Swane, who deserted her as a child. Despite this rejection Hester admits: "[t]here's a longing in me for her that won't quell the whole time" (Carr *Plays* 275). In representing mother figures who are yearned for, but never found, I contend that Carr's work may reveal an unsatisfied desire for canonical literary foremothers; these are the literary foremothers that were invisible and hidden in the canon, but nevertheless coveted by the playwright.

In contrast, Emma Dante's absent parents in her plays are not sources of curiosity or objects of desire on the part of the living characters, who, unlike Carr's characters, do not pine after the missing parents. On the contrary, the absent figures can be sources of pain and danger, as is the case in *Carnezzeria* where the absent father is remembered as an abusive figure who violated his children, and in *Il Festino*, where the father is negligent and exploitative and the mother neglectful in her duty of care. Dante links this absence of parental figures to the birth *manqué* of her plays, which are not born of the traditional, canonical methods of writing, but through an alternative creation process ("La strada scomoda" 41). This could be read as a rejection of the traditional, canonical approaches to writing and creating theatre. It could be argued that Dante was inspired in this rejection by Polish practitioner Tadeusz Kantor, whom she saw in

performance in Teatro Biondo, Palermo as a student. Kantor produced one of his

"cricotages" entitled *Macchina dell'amore e della morte* ("Machine of Love and Death") in

collaboration with Museo nazionale delle marionette ("National Museum of

Marionettes"), Palermo. This performance recounts Kantor's meetings with the art of

other artists, and is at the same time a tribute to the art of the twentieth century and a

very personal confession. The short performance was based on Maeterlinck's play *The*

Death of Tintagiles (1894) and in Kantor's incarnation, featured actors and marionettes

onstage as well as sculptures, objects and machines. Unconventionally, Kantor

appeared onstage with his actors, directing the action during the performance. Dante

recalls "[l]ui che dava le spalle al pubblico e che dirigeva e vedeva quello che aveva

davanti" ("him turning his back on the audience and that he directed and seeing

everything he had in front of him" 33). In turning his back on the audience, Kantor

metaphorically turned his back on conventional mores that inform us that one must

always face the gathered audience when onstage. This challenge to convention

provoked a reaction in Dante:

> In quell'occasione, forse, ci fu un piccolo scarto che mi aiutò a capire che non mi interessava fare certo teatro, seguire la tradizione, ma dare le spalle al pubblico e fare ricerca (33).

> In that moment, perhaps there was small shift in me that helped me to realise that I wasn't interested in making a certain kind of theatre, in following tradition, but instead I wanted to turn my back on the audience and do practical theatre research.[154]

It seems to me that this moment marks a break with tradition, especially with the artistic path and approaches that the canon sanctions and propagates. Dante may have realized she did not wish to follow the conventions and processes delineated by tradition, but rather to wanted to create her own artistic path. It can be observed that Dante shows a distinct lack of interest in the literary canon, especially when it concerns the Italian national theatrical canon. She looks to writers that are outside the Italian national frame of reference for inspiration, especially to practitioners like Kantor who are willing to contrast traditional forms of theatre. This lack of engagement with the Italian theatrical canon is part of what I term Dante's "distancing" technique, which I will look at later in this chapter. For the present, we will draw a tentative link between the negative relationship between Dante's characters and their absent parents; a relationship characterised by a rancour induced by a sense of abandonment. Just as the represented characters feel anger and resentment, accompanied by a sensation of remoteness from their absent parents, so too does Dante feel alienation and frustration in the face of a national canon that neglects the experience of women writers like her. These negative sensations and associations, I argue, drive Dante towards a rejection and avoidance of the national canon.

I have already argued that, in depicting absent mothers who are desperately desired by their children, Carr enacts a form of mourning for her lost female theatrical precursors. I propose that she deals with such a lack pro-actively, by seeking out female

models and inserting women into canonical discourses.[155] "Dealing with the Dead," a

lecture given by Carr in the Peacock Theatre in 1997,[156] is helpful to our understanding

of her position in relation to absent female models. "Dealing with the Dead" is

essentially a treatise on the canon. It sets out Carr's position on literary and theatrical

tradition from her point of view as a (female) writer. Recognising that the canon is

male-dominated, Carr respects the wisdom it contains, but uses critical intervention

strategies to insert women writers and women's experiences into it.

In the lecture, Carr defines literature as "one endless conversation among

kinsmen and *kinswomen*" (194) [my emphasis]. This insertion of the feminine into a

generally male discourse is strategic on the part of Carr. Later in the same piece, when

quoting Keats on his doctrine of negative capability, where Keats refers to "man" in the

universal sense, Carr inserts the word "woman" in brackets and draws the reader's

attention to the insertion by stating that the brackets are her own immediately after:

> Several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality
> went to form a Man (or Woman) [brackets mine] of Achievement especially in
> Literature and which Shakespeare possessed so abundantly – I mean *negative
> capability,* that is when man (or woman) is capable of being in uncertainties,
> Mysteries, doubts without any irritable searching after fact and reason (192).

In so doing, Carr inserts and inscribes her own experience and that of women in general

into Keats's gendered masculine discourse, but also into the discourse of the canon and

canonical writers. She claims a place for herself and for women within the bounds of Keats' philosophical discourse.

After inserting herself into the canonical discourse, Carr goes about creating a partial female literary genealogy by singling out a female model in Emily Dickinson (1830 - 1866). In speaking about canonical writers, she draws a clear distinction between godly poets and ordinary prose writers. While categorizing herself as an ordinary prose writer, Carr lists Dickinson as being one of the "gods incarnate," alongside writers such as Keats, Homer and Shakespeare. It would seem that amongst the male ranks of poets, Carr seeks out and holds up a female model in Dickinson. She imagines a literary conversation between Emily Dickinson and Keats, in so doing she sets a precedent; if Dickinson has already conversed with the greats through the medium of her literature, the implication is that so too can Carr and women like her. Through these strategies, Carr identifies a female predecessor in Dickinson, ranks her among the canonical greats, draws a connection between the nineteenth-century poet and Carr herself, and in so doing makes a firm assertion that women can be listed among the canonical greats (and in some cases already are).

Both playwrights, then it can be argued, may feel the absence of female canonical models and consequently react in various ways. It is my contention that Dante and Carr manifest the absence of female writers in the canon in the recurring theme of absent

parents in their plays. However, each playwright treats these absent parents in a

divergent manner; Dante's parents are hostile and threatening, while Carr's are yearned

for and missed. Reading the absent parents as cyphers for the playwrights' relationship

with and attitude towards the canon, I propose that Dante shows signs of

disengagement and distance from an interaction with it – an action which may have the

benefit of opening up a unique creative space in which she can freely pursue her ideal

of making theatre as research. I posit that Carr instead, actively engages with the canon,

using the strategies of inserting female models into canonical discourses and tracing a

partial female genealogy through Emily Dickinson, in order to negotiate the canon on

her own terms.

Gilbert & Gubar argue that the search for female precursors is a strategy adopted

by writers in reaction to the Anxiety of Authorship in an attempt to construct and

maintain a sense of authorial authority in the female writer. The same search can be

interpreted as indicative of the Anxiety of Ontology, but for different reasons. The

negotiation of the canon and the discovery of female models may shore up the author's

sense of security within the profession of playwright. If women such as Isabella

Andreini have been professional and successful playwrights, then perhaps the

contemporary playwright may also do so and look to Andreini for inspiration. If Emily

Dickinson has come to be ranked along with the best writers in history, then modern

playwrights can also maintain hope that they may one day gain access to the elevated

ranks of those dead writers. However, as in Emma Dante's case, the path of searching

for female models is not always followed. It appears that Dante demonstrates a rejection

of a canon that fails to be adequately representative; in so doing she distances herself

and her work from the well-worn path of theatrical representation traditionally

followed, and this move has the potential to release a creative and artistic freedom that

facilitates the development of a unique approach to working. Uncoupled from the

canon, an artist can discover a unique, liberating space in which to create

independently, but, as many feminist scholars warn, the road to creation is a difficult

one, especially if it lacks the guiding lights necessary to illuminate the way of the artist.

I Want to Write Alone!

One of the outstanding features of the theatre is its innately collaborative nature.

No single artist can create a work of theatrical art. Another strategy that may be seen as

symptomatic of the Anxiety of Ontology is the playwright's acceptance or avoidance of

collaboration. Given their focus on poetry and prose, Gilbert & Gubar's study does not

offer any illumination on writing for the theatre, as these types of writing tend to be a

solitary activity. If women playwrights feel that their authorial authority is insufficient

due to the Anxiety of Authorship, in addition they feel an anxiety relating to the

instability of their ontology and may look to the collaborative process as a potential

route to ameliorate these anxieties. I outlined in the previous chapter how collaboration

can prove risky for female playwrights, given the dangers it poses to authorial integrity

and artistic vision. In this chapter, however, we will examine the possibility that

collaboration, on occasion, might also offer some advantages. Emma Dante embraces

the idea of collaboration in the creation of her works, renouncing private creation to

make her theatre with, and through her actors. Marina Carr, as we will see, has a more

ambiguous position in relation to the mechanisms of collaborative work.

At the beginning of her career, Carr experimented with working collaboratively,

but later developed a more solitary approach to writing. Actress Sarah Jane Scaife, in

her article "Mutual Beginnings: Marina Carr*'s Low in the Dark*," describes how Carr

developed her play *Low in the Dark* with a young, experimental company called

Crooked Sixpence in 1989:

> Marina would write at night and come in the next day with a whole new scene
> … We would play the scene, then we would play with it. Afterwards, we would
> all talk about what worked and what didn't. Marina would then revise what she
> thought was necessary (6).

After this collaborative experience, Carr went on to work in a similar format with the

Belfast theatre company Tinderbox, along with the Dublin-based Pigsback company,[157]

on a play entitled *This Love Thing* in 1991. At the time of the production, Carr expressed

her ambivalence on collaboration as a road to playwrighting:

> I have mixed feelings about working in this way. On the whole it has been a
> happy experience because, although they are young, both companies are very

experienced and have a lot of integrity. It's difficult for a writer not to be precious about his or her work but, equally, the actors and directors should not feel that in being involved with devising a play, they can do what they like with it (J. Coyle).

It would seem from this statement that the primary point of tension for Carr in this creative process centred on an issue of authorial control; a conflict between the weight of the actors', director's and playwright's input and artistic visions. Whose contribution mattered the most? Who had the last say? If one works in collaboration, the lines that usually mark out each person's role in a traditional rehearsal format, necessarily become blurred, and consequently the playwright may feel that she risks losing artistic control of the project. Carr seems to have held fast to her sense of authority: "[m]y understanding was always that I, and only I, do the writing" (J. Coyle), but she perhaps had difficulty in reconciling this sense with the demands of devising, which require compromise on the artists' behalf. This tension is communicated in an unresolved problem that Carr poses during the same interview:

> You sometimes wonder how far as a writer you can be expected to give way, but at the same time, you have to ask yourself, what right have I to insist that something be done in a certain way if it doesn't work artistically? (J. Coyle)

After this experience, Carr moved away from collaboration to a more solitary writing process, writing her next play, *The Mai* (1994) alone. This style of working has

continued ever since, although indications are that she is now once again interested in attempting to create in collaboration with other artists.[158]

Emma Dante embraces this distinctive trait of theatricality – collaboration - fully. As already mentioned in Chapter One, after her actor training in the Accademia Silvio D'Amico, Dante worked as a professional touring actress, but during a long and gruelling tour became disillusioned with the professional isolation that working as a touring actress required, believing this kind of theatre to be at odds with her personal concept of theatrical art.[159] In response, she returned to Sicily and, after abandoning the theatre for the period of a year, she began a workshopping process in Palermo with local artists, out of which her collaborative method would later emerge.

In response to her experiences of director-led, commercial theatre, Dante went on to develop a company with fixed members who share not only their artistic path, but also their life experiences. Actors Sabino Civilleri and Manuela Lo Sicco were among the founding members of the company and have since appeared in most of the company's plays.[160] Theatre companies in the past such as The Living Theatre[161] have experimented with the creation of alternative formations and practices in order to work outside of the strictures of commercial theatre. Dante's company, Sud Costa Occidentale was formulated as a permanent team, a sort of extended family, in which there is a core group of individuals who live separately, but who are committed to a long-term

working and creative relationship. Theirs is a collective approach to making theatre, but

cannot be described as egalitarian and democratic (as one might describe Théâtre du

Soleil's approach for example),[162] given that Emma Dante is firmly positioned as the

group's director and artistic leader. The advantages of such a collective and communal

organisation are clear:

> Abbiamo un percorso comune e un repertorio, per cui gli attori sono persone che si incontrano su una progettualità condivisa, persone che si incontrano anche nella vita, sulla concretezza, non semplicemente per il fatto di essere obbligati a lavorare insieme, a fare un viaggio insieme ("La strada scomoda" 40/41)

> We have a common path and repertoire, so the actors relate to each other on the level of this shared project; they are people who have a relationship in real life which is based on actuality, not simply on the basis of having to work together, travel together

Dante, then, associates and connects her artistic life to her private life, choosing

to share her creative and personal experiences with her group. Given the close ties that

exist between the actors and Dante, we could use the metaphor of the family to define

this type of collective creation as a "familial ensemble."[163] There is a palpable affection

between the members of the group that recalls the intimacy of traditional familial

bonds, especially on Dante's behalf who says: "si capisce che i miei ragazzi sono la mia

vita, no?'" ("it's obvious that these guys are my life, isn't it?" "La strada scomoda" 45).

This affection and shared sense of purpose is not diminished by Dante's clear authority

in her role as playwright and director:

> Io sono il leader, sono la persona che, come dicono loro, "ha le visioni." Loro sono completamente al servizio della mia visionarietà e soprattutto sono al servizio di una poetica che stiamo ancora cercando. Io sono per loro il motore di tutto, però loro sanno che senza di loro io non sono niente ("La pratica" 193).

> I am the leader, I am the person, as they put it, who "has the visions." They are completely at the service of my vision and, above all, they are at the service of the poetics we are still seeking out. For them, I am the motor driving everything, but they know that without them I am nothing.

This philosophy of collaboration extends to the group's working and creative methods. Dante does not write her scripts in the traditional way, as other writers do, by sitting at a table and then bringing the finished script to a rehearsal with the actors. Instead, she devises scripts through a process of physically and mentally intense workshops and rehearsals. The first phase of her work is a general workshop with a number of actors and participants based around a theme, idea or set of images. In the second stage, she selects a more closed group of actors from the company and they focus on a number of improvisations:

> I miei attori si mettono in scena , fanno un gran casino: e io estrapolo le parole che mi servono, li faccio incontrare, suggerisco di dire qualcosa, dò uno stimolo ("La strada scomoda" 57).

> My actors enter into a scene, they make a bit of a racket and I extract the words that I need. I get them to meet, I suggest lines to them, give them an impulse to work on.

The improvisations provide a starting point, which generates the raw material out of which a play, mediated by Dante's skilful hand, gradually emerges. The text is refined by the playwright alone at home, in a process that both digests the day's work and

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refines the scenarios proposed by the actors in improvisation. Although this writing

phase is vital to the overall development of the finished piece, almost all the work on

the spectacle is done in the rehearsal room, with and through the actors' bodies.[164]

Marvin Carlson, in his article on anti-theatricality, "The Resistance to

Theatricality" (2002) observes that within processes of collaboration, tension can exist

between theatre artists; between the author and the director, between the text and

theatricalisation. This distrust between artists is unfortunate, he states, "because it pits

against each other parties that would be more profitably united in a common concern"

(249). Although given her status as the company's artistic director, director and

playwright, Emma Dante does not, as Carlson has observed in others, place herself in

conflict with the other art forms in the theatre in an attempt to assert the primacy of her

role. Instead, she embraces the theatre's innate collaborative nature and works

alongside, and with her actors to create theatre. This embrace of the collaborative

process facilitates Dante's work and pays a major role in the development of her unique

theatrical style.

How does Dante manage to circumvent the dangers and risks associated with

collaboration for female playwrights outlined in the first chapter? Her position as the

leader of a group that came together under her direction, and with actors of her own

choosing, ensures that her artistic authority is respected and is not compromised. Her

position as leader and artistic creator is established within the company. Nevertheless,

outside the confines of their small group, she admits to having encountered difficulties

as a woman working in a male-dominated theatre industry: "je dois travailler dur pour

faire valoir mon opinion lorsqu'il y a des décisions à prendre même si celles-ci relèvent

tout à fait de mes compétences!" ("I have to work hard to assert my opinion when there

are decisions to be taken even if they come within my sphere of authority!" "Un art

fondé sur le doute" 160). I propose that Dante's insistence on the financial, geographical

and artistic isolation of Sud Costa Occidentale allows her to exercise a high degree of

control over the content, direction and distribution of her work. I will investigate this

issue at a later stage in this thesis.

To conclude this section on collaboration, we have seen how the engagement

with, or rejection of, collaboration can be read as a working strategy developed in

response to the Anxiety of Ontology because playwrights perceive gender

discrimination within the system of theatrical production. The playwrights this study

considers demonstrate varying approaches to the question of collaboration. As

discussed in Chapter One in relation to Marsha Norman, collaboration, with its

complex power dynamics and interactions can present a risk to the female playwright's

artistic vision. In Marina Carr's case, after an initial experimentation with collaborative

work, she moved to a more solitary writing practice. Although sure of her artistic voice

at an early stage in her writing career, it could be posited that she was unsure how to

marry that certainty and clarity of vision with the demands of working with actors,

directors and other creatives. Carr moved away from the variability surrounding such a

form of collaboration to solitary writing, whereby the collaborative element of theatre

was postponed until the moment of production. Emma Dante, on the other hand, has

fully engaged with collaboration in her creative process, even pursuing it beyond

traditional limits, blurring the lines between professional and personal lives in her

"familial ensemble." Dante contains the risks inherent in the collaborative process by

clearly positioning herself as the leader of the group. In such a context, her artistic

vision is respected and developed without the danger of it being compromised by the

process of collaboration. Female playwrights, therefore, may react to the challenges that

collaboration presents in varying ways. They may react by embracing the collective

creation of work like Dante, or choosing to write in isolation, like Carr. Both working

strategies can be read as efforts to protect and safeguard the integrity of their artistic

vision and as attempts to assuage and manage the playwrights' Anxiety of Ontology.

Positioning – Am I Who You Say I Am?

As their position within the ranks of artists and writers has traditionally been

disputed, women playwrights have had to carefully negotiate their public position in

order to have their work accepted as valid and worthy. "Positioning" here refers to a

process through which one's public profile as an artist is claimed, reclaimed, negotiated

and represented. Gilbert & Gubar identify two main strategies that women adopted to achieve recognition and acceptance. Firstly, they argue that some women, such as George Eliot and the Brontë sisters, chose to use a male or androgynous pseudonym to conceal their female identity. Secondly, they postulate that writers adopted tropic public positions. The choice to adopt a pen-name was a decision taken in response to societal and cultural beliefs at the time that writing and women were innately incompatible, or that women's writing was trifling and undeserving of serious attention. Echoing Virginia Woolf's ideas on the matter, Gilbert & Gubar state that the woman writer was locked into a double bind in that "she had to choose between admitting that she was 'only a woman' or protesting that she was 'as good as a man'" (64). This tension seemed unresolvable for certain women writers, who circumvented the problem by adopting a different, non-female, name. The reasons for adopting such a strategy are clear: "the cloak of maleness was obviously a practical-seeming refuge from those double binds of 'femininity,'" thus enabling the woman writer to "walk more freely about the provinces of literature that were ordinarily forbidden to ladies" (65). Gilbert & Gubar, however, insist that this strategy is equally as problematic as that of identifying as a woman writer, because by denying one's own gender, women writers risk provoking an identity crisis within themselves (69). The use of pseudonyms has never been popular in the theatre as it has been in prose and poetic forms, and therefore, for the purposes of this chapter I will disregard the idea of "cloaking." The

reasons for this are probably attributable to the public nature of the theatre as well as the necessity for writers to meet and work with artistic directors subsequent to acceptance of the script for production.[165] I will, however, take into account Gilbert & Gubar's second strategy of taking up a given public position, as nineteenth-century women writers did in choosing between the available angel/monster tropic positions. I will argue that this positioning is analogous in a modern context with the identification with, or rejection of, the "feminist writer" position.

If the woman writer decided not to cloak her identity in a male name there were a limited number of public positions available to her. Women who wrote under their own names had to choose between the public attitudes of modest, apologetic lady or wild, uncontrolled madwoman; thus both conforming to and confirming the tropic portrayals of "woman" as either an angel or demon in currency at the time. Those women who refused to apologize for their literary work were dismissed and demonised as mad and monstrous.[166] The artist that Gilbert and Gubar identify as typifying the adoption of this latter strategy is Aphra Behn. Refusing to conform to the "feminine" qualities of modesty and humility, Behn instead decided to reject the norms of respectable female behaviour, becoming therefore a "monster," with the consequence that she "was and is always considered a somewhat 'shady lady,' no doubt promiscuous, probably self-indulgent, and certainly 'indecent'" (63). As we have seen, the outcome of this particular strategy was that Behn's theatrical work was gradually

suppressed and eventually removed from the canon, until it was recovered by the work of feminist academics following on the Second Wave.

Effectively, the central issue here relates to how the artist positions herself in the public sphere. In today's globalized and technologized society where visibility and visuality are paramount to our understanding of the world, the act of positioning one's self as a writer within the field of theatre is a vital but challenging task. How one portrays oneself as a playwright may determine the reception of one's work, and it may be influential in the development of one's future career. "Positioning" is achieved through many diverse channels, ranging from the profile of the theatres where your work appears, to the tone and content of published interviews and photographs.[167]

An important element in this modern positioning is the acceptance or rejection of the label feminist writer. Inevitably, any woman who writes today will be asked either to identify with, or reject the labels of "feminist" and "woman" writer. In an English-language context there has been, since the Second Wave of feminism, an increased attention for women who write and this has resulted in the use of the word "woman" as an adjectival accompaniment to the label "writer."[168] Some writers have embraced this nomination, while others are careful to avoid it. I have already discussed the highs and lows of being a "woman writer" in Chapter One, so will limit my comments here to the

role the acceptance or rejection of the denomination of "feminist" can play in the writer's own positioning of their artistic self in the wider community.

The adoption (or rejection) of the label of feminist can constitute a working strategy that either seeks to mark out one's difference through identification with other writers who are women, or plays down this difference in an attempt to have one's work judged independently of the fact that a woman wrote it, avoiding any undesired connotations that idea may carry. Adopting the label woman or feminist writer necessarily aligns writers with a specific group and line of thinking. On the one hand, this affiliation with a group can admit the playwright and their work into a pre-existing community that is ready to value their contribution; on the other hand, it may imply that the author holds certain beliefs and may thus alter the critical reception of their work. Identification as a feminist opens your work up to ready-made audiences. Prizes such as the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, which awards women playwrights in English[169] and the Donnadiscena prize,[170] which awards women in the creative arts, have established a circuit of audiences that are attracted to writers' work as a result of association with the awards.[171] The rejection of the label of woman or feminist writer, however, can also be a strategic working approach. Identification with the label "feminist" can carry with it unwanted associations and connotations. More significant, however, is the perception that such an identification increases the risk of the work being pigeon-holed and pushed out of mainstream discourse.

Looking first to Emma Dante's positioning, we see that she does not accept the

label of feminist when applied to her work. Neither does she herself identify as a

feminist:

> No, non sono una femminista, ma sono pronta a difendere con le unghie e con i denti i diritti della donna e lotto perché la mia parola, il mio pensiero sia considerato al pari di un uomo. ("Le famose").
>
> No, I'm not a feminist, but I am ready to fight tooth and nail for women's rights. I fight so that my words and my thoughts can be considered equal to those of a man.

This reflects the broader ambivalence about feminism in contemporary society referred

to in Chapter One. Feminism often carries negative associations in contemporary

society. Young women resist the label of feminism, while, at the same time espousing

feminist thoughts, ideals and objectives. They feel that feminism is old-fashioned, that

the feminist project has achieved its aims, that gender inequality is either non-existent

or breathing its last breaths. In 1998 Natasha Walter identified this tendency towards

negative associations with feminism, arguing that women may feel positive about the

thoughts, ideas and practices of feminism, but may not wish to be identified as

feminists:

> this is because feminism does have a particular image that can be alienating to young women: it is associated with man-hating and with a rather sullen kind of political correctness and puritanism. Feminists are perceived as obsessed with sexual politics, body image, language and pornography rather than with pragmatic strategies to make women nearer to equality. The movement is seen as intolerant, strident and sloganeering. Its characteristic attitude is understood to

be angry rather than optimistic, whingey rather than buoyant, negative rather than positive. The feminist is seen as an outsider, not an insider (Walter 36).[172]

The perception of equality between the sexes has been contested by feminist writers such as Banyard and Soffici who point out a series of outstanding and new inequalities that exist. There is some indication in the number of feminist organisations that have emerged over the last four years that attitudes may be slowly changing towards both the word and the movement.

Dante's rejection of the title "feminist," should not, however, be interpreted as a wholesale rejection of the movement and the philosophies behind it. She states categorically her support for the work done by Second Wave feminism and underlines the on-going oppression experienced by women in general and Italian women in particular. Dante perceives feminism to be a political movement, one that as an artist she cannot identify with. Italian feminism has long borne the imprint of cultural feminist thought through its insistent emphasis on sexual difference, and has demonstrated a distinct tendency towards separatism.[173] Dante rejects the essentializing tendencies of Cultural feminism, often expressing her belief in the basic lack of difference between women and men. She does not perceive there to be an innate difference between male and females: "non credo francamente di essere diversa da un uomo perché ho l'utero e le ovaie ("frankly, I don't believe I am any different from a man just because I have a uterus and ovaries" "Le famose").

Dante perceives the word "feminist" to pertain to a historically specific political movement and philosophy. It would seem that this consideration blocks her from an identification with the term. She rejects the use of gender-specific terminology around women who write, pointing out that such language is rarely used in relation to men:

> Malheureusement, il ne m'arrive pas souvent de voir des spectacles montés par des femmes. Quand cela se produit, je ne pense jamais au sexe de l'artiste. Je n'utiliserai jamais l'expression 'mise en scène au féminin' ou 'dramaturgie au féminin'. A-t-on déjà entendu parler de mise en scène masculine ou de dramaturgie masculine? (Dante "Un art fondé sur le doute" 161)

> Unfortunately, I don't often see performances by women. When it does happen, I never think of the artist's gender. I never use the term female *mise en scène* or female dramaturgy. Have you ever heard of male *mise en scène* or male dramaturgy?[174]

Carr is also reluctant to identify as a feminist writer. While many feminist critics and commentators have welcomed Marina Carr's success on the National Stage and the addition of a female voice to the host of Irish male canonical and contemporary playwrights, a number of studies have appeared that interrogate her feminist credentials. At this stage of Carr's career, it is worthwhile pausing and considering in more depth to what extent her plays can be considered feminist. Carr, like Dante, has never self-identified as a feminist writer, claiming in an interview with Mike Murphy, "I don't consciously set out with a feminist agenda" (52). This reluctance on Carr's behalf to associate with the term "feminist," does not, however, hinder her from expressing an interest in and concern for feminist issues, equality first among them: "I

think just to be on a par would be sufficient" (52). Instead of identifying her characters

as feminists, a designation that has come to be a "dirty word" that people are afraid of,

Carr defines them as "natural" feminists; women who "feel their worth, and know their

rights, and naturally have a sense of themselves" (52). This approach to feminism could

be described as non-political. While Victoria White praises Carr's ability "to slough off

the need to politicise her woman's voice" (White), her non-politicised portrayal of

women has been cause for concern for other writers, such as Clare Wallace, who

examines Carr's work from the perspective of "positive, politically aggressive

feminism" ("Crossroad*s*" 87).

Carr echoes Dante's objections to the insistence on the part of commentators of

referring to playwrights in gendered terms:

> I don't think it matters a damn if the voice is male or female; it's what the voice is
> saying [...] The work doesn't care if it was a man or woman that wrote it; did you
> have ten children screaming in the kitchen or a cork-lined study to work in
> (Kilroy).

Admitting that women writers are afraid that their work will be "tagged as 'feminist'"

("Interview with Mike Murphy" 52), Carr gives voice to the anxiety that playwrights

experience about positioning. They fear that the adoption of a feminist position will

distort the reception of their work and ultimately destabilise their ontology further.

While rejecting the label feminist writer, Dante and Carr apply the base lessons of feminism to their artistic work producing theatre that is gender-focussed in its themes, characterisation and symbolism. They occupy a split position, then, in relation to their ontology. Dante and Carr foreground their right as women to be equal through their art, which is not however, loaded with the historical responsibilities of feminist political thought and action. Neither Carr nor Dante can be defined as feminists, but they perform feminism in their work through acts that are likely to advance women's rights, representation and ways of thinking about themselves. This rejection of a label reflects an anxiety regarding their ontological position.

In the Thick of it or Hanging on the Margins?

Another positioning decision that must be made is the choice between a central or peripheral placing. The playwright must negotiate a path with regard to these binary positions during her professional and artistic career. The Anxiety of Ontology may lead her to invest heavily in attaining a central siting in order to gain a more stable ontological situation, or in contrast, lead her to reject the authority and resources of the centre in favour of an independent, peripheral locus.

A playwright may seek to be centrally located in geographical and cultural terms, or choose to maintain a position that is marginally located. The centre-periphery dialectic was dealt with by Immanuel Wallerstein in his book, *The Modern World System*

(1974), which outlines the power asymmetry that exists in the economic relationships between the world's central (core) countries and those of the periphery. Drawing on elements of dependency theory, he argues that the centre systematically exploits the periphery for goods and services it needs and cannot provide itself under the capitalist system.[175] If we apply Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" to Wallerstein's economic model, we gain an insight not only into the workings of the cultural apparatus, but also the potential reasons for and ramifications of a choice of central/peripheral positioning. Bourdieu argues that cultural goods (in this case, written texts and live performances) "can be appropriated both materially … and symbolically" (50). I would suggest that in a theatrical context, an artist who is centrally located is more likely to benefit from Bourdieu's other form of capital; "social capital." Located in the artistic, cultural and economic centre, an artist can draw upon their social capital to access the supports that the cultural institutions and systems can provide such as funding, visibility and production. Instead, a peripheral placing makes the likelihood of funding and exposure less probable, but may benefit from an artistic freedom and intellectual independence that is lacking in a central location. Marina Carr has located herself centrally, while conversely, Dante has decided to remove herself to the periphery. Carr has successfully placed herself at the centre of Irish theatre, developing a continuing relationship with the Abbey National Theatre, gaining admission to the *Aosdána* and securing associations with centrally important cultural institutions and universities. This positioning has been

vital to the promulgation of Carr's work; allowing it to reach audiences all over Ireland, and significantly, many countries around the world. This is a significant achievement for an Irish female playwright, and is not something that any of her predecessors were able to do. It should not be underestimated. Dante, instead, has chosen to locate herself on the margins of the Italian theatrical scene; receiving no state funding, self-financing her work and eschewing any institutional roles. Carr's position offers obvious attractions; easy access to important theatres and larger audiences, financial security and critical approval. It could be argued that she assuages the Anxiety of Ontology by securing official recognition for herself as an artist and her work and also stabilises her position through the attainment of financial security. Dante's unconventional choice, however, requires more analysis.

Dante's peripheral positioning has three manifestations; her geographical location in Palermo, rejection of the mainstream theatre in Italy and deployment of a marginal idiom. Italy is a country divided in geographical, linguistic and cultural terms. It is a large country, with many identifiable centres and multiple peripheries. Emma Dante locates her work in one of the most distant peripheral locations in Italy, both in geographical, but most importantly, cultural terms.[176] Dante returned to Palermo in 1999, after working in two of the largest centres of Italian theatrical activity; Turin and Rome. Theatrically, Palermo has little to offer, either on the level of institutional support or in terms of an artistic community. Mimma Gallina provides an overview of the

theatrical panorama of the city in her volume *Il teatro possibile: linee organizzative e tendenze del teatro italiano* (2005), noting that while it demonstrates "un'attività diffusa" ("widespread activity") in theatrical terms, "l'offerta complessiva resta bassa" ("overall provision remains low" 94). This reality provokes the question; why choose to work in such a peripheral context? The answer, I believe lies in Dante's desire for artistic independence and freedom, which is unconstrained by the demands of institutional criticism and pressures. I contend that Dante employs what I term a "distancing" technique to retain and maintain her artistic integrity. Distancing refers not only to the rejection of the canon already outlined, but also her choice of a peripheral geographical and cultural location, and the employment of a minority idiom.

The Italian theatrical scene is characterised by two main types of theatre activity. The *teatri stabili* are state owned and managed theatres, found in every major Italian city. Their artistic programme is dominated by the revival of canonical texts and a small amount of new writing. They are generally conservative and mainstream in their artistic output and tend not to favour the promotion of upcoming artists. This conservatism is due in part to their audience's taste. The first *stabile* was the Piccolo Teatro in Milan, founded by Paolo Grassi and Giorgio Strehler, which was "the first state theatre in Italy" (Prosperi 18). Its establishment was characterised, according to Prosperi, by "a massive importation/translation of the theatre of Bertolt Brecht" (18). Although originally conceived of by Strehler and Grassi as a theatre for all levels of society and as

a public service, the current reality within the *stabili* is quite different. These days, their audiences consist of middle-aged and retired, mostly bourgeois season-ticket holders. Emma Dante works in Palermo, which has a *stabile* called Il Biondo. Claudia Brunetto comments on how Il Biondo remains a point of reference for many young theatre practitioners in Palermo, but the relationship is not reciprocated by the theatre, which is reluctant to stage work by young, experimental companies. Dante has little or no contact with the official theatres in Palermo: "[n]on abbiamo nessun tipo di rapporto né con le istituzioni, né con i teatri della città" ("we have no relationship either with the city's institutions or its theatres" Dante "La pratica" 191) despite the quality and international profile of her theatrical output.[177]

Secondly, there is a long-standing tradition of an experimental theatre in Italy, concentrated in the larger cities such as Milan, Rome and Turin. Today's strain is characterised as "teatro –immagine" ("image theatre) and is currently typified by groups such as Societas Raffaello Sanzio, MOTUS and Fanny & Alexander,[178] who have gone beyond the limits of words, and work more and more in the realm of the image. This type of theatre is followed by an elite group of intellectuals, who travel to festivals in Italy and abroad to see their work. While it is difficult to assess whether these companies or individuals are truly experimental in their approach to theatre, they are known as such in Italy. It is my belief that Emma Dante questions the credentials of

Italian experimental theatre, investigating its revolutionary qualities and highlighting

its complacencies.[179]

This study contends that Dante may have deliberately distanced herself from the

Italian institutional and experimental scene in reaction to the Anxiety of Ontology. This

could be read to constitute a rejection of both models proposed by the institutional and

experimental scenes. Recognizing that her art does not conform to either model, she

chooses a separate and distinctive path to making theatre. The employment of such

distancing from the mainstream theatrical scene helps her avoid unpleasant material,

intellectual, and artistic compromises that might otherwise prove a challenge to resist.

Dante's plays are not written in standard Italian, but in a form of Sicilian dialect

that Emiliano Morreale has described as "imbastardito, seminuovo, lesionato nella

pronuncia da lingue giovani e impure, contaminato da parlate gergali e dall'italiano"

("bastardised, semi-new, damaged in pronunciation by impure and young tongues,

contaminated by slang speech and Italian" 103).[180] The choice to write in mostly Sicilian

dialect and not in Italian is strategic. Although Dante risks limiting her audience

drastically with this choice, considering that many Italians find Sicilian

incomprehensible, I argue that she employs it as part of her distancing strategy. The

choice of Sicilian can be interpreted as a demarcation between Dante's theatre and that

of the established theatre and experimental theatre. With her dialect idiom, Dante

draws a linguistic line between her work and that of others. It is an act of self-

identification and isolation.[181]

Dante also chooses to "stare fuori dai circuiti ufficiali" ("stay outside of the

official circuits" Dante "Emma Dante: Teatro a nervi scoperti"), where there are

concessions required in order to have your shows staged; there's the pressure of

"compromessi, dalle regole soffocanti di dover dire determinate cose o di non doverle

dire per non dispiacere a qualcuno." ("compromises, suffocating rules that say you

must say some things or not say others so you don't offend anyone"). The decision to

distance herself has also allowed her to stay away "dai meccanismi che soffocano il

pensiero libero che un artista dovrebbe avere" ("from the mechanisms that suffocate the

free thought every artist should have" "Emma Dante: Teatro a nervi scoperti"). Her

distance from the official circuits, then, can be seen as an attempt to preserve the

integrity of her artistic voice and style. Through distancing, Dante has been able to work

free from interference, be it institutional or critical, and concentrate on developing her

own theatrical language, style and method. She has established herself as a playwright

and theatre practitioner, working with her own actors in their own private and

independent space La Vicaria in Palermo. Such a peripheral positioning, eschewing as it

does Bourdieu's concept of "social capital," has carried with it considerable negative

consequences. As Andrea Porcheddu has noted, one significant negative impact has

been on the distribution of her work in Italy, with *Cani di bancata* given only the most

basic support by the CRT in Milan and -vitally for a play about the Sicilian mafia- was

shown only a handful of times in Sicily. *Le Pulle* toured only a few dates in Italy before

going on an extensive tour in France and Europe (Porcheddu "Le sfide" 112). This

reliance on self-funding and co-productions has the negative effect of limiting the

dissemination of her productions within Sicily and Italy.[182]

Carr and Dante have adopted contrasting positioning strategies in terms of the

centre/periphery location. Carr's central positioning has provided space for process of

artistic creation, financial stability and allowed her work to reach audiences that would

almost certainly would have been beyond her reach otherwise. Her success in an Irish

context, although perhaps not unprecedented (if we consider Augusta Gregory's record

as the most produced playwright), is remarkable and has not been achieved by any

other Irish female playwright in living history. Dante, on the other hand, appears to

have chosen quite a different approach and path. Through the use of various distancing

techniques, Dante has situated herself on the geographic and artistic periphery. As

outlined above, Dante appears to have decided to assume this positioning as a reaction

to pressures present within the institutional Italian theatre. It could be argued that such

pressures are more pronounced in an Italian theatrical context, and that they are

something that Carr may have to contend with less.[183] By staying away from the centres

of cultural production, it could be said that Dante chooses the opposite approach to

Carr's reaction to the Anxiety of Ontology. A distrust of the institutions and established

theatre led her to construct a separate path for herself as an artist. This divided her fate

as an artist from the demands of the mainstream theatre and may have granted her

more control over her own artistic production, position and vision, though it must be

noted that such a positioning presents serious consequences in financial terms and

would appear to limit the reach and distribution of her work.

To conclude this section, we have seen how strategies, extrapolated from Gilbert

& Gubar's framework and updated to a modern context, may be employed by female

playwrights in reaction to the Anxiety of Ontology, where present. In the next chapter,

we will look specifically at the work strategies grouped under the heading of textual

manipulations.

Chapter Three – Dramaturgical Manipulations

> Auld ones dying don't interest me. Women
> who've stopped ovulating should die
> offstage. Who cares?[1]

Following on from the previous chapter, which examined strategies of process

and positioning that female playwrights may adopt to cope with the Anxiety of

Ontology, this chapter looks at working strategies that may be manifest *within* the

bounds of the play. The approaches outlined in this chapter relate to how the writer

manipulates dramaturgy[2] and textuality in reaction to the anxiety, and will focus

especially on the technique of canonical revision. Cathy Leeney argues that "the woman

playwright must negotiate the representational inheritance in relation to which she

inevitably works" ("Ireland's 'Exiled' Women Playwrights" 162). This study extends

this analysis to encompass the Anxiety of Ontology and contends that in the fraught

process of negotiation, Emma Dante and Marina Carr may employ the strategy of

canonical revision on two levels: content and form. I argue that their position as

playwrights may be threatened by both the masculine patriarchal forms perpetuated

within the canon, as well as its gendered content: under this reading, the process of

conciliation with the canon is part of a wider negotiation of their own position, and its

relationship to their work. Carr and Dante refuse to unquestioningly accept the features

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and characteristics of male-created and centred genres, choosing instead to interrogate and contest the norms and images contained within canonical texts.

Borrowing From Autolycus' Bag

As we saw in the last chapter, the playwrights' relationship with the canon is a complex one. They look to canonical texts for inspiration and reference. At times the canon provides them with inspiration as they recognise its value and importance, at others, it acts as a foil to write against – against its tropic portrayal of female figures and the gender binary, against its male-centred themes[3] and forms. Many of Marina Carr's plays are adaptations or reworkings of canonical texts; *By the Bog of Cats…*(1998) was a reimagining of Euripides' *Medea, Ariel* (2002) was based on *The Oresteia, The Cordelia Dream* (2008) contained elements of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Carr's most recent play *Phaedra Backwards* (2011) was strongly influenced by Euripides' *Hippolytus* and associated Greek myths.[4] Emma Dante has also adapted canonical works in her theatre; her early production *Il Sortilegio* (1999) was based on a novel *Of Love and Other Demons* (1994) by Gabriel García Márquez, *Insulti* ("Insults" 2000) based on the novel *Superwoobinda* (1996) by Aldo Nove, *La Scimia* (2004) – inspired by Tommaso Landolfi's *Le due zitelle* (1946), Dante also adapted Euripides' *Medea* in 2003. Through revisions and rewritings of classic texts both playwrights dramatize their specifically female negotiation with the canon.

Gilbert & Gubar propose that women writers adopt a revisionary approach to texts. In their view, they engage in a process whereby canonical texts and genres are assimilated and manipulated to fit their needs; "[s]uch writers, therefore, both participated in and –to use one of Harold Bloom's key terms – 'swerved' from the central sequences of male literary history, enacting a uniquely female process of revision and redefinition" (73). As already stated, this revision and redefinition takes place on the levels of form and content. For the purposes of our study, we will look at the issue of content outlined by Gilbert & Gubar under two new subheadings; thematic interventions and representation of women characters. In terms of content, women writers must confront, assimilate and ultimately manipulate the polarised male constructions of women represented in the canon. With regard to form, they revise and modify established structures to suit their own mode of expression; thus they depart from tradition while often retaining the surface appearance of conformity.

Steve Wilmer has noted how the re-working of Greek tragedies has been a common feature in contemporary Irish theatre,[5] while Melissa Sihra links Carr's use of the existing tragic model to Thomas Kilroy's observation that the bag of Autolycus is part of every writer's artistic cache ("A Cautionary Tale" 257).[6] Carr herself speaks about the process of canonical revision in "Dealing with the Dead," and specifically, the borrowing of themes and motifs, where she notes that it is a technique used by many writers – Shakespeare among them (196). As Brian Arkins notes, the metaphors

surrounding this work of appropriation often suggest a passive process, whereas when

"a writer makes use of material from the past it is, rather, *active*" (186). Italian

philosopher Adriana Cavarero has argued that, when faced with inadequate and

unsatisfactory female figures and themes in the male tradition, women writers have two

choices; either they go about the creation of new images, or they can "steal" from the

old tradition (Cavarero 4). In fact, "steal" is the very term employed by Carr in relation

to this process (*Dealing With the Dead* 196). In this feminist "technique of theft,"

Cavarero employs "stolen" canonical figures, such as Diotima and Penelope, thus

rendering them visible and reimagining them, so that they are "freely replayed,

reactivated by a new way of thinking" (5). Cavarero's work is played out in the realm of

philosophy, but I argue that Carr and Dante, within the sphere of theatrical

representation, carry out a similar operation; both writers "steal" from the treasure

trove of canonical figures, myths, themes and structures, while moulding and

manipulating the plunder for their own uses. I believe that like Cavarero, Dante's and

Carr's interventions into the canon are informed "by women's present needs"

(Cavarero 9). This reimagining, moulding and remodelling of classical forms and plots

constitutes a revisionary, and therefore radical, intervention on the playwrights' behalf.

It is in this vein, then, that I would like to examine how the dramaturgical

manipulations of Emma Dante and Marina Carr, as women who borrow, bend and

rebirth canonical elements challenge representation, subvert meaning and intervene to

reformulate theatrical discourse around "woman."

Breaking the Form

Canonical works have traditionally favoured the male perspective, thereby

promoting tropic images of women and failing to accommodate female themes.

Structurally speaking, plays have tended to display hegemonic features and forms.

Gilbert & Gubar comment on how difficult it is for women to work within the strictures

of traditional forms such as genre, structure and plotlines, contending that most

"Western literary genres are […] essentially male – devised by male authors to tell male

stories about the world" (67). Given the unsuitability of such structures, female

playwrights often reject, disrupt or adapt them to suit their own artistic purposes.

Through this kind of intervention, traditional genres and plotlines are renovated and

transformed. Both Marina Carr and Emma Dante reject the uncritical employment of

genres, plotlines and conventions within their plays; their work disrupts the continuity

of canonical structures by contesting, altering and resisting convention. Marina Carr's

work borrows structures from canonical works and reshapes them,[7] while Emma Dante

deconstructs canonical configurations to build plays that refuse to conform to

normative forms. Emma Dante displays a clear resistance to all traditional forms in her

work. She writes plays that are non-realistic, episodic, unconventionally short in length,

and that resist narrative coherence. Carr, instead, over the course of her career, has oscillated between two positions of outright resistance and seeming conformance to canonical forms. This conflicted stance should not be interpreted to mean that Carr is guilty of what Gilbert & Gubar term "male mimicry," rather her apparent conformance to traditional forms constitutes a subtle manipulation and revision of such configurations.

Defying Expectations with non-linear narrative

Dante's theatre resists realism. Her theatre pieces are short and usually last for no more than an hour in performance. In a rejection of the act structure they are episodic in form, like *mPalermu*, which in the published version is divided into nine separate scenes or episodes, each of which has a title. Although this explicit division of the play in the printed text was not to be repeated in later plays, it can be observed that many of her subsequent works are composed of a number of interwoven episodes.[8]

One of the outstanding features of Dante's work is the rejection of the traditional idea of linear narrative progression. Narrative coherence and progression has been a central tenet of theatre since Aristotle wrote his *Poetics* in 335BC. In it he emphasized the importance of coherence in plot:

> in the other mimetic arts a unitary mimesis has a unitary object, so too the plot, since it is mimesis of an action, should be of unitary and indeed whole action;

and the component events should be so structured that if any is displaced or removed, the sense of the whole is disturbed and dislocated (59)

This definition, with its insistence on the presentation of a single complete event for scrutiny, combined with Aristotle's principle of the unity of time, has engendered a lengthy and dominant tradition of chronological plots and linear narratives within theatre history. Dante contests this tradition in her plays, frustrating narrative progression and contesting chronological coherence. In *mPalermu*, the sole action the family wishes to complete – leaving the confines of their home – is continually thwarted. The characters assert their intention to leave at regular intervals throughout the play: "[n]iscèmu" ("[l]et's go out" Dante *Carnezzeria* 25), but this mantra sounds ever more hollow as the play progresses and the realisation of this simple desire continues to elude them. One is reminded of Beckett's tramps in *Waiting for Godot* (1953), waiting endlessly for something or someone who will never come; or the women in Chekov's *Three Sisters* (1901) who fruitlessly repeat their wish to go to the near-mythical, but unattainable Moscow. There is no narrative progression in *mPalermu*; the failure of the family to complete a single task prevents it. The result of such dramaturgical resistance is a pervading sense of frustration within the economy of the play, leading to an atmosphere of intense claustrophobia. It recalls Vivian Mercier's oft-quoted description of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, as a play where "nothing happens,

twice." Like Beckett's play, which "keeps audiences glued to their seats," (Mercier)

mPalermu makes strangely compelling viewing.

Instead, in *Vita mia*, the linear narrative is disrupted and modified. *Vita mia* is a short

one-act play that depicts the death of the youngest of three brothers and his mother's

terrible pain at his passing. Set in one room of the family apartment, the action of the

play takes place around a single bed, which is awaiting the corpse of young Chicco. All

three boys appear to be alive throughout most of the play, racing around the bed on

foot or on their shared bicycle and chasing one another, but it soon becomes

heartbreakingly clear that the "baby" of the family has had an accident and is dying or

dead. Dante, at first, had thought of presenting the story of the dead boy beginning

with his corpse in the bed, but later rejected this traditional narrative structure:

> quando ho cominciato *Vita mia*, ho messo Giacomino [...] sul letto da morto e loro tre intorno. Ho provato una settimana questa situazione: lui era già morto e loro erano intorno ("La strada scomoda" 52).

> when I began work on *Vita mia*, I placed a dead Giacomino […] on the bed with the other three surrounding him. I rehearsed this scenario for a week; he was already dead and they were gathered around him.

However, this chronologically faithful account of events did not satisfy Dante and so,

she inverted the sequence of events "ho svuotato il letto, ho tolto Giacomino da lì" ("I

emptied the bed, I removed Giacomino from it" 52). Such chronological continuity in

the narrative would have had the effect of concentrating the focus of the piece on the

death of the son; but Dante wished the central idea to be the mother and, the horror of her pain at losing her child: "[l]a morte del figlio non è importante tanto quanto il dolore di lei" ("the death of the son is not as important as *her* pain" 52). Thus, by changing the chronology, the action of the play is shifted in favour of the mother's perspective and consequently, "diventa lei il perno" ("she becomes the central point" 52). This central focus on the mother echoes Franca Rame and Dario Fo's *Maria alla croce* (1969) whereby the Virgin Mary becomes the centre of the passion scene, not her son Jesus, as would have been traditional.[9] The shift in form from a traditional, more realistic chronology which observes the unities of action and time, facilitates an alternative perspective within the play's economy. Canonical form is altered to suit Dante's communicative purpose and accommodate her (female) perspective.

Experimenting With Traditional Structures

Carr's early plays, *Ullaloo*, *This Love Thing* and *Low in the Dark*,[10] reject traditional models of structure, narrative and the conventions of realism. These plays present characters in absurd situations[11] and are characterised by the use of humour, unusual settings and a sense of fun. While critical reaction to these pieces was mixed,[12] some commentators felt that this young playwright was mounting a challenge to the establishment through the medium of her witty, acerbic writing. Scholars have commented on how Carr's early plays resist canonical norms in terms of form and

content. As Sihra has noted, *The Mai*, which was produced in 1994, marked a change in the direction of Carr's writing; moving "away from consciously experimental forms towards character and plot-driven drama" (Sihra *Women in Irish Drama*). *The Mai*, as well as Carr's subsequent plays, outwardly appear to conform to the traditional model of a realist, "well-made" play.[13] Although commentators like Wallace have assessed Carr's development as a writer as a move into from playful experimentalism into more conservative forms beginning with *The Mai* ("Tragic Destiny and Abjection" 432/433), I argue that her use of these forms is far from conventional.

The Mai focuses on the return of the Mai's husband, Robert, after a long absence from the family home and their marriage. The play examines a number of important and life-changing events for the Mai: it tracks the Mai's hopes for a harmonious marriage on Robert's return, her disappointment when he fails to fulfil that hope by behaving poorly and flirting with other women, and her eventual death. The action of the play's events is framed by her daughter Millie's narrative interventions. In *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan*, the deaths of the two protagonists are telegraphed to the audience early on through Carr's disruption of the realist format of the well-made play. The well-made play is characterised by a linear pattern that moves from exposition to crisis and ultimately to resolution, incorporating a sense of resolution or closure at the end of the play. Feminist commentators such as Sue Ellen Case and Jill Dolan in a theatrical context, and Laura Mulvey in film studies,[14] have been critical both of the well-made

play, and of the realist tradition to which it belongs. The main criticisms have centred

on the androcentric discourse prevalent in the form, the placing of the male in the

subject position and the status of women who are defined only in relation to the male

characters (as wives, daughters, lovers) in the form. Any uncritical use of such a form

by women writers is considered to be problematic due to the meanings and

representations associated with the tradition.

Carr, while ostensibly appearing to utilise the conventions of the form of the

well-made play, makes deliberate interventions into the structure of these two plays to

confound it. In *The Mai*, which is a two-act play, the eponymous protagonist's death is

communicated to the audience at the close of Act One. In a startling visual but silent

image, her husband, Robert, is seen upstage carrying her soaked dead body. The play's

action jumps forward from Act One's exposition of the story to the event of the Mai's

suicide by drowning, which took place "a year and a half" after the events depicted

(Carr *Plays* 128). But in Act Two, the Mai is present and living again onstage. The play

returns to loosely following the form of a well-made play, moving on to situation,

unravelling and discussion. Likewise, in *Portia Coughlan*, the conventions of the well-

made play seemed to be followed in Act One, as we witness a standard exposition of

Portia's story. The play charts Portia's unhappiness in her marriage, her obsession with

her dead twin Gabriel and her failed efforts to find a solution to her desolation.

However, at the opening of Act Two, this illusion of conformance to convention is

shattered as Portia's wet and dripping body is hauled out of the Belmont River before

her friends, neighbours and family. The rest of the act deals with a discussion of the

consequences of that death and her relatives' attempts at apportioning blame. But, in

Act Three, we are hurled back in time to the days leading up to her death –what in the

well-made play would be termed the situation[15] and once again, we are witness to

Portia who is alive and progressing towards her death.

This disruption to the form of the well-made play could be viewed as a feminist

intervention which disrupts the conventions of realism, and is used as a revisionary

tactic. On the surface, Carr's plays seem to conform to the style of a well-made play

(through the use of act-structure, and by using the first act for exposition), which causes

the audience to build up a number of expectations about the potential progress of the

play. If we agree with Carlson's observation that "[t]he expectations an audience brings

to a new reception experience are the residue of memory of previous experiences"

(Carslon *The Haunted Stage* 5), then the memory of previous well-made plays forms an

expectation in the spectator's mind of how the play might proceed. Carr's disruption of

the linear progress constitutes a strategic rejection of the traditional canon and the

theatre which has traditionally favoured the well-made format.

Both Dante and Carr make strategic disruptions to the traditional structures of

plays, challenging the conventions of Aristotle's unities and Scribe's well-made plays.

This disruption constitutes a negotiation of canonical norms which may be employed to assuage the Anxiety of Ontology. By contesting the established norms and conventions surrounding structure in the theatre, female playwrights can reject the imposition of male forms, cutting the cloth of theatrical art to fit their model of expression. In undertaking such a negotiation, the playwrights refuse to assume that the existing forms suit their diverging ontology and artistic needs, and shore up their own sense of security by moulding them to their desired shape.

Challenging with Content

Moving on from an analysis of form to that of content we observe that thematically speaking, both Carr and Dante focus on matters that have either traditionally been considered feminine- and therefore unimportant, or issues that have historically been investigated from a male point of view. Therefore, neglected themes such as motherhood are brought to the centre and problematized in the process; and oft-visited themes such as heterosexual relationships, marriage and the family are visualised from a new angle. With regard to characterisation and representation, I will argue that Carr resists the canonical construction of unrealistic female characters and instead creates female characters that are complex and nuanced. While Emma Dante, instead, performs an interrogation of the very notion of gender through the medium of her characters.

The Woman Will Not Be As Represented

In this section, we will examine the interventions of female playwrights in, and their alterations to, the representation of female figures onstage. While I do not claim that women writers only focus on female characters and themes, or that men concentrate only male characters and themes, it does appear that female playwrights privilege female characters and issues in their writing. Many would argue that women characters have long been represented onstage, beginning with figures such as Medea and Antigone in the amphitheatres of Ancient Greece,[16] through to Shakespeare's Portia,[17] Oscar Wilde's Salome,[18] and more recent figures such as Strindberg's Miss Julie[19] and Ibsen's Hedda Gabler[20]. However, of note to this thesis is the fact that most of these historical representations have been created and brought to life by male writers, and filtered through a male perspective. In an Irish context, female theatrical characters of note are J.M Synge's Maura (*Riders to the Sea*) and Nora (*In the Shadow of the Glen*, 1903), Yeats' Eimear (*The Only Jealousy of Emer*, 1919), Brian Friel's dancing sisters (*Dancing at Lughnasa*) and Tom Murphy's female trio (*Bailegangaire*). In an Italian context, likewise, we find many female characters of note, such as Commedia dell'Arte's scheming Columbina, Goldoni's Mirandolina, protagonist of *La Locandiera*, Pirandello's Figliastra (*Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*), Verga's la Lupa. While each of these representations contributes something to the discourse around the representation of women, and indeed, some of them are very compelling depictions of women and

womanhood, the focus of this section is on those female characters which have been

imagined, created and brought into imaginative existence by female playwrights.

There is, we can conclude, a long and, at times, rich tradition of playwrights

creating and representing women onstage. What then marks out Dante's and Carr's

work as different to these representations? Overwhelmingly, such representations have

been imagined by male playwrights and drawn from the well of their own experience.

Women's voices have rarely been heard, and as such, unique female experiences have

been at best, guessed at, alluded to and approximated, at worst, side-lined and

undermined. Nobody would argue that Medea is not a compelling character, but who is

to say what character might have emerged from a Medea penned by an Athenian

female?

Given the historical neglect of female characters and themes in the canon,

perhaps women's concentration on and selection of female characters is not surprising.

Emily Glassberg Sands' statistical analysis of perceived gender discrimination in the

submission of plays to theatre found that "female-written scripts are more than twice as

likely to have majority female parts" when compared with male-written scripts (49).

This interest in female characters could stem from the prevalence of unsatisfactory

tropic images and characterisations of women that proliferate the canon.[21] The act of

reviewing and revising these representations constitutes an intervention into the canon,

as well as a manipulation of its themes and images to suit the diverging artistic aims

and interests of female playwrights.

The portrayals of women in works of literature have often been mere tropes, as

Gilbert & Gubar establish clearly in the chapter "The Queen's Looking Glass: Female

Creativity, Male Images of Women, and the Metaphor of Literary Paternity." In their

analysis, they specifically address the tropes of angel and monster in relation to the

portrayal of women in literary history. They argue that women writers must

interrogate, manipulate and remodel the images of women in the canon in order to

"shatter the mirror that has so long reflected what every woman was supposed to be"

(76).[22] This revision constitutes a type of resistance to the strictures imposed by the

canon; by attacking tropic images of woman, they criticize patriarchal institutions and

conventions (77). Marina Carr reimagines and (re)images women differently to their

canonical depictions, through her heavy emphasis on female protagonists[23] and

recurring focus on issues like family, maternity and marriage from a female perspective.

While Emma Dante does not deviate significantly from tropic images of woman, and

many of her plays feature males in the central roles, she nevertheless interrogates the

very idea of gender in a way that broadens the canonical discourse on issues of

sexuality and sex. As we will see, in Dante's work, male characters feature

predominantly, and her women are, by her own admission, victims of their

circumstances. She struggles to find a place for her female characters within the

gendered hierarchy of her plays' worlds. In response, Dante deconstructs the traditional gender binary that lies at the foundation of all societal interactions, and in so doing, resists canonical depictions of essentialist gender identities; opening up the cultural imagination to facilitate the (re)imaging of not only women, but also men.

Before we proceed to examine how playwrights react to tropic canonical portrayals of women, we must first establish how "woman" has been represented in Irish and Italian culture and theatre in the past. In an Irish theatrical context, woman has been traditionally represented as a symbol for the nation of Ireland, and Anna McMullan further contests that traditional stereotypes of woman in Irish theatre are "as a-sexual self-sacrificing mothers, powerless victims, or sexual comforts" ("Gender, Authorship and Performance" 36).[24] Roberto Alonge's analysis of the presentation of women in Pirandello's theatre entitled *Madri, baldracche e amanti: la figura femminile nel teatro di Luigi Pirandello* (1997), translated as *Mothers, Whores and Lovers: Female figures in the Theatre of Luigi Pirandello*, expresses neatly the general representation of female figures in the wider Italian canon.[25]

We saw in Chapter One how Italy and Ireland present variegating social and cultural realities that have a material effect on the lives of women and men, and so we will not return to detailing those differences here. Despite these distinctions, there are many similarities to be observed between the situations of women in both countries. Although Italy and Ireland present diverse social and cultural realities, one vital

institution has historically wielded a powerful influence on shaping perceptions of

gender, sexuality and sexual conduct in both countries; the Catholic Church. Catholic

social policy and state legislation have led to a number of enduring tropes regarding

women in the national imaginations of Ireland and Italy; tropes that have been

propagated by theatrical representation. These motifs have been created, for the most

part, by male writers and are signified by the female body and voice. Woman has come

to be associated with fixed and inflexible concepts of space, place, time and identity.

The Catholic Church had fixed ideas about women and their role in society. The

unique position afforded to the Catholic Church by the Free State and later

governments in Ireland meant that the particular identity the Church constructed for

women had a material effect on their lives. The special relationship in Ireland between

Church and State enshrined in the 1937 Constitution ensured a legislative grounding for

Catholic social policy. Though Church and State have been separated in Italy since the

introduction of the *Legge delle Guarentigie* in 1871, the strong influence of Catholic social

policy can nevertheless be seen in contemporary legislation and politics.[26] The

separation between Church and State has not succeeded in fully removing the influence

of Catholic social policy from Italian cultural life.

Catholic discourse situated women firmly in the private sphere of the home in

what it perceived as her supreme role as mother. Further to this, in the characteristics of

the ideal woman, according to Catholic social policy, were in Fr. D. Barry's words; "the

passive virtues of humility, patience, meekness, forbearance and self-repression" (qtd in

Cullen Owens 99).[27] Women were thus tied to domesticity with no public role, and the

characteristics of passivity, sexual purity and maternal instincts were prescribed as

ideal traits (Valiulis 152-158). These proscribed behaviours stem from what Maggie

Günsberg terms "one of the oldest formulations […] to be found in Christianity", that of

"the Mary-Eve, or Madonna-whore pairing" (146). Underlying these beliefs about the

nature of women are many assumptions about female behaviour; women should

submit to male authority, they should remain passive, their sexuality is a threat to

society and therefore should be controlled by the institution of marriage, and all of their

activities should be strictly limited to the private realm of the home - the "public arena

wherein political and economic power resided was no place for women" (Valiulis 153).

In the context of this particular study, it is significant that the theatre resides firmly in

the public realm and therefore has traditionally lain beyond the bounds of acceptable

female behaviour.

Theories that influenced the Catholic shaping of the ideal female figure have a

firm grounding in the gender binary system. Feminists such as Judith Butler and

Simone de Beauvoir have commented on how gender is constructed by society and is

not an innate quality.[28] In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler defines gender as "the repeated

stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that

congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance" (33). Traditional gender

norms and normative gender behaviours in Italy and Ireland have been expressed in terms of binary oppositions; women have been characterised as silent, dependent, lacking in authority, maternal and domestic. While men instead, are traditionally characterised as vocal, independent, authoritative, and the breadwinner who often occupies the public realm. Although many changes and shifts in these traditional gender behaviours have come about since the period of intense feminist activism seen during the 1960s and 1970s, the fact remains that Italy and Ireland continue to be divided along gender lines. Though, over time, there has been undeniably been some shift in the perception of gender roles in society, it is evident that men and women still grapple and struggle with the expectations of normative gender roles and, in general, in Italian and Irish society, albeit with notable exceptions, demands the fulfilment (to varying extents) of standardized gender roles.

The strategies employed in response to these traditional, tropic representations of woman by the two writers under scrutiny here are divergent; Carr challenges tropes directly by reimagining and redrawing woman within the bounds of her artistic work; Dante instead focusses her challenge on the very foundations of gender discrimination through a deconstruction of the gender binary system. In an attempt to frame both approaches within the bounds of feminist theory, we could argue that Carr's approach to representation is better analysed from a liberal feminist perspective, while Dante's benefits from a materialist feminist investigation. Carr's intervention into the existing

system of gendered representation shifts the current parameters of representation to include new and contrasting female figures. Dante's challenge, like the theories of Materialist feminism, seeks to question and undermine the fixity of concepts supporting the current and traditional gendered representation.

Wrestling with the Figure of "Woman" Past

Carr's work, coming as it does from a female perspective, resists tropic associations creating new possibilities for women in the national cultural imagination (Cerquoni), disrupting meta-narratives (Fitzpatrick "Disrupting Metanarratives"), challenging the traditional conflation of woman and maternity (Sihra "Playing"), and allowing for the reimagining of women's place and identity (McMullan "Unhomely"). As Carr's women transgress the space afforded to them by traditional motifs, themes and notions, they progress into a new arena where fresh possibilities can be explored.

Rhona Trench notes that Carr's early experimental plays resisted "the theatrical traditions of Irish theatre such as the rural, the land, the Catholic Church and the cottage kitchen" (29), but Carr was also immediately interested in resisting and dissecting the traditions of female characterisation in Irish theatre. Carr refuses to draw her women within the mould of familiar well-worn female characters, moving beyond the many simple portrayals of women that we have found thus far. Instead, she writes complicated women whose choices are often not wise (*The Mai*), talented women who

sometimes choose the easier path in life to their own detriment (*Woman and Scarecrow*),

women whose actions are in conflict with their desires (*On Raftery's Hill*; *The Cordelia*

Dream) and women who choose to change their lives in the hope of a more meaningful

existence (*Marble).* This redrawing of the female, working against the old conventions of

the Irish theatrical canon, opens up new imaginative spaces in which the idea of woman

can be explored and reconfigured.

Carr's work, which presents alternative female models of experience and

behaviour, allows women to conceive of themselves and other women differently. Her

female characters reject the idea of woman as outlined by Catholic social theory and

tropes previously found in canonical male works, portraying instead complex,

profound, thinking women. In bringing new female figures to the stage, Carr is

allowing Irish women and men to imagine "woman" in new and sometimes difficult

ways. Underlying all these characterisations is an on-going and courageous battle with

an unfriendly world - one which at times proves stronger than the female characters.

In 2009, Carr wrote a play that questioned and contested, not only the

representation of women but also revised canonical themes, called *Marble*. In Jeremy

Herrin's production at the Abbey Theatre, the world of *Marble* was a shiny, grey cold

metallic realm, broken up only by the uncanny (and seemingly independent) movement

of a sofa and dominated from on high by a towering column of cream marble. There is a

pervading sense of dissatisfaction in the personal lives of all the characters in the play,

and Robert Innes Hopkins' set reflected this in the greys of an unforgiving urban

landscape. This shiny picture of urbanity was not what one would generally have

expected at that time from a Carr play[29] and along with the change in location and

society, came a shift in Carr's representation of women. The play is about a personal

awakening. Protagonist Catherine comes to a deeper knowledge of herself and an

understanding of the dynamics of her life through a series of dreams. She shares a

number of mutual dreams with her husband's best friend, Art, in which they make love

in a room made entirely of marble. Both find the experience intoxicating and, as the

play progresses, their waking lives are utterly transformed by the seductive possibilities

of their mutual dream.

Under the weight of the standards set out by Catholic Church and State,

women's identities were for many years subsumed, repressed and hidden. Marina Carr

undermines, and eventually throws off, the heavy mantle of the "ideal women" in an

effort to find Catherine's true identity. *Marble* can be interpreted as one woman's search

for identity through the casting off of the weight of traditional gender expectations and

roles. Catherine seeks to uncover and understand her identity and a life that has been

buried for many years under the demands of social convention. By stripping away the

labels of wife and mother, and stepping out of their confines, Catherine attempts to

come face to face with herself.

Bored with the monotony of her life, Catherine believes "the life not lived is what kills" (17). Her dreaming life begins to provide her with a sense of truth and meaning, until eventually her "waking life is just pretence" (39). The dreams provoke in her an exploration of her identity. They allow her to imagine herself and her experience in other terms. In the dreams, Catherine is not a wife or mother, but sees herself as she truly is. This is a world where we are "shown our untrammelled selves before living mucks it all up" (Carr *Cordelia* 22). When, in waking moments, she attempts to consider her identity after stripping away the roles of mother and wife, she cannot articulate what is left. The dreaming has undone her, and in her undoing, she has discovered not a central stable identity, but a void: "[f]eel I've been peeled like an onion. I'm down to the core and there's nothing there" (Carr *Marble* 50), "the mind, the heart, the soul, whatever there is that's me is just not there" (50/51). Caught up in the pressures of social convention, the institution of marriage, and defined within the confines of the roles of mother and housewife, she has ultimately neglected herself. Without the assigned roles of wife or mother, she does not know what or who she is. This is a profound realisation.

The decision to abandon her children is a momentous and significant event in Irish theatre history; marked in the text and in Jeremy Herrin's production by a lengthy and loud silence. In those thirty seconds without words, a spectrum of emotions swept across actress Aisling O'Sullivan's face, making Catherine's internal dilemma and

anguish manifest. This was by no means an easy or unconsidered decision. Thwarting the trope of the dedicated and selfless mother, Catherine's deliberation leads her to the decision that she needs to leave her children and her husband in order to find herself.[30] There is a sense that the decision is agonising, but ultimately she refuses to place their welfare over her own. The typical privileging of the child over the mother is inverted.

Catherine walks out of her house as a woman liberated from the labels and roles of wife and of mother. She does not know what remains of her identity when these things are taken away, but is determined to discover and explore whatever is left. Through Catherine, the figure of "woman" moves from the traditional representation of the dependent and self-sacrificing wife (or lover), to a person who strikes out on her own in a bid for independence and self-knowledge. "Woman" now becomes the agent and instigator of her own destiny. Carr demonstrates how prescribed societal and cultural roles can obscure and suppress a person's identity. By challenging and stripping away such roles, Carr invites an exploration of women's identities in a context in which they are no longer constrained by traditional social convention.

Attacking the Authority of the Gender Binary

Dante's interrogation of the categories of sex, gender and sexuality in her plays constitute her particular intervention into the traditional representation of women in the theatrical canon. As far back as Virginia Woolf, feminist commentators have

recognised how women writers can challenge literary and theatrical convention,

through a disruption of style and form by, what she termed breaking "the sentence"

and breaking "the sequence." Woolf was also enthused by the untapped possibilities

that lay locked inside the typical representations of women, whose characterisation had

hitherto been "too simple" (107). Beginning with her early, unpublished plays,[31] Dante

has challenged simplistic representations of gender, identities, and sexualities in Italian

theatre by presenting characters that alternately conform to and disrupt these very

categories.

It should be noted that Dante's characterisation of women does not explicitly

challenge the tropic images present in the canon. Her female characters are victims of

their circumstance; silent and silenced, ill-equipped to deal with the hostile world they

inhabit. Dante describes them in the following terms:

> Sono creature moribonde con una carica vitale esagerata e ingombrante. Sono donne del sud, forti e fragili allo stesso tempo. Sono donne con un forte istinto di sopravivvenza ("La pratica" 196).
>
> They are dying creatures that have a vital force that is at once excessive and cumbersome. They are women of the south, strong and fragile at the same time. They are women with a strong sense of survival.

Throughout her work, Dante presents characters in conflict with prescribed

societal gender roles and proscribed behaviours. Judith Butler links identity to the

concepts of sex, gender and sexuality. Describing what she terms to be "intelligible

genders," Butler traces the expected continuity between sex, gender, sexual practice and desire (*Gender Trouble* 17). This continuity creates the illusion of a unity of gender where it denotes "a unity of experience, of sex, gender and desire" (22) that requires a stable and oppositional heterosexuality.

In her *Trilogy of the Sicilian Family*, then, Emma Dante explores the limits of this normative discourse, challenging its functionality. Her male and female characters conform strictly and excessively to normative gender behaviours and sexualities with often catastrophic results. In her later plays, however, gendered roles, bodies and sexualities are opened up for discussion and new possibilities are revealed.

Attempts at Conformance

Looking first at Emma Dante's early plays, we can observe how the imposition of strictly normative gender behaviour in order to create a semblance of gender unity, creates frustrations within the characters who fail to achieve complete gender identification, resulting in negative outcomes and violence. This pattern first emerged in the play that brought Dante to prominence in 2001, *mPalermu.* It presents us with a non-nuclear family composed of two male and three female characters, some of whom are related by blood, others by marriage.[32] We encounter the family as they rise in the morning and prepare to leave the house to go out together. A series of obstacles

throughout the play prevents them from achieving this seemingly modest goal of

leaving the house. *mPalermu* presents a closed and claustrophobic space in which the

family live out their lives. Set in one room of the family home, its theatrical presentation

conjures a sense of enclosure, confinement and oppression – what Andrea Porcheddu

and Patrizia Bologna have described as "una suggestione opprimente di chiusura" ("an

oppressive impression of enclosure") where "predomina sempre una 'casalinghitudine'

molto stretta, davvero senza via d'uscita" ("a narrow 'domesticity' predominates,

providing absolutely no way out" Porcheddu *Palermo dentro* 46).[33] The characters relate

to each other principally through conflict, and seem incapable of interaction with the

external world.

Dante uses the play as a site of exploration for received and normative notions of

femininity and masculinity. Throughout the play the two male characters, Mimmo and

Giammarco, conform to the masculine roles of authority, dominance and independence.

The three female characters, Nonna Citta, Zia Lucia and Rosalia, instead, generally

follow the normative female behaviour and are silent and dependent. The male

discourse is privileged; the women are silenced or spoken over when they attempt to

contribute. The image here is one of male dominance, punctured by attempts at female

expression. There are fissures in this seemly smooth exterior, however. At key

moments, the characters reject the restrictions of gender norms and perform

transgressive acts. Early in the play, just as the family are about to leave the apartment,

Mimmo realises that Rosalia is wearing slippers, not shoes. He refuses to allow her go

out in public wearing her slippers. Rosalia actually does not possess a pair of shoes and

tries to communicate this to Mimmo, who refuses point blank to listen to her objections.

As her voice is not heard, Rosalia expresses her frustration and resistance through a

transgressive and demonstrative striptease. Acting with "l'intenzione di provocare uno

scandalo" ("the intention of creating a scandal" Dante *Carnezzeria* 37), Rosalia steps

outside of accepted and acceptable gendered behaviour in order to register her non-

conformity with Mimmo's ruling, and therefore the wider gender hierarchy.[34] Although

Rosalia speaks a monologue just before the removal of her clothes, it is my contention

that her voice is not heard in the economy of the play and that only through the use of

her body in ways that contest normative gender behaviour can Rosalia have any hope

of resistance.[35]

In *Carnezzeria*, the normative masculine and feminine gender roles already

present in *mPalermu* are elaborated and brought to their extreme. "Carnezzeria" is the

name used in Palermo for a butcher's shop. The play title is a metaphor for the

destructive power of the family and specifically, the status of protagonist Nina who is

considered by her brothers to be nothing more than "carne da macello" ("meat for

butchering" 75); inferior, something less than human. Goffredo Fofi has described the

play as a "danza di morte" ("dance of death" 58). In *Carnezzeria*, we meet the Cuore

family, again non-nuclear in make-up, which is composed of three brothers and one

sister. Nina, the sister is characterised as, "una bambina fragile e indifesa: Nina 'a scimunita" ("a fragile and defenceless child: Nina the idiot" 80).

Nina is forced to replicate normative female behaviours; she is a carer, who is confined to the home and denied any expression or freedom- she is literally a domestic and sexual slave.[36] The three brothers, Paride, Ignazio and Toruccio have brought Nina a great distance from their shared home to a church where she is to await her new husband, who will marry her that very day.[37] This elaborate fairy-tale narrative has been invented as a means of abandoning Nina and her unborn child. Nina is subject to psychological and physical violence at the hands of her brothers in the course of the play. *Carnezzeria* conceals two family secrets; the first is the secret of the sexual abuse of the boys by their father as children. The second is that Nina's pregnancy is due to sexual abuse at the hands of her brothers.

The ideal of virile male heterosexuality is the locus of the principal conflict in the play.[38] Critic Renato Palazzi identified *Carnezzeria* as being characterised by "le ossessioni maschiliste degli uomini e la subalternità della donna" ("the chauvinist obsessions of men and the subordination of women" "Una macabra festa"). The characters' investment in the expected continuity between sex, gender, sexual practice and desire is such that its mere questioning provokes a violent encounter between the brothers. Examining an old family photograph of a child dressed in a pink dress,

Ignazio states that it is not their cousin, Graziella, but rather Toruccio. This accusation proves inflammatory and explosive and Toruccio flies into a violent fury. The culmination of the argument is precipitated by Ignazio calling Toruccio a "finocchio" ("faggot"); an explicit reference to the sexual abuse he suffered in childhood at his father's hands. At the core of this confrontation is Toruccio's perceived failure to adequately fulfil a normative heterosexual male role, which has been tainted by what the brothers categorize as homosexual activity during the sexual abuse. This inability to perform a normative male role is highlighted in Toruccio, but must affect all three men, as they were all similarly abused by their father.[39] Consequently, there is a clear struggle in all three men to reconcile the trauma of their sexual abuse with their normative heterosexual masculine identity and, unable to do so, they channel their vexation into physical and sexual violence. The violence is sometimes directed against one another, but more frequently against the weakest member of the family, Nina. The brothers bring the societal normative sexual roles to their extreme conclusion in their relationship with the defenceless and childlike Nina. Her brothers mould her into a domestic and sexual slave. A prisoner in her home, Nina is not only an excellent domestic worker who does everything for the brothers, but she is also required to be unquestioningly obedient.

> NINA. Io so fare tutto: so cucinare, so lavare, faccio bene la lavabiancheria [...] So stirare, so pulire le scale del pianerottolo, so fare i regali, una volta alla settimana pulisco i lampadari e una volta al mese dentro gli armadi.
> […]

> (*Pausa*) Faccio tutto a comando (*Carnezzeria* 127)

> NINA. I'm able to do everything: I can cook, I can wash up, I'm good at the
> washing machine […] I can iron, I can clean the landing stairs, I'm able to buy
> presents, once a week I clean the hanging lamps and once a month inside the
> wardrobes.
> […]
> (*Pause)* I do what I'm told, when I'm told.

The brothers, nevertheless, demonstrate an unrelenting and unmerciful cruelty to

Nina; exploiting her ruthlessly for their own deires. The audience identifies with Nina,

whose simple wish is to live out the normative female dream of getting married, having

a husband and a family of her own. The brothers eventually abandon her in the church,

and, left alone, Nina hangs herself with her wedding veil.

In the early plays, then, Dante illustrates the negative consequences – violence

and abuse - of rigidly imposed gender normativity and compulsory heterosexuality. In

some of her later plays, however, she deconstructs these roles showing positive

outcomes, thus allowing Italian men and women to think about gender, sex and

sexuality in new ways.

Challenging Binary Gender

We will now look at two plays, *Mishelle di Sant'Oliva* and *Le Pulle* in which Dante

allows her characters to disrupt and play with traditional masculinities, gender roles

and identities while presenting a spectrum of sexualities and sexual practices. These

plays have a distinct LGBTQ focus, and can be seen to draw on a tradition that

incorporates, in an Italian context, plays such as Mario Mieli's play *La Traviata Norma.*

ovvero: Vaffanculo... ebbene sì! (1976), and Annibale Ruccello's *Le cinque rose di Jennifer*

(1980). Plays that prominently feature LGBT characters are, in an Italian context, quite

rare. *Mishelle di Sant'Oliva*, first produced in 2005, presents us with a father and son who

are living in the shadow of a long absent mother. Gaetano refuses to look his son,

Salvatore, in the face. Salvatore is, in the author words, "un ragazzino omosessuale che

batte il marciapiede per procurare da vivere a sé e al padre" ("a young homosexual guy

that walks the streets to earn a living for himself and his father" Dante "Le famose"). In

contrast to the *Trilogy of the Sicilian Family*, where anguished and suffering characters

follow traditional gender roles, Salvatore lives contentedly outside the strictures of

traditional normative gender behaviours; talking openly about his nocturnal

homosexual activities, dancing and singing on the balcony, and taking pride in dressing

as a woman. In this play, Dante presents us, for the first time in her writing, with a

character that does not conform to the demands of an intelligible gender. Any sense of

shame the son may feel about his gender identity is purged at the close of the play,

when, in a moment of mutual recognition and acceptance, Salvatore reveals himself in

female dress to his father, and finally they both look one another in the eye.

> MISHELLE. Guarda, papà, come passeggio a Sant'Oliva, tutte le sere, come
> faceva mia madre: da una punta all'altra punta. E tutti mi chiamano:
> "Mishella? Dove sei stata ieri sera?" "Me ne sono andata in discoteca!" "Miii,
> tutta ballerina sei, Mishella!!" Chiamami, papà! Chiamami: "Mishella!"

> *Mishelle si ferma, si scopre il petto e dopo essersi accarezzata apre la bocca e simula un pompino. Il padre la guarda.*
> *Lentamente Mishelle si volta verso di lui. Si avvicina con grande sensualità, lo bacia castamente in fronte e lo abbraccia* (Dante *Mishelle*)

> MISHELLE. Look Dad, look how I walk the Sant'Oliva strip every night, like my mother did; from one end to the other. And they all call out to me "Mishelle? Where were you last night?" "I went to a disco!" "Wow, you're a real dancer, Mishelle!" Call me, Dad! Call me "Mishelle!"

> *Mishelle stops, exposes her chest and after touching herself, opens her mouth to simulate a blowjob. Her father watches.*
> *Slowly Mishelle turns to him. She comes closer to him, moving sensually; she kisses him chastely on the forehead and hugs him*

Both men recognise Mishelle's alternative expression of gender identity, her rejection of "intelligible gender" and departure from traditional masculinity. The play closes with this momentous acceptance of difference.

Le Pulle, premiered in 2009, underlines Emma Dante's belief that a looser understanding of gender is both favourable and necessary not only for the individual, but also for a more harmonious society. *Le Pulle* features four transvestites and one transsexual prostitute. Echoing Judith Butler's statement that "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results (*Gender Trouble* 25), the characters refuse to conform to gender stereotyping; mixing and matching features of typically male and female behaviour and bodily stylization. One of the characters was born with male anatomical features and is undergoing medical treatment to become female. The other four, however, have no desire to become women, but behave in a mode that

incorporates elements that would traditionally be described as female. The traditional binary framework of gender and is swept away and normative masculinities are discarded. These characters live outside of the confines of normative intelligible gender, dressing as women, using female names, but engaging in male homosexual sex and retaining (with the exception of one) male anatomical features. The community they form is necessary, however, because of society's refusal to accept such a deviation from intelligible gender, and this rejection often results in violence. Despite this, their existence is portrayed as happy precisely because they are free to express their sex, gender, sexuality and desire as they wish.

There is then a stark contrast in the outcomes for characters who invest in intelligible genders and those who do not in Dante's plays. In her early plays, Dante's focus on traditional gender roles, behaviours, and sexualities leads to violence and predominantly negative outcomes. In *Mishelle di Sant'Oliva* and *Le Pulle*, Dante disrupts these normative categories with positive outcomes thus, allowing Italian women and men to imagine new possibilities outside the strictures of traditional categories of gender and desire. The disparity in outcomes encourages audiences towards a reassessment of gender roles and the gender binary itself within Italian society, and points towards the potential acceptance of alternative identities, sexualities and roles as a liberating and transformative stratagem for the wider community.

Intervention into Received Themes

Gilbert & Gubar posit that in the context of creation, the choice of themes poses a significant challenge to women writers. Identifying a predominance of male-focussed genres and plot-lines within the canon, they argue that this negatively effects the female writer as "she herself secretly realizes that her employment of (and participation in) patriarchal plots and genres inevitably involves her in duplicity or bad faith" (69). Gilbert & Gubar's analysis however, subsumes the issue of themes in a wider discourse on genres and plotlines within the canon. This study will pause to give greater consideration to thematic concerns - separate to issues of genre and plot.

Playwrights today must engage with a canon that has long privileged male-centred themes that fail to include female experience in theatre. Traditionally, themes concerning men and the public sphere, such as the world of work, politics and the father-son relationship, have been placed at the centre of theatrical discourse, with female-centred themes, such as maternity, being relegated to positions of minor importance within the collective cultural imagination. When matters that included women, such as the family and marriage were featured, they were generally filtered through the lens of male experience by male writers. As Melissa Sihra has pointed out, Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) can be considered an example of such filtering (Sihra *Women in Irish Drama* 208). The switch from male-centred thematic concerns and

characterisation to female-centred discourse is a complicated process that necessarily has implications for the reception of the work, especially if one considers Jill Dolan's contention that "[t]he male spectator's position is the point from which the text is most intelligible" (*The Feminist Spectator as Critic*. 13). Female-authored dramaturgies may dislodge the privileged male spectator from his red velvet seat in the process of revision, thus confounding the traditional criteria for evaluation of a work. Writers who now attempt to engage with thematic concerns that are pertinent to women must, unfortunately, contend with critical opinion that undervalues such issues, thinking them to be less worthy in artistic terms. This idea is expressed concisely by Caroline Williams of Glasshouse Productions who reports that critics of their work believed that "a play which explored women's sexuality, pornography, eating disorders and more was marginal because it was not about men" (137). [40]

How do Marina Carr and Emma Dante react to the absence of female-centred discourse and thematic concerns in canonical models? Following Lisa Fitzpatrick's claim that "drama by women disrupts hegemonic narratives" (320), this study contends that Dante and Carr challenge the traditional presentation of canonical themes and their concomitant ideologies in a twofold manner; first by reframing the dominant discourse from a female perspective and, secondly, by focussing on themes, previously marginalised, that are central to women's experience. Carr shifts her focus onto the theme of maternity and reframes the discourse on heterosexual relationships from a

female perspective in many of her plays, while Dante challenges the traditionally

positive portrayal of the Italian family in her deconstruction and exposure of its

negative mechanisms.

Motherhood and the Ideal Mother

Carr brings the previously marginalised female issue of maternity into a position

of centrality within her plays' economy. The maternity theme is one that has

traditionally been neglected in favour of the male-centred themes of paternity and

father-son relationships. If we consider Melissa Sihra's assertion that "[t]heatre is an

ideal forum within which to re-imagine conservative notions of corporeality, sexuality

and gendered identity" ("Playing" 157), we see that Carr uses it to challenge one of the

most ingrained cultural tropes relating to Irish women, the idea "that 'woman' and

'mother' are innately linked" ("Playing" 168). Countering the traditionally idealised

image of woman as loving and self-sacrificing mother,[41] Carr's mothers are absent and

longed for (*By the Bog of Cats…*), ill-equipped for the role *(Ariel)*, detached, distant, and

fall short of the task of loving their children (*Portia Coughlan*, *The Mai*). They are the

destroyers of their children emotionally and physically (*Ariel, By the Bog of Cats...*), they

measure motherhood according to quantity not quality (*Low in the Dark*, *Woman and*

Scarecrow) and they ultimately contest the myth that mothering alone can be enough to

sustain a woman in life (*Marble*). The machinations, processes and emotions of

motherhood as portrayed thus far in Irish theatre are exposed, examined and deconstructed.

Anna McMullan, in her article "Marina Carr's Unhomely Women," has noted how, in Carr's work, "[t]he culturally hallowed role of maternity is demystified" (14). The elevated position within the cultural ideal for the Mother figure is also recognised and interrogated by scholars such as Fitzpatrick, Leeney, Sihra, Sweeney and Trench. The mother figure in Ireland has traditionally been a signifier for the nation, and has been portrayed as a self-sacrificing and self-effacing individual. Sihra's various analyses have illustrated how Carr counters the assumed link between woman and mother,[42] resists the images of women as symbols of the nation,[43] and disrupts the traditional depiction of domestic tranquillity through the medium of her alternative mothers.[44]

Low in the Dark (1989)[45] begins a line of inquiry into maternity with a light-hearted exposure of the facade of Irish motherhood that would prove to be a continual presence throughout Carr's work. It is a satirical analysis of "Irish motherhood as measured by quantity" as advocated by the Catholic Church (Sweeney 192). The mother figure in the play, Bender, churns out baby after baby, unconcerned about their sex, names or characters. It is the act of reproducing, of motherhood itself that is important. For decades, the Catholic Church's policies against contraception meant that numerous pregnancies for Irish women and large families, with the number of children going into

double figures, were not unusual. This focus on the quantity of children, to the neglect

of attention on the quality of parenting and family life, was a feature of Irish life for

many decades. Woman[46] in *Woman and Scarecrow* exemplifies out this Catholic policy,

with children that range significantly in age from Michael, who's climbing Everest, to

her youngest, Hal, who isn't long in school and "can't even read yet" (13). Scarecrow

links her obsession with pregnancy and motherhood to a desire for accumulation and

possession:

> Numbers. You just wanted numbers. You just wanted to look and
> say this one is mine and this one and this and him and her and
> those and that pair up there in the oak tree. Mine. All mine. That's
> what you wanted. Greedy for numbers. Insatiable for the head
> count. The leg count. I own sixteen pairs of legs and the two that
> didn't make it and eight noses and sixteen eyes and the two that
> didn't make it and sixteen ears and eighty fingers and eighty toes
> and reciting their names and ages to knock yourself out after
> another exhausting day of counting and coveting and even still
> wondering if you could squeeze another one in as you slide into
> your grave (16)

Carr questions the value of such a form of motherhood, by placing it within an

economy of possession. Scarecrow's description of Woman's style of maternity is

loaded with connotations of cupidity, greed and consumption. The individuality of the

children is elided; Scarecrow's words cloud together to form an image of a mass of

disembodied limbs and body parts, not one of whole and individual children. It seems

that the focus of Woman's motherhood is not the welfare and well-being of each child,

but rather a deep-seated desire for ownership and authorship.

In the process of maternity, Woman has sacrificed her own potential for the sake of a mediocre husband and her eight children. On her own admission she has used her children as a screen to hide behind, an escape route to avoid the difficult choices in life and an excuse to stay in a loveless and resentful marriage; "if it wasn't for the children I'd have walked years ago" (39). There is a resounding criticism of this approach from Scarecrow who concludes that the children were her "shield to beat the world away" (66). Motherhood, instead of a self-less act it has long been portrayed as becomes, in Carr's representation, self-serving and selfish. In this subversion of the traditional image of the self-less mother, Carr problematizes and complicates traditional perceptions of motherhood.

The inversion of the image of the self-less mother is furthered in her portrayal of what I will term the "self-full" mother figure; a mother who is full of a sense of her own needs within the bounds of the maternal relationship. Not only is motherhood understood in terms of an economy of possession, but Carr also examines the power relations between mother and child in her plays. Carr's early plays often depict women whose children are secondary to their own personal and sexual needs (*The Mai, Portia Coughlan)*, while her later plays (*Woman and Scarecrow* and *Marble*) explore the consequences of placing your children's needs before your own. Carr focusses in on the power dynamic within the mother-child relationship. Historically, the mother's rights have been considered secondary to those of the child, both in formal legislative terms

and informally in societal attitudes. Commenting on the privileging of the child in the

mother-child relationship, Carr criticises the tendency to elevate "the child at the

expense of the mother. It's like your life is not valid except in fulfilling this child's

needs" ("Interview with Stephenson and Langridge" 150).

Marble marked a departure in Carr's presentation of women and showed a

development in the representation of women more generally on the Irish stage, and

specifically the themes of maternity and heterosexual relationships.[47] Carr's earlier

plays had already examined these key areas, but *Marble* takes up the threads of these

themes spun before and weaves them into a more explicitly feminist revisionary

strategy. In *Marble,* Carr examines the interplay of mother and child's needs. Catherine

is a housewife and stay at home mother, who ostensibly embodies the lifestyle so

revered by tradition. Like Woman in *Woman and Scarecrow*, Catherine seems to have had

numerous children (*Marble* 29). Instead of a picture of domestic bliss, however, we are

presented with a troubled and restless wife and mother. Motherhood takes the place of

a career, with both of the women featured in the play working as full-time mothers.

Catherine, along with Art's wife Anne, is clearly disillusioned with the responsibilities,

the lifestyle and the rewards that her status as a mother and housewife brings. She is a

caring mother who loves her children, showing no trace of the indifference, distance or

fear evident in the Mai's or Portia Coughlan's relationship with their children.[48]

Nonetheless, Catherine echoes Portia's boredom and sense of defeat in the face of

unrelenting motherhood "[a]fter seventeen years of crying children you get pretty immune" (29). It becomes evident that her suffering stems from the subjugation of herself to her children. A terrible sense of a life characterised only by routine and endless monotony emerges from the first scene between Ben and Catherine; he repeats the same line he says every night when he comes home, she can predict what he had for dinner (15). Anne, Art's wife, also seems to be fossilised into the normative role of mother and housewife, finding it so unsatisfying that it has become no more than a lengthy wait for death. She is "[j]ust waiting for it all to end like everyone else" (26). In contrast to the traditional utopian ideal of motherhood, for Carr's women, domestic life - which ideally should be filled with pleasurable dedication to her children - is instead one of confinement and boredom edging on despair. Ben believes that they must rear their "young until they can survive without us. And that's it" (57). This is simply not enough for Catherine, on whose shoulders almost the total responsibility of the task is laid. She rejects the renunciation of her hopes, desires and identity, solely for her children's sake. Instead, at the close of the play she leaves the family home, and her role as mother, in order to pursue her own personal desires. The dynamic of the mother's needs being subjugated to the child's is inverted. The needs of the mother are this time privileged.

Carr's depiction of mothers then, is complex, broad and varying. She explores through her characters a range of (un)motherly behaviours and examines their

consequences. It would be difficult to describe her work as a celebration of motherhood; rather, it is a dissection of the emotions, positions and sacrifices that can be concomitant to motherhood. Carr investigates the ambivalence that women, as mothers, can feel towards their children and the process of motherhood. On the spectrum of emotions that accompany mothering, she notes that "[w]e mostly only acknowledge the good ones. If we were allowed to talk about the other ones, maybe it would alleviate them in some way" ("Interview with Stephenson & Langridge" 150/1). Carr's representations address these "other ones" on the national stage and thus begin an introduction of these diverging representations into the cultural imagination. Carr, in so doing, brings the theme of motherhood to the centre of her plays' discourse and critically revises the ideal of maternity that has had cultural currency within Irish society for decades.

Marriage and Heterosexual Relationships

A second strategy regarding thematic concerns is the reframing of existing discourses and themes; rejecting the previous focus and privileging a new perspective. Carr follows this strategy in relation to the theme of heterosexual relationships and marriage. This is a theme which has often formed the central concern of dramatic texts. Traditionally, however, with a few notable exceptions,[49] the privileged point of view in this focus has been that of the male partner or husband. Carr challenges that history by

approaching the issue of thematic representation with a decided focus on the female

experience.

Carr explores women's attachment to and reliance on men, even where it is

problematic. The traditional model of male-female relationships was that of the

authoritative male, and the submissive, passive and self-sacrificing female. Her women

resist and contest this model. The incompatibility of men and women was a

preoccupation articulated very early on in Carr's writing, in plays such as *Low in the*

Dark (1989) and *Ullaloo* (1991). Examining this theme, studies have noted how Carr's

female characters are often attached to, and dependent on, unsuitable male partners or

figures.[50] Throughout Carr's plays, the audience is asked to see the theme of

heterosexual relationships and marriage from the female point of view through the gaze

of her characters. That is not to say that Carr in any way romanticises the female

perspective; as in her other strategies, Carr problematizes and interrogates the woman's

position. Her female characters tend to search for meaning and identity through poorly

equipped men and often wilfully ignore the dire reality of their relationship. The Mai

insists on welcoming Robert back with open arms, even though all the signs point to his

faithlessness and disinterest, Frances in *Ariel* stays with Fermoy despite the lack of love

and his propensity to violence, and Woman (*Woman and Scarecrow*) wilfully maintains

her love for Him in the face of overwhelming evidence of his disinterest and

unworthiness. There is a definite sense that these women cannot bear to be without the

men in their lives; that they do not know how to be alone.[51] Across the works of her

oeuvre, Carr's women continue to choose unsuitable men, but the results of this unwise

choice gradually become less drastic as the years pass. Whereas rejection by Robert and

Carthage led the Mai and Hester respectively to suicide and murder, Woman (*Woman*

and Scarecrow) just loses all desire to live, having reached a point of bitter resignation. In

the early plays the female characters' attachment to their men is intense and destructive,

while in the later plays, especially *Marble*, the power of the bond wanes allowing the

female character to see beyond the male partner; facilitating a more significant search

for identity, subjectivity and meaning.

In *Marble*, Catherine does not hold fast to her unsuitable man. Unlike the

protagonists of *The Mai* and *By the Bog of Cats…* who, in their ferocious attachment to

the men in their lives fight tooth and nail to keep them, Catherine decides to leave her

husband Ben. Provoked by the passion of her dream, she sets about unpicking and

examining the threads of her relationship with him. When she finds it lacking, she

detaches herself from it. Catherine discards the trope of the passive and submissive

woman and becomes authoritative in her evaluation of their marriage, assessing it as

merely a product of social convention. Their incompatibility becomes manifest as

Catherine begins to question the institutions and social norms that keep them together.

Carr thus dramatizes the tension between the legal institution of marriage and the

desires of the individual woman. Catherine comes to see the societally constructed

norms of marriage as senseless and confining, but her husband Ben, however, regards

them as necessary and reassuring – something that protects them from the anarchy of

the world: "I know the wilderness is out there, and that we are safe inside seems to me

a great miracle" (60). Ben's insistence on the importance of structure and order alienates

Catherine, who instead feels compelled to deconstruct the façade of normality and ask

the big existential questions of life:

> CATHERINE. What are these senseless rules we live by? Who decided them and
> why? (32)

Whereas women like the Mai and Hester, and indeed Anne in *Marble,* deliberately

ignore signs of incompatibility with their men, Catherine instead recognises and accepts

them, inspiring her to take up a position of agency in ending her marriage.

The assumed authority and dominance of the male in heterosexual relationships

is also explored in Carr's plays. Dependence on men, and women's concomitant self-

sacrifice, are shown to have negative consequences for the personal development and

expression of females. The women that populate Carr's plays are rich and interesting

individuals who possess many talents and capacities. These talents are not always

developed to the full, however. They are often neglected or underdeveloped and

suppressed for the gratification of the men in their lives. Historically, self-sacrifice was a

quality expected of women; they sacrificed themselves for the greater good of the

family in reproductive, material and emotional terms; this was an important factor in the promotion of male authority in the home and wider society. In her work, Carr questions this tradition. The Mai is an excellent cello player, better than Robert, but hasn't played in years because her brilliance undermined him. Similarly, Woman (*Woman and Scarecrow*) played the piano better than her husband, Him, a "barbarian" who murders Chopin (29) and admits that "he never liked me to do anything better than him" (28). Woman (*The Cordelia Dream)*, sacrifices more than a hobby, when she brings a halt to her successful composing career to allow her father regain his status as a composer. This conformance to the tropic depiction of the female figure in theatre as a self-sacrificing martyr could be problematic from a feminist point of view, if it were not for Carr's development of the matter in her later plays. The willingness to suppress the self changes with Catherine in *Marble*; a woman who refuses to follow the path of self-sacrifice.

The moment in which Catherine leaves Ben is a significant development in the representation of the figure of Woman in Irish theatre history. Echoing Nora's departure in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) and the protagonist of the same name in *In the Shadow of the Glen* by J.M. Synge,[52] Catherine leaves her husband behind in the private realm of the family home to face an uncertain, but independent, future. In contrast to Synge's Nora, who leaves her home and husband to walk the road with the Tramp - thus tying her future destiny to another man - Carr's protagonist leaves alone.[53]

Although, initially she saw a union with Art as a viable alternative - a simple substitution of one man for another - Art's refusal to go with her helps Catherine realise that her future existence cannot rely on any man. While Carr's previous female characters feared being alone, Catherine realises that she does not need a male companion to continue. The mould of the formulaic heterosexual relationship is broken. Art was, in her words "just a signal, a beacon, not important in himself but a sign" that has brought her to a different place. Though she initially mistook him for "the great magic thing that has been missing" (58), Catherine comes to recognise that it is not Art that has been lacking, but rather her own identity. No man will provide her with wholeness and fulfilment, she must be her own salvation - she must look to herself. In rejecting the traditional model of the heterosexual relationship as a barrier to her own self-knowledge, Catherine revises the canonical presentation of marriage and relationships between men and women, proposing that development of and dependence on the self is the way to true identity.

In her examination of heterosexual relationships from the woman's perspective, Carr first examines and then rejects traditional models of the stable marriage, the strong husband and the dependent wife. She does not simply invert the tropes, but looks critically at both men and women's behaviour within the limits of the heterosexual couple. In her examination of the theme of heterosexual relationships through women's eyes, she shifts the focus from the traditionally male perspective to that of the female,

and in the process uncovers and exposes the weaknesses and confusion that women

have in their relationships with men. She presents women who find it a challenge to

conceive of themselves without a male companion and women who sacrifice

themselves for the gratification of those men. In *Marble*, however, Carr represents a

woman who critically scrutinizes the value of such roles and ultimately rejects them.

The dominant discourse on the theme of marriage and heterosexual relationship is

challenged and resisted.

Subverting the Sacred "Family" – "la famiglia da cui siamo protetti e di cui siamo prigionieri"[54]

Also working towards a shifting and reimagining of traditional notions is Emma

Dante's portrayal of the family. In contrast to the traditional and prevailing

romanticization of the Italian family, Dante presents a dystopic vision of familial

relations, especially in her *Trilogy of the Sicilian Family*. Redrawing the family from a

female point of view (Morreale 102), Dante depicts it as a site of oppression, neglect,

violence and abuse. Like Martin McDonagh's plays, which portray the family and home

as "sites of never ending physical and emotional feuds" (Trench 13), Dante's families,

with rare exceptions,[55] are paralyzed and self-referencing (*mPalermu*), sites of horrific

intergenerational abuse (*Carnezzeria* and *Le Pulle*), dysfunctional and lacking in love (*Il

Festino*).[56] Dante deconstructs the traditional patriarchal, child-centred and Catholic

institution of the family, so important to Italian social, political and cultural life, and

reveals its oppressive and destructive potential. Her investigation of the family, though damning, is not altogether negative, however. In her later plays, Dante seems to suggest a redemptive possibility for the institution through a process of transformation and development. Two key solutions are put forward; firstly, the acceptance of difference - particularly in relation to gender and sexuality, and the creation of alternative family groupings.

In the preceding chapter, we noted how many of Dante's onstage families are lacking parental figures. We now make the observation that most of the families presented are non-nuclear in composition and incomplete, but are nevertheless based on strong traditional blood and marriage ties and their concomitant duties and responsibilities. Emma Dante's presentation of the Italian family resists and subverts traditional concepts that elevate and mythologise the institution.

The family has long been considered the fundamental building block on which Italian society has been constructed. The family is central both to the social and economic life of the country. Janet Finch, in a 1989 study of families in seven countries commented "[t]o Italians relationships with both relatives and friends form a much more integral part of daily life than elsewhere. They are more likely to share a home with their relatives and also to have relatives living nearby … Relationships between parents and children seem particularly important" (qtd in Ginsborg 68). Paul Ginsborg

in his book *Italy and its Discontents: Family, Civil Society, State, 1980-2001*(2001) draws a

convincing picture of the complexities of this Italian family life lived in close proximity.

He underlines the centrality of the family as both a metaphor and an actuality in Italian

life (xiii). A striking feature that emerges from Ginsborg's analysis is the potential of the

Italian family to provide stability, support and sustenance, but often at the cost of

encouraging dependency and a diminution of the importance of the individual in

favour of the group (81).

Dante dramatizes the limits and constrictions of family life in Italy, especially in

Sicily, where the bonds of family would appear to be even stronger than elsewhere in

Italy.[57] Sicilian novelist and political commentator Leonardo Sciascia once described the

concept of family in Sicily as extending far beyond that of a unit based on bonds of love:

> la famiglia è l'unico istituto veramente vivo nella coscienza del siciliano: ma vive
> più come drammatico nodo contrattuale, giuridico, che come aggregato naturale
> e sentimentale. La famiglia è lo Stato del siciliano (94)

> the only institution in the Sicilian conscience that really counts, is the family;
> counts, that is to say, more as a dramatic juridical contract or bond than as a
> natural association based on affection. The family is the Sicilian's state. [58]

If we agree with Paul Ginsborg's analysis that the Italian family is "child-

orientated, patriarchal and Catholic" (69), then Dante's work systematically constructs a

vision of the family that questions or resists these definitions. Contrary to the cultural

norm of child-oriented families, children in Dante's plays are often ignored, treated

with indifference, neglected and abused.[59] Far from its typical representation as a loving

and secure place for the young, in Dante's plays the family is instead a hostile

environment for children. Although Dante does not deal with the issue of maternity

directly as Carr does, she focusses on the fate of progeny whose parents do not care for

them in an adequate manner. There is a marked indifference on the parents' behalf

when it comes to their own off-spring. Thus, the three sons in *Carnezzeria* fail to be

protected from their predatory father by their mother, who is either unaware of the

sexual abuse he subjects them to, or is perhaps complicit in it.[60] The boys suffer a

significant trauma as a result of this abuse. The mother figure in *Il Festino*, neglects her

son in favour of her husband. In an inversion of typical familial responsibilities, when

the young child returns unaccompanied and soaking wet after his father failed to collect

him from school, the mother is more concerned that the child hasn't brought his father

home, than about her son's wellbeing. This mother wilfully neglects her child's raging

high temperature with a catastrophic outcome - he consequently suffers a permanent

distortion to his voice. Finally, in *Le Pulle* neglect turns to exploitation when transvestite

prostitute Moira recalls being woken by his/her mother as a 12 year-old boy one

morning in order to introduce him/her into prostitution (106). The family instead of

being child-oriented becomes a locus of the neglect and abuse of children; a site of

danger, menace and suffering.

The patriarchal identity of the Italian family is explored through Dante's work.

She presents families built on the hierarchical structures advocated by patriarchal

ideologies. The maintenance of this structure is exposed as a driving force behind the

violence experienced within the boundaries of the familial unit. The family as a prime

site of violence and abuse is first explored in *mPalermu*; it is already, in this early play, a

site of patriarchal oppression and conflict, controlled with both violence and the threat

of violence.[61] Mimmo assumes the role of the patriarchal head of the family, though he

is significantly younger than both Nonna Citta and Zia Lucia. As "capo-famiglia"

("head of the family"), his authority is asserted and maintained through violence. Early

in the play, Giammarco (the only other male in the family) dares to criticise Mimmo's

appearance, claiming that his trousers "[s]u' curti" ("are too short" *Carnezzeria* 27) and

"[s]tritti" ("too tight" 28) and noting that he is also wearing "i quasètti rosa" ("pink

socks" 29).[62] Mimmo reacts with fury to this perceived challenge to his masculinity and

authority; he punishes not only Giammarco but also the rest of the family in a whipping

frenzy. In the episode called, "Le cinghiate dell'amore" ("The Lashes of Love"), Mimmo

uses his belt as a whip to "segna il cammino di Zia Lucia, Giammarco, Rosalia e Nonna

Citta" ("score the path of Aunty Lucia, Giammarco, Rosalia and Granny Citta" 30).

During the whipping, Mimmo speaks alternately in terms of love and of hate. First, he

invokes the familial bonds of love and affection that tie them together:

> Tutti cosi io fazzu per voi, tutto! Amunì, zia Lucia, che ti vogghiu bene. A tutti vogghiu bene. Puru a tia Giammarco, veni ccà! 'Un mi lassàri sulu comu un cane, ca ti vogghiu bene. (31)

> Everything I do is for you, everything! Come on Aunty Lucia, I'm very fond of you. I love you all. Even you Giammarco, come here! Don't leave me here on my own, 'cause I'm fond of you all

Then, he moves on to bind those relationships to his authority, reasserting the responsibility they have to conform to the obligations inherent in the Italian patriarchal family system. He, as the ostensible head of the family, treats his relatives with aggression, insults and threats:

> MIMMO. Ma picchì mi stai taliànnu accussì, figghiu 'i suca minchia? 'Un m'aviti a taliàri, bastardi, 'un m'aviti a criticare. Mai! Picchì si no v'ammazzo, vi scanno!!! Fetenti, in polvere v'arridùciu …(32)

> MIMMO. Why are you looking at me like that, you sons of bitches? Don't dare look at me, you bastards, don't criticise me. Ever! Otherwise I'll murder you, I'll kill you!!! I'll reduce you dirty fuckers to dust …

Mimmo's patriarchal authority thus binds familial love to conformance. Affection is yoked to obedience. His power is paramount and everyone within the family must suffer in order to maintain it. In Dante's dystopian families, patriarchal authority is maintained through the use or threat of violence. *mPalermu* dramatizes the negatives of patriarchy at work within family systems, however, in this play the consequences are somewhat tempered. In the second play in the trilogy, Dante goes further in her

illustration of the damaging effects of excessive and uncontrolled patriarchal power in the family in her portrayal of sexual violence.

In *Carnezzeria* Dante illustrates patriarchal control and power at its extreme in her portrayal of the family as the site of brutality and sexual abuse. The play is unmitigating in its portrayal of the abuse, cruelty and oppression within the family. Thus, the family becomes a site of cyclical and intergenerational abuse. Like in *mPalermu* we see the patriarchal hierarchy at work, with Paride, the oldest brother at the top, and Nina as the idiot female at the very bottom. Brothers Toruccio and Ignazio jostle for position under Paride. The first significant conflict in the play emerges from this competition for status and position within the hierarchy. Nina's abuse is related to her gender identity as a woman within this hierarchical economy of the family. Dante, in *Carnezzeria* dramatizes the excess of patriarchal power and its devastating consequences for those positioned lower down on the ladder of the hierarchy. Nina, both as a person with an intellectual disability and as a woman, is at the bottom of the pecking order and, as a result, becomes a prisoner in her own home, is subjected to physical and sexual abuse and is ultimately left to die by her brothers. Dante broadens the limits of this discourse from the specific situation of the Cuore family to a comment on wider Sicilian and Italian society through her underscoring of the family's social isolation. Though their home is physically located within the community, there is no evidence of any outside intervention or influence on the family on behalf of wider

society.[63] The absence of institutional support for, and involvement with the family - a problem that is a noted wider historical phenomenon in Sicily - is seen to facilitate the abuse of the patriarchal power at work within the family system.

In both *mPalermu* and *Carnezzeria*, Emma Dante contests traditional portrayals of the Italian family; it is depicted as a site of the subjugation of women, children and those who are in a lower position within the patriarchal hierarchy. Shifting the focus on this often-visited theme in Italian theatre history from male to female, Dante illustrates through her characters the damage and destruction wrought by the Italian family's patriarchal, Catholic ontology.[64]

Dante maintains a focus on the Catholic Church's policies on gender, sexuality and sexual practice in relation to the family in her plays; deconstructing the rhetoric and demonstrating the results of intolerance for difference. In *Mishelle di Sant'Oliva* and *Le Pulle*, the playwright illustrates how alternative gender and sexual identities are rejected and suppressed because they have no place within the economy of the traditional Catholic family, which insists on reified gender roles, stable gender identities, unity of gender and the primacy of heterosexual relationships. In these two plays in particular, Dante suggests a transformative possibility for the institution of the family through a process of change. A twofold solution is suggested. Firstly, Dante suggests the acceptance of difference within the family unit- whether it be difference

with regard to gender identities, intellectual ability or sexual preference - as key to familial unity and tranquillity. Secondly, she proposes the adoption of alternative family configurations. The issue of difference has been adequately explored in the earlier section of this chapter in relation to alternative identities and ontologies. As we have seen, father Gaetano's acceptance of his son Salvatore's alternative identity and sexuality leads to a thawing and pacification of relations between them in the closing scene. Through representations such as Salvatore in *Mishelle di Sant'Oliva* and in *Le Pulle*, Dante insists on the transformative potential of tolerance and acceptance of difference within the family.

In *Le Pulle*, Dante goes on to suggest that where one's own biological family has failed an individual, the construction of an alternative grouping is not only possible, but desirable. This idea is dramatized through the prostitutes' creation of a group that, in its provision of support and companionship, is parallel and analogous to that of a traditional family. She also suggests that the strict definitions of family, as created by the union of a man and woman through marriage, should be liberated and enlarged. This constitutes an advocacy for a transformation of the concept of the traditional family. Stellina, in Dante's *Le Pulle*, born with male genitalia, but dressed and named as female, wishes to marry her fiancé, a man named Rocco. The final scene of the play enacts Stellina's desire to marry Rocco; she first imagines the perfect scene:

> STELLINA. 'A gente è arrivata! Tutta 'a chiesa è china. 'O prevete ha da fa na funzione veloce veloce se no 'a gente si sfastiria e se ne va, pecchè 'a cosa cchiù importante è quannu 'o prevete dice: vuoi tu Stellina? Sì. Vuoi tu Rocco? Sì. 'Un ci dà manco 'o tempo di fernì 'a parola. Firmo io. Poi firma Rocco. A chistu punto puoi baciare la sposa. Applauso. Viva la sposa! Viva la sposa! (110) [65]

> STELLINA. Everybody's here! The church is packed. The priest had better get through the ceremony quick, otherwise people will get bored and leave. Because the most important moment is when the priest says "Do you, Stellina?" "Yes." "Do you, Rocco?" "Yes." There isn't even time to get the last word out. I sign. Then Rocco signs. You may now kiss the bride. Applause. Long live the bride! Hooray for the bride!

Her imaginary ideal however, is interrupted by the negative judgements of those gathered, which reflect the prejudices held in wider society: "ma che è? Un matrimonio ommini e ommini? Schhii!" ("what's this? A wedding between a man and another man? Yuk!" 110) The opposition to this alternative familial arrangement has a strong Catholic basis:

> STELLINA. Stai facendo scandalo dinanzi 'a chella croce. Se proprio devi farle ste purcherie, falle 'e nascosto… ma davanti a Dio e a Madonna devi portà rispetto!' (110)

> STELLINA. You're causing a scandal in front of the cross. If you want to do this filthy stuff, then do it on the sly … but here in the presence of God and the Virgin Mary you have to have respect!

Stellina seems defeated and breaks into tears. She will not be able to marry her Rocco in a church or elsewhere, but the play closes with a show of solidarity and strength between the couple. Among the final stage directions: "Stellina si alza e silenziosa si avvia verso l'altare dove Rocco-Mab l'aspetta a braccia aperte" ("Stellina gets up and

silently makes her way to the altar where Rocco-Mab awaits her with open arms" 110). There is a happy ending awaiting Dante's Cinderella Stellina; she will spend her days with her "principe azzurro" ("prince charming") Rocco, with or without societal, religious and state recognition and sanction.

Thus, Dante contests the hegemonic depictions of Italian family life as a haven for children, as led by the "strong man" at the head of the family and as Catholic in nature. Dante resists these definitions by portraying a dystopian vision of the family, as a site of abuse and violence, oppression and intolerance, but points to the possibility for change in the acceptance of difference and the creation of alternative family groupings.

The Palimpsest

In their confrontation with the canon, our playwrights encounter inadequate and tropic characterisations of women. The tropic female figures in the canon cannot be simply ignored; in Gilbert & Gubar's opinion, "a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' which male authors have generated for her" (17). Marina Carr explicitly challenges tropic representations of women in the canon by creating female characters that resist traditional images of women. Emma Dante's approach can be seen as more problematic, as her female characters coincide with established tropes, but while presenting such female characters, Dante simultaneously shifts her attention to the wider issue of

gender identity. Dante disrupts our traditional understanding of gender identities by blurring the distinctions between male and female and presenting alternative gender subjectivities and sexualities. Both writers disrupt tradition in their reframing and refocusing of canonical thematic concerns to undermine their basic premises or to shift the focus to privilege a female perspective.

Gilbert & Gubar are keen to underline women writers' subversive relationship with inherited canonical forms and content. Such subversion and resistance is not generally tolerated, they argue, and so women authors employ a sort of doublespeak that on the surface complies with the stated norms, while concealing another message. They provide a compelling description of this strategy as "palimpsestic." The image of the palimpsest, "a manuscript or piece of writing material on which later writing has been superimposed on effaced earlier writing" (*OED*) encapsulates perfectly these "works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" (Gilbert & Gubar 73). Although the palimpsest refers specifically to the super-imposition of one text upon another, in a theatrical context, we could substitute the written text for any of the many sign systems at work in the theatre. Marvin Carlson, in his book *The Haunted Stage* (2006) describes the stage as a memory machine that is "haunted" by the spectres of past performances, productions, actors, sets and texts. Carlson argues that an audience's experience of a performance is inevitably informed by the individual and collective memory. These memories, he

argues, can relate not only to the text, but also to the actors' bodies, the production and to the physical space of the theatre itself. Thus, spectators at a performance look at it through the filter of memory, and all performances play "in various degrees and combinations with that audience's collective and individual memories of previous experience with this play, this director, these actors, this story, this theatrical space" (165). It is these memories that form the "original" but faded text in the palimpsest model.

The theatrical palimpsest, then, is a useful metaphor for the work of Marina Carr and Emma Dante, who inscribe their own meanings onto the faded manuscript of canonical texts, previous theatrical performances, remembered and forgotten bodies and settings, thus simultaneously acknowledging their presence and renewing the tradition through radical interventions to it.

Chapter Four – Challenging Death(s)

> Nothing said about death by the living can possibly relate to death as it will be experienced by the dying. Nothing known about death by the dead can be communicated to the living. Over this appalling chasm tragedy throws a frail bridge of imagination.
>
> Howard Barker[1]

Having established the various ways in which the Anxiety of Ontology may manifest itself in the bounds of the writers' working strategies, both intratextually and extratextually, the following chapters turn their attention to the recurring use of the theme of death across Carr's and Dante's *oeuvre*. The repetition of the death motif over a significant number of the chosen writers' plays raises the question: why does this concern return so frequently in these playwrights' work? Taking Jonathon Dollimore's statement that "philosophical meditation on death frequently occurs […] in times of acute crisis" (41) as a starting point, the following two chapters, then, attempt to interrogate this question by considering the possibility that this recurrence of death is indicative of the authors' crisis of position -the Anxiety of Ontology. The disparate articulations of death and dying in Dante's and Carr's works are examined, placing particular emphasis on the two plays that contain self-death at the centre of the dramatic action; *Carnezzeria* and *Woman and Scarecrow.* The analysis will be

carried out on two levels; firstly, the deaths of the protagonists will be seen as a

staging of a measured rejection of the characters' poor material conditions and, as

such, can be read as a resistance to patriarchy; and secondly, it will be argued that

such dramatizations of death may signify and reflect the female dramatists' own

negotiation with the Anxiety of Ontology.[2] In the former case, death can function as a

dramatic device, but also as a vehicle for social concerns; in the latter, it may serve

also as a signifier for the writers' frustration regarding their position and their

dialogue with such an ontology.[3] A pattern, then, emerges from the female

playwrights' encounter with death in their work; instead of being the expected

negative signifier, death can be seen to becomes a site of resistance, rejection,

assertion and potentially, transformation.

A Signifier with a Multiplicity of Meanings

Carr's and Dante's plays are characterised by the conspicuous recurrence of the

theme of death. Not only do the plays often feature the death of the protagonist, such as

in *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, *By the Bog of Cats…*, *Woman and Scarecrow*, *mPalermu*,

Carnezzeria and *Vita Mia*, but death permeates the plays in a variety of ways and

through a multitude of figures. Contrasting the modern taste for signalling a clear

divide between life and death, in these playwrights' work, the lines and divisions

between this world and the next are not clearly drawn. A number of characters across

the playwrights' body of work occupy liminal spaces within the spectrum of life and death. Neither alive nor dead, these characters blur the boundaries of our understanding of death. The unstable and transformative nature of liminality is utilised by Carr and Dante in their characterisation and in the setting of their plays to facilitate a more profound investigation of life's greatest mystery - death. While studying the Ndembu tribe of Zambia, British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner formed the theory of liminality after Van Gennep's theories on *Rites de passage*. In his book, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967) Turner investigates rites of passage within the tribe; these rites are cultural practices and norms connected to the transition and movement from one social or religious state to another. Some of the rites Turner studied marked significant life-events such as birth, death, marriage, and puberty. In his study of rituals, Van Gennep had theorised that that all rites of transition have three stages; separation in which the subject is detached from "an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions," margin (or limen) in which "the state of the liminal subject (the 'passenger') is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state," and finally, aggregation, in which the subject is stable again and "is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards" (Turner 94). Turner then focussed on the middle phase; the liminal phase. Through the application of this liminal state, the typically closed states of dying and death are prised open for scrutiny.

Death is, undoubtedly, one of the widest ranging themes available for study. As a topic, its scope for investigation is almost limitless. It has been used in literary and theatrical representation as a dramatic device, and as a signifier that points to any number of meanings. Due to the scope of the topic of death, it would be impossible in the space allocated here to explore every aspect of such a motif within the playwrights' works. Therefore, I propose to briefly introduce what I believe are the main significances of the theme for both writers; firstly exploring the range of dead, moribund and revenant figures present in Carr's and Dante's work, before narrowing our focus to examine the self-deaths of two female protagonists, Nina and Woman. I will outline how Carr and Dante use the death motif to explore issues of memory and the past, to highlight social concerns, to scrutinize and develop new attitudes regarding death and death processes from a secular viewpoint, to investigate the relationship between the living and the dead, as well as to negotiate their own anxieties regarding their professional and artistic position.

In order to extrapolate these meanings from the many deathly characters and situations presented in the plays, it may be useful to adopt a provisional taxonomy of death in the plays of Dante and Carr. I propose that both writers present characters that can be considered under the following headings: 1) *The Dead* 2) *The Others* 3) *Those on the Threshold*.

The Dead

Theatre, as Marvin Carlson has noted, has a spectral quality about it, with one of the defining features of performance being "its ghostliness, its sense of return" (*The Haunted Stage* 1). Within this phantasmic frame, Carr and Dante conjure up a number of revenant figures; including the dead who return in spectral form or as memories. In Carr's plays, the dead often come back to this world as ghosts. Dante, instead, creates a world where embodied visitants do not appear, but where dead relatives haunt those who are still living in significant and disruptive ways via the medium of memory. In her dramatic worlds, the deceased serve as vehicles through which memory and the past, as well as the relationship between the living and the dead can be surveyed. Both playwrights demonstrate a "concern with destructive pasts that continue to haunt the present in harmful ways" (Trench 11).

Marina Carr plays on the imaginative border delineating life from death, probing what Cathy Leeney refers to as the "permeability" between these two positions ("Character" 711), and willing ghost characters such as Gabriel (*Portia Coughlan*), Joseph Swane (*By the Bog of Cats…*) and Ariel (*Ariel*) into a liminal existence. As Nina Witoszek & Patrick Sheeran note, Irish literature and especially Irish poetry has often had recourse to non-living characters such as "ghosts, apparitions, bog-queens, skeletons, the resurrected dead, night-walkers" (24). In the world of theatre, Shakespeare's ghost of Hamlet's father is the revenant father figure *par excellence*. The tradition of the

revenant is carried on in Carr's dramatic work with the return of deceased family members who serve as a reminder to living relatives of bad deeds committed in the past, and who return to exact revenge on the living.[4] Their presence is often unwelcome and sometimes frightening to the living. Some of these figures, like Joseph Swane[5] and Ariel[6] seem lonely, scared and tired of wandering aimlessly in a purgatorial space. In contrast to these harmless figures, other ghosts are more determined in their return to this world. These are ghosts whose reappearance proves a catalyst for revenge against the living for past deeds. This type of ghost is typified by the revenant father figure Fermoy in *Ariel*[7] and Portia Coughlan's twin, Gabriel. Gabriel, who died fifteen years before the action of *Portia Coughlan* returns to exact revenge on his sister for her abandonment of him at the time of his death. He maintains a constant sense of his presence onstage through his singing, his physical manifestation, and through the dialogue of the living characters. Gabriel is no longer of this world, but neither does he fully inhabit the world of the dead; he possesses a mobility between this world and others.[8] Portia states, "[h]e's closin' in on me, I hear his footfall crossin' the worlds" (Carr *Plays* 251). Gabriel returns to this world to exercise his remaining power over his twin, who, he feels, abandoned him. This revenant figure, who embodies revenge and spite, intervenes in the events of the world of the living to satisfy his base desire for vengeance. Unlike the ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, who returns to incite his son to

violent retribution for his father's death, thus taking a passive role in the vengeance, Gabriel's ghost is active in driving Portia to take her own life.

Although Emma Dante's plays do not contain direct hauntings by liminal or ghostly figures, the dead relatives of the Cuore family do have a tangible presence and influence in *Carnezzeria*. Nina carries the photos of her dead family members – her mother and father, her grandmother and grandfather, as well as cousins – in her belt. Nina's attachment to the family photos that she carries with her, underline her liminal status. If, as Melanie Gliozzi suggests, "le fotografie sono frammenti di vita morta" ("The photographs are fragments of a dead life" 119), then Nina already enjoys the company of the dead, as "sono tutti morti" ("they are all dead" Dante *Carnezzeria* 87). Her dead relatives are as important to her as her living brothers. While her brothers resent the presence of the photographs and the memories they evoke, Nina values and protects them.[9]

Dante thus instigates a process of remembering within the context of the theatre, noted by Carlson as a locus particularly implicated in memory (*The Haunted Stage* 5). However, within the fictive economy of *Carnezzeria*, this process of remembering becomes threatening to the stability of the present, particularly in the moment when the image of the father is resurrected onstage. Unlike the previous figures evoked, whose presence was restricted to unobtrusive and humorous imaginative manifestations, the

memory of the father gains a physical articulation. He is given form through the

physicality and vocal flexibility of the actor playing Toruccio.[10] This new onstage

presence is threatening and dangerous, as it recalls incidents of child sexual abuse of

which all the brothers were victims.[11]

> TORUCCIO. *(Imitando la voce del padre).* «Dammi le mani che te le riscaldo!»
>
> [...]
>
> *Toruccio si mette una mano dietro la schiena e comincia ad agitarla. Sta masturbando il padre che gli sta dietro.*
>
> Mii Papà!!! Si apre e si chiude! *(Imitando la voce del padre)* «Zìttuti!» (Dante *Carnezzeria* 102)

> TORUCCIO. (*Imitating his father's voice*) "Give me your hands and I'll warm them for you!"
>
> […]
>
> *Toruccio places a hand behind his back and begins to move it. He is masturbating his father who is standing behind him.*
>
> Wow Dad!!! It opens and closes! *(Imitating his father's voice)* "Shut up!"

This physical manifestation of a collective memory proves to be intolerable and highly

disruptive to the living characters. The memory becomes a collective reliving of a past

trauma, the past is dragged into the present, where it sheds its distant quality, bringing

an immediacy that threatens to once again hurt and damage the Cuore family. A fight

breaks out between Toruccio and Ignazio, an arguement which the eldest brother,

Paride, seems unable to quell. The only solution is, it seems, the one to which they often

have recourse; focussing their anger on their defenceless younger sister. Nina is blamed

for the argument:

> PARIDE. Vidìsti chi cazzo combinasti? I tò frati si stanno scannando pi colpa tua ... se 'un purtavi sti cazzo di fotografie, tutto andava liscio come l'olio ... disgraziata! (107)

> PARIDE. Do you see what you've fucking done? Your brothers are killing each other because of you … if you didn't bring those fucking photos, everything would have gone smoothly … idiot!

Like the ghosts of Gabriel and Fermoy, the father of the Cuore family returns, if

not as a supernatural ghostly presence, but as a physically manifest memory which

threatens to seriously disrupt the present world of the living. Internal memory becomes

externally articulated as the siblings are forced to relive the ordeal of their childhood

sexual abuse.

By dramatizing these ghostly figures onstage, Dante and Carr highlight issues

related to the human mind, particularly memory. These difficult memories often test the

boundaries of the relationship between the dead and the living. Apart from a few

examples of benevolent memories, the connection between the living and the dead is

portrayed in a negative light, with the past looming large as a threat to the happiness or

very existence of the living. What then does the recurrent presence of these ghosts and

ghostly figures signify? The dead in Carr's and Dante's plays represent a disruption to

the world of the living; they are reminders of bad deeds and unpleasant memories as well as catalysts for action. The presence of the dead, whether physically manifest or residing only in memory, belies the usual distinction made between the world of the living and that of the dead. Instead of being completely separate, those from the world of the dead are shown to have a significant influence on the living. In Carr's plays, the dead sometimes intervene directly in the lives of their living relatives, changing the course of their destinies and spurring them on to action. In Dante's plays, the presence of the dead is seen in their legacy of violence and cruelty. The misdeeds perpetrated by the now dead father are seen to have put in motion a life of violence and abuse for Nina. The dead, the memory of them and the past are shown to have a significant, if not always positive, influence on the living.

The Others

We can assume that the figures and characters outlined above have all been living human beings at some stage in the life process, whereas in the next section, we will examine figures that do not share a human ontology, who live outside of our system of classification of life. The Ghost Fancier in *By the Bog of Cats…*, [12] The Thing in the Wardrobe and Scarecrow in *Woman and Scarecrow* are not human, though they may have an embodied, human appearance. These figures could be classified as what we term, "supernatural" beings. What they share is the common task assigned to them; to bring the moribund subject to meet death.

Woman and Scarecrow premiered in the Royal Court Theatre on 21 June 2006. It is a deathbed narrative, where the protagonist, archetypal Woman, is dying of an unspecified ailment much to the chagrin of her Husband, Him, and her aunt named Auntie Ah. The play tracks the progress of Woman, who in middle-age, has decided to make a "wilful jaunt" (Carr *Woman and Scarecrow* 33) towards her death as an act of revenge against her faithless husband. It is an extended deathbed scene, in which she battles against death (in the form of the Thing in the Wardrobe) and follows her slow descent into death in a linear fashion, ending with her last breath. In this play, Scarecrow is a liminal character whose ontology differs from the living characters in significant ways. She accompanies Woman throughout the play and is not visible to any other character, though she takes on a physical manifestation through the figure of the actress in order to satisfy the exigencies of theatrical performance. Neither is she alive in the traditional sense - she is not human, but her existence is linked to Woman's and their fates are tied. Scarecrow could be a supernatural being, a ghost, or Woman's conscience or her soul. Cathy Leeney sees Scarecrow as a reconfiguration of Irish mythological figure of the Morrigán ("Character" 713 - 714), while Sihra describes her as a "Platonic 'one-age' observer of internal battles and conflict" ("Unbearable" 27). Carr defines the interaction between Scarecrow and Woman as "a dialogue between self and soul" ("Interview with Seán Rocks").[13] Scarecrow existed before Woman's life began and will continue to exist after Woman has died:

> SCARECROW. I truly believed when I latched onto you before the weaver's throne, I truly believed that you and I would amount to something. I was wrong. (Carr *Woman and Scarecrow* 19)

Scarecrow's existence is eternal and immortal; after Woman's death, Scarecrow will have another chance to go on and choose a new companion and, consequently, a new life.[14] Her ontology is ambiguous. Though physically present onstage and visible to Woman, her existence goes completely unnoticed by Him and Auntie Ah. Her invisibility and inaudibility to the other living characters suggests that she is present in this world without being physically manifest. This suggests a new ontology that cannot be catered for in our current frame of reference for ontological states. Invisible and immortal, Scarecrow's existence eludes definition within our binary frameworks for the living and the dead.

Scarecrow is also in a process of transition; having spent a lifetime with Woman, she has decided to separate from her. This choice becomes the final and decisive catalyst for woman's death.[15] She undergoes a physical transformation from her initial state, where we witnessed her embodied as a woman, into a hybrid creature that is half woman and half bird. Her transformation is linked to her negotiations with the Thing in the Wardrobe, a black-winged, clawed and beaked creature. It seems that Scarecrow fuses with the Thing, Carr's "angel of death" who has come to bring Woman into the realm of the dead. The author appears to suggest that this transformation is a necessary

part of a *rites de passage* that we are unfamiliar with. Scarecrow changes from an

invisible but embodied female companion, to this hybrid creature who is to play a vital

role in Woman's transition from life to death. Its task is to bring about a sort of post-

Catholic Last Judgement at the close of Woman's life. Her transformation here is an

important stage in Carr's delineated *rite de passage* of death in a post-Catholic Ireland.

Both Sicilian and Irish societies are marked by the signs and symbols of a

Christianity now dying, neglected and partially forgotten.[16] Neither *Vita mia* nor *Woman*

and Scarecrow appear to have any Christian or Catholic significance; though the vestiges

of Catholic belief systems remain in the plays (crucifix, candles, rosary, priest), these

symbols are not imbued with religious meaning.[17] These plays then could be viewed as

an investigation into the role of death in post-Catholic societies. Both writers examine a

new type of death experienced in a space that is no longer framed by Catholic ritual and

ceremony. Both Irish and Italian societies are gradually moving away from the beliefs

and ceremonial trappings of Catholicism, but many of life's most important rituals such

as births, weddings and funerals, are still framed within the rites of Catholic

celebrations. In both nations, the populations seek to imagine new ways to celebrate

such momentous life events in a secular manner. This is most clearly seen in Carr's use

of the character Scarecrow, whom she deploys to enact a sort of secular Last Judgement

on the dying Woman. In the final scene, Scarecrow asks Woman a number of weighty

questions about her life choices, her "sins" are calculated and certain truths about her

life are revealed and acknowledged. Interestingly, the "sins" discussed are committed only against herself. The questionnaire that Scarecrow reads has been designed by Woman. In this post-Catholic model, the dying person no longer answers to a higher being, a God for their failings, but rather to themselves.

The portrayal of these deathly processes onstage also serves to restore the issue of death to the public arena. In contrast to Phillipe Ariès' model of death in which society has banished death from public discourse making it a private act, our authors do not seek to hide or suppress death but rather bring it to the spectators' attention, thus directing grief and personal loss into the public sphere. The suspension and contemplation of modern death onstage provides us with a space in which to scrutinise new attitudes to death and to develop a new vocabulary with which to talk about our one truly common experience.

Those on the Threshold

In life, death can come suddenly and unexpectedly, creating a sense of shock in the community, or it can come creeping and slowly, whereby relatives have time to resign themselves to its reality before the event itself occurs. Our modern experience of death, according to Phillipe Ariès, is that of what he terms "Invisible Death" (*The Hour of Our Death*). In this model, modern technologically advanced societies have banished death from the community's life; there are few signs of mourning and remembrance. Death has become a private act. Emma Dante and Marina Carr utilise the death motif to

dramatize and investigate new attitudes to death and dying, and to publicly explore

secular possibilities in the face of death. Chicco, in *Vita mia* and Woman in *Woman and*

Scarecrow, are liminal figures in that during their transition to death, they shift between

the supposedly fixed ontological states of life and death. In these two plays, Carr and

Dante suspend the moment of death to portray a process that takes place out of time.

Chicco and Woman are portrayed somewhere in the flux between the binary (and

supposedly stable) ontologies of life and death.

Just like Victor Turner's neophytes, who "are neither living nor dead from one

aspect, and both living and dead from another" (97), Chicco appears to be alive in some

moments and dead or dying in others. Throughout the play, he oscillates between the

life and passions he had when he was living, and the abandonment of his life and

interests on the road to death. The audience soon realises that the wake bed is being

prepared for him, that the youngest of three sons, the "baby" of the family, has died.

Initially, Chicco plays with his brothers and jokes with them, and is full of mischief and

seemingly full of life. However, as the mother prepares the bed and Chicco for a funeral

wake, subtle markers make it clear that he is no longer in life. While his mother dresses

him in a white suit for the wake, Chicco tears away from her to play imaginary football

with his favourite local football team. Later, she places him, "un angelo vestito di

bianco" ("an angel dressed in white" Dante *Carnezzeria* 59), in the wake bed. Lying on

his back, he fastens his hands across his chest and closes his eyes. At this point, he loses

all signs of animation and appears to be dead. His mother cannot countenance his death

at this moment and so begins a desperate effort to bring him back to life. Chicco then

gets out of the deathbed and "scappa, corre … è vivo e pazzo di gioia" *("flees, runs …*

he's alive and crazily happy" 164). On his final lap of life, he runs into the family

bicycle, thus recreating the accident that killed him. In this moment, "si stacca

dall'anima" ("he separates from his soul" 164). Afterwards, Chicco appears to be

definitively dead; his body is limp and lifeless; he no longer speaks or breathes. In the

course of the play, Chicco passes through two distinct phases; the first is located

between the moment of his accident and actual death, and the second between his death

and the official funerary rites that should follow. There is no reference to an after-life.

Dante has described *Vita mia* as a wake (138), but it is really an examination of the

processes of death, our own difficulty in accepting unexpected deaths, as well as our

processes of mourning. The death of Woman (*Woman and Scarecrow*) could also be

considered within the confines of this category, but we will examine her death later in

parallel to the death of another female protagonist, Nina.

The above categories represent a sample of some of the meanings that the death

motif can carry in Carr's and Dante's plays. Whether a signifier for memory and the

influence of the past upon the present, an exploration of the relationship between the

living and the dead, or a new, secular investigation in new attitudes and practices of

death, both writers deploy this theme regularly and to great effect.

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Historical Thinking on Suicide

Before we continue with our examination of deathly figures in the plays of Dante

and Carr, we will first consider the subject of thanatology, and its treatment in

academia thus far. Studies of death, while rare until the 1960s, have grown in frequency

and importance in recent times. Thanatology is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*

as "[t]he scientific study of death, its causes and phenomena." [18] Thanatology has many

branches that cover such diverse areas as medicine, sociology,[19] history,[20] philosophy,[21]

psychoanalysis[22] and feminism. What interests us primarily in this study is the position

of feminist theorists on the dialogue between the literary and theatrical motif of death

and the representation of "woman." In this chapter, we will narrow the focus to pay

particular attention to the playwrights' representation of voluntary death in their

female protagonists and we will consider how this representation stands in comparison

to historical portrayals of female suicide. But first, we must consider how self-death has

been viewed historically.

The act of suicide and its potential significance for human existence, and society

in general, has been considered by philosophers for at least four-thousand years.[23]

Many dissimilar philosophies have tended to converge in their view of suicidal

behaviour and actions as negative in nature. The Greeks, led by Plato's reflection on

Socrates' death by suicide, *Phaedo* and his *Laws*, held suicide to be wrong, except in

some exceptional circumstances as it constituted a desertion of the citizen's duty to the

state. While the Greeks considered the act of self-death in relation to an individual's

social roles and obligations, later Stoics, such as Seneca, shifted the focus to the

conditions that may lead a person to kill themselves. Seneca saw suicide as a viable way

of escaping an unbearable life and also as an assertion of human freedom, a way of

escaping the hold social conventions and expectations have over the individual. The

coming of Christianity was a milestone in the development of thought on matters of

suicide, for its doctrine has long taught that suicide is morally wrong and therefore a sin

against God. [24] Both the Catholic and Protestant Churches view suicide as a grave sin,

considering life itself to be a gift from God and the taking of that life by an individual to

be an assertion of dominion over what naturally belongs to God. In many jurisdictions,

including Ireland and Italy this religious doctrine was enshrined in law, making suicide

illegal.[25] Despite this, some treatise in defence of suicide have been written, beginning in

the modern era with John Donne's *Biathanatos* (c. 1607) and David Hume's *On Suicide*

(1783).[26] In the twentieth-century both Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre considered

suicide as a possible assertion of individual human will in the face of the unrelenting

absurdity of life. Regardless of these isolated defences, suicide continues to be generally

viewed culturally as a negative action and one that should be prevented.

A Feminist View

There is a long history of female self-death in mythical, literary and theatrical history, beginning with Antigone's political suicide by hanging,[27] through to Cleopatra's poisoning, Dido's self-immolation, Ophelia's desperate drowning,[28] Clarissa's slow descent into death,[29] Emma Bovary's poisoning,[30] Anna Karenina's thrust into the path of a train,[31] Miss Julie's death by razorblade,[32] Hedda Gabler's violent shot to the head,[33] continuing right up to modern voluntary deaths such as the poisoning of the protagonist in Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*. The scholar who wishes to tread in these fields of investigation, attempting to interpret depictions of suicide, must go cautiously, as feminist critic Margaret Higonnet reminds us that "[w]omen's voluntary deaths are even more difficult to read than men's because women's very autonomy is in question and their intentions are therefore opaque" (68).

From a sociological standpoint, suicide has often been considered in a gender-blind fashion, though more recent studies treat both genders separately, observing differences in frequency, rates of suicide attempts, and methods used. Studies have shown that while women are more likely to attempt suicide than men, men are much more likely to complete suicide to death.[34] There are also significant observable differences between men and women in the methods of suicide employed, with men

choosing what are typically characterised as violent means (using firearms for example), and women choosing "passive" methods (such as gassing and drug overdoses).

Higonnet states that "[t]o take one's life is to force others to read one's death" (68). In line with societal and scholarly views on suicide, feminist readings of female deaths in literary and theatrical history have been generally negative. In her book, *Women and Death: linkages in Western Thought and Literature* (1984), feminist literary commentator Beth Ann Bassein examines the link between represented women and the motif of death that pervades Western thought and culture. Her analysis examines the origins and traces of this link in language and Christianity, and then turns to visual art, poetry and novels. Bassein appears to view any link between women and death in art as necessarily negative and destructive, one which she understands to subtract "from the preoccupation with life" and which "diminishes the reader's capacity to be involved vicariously in the lives of the characters in the work" (119). Bassein, thus, reads any narrative that terminates in the death of a woman as necessarily anti-feminist.[35] Similarly, feminist and classicist Gail Holst-Warhaft, in her contribution to the special issue of Tulsa Studies in Women's literature, dedicated to the feminist legacy of Carolyn Heilbrun, "Death Unmanned," does not see suicide and feminism as compatible, to her suicide is not "an act that can be linked, by any stretch of the imagination, to feminism" (281). In the article, Holst-Warhaft considers the issue of voluntary death in the context

of Heilburn's writings on the subject. At the heart of this tension lies the conflict

between individual choice and the pain inflicted on survivors. Sandra Gilbert, in her

article, "The Supple Suitor" also struggles to reconcile the traditional feminist emphasis

on "choice" with death, tempering her argument on representations of female suicide

with references to difficult issues such as assisted death and societal pressures (253).

Following this trend, the deathly outcomes in Carr's plays have been questioned

and criticised. Anna McMullan, in noting that many of the plays end in the suicide of

the female protagonist, assesses their portrayal of Irish womanhood as "extremely

pessimistic" (83).[36] Perhaps the most vigorous criticism has come from Clare Wallace

who perceives Carr to have followed a negative path in feminist terms throughout her

career; moving from a "playful satirical feminism" to "grim patriarchal tragedy"

("Crossroads" 87). She laments the seeming abdication of Carr's protagonists "from a

confrontation with patriarchy, or if they do engage they, disappointingly, throw in the

towel by committing suicide" ("Tragic Destiny and Abjection" 435). Thus, Wallace

views suicide as a form of defeat, disintegration and resignation. Cathy Leeney,

however contrasts these negative readings, for her "death is reframed as the final

resistance" in *Portia Coughlan* and *By the Bog of Cats…* ("Ireland's 'Exiled' Women

Playwrights" 158). This reading is keeping with Melissa Sihra's contention that in Carr's

theatre, death (instead of a signifier of defeat and annihilation) is a site of expurgation

and renewal ("Unbearable" 22). Building on Leeney and Sihra's alternative readings, I intend to propose a different interpretation of these voluntary deaths.

Resistant Suicide

Sandra Gilbert proposes a provisional taxonomy of textual representations of female suicide in her article, "The Supple Suitor" (2005), consisting of four categories; erotic, sacrificial, self-loathing and mimetic/competitive suicides.[37] I will suggest an addition to this classification; resistant suicide.[38][39]

In proposing this additional category, I qualify my contention by stating clearly that my study refers to only to narrative and theatrical representations and not to real people who take part in suicidal behaviour.[40] Therefore, I intend to propose that the voluntary deaths of Emma Dante's and Marina Carr's protagonists can be read, contrary to the generally negative readings of female suicide, as a resistant strategy to the patriarchal social order they encounter within the fictive economy of the plays. Bronfen and Higonnet occupy positions that are not opposed to such a reading. Higonnet herself suggests that, contrary to the obscuring of the feminine carried out by male authors, when female writers portray suicidal women there is a clear focus on the choice undertaken "rather than social victimization" (80), thus restoring agency to the dead or dying character. Higonnet does not go so far as to interpret this difference in positive terms but posits that, through a series of ambiguities and genre revisions,

works by women writers that feature female suicide "force us to read backward from the ultimately unknown character of death and of woman to our presumptions about motive, genre and social order"(81). Bronfen goes further in arguing against Bassein's reading of images of women and death in art and literature as merely "necrophilic misogyny" (60). Seeing the self-deaths of Madame Bovary and Clarissa (among others) in a positive light; as an act of agency, Bronfen posits that they can interpreted as "a woman using death as a conscious act of setting a mark, as a form of writing with her body, a materialisation of the sign" (141). If, as Bronfen contends, the act of suicide can definitively write the woman's version of her own life, giving it authority, then we can consider that self-death may, in lieu of other satisfactory choices, constitute a statement against the conditions that the woman lives in. From this viewpoint, staged death may "signify a moment of control and power, given that the woman's self-disintegration also becomes an act of self-construction" (141).

In the case of the two playwrights under consideration in this thesis, I will argue that the deaths of their protagonists constitute a protest, a form of resistance against the oppressive circumstances, and the discriminatory material and intellectual conditions in which they live under patriarchy. I will demonstrate that their choice of death can be seen as a deployment of their power and control to reject, refuse, resist and rewrite the constraints of an androcentric world that constricts their choices, regulates their desire and exposes them to abuse and violence. This reading, then, shifts somewhat the

general perception of narrative female suicides. Instead of being compulsory negative

outcomes for the female characters, they can now be read in a more nuanced way,

recognising the tragedy of the premature end to a life, while nevertheless appreciating

the control and agency that is potentially inherent in such narrative acts.

Nina Resists - "ho sognato delle grandi ali dorate"[41]

In order to examine this idea, we will look now at Emma Dante's suicide, Nina.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, *Carnezzeria* is a play centred on the Cuore

family, consisting of three brothers and the intellectually challenged sister, Nina. The

brothers have brought pregnant Nina several hours away from their home in order to

abandon her in a deserted religious shrine. Her pregnancy, which is now in the final

stages, can no longer be hidden from the community and the resulting baby would

reveal the family secret to society – that the new-born is the product of sibling incest.

The play charts the brothers' attempts to desert Nina through the (false) promise of a

husband and a wedding that very day. In the final scene, Nina, dressed as a bride in

white, tacitly accepts their desertion and, after the brothers have left, silently kills

herself in an inverted hanging with her wedding veil.

In contrast to Carr's protagonists the Mai and Portia, whose deaths take place

offstage, Nina's suicide is portrayed onstage.[42] Her two brothers, Ignazio and Toruccio

leave the shrine, followed a short time later by Paride. Before he leaves, he pulls her veil

down over her face and nails its train to the ground. Nina begins to panic, frantically

repeating sections of dialogue from earlier in the play. Before Paride exits, Nina asks

him to take the family photos she has stored in her belt back home. After attempting to

follow her brothers but becoming entangled in her veil, Nina sits down.

> Senza un lamento, sale sul trono e, tirando forte il velo che come un cappio le
> stringe il collo, s'impicca al contrario: da terra verso il cielo (Dante *Carnezzeria*
> 131)

> Without complaint, she gets up on the throne and, pulling hard on the veil which
> squeezes around her neck like a noose, she hangs herself upside-down: from the
> earth towards the sky.

Intention

Given her intellectual difficulties, it seems appropriate that we address the issue

of intention in Nina's action. That Nina means to die seems clear, not only by the act of

hanging, but especially if we consider that this upside-down hanging requires an

extraordinary physical force to complete (without the downward force of gravity that

would normally be present in a conventional hanging). Therefore we must conclude

that her death is not the result of an accident; it is intentional. Furthermore, to read her

death as a simple act of desperation provoked by the shock of her brothers' sudden

desertion would be a mistake. Nina, in fact, is aware throughout the play that the

brothers are attempting to leave her there alone and does what she can to prevent it.[43]

After several interceptions, punctuated by scenes of violence, humiliation and terror,

Nina decides to allow her brothers to go; as Paride steals away from the scene, she calls him back, asking him only to bring the family photos home. As the photos are her most valued possession, something she could not do without on her wedding day, this return of the pictures to Paride indicates acknowledgment and a certain acceptance of her abandonment. She knows she will never go home again. Despite her characterisation as intellectually challenged, Dante draws a character with remarkable understanding of, and insight into, her own situation, a character undoubtedly capable of agency and choice.[44]

Can we therefore interpret Nina's death as resistant? In answering this question, we must first examine Nina's own motivations for dying. That Nina chooses to die has been established. However, any reading of her death as a capitulation to hostile circumstances needs to be resisted. Nina's death is framed by her literal imprisonment within a patriarchal family, which is supported by an androcentric society unconcerned with the welfare of its most vulnerable citizens. Nina tries to follow her brothers, even though she seems to have understood their intention to abandon and deceive her. She is prevented by her wedding veil, which in the attempt coils around her neck.[45] Both her veil and her white dress could be read to symbolise patriarchy's control over women's sexuality, reproduction, freedom and agency. Her endeavour to follow her brother can be read as an attempt to return to the life she previously led, but she is blocked by the veil which forms a noose around her neck representing the suffocation and oppression

associated with her family life and confinement to the domestic sphere. Before she dies,

we witness Nina who, "[s]grana gli occhi, alza lo sguardo al cielo e annusa i fiori che

mandano barbagli" ("[s]he opens her eyes wide, turns her face skyward and smells the

glistening flowers" 131). This is the key moment, where Nina's skyward glance marks

her decision to end her life. This shift in focus from the earth to the heavens could be

interpreted as a wish to leave this earth to join Nina's beloved seagulls –symbols of

freedom and liberty - or to join her dead relatives in Heaven. Although some may argue

that death is the only choice available to her at this point, I disagree; the protagonist

could choose to wait for her brothers to come back, or for help in some form to arrive;

she could seek to attract attention to encourage others to come to her aid; she could

make further attempts (beyond the most basic) to escape. But, Nina instead, chooses to

die. We witness no emotional breakdown, only a clear and calm determination and

resolve. This ending represents no "throwing in the towel" as Clare Wallace would

have it, but is rather a decisive and deliberate action that signals not defeat but agency.

The question remains; why does Nina choose death? We could read Nina's death

as motivated by a desire to leave behind her life of oppression, domestic and sexual

slavery and violence and begin the "vita nuova" ('new life" 114) promised to her by

Paride. As discussed in the previous chapter, Nina is a domestic and sexual slave in the

family home. She is denied her physical freedom through imprisonment, her sexual

freedom through incestuous sexual contact, and her intellectual freedom through

violence – in such a context she is also denied any form of agency.

In such an oppressive and abusive context, Nina initially expresses a desire for a

different life through the medium of her fantasies about her the fictional husband,

which her brothers have apparently chosen for her. In her new life, she imagines she

will have a slim handsome husband (125) who loves and respects her (126); she hopes

she will live in a house where the windows and doors are always open (126), one that is

located in the city where she can interact with other people (130).[46] These desires

communicate to the audience that what Nina longs for is respect, freedom and affection.

As Nina comes to an understanding of her brothers' true intentions and the nature of

their deception, she lets go of the dream and seeks death as an alternative new

beginning. She recognises the fantasy of her husband as the dream that it is and seeks

an alternative solution. There are indications that she envisions death as a flight with

the seagulls she often comments on, or as a reunion with her dead relatives. Birds,

according to the *Dictionary of Literary Symbols* (2007), can carry a variety of metonymical

and metaphorical meanings. One of these is the image of the caged bird, which has

often stood "for a woman's restricted life in a society dominated by men" (Ferber 27).[47]

In line with this potential reading, Dante liberates the bird from its prison, and in so

doing, it becomes a symbol of emancipation and freedom for Nina. For the first time in

the fictive economy of the play, Nina uses her agency and, in doing so, chooses to die.

In death, she will not be married to her fantasy husband, but she will be accompanied by the seagulls and/or reunited deceased family members. Nina's death does not signify defeat and despair, therefore, but rather can be read as her first use of her agency. She frees herself from the prison of her life.

In refusing to continue living after her abandonment by passively awaiting either starvation or rescue, Nina actively chooses her new life through death: thus writing a new future for herself. She refuses to be bound by the fate her brothers have set out for her, and in so doing also rejects the implications of any possible intervention society may attempt at this late stage. Nina chooses to act on her terms, and not on the terms of others. In this act of agency Nina deploys her power over life in order to reject her brothers' treatment of her, but also, in a wider reading, her death can be seen as a rejection of the Italian state and society's abdication of responsibility and complicity in regard to such familial abuse. This is a resistant act.

Woman Defies – "I ran west to die"[48]

For a more explicit example of resistant suicide, we can look to Marina Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow.* During the course of the play, Woman comes to terms with her life, seeks resolution and clarity about her childhood and deceased mother from her aunt, and alternates between love, resentment and spite towards her husband. Sihra describes *Woman and Scarecrow* as "an intense contemplation on the cyclicality of life

and death" ("Birthdays and Deathdays" 171). It is a play that focusses on the

significance of death in our lives.

As Woman is dying of a sickness, it may be viewed as problematic to class her

death as suicide. However, if we understand "suicide" as "the action of killing oneself

intentionally" (*OED*), we can class Woman's voluntary death as suicide. From the

outset, Carr makes it clear to the audience that Woman is resolved to die and that this

determination, manifesting itself in an undetermined illness, has become the catalyst for

her death:

> SCARECROW. Well, maybe you should've thought a bit harder about that
>   before you decided to die.
>
> WOMAN. I didn't decide to die. How dare you!
>
> SCARECROW. You can lie to everyone except me. (Carr *Woman and Scarecrow*
>   16/17)

Woman's decision was motivated by her spite and bitterness. This sentiment stems

from a disappointment that "the world has not yielded all" she hoped it would (18).

Although she wavers somewhat in her resolution,[49] she nevertheless puts a series of

events in motion that, as they cannot be arrested, eventually lead to her death.

The play tracks Woman's descent into death after making this decision to die.

Her ontology throughout is fluctuating and changing; in her initial interaction with

Scarecrow, Woman is seemingly in a state of unconsciousness (18), though she appears

alive and active to the audience. Woman's state while alone with Scarecrow is an undefined condition, where she is not conscious to the world, but nevertheless capable of interacting with her companion. She only returns to consciousness when talking to her husband, Him or her Auntie Ah. In these blazing moments of dramatic banter, feisty provocation and sentimental recollection, Woman is fully and indisputably alive, though her physical decline is painfully evident. Her motor skills soon begin to fail her; she can no longer hold her wine glass to her mouth to drink (30), and fissures in what we perceive as reality appear. This physical deterioration is accompanied by an alteration in her ontology. As Act One comes to a close, having passionately confronted Him about his continuing extra-marital affair, we observe that Woman is edging ever closer to the realm of death. She herself feels a shift in her being:

> SCARECROW. Close, you're getting close.
>
> WOMAN. I see tombs in shadow, mossy, weather-scarred tombs and all the dead squashed in and me with them wondering if there is starlight above. I'm being buried alive. I am my own ghost. (40)

The descent into death causes a rupture within Woman's ontology. She is entering the world of death, tasting the sensations of the dead, though still clutching to life. This shifting towards death becomes more pronounced, until finally, in the closing scene, she ceases breathing and dies. Woman's transformation follows an unwavering linear progress. Although quite lively at the play's opening, indulging in glasses of wine and

cigarette smoking, her decline is even and regular. The play tracks the arc of her

transition from an unwell, but alert subject, to her final breath and death at the play's

close. Despite her desire for an epic and romantic ending, her death is anti-climactic,

and even a touch banal.

How then is Woman's death resistant? According to her own admission, her

choice of death is motivated by revenge and her disillusionment with life. Like the Mai

before her, Woman believed in, and committed to, the patriarchal fantasy of utopian

married life, choosing however, a man who exemplified the negative attributes of the

traditional husband. Him is unfaithful; he has had numerous extra-marital affairs[50] and

is, at the time of Woman's death, in constant contact with his current lover,[51] he is

disinterested, distant and detached from the family and his own children, whom he

describes as "[s]trangers" (61). The resistance inherent in Woman's death could be seen

as two-fold; she resists her husband's treatment of her by dying and thus committing

the ultimate act of infidelity, and secondly, she chooses to die as an act of resistance to

the patriarchal conventions that regulated her life. Woman has been conventional in her

life choices, marrying a man who does not seem to deserve her, enduring his

infidelities, producing and raising numerous children and working within the home,

only to be continually disappointed and hurt by a husband who abused the power such

a patriarchal system afforded him as a male. Him firmly believed in the traditional

patriarchal idea of marriage whereby the wife becomes the possession of the husband,[52]

and he sees his wife as a background presence whose only desire is to be there "for me and me only" (60). Him exploited the androcentric nature of marriage to promote his own sense of self, shirk his paternal responsibilities and to deceive and betray his wife. He availed of the traditional double-standard whereby infidelity is acceptable and indeed laudable in the husband, but considered an unforgivable betrayal if committed by the wife. Like the Mai, Woman seems to have been blinded to the harsh reality of her marriage by her unfailing belief in the myths of romantic love and her idealistic adoration of her unworthy husband.[53] Although intensely attached to the romantic vision of heterosexual marriage and relations, Woman eventually comes to recognise the hard truth about her marriage; it was no romantic tale of star-crossed lovers, but was instead "nothing but a façade for procreation" (60).

Entangled in a marriage which is supported by the weight of a lengthy patriarchal tradition, Woman was consumed by her ruinous relationship; each infidelity was a step towards a slow destruction of herself. She describes his infidelities as: "[a]nnihilation of me!" (39). Under the burden of such suffering, she does not disintegrate or crumble, she decides instead to reject her husband and the system of patriarchal marriage through her death. Woman leaves her husband by means of her death. If we understand infidelity to mean a breaking and betrayal of trust, an act of (albeit temporarily) "leaving" one's partner, then we can see how Him interprets her death as the ultimate form of infidelity:

> HIM. Oh, it matters and will matter more when you leave me.
> SCARECROW. He makes your death sound like an infidelity.
> WOMAN. And is it not? (27)

Read in this vein, one could argue that Woman deploys her suicide as a strategy to resist and reject her husband's behaviour and by extension, as a resistance to the expectations, strictures and suffering imposed by patriarchal regulation of female sexuality through marriage. Woman defies established convention by removing herself from the marriage and the system that caused her suffering. Thus, through death, Woman writes her own body into death as "a way of getting rid of the oppression connected with the feminine body" (Bronfen 142). This is not an expression of defeat or resignation, as Wallace would have it, it is rather an act of defiance. This reading is supported by Sihra's contention that in Carr's *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan* and *By the Bog of Cats…*, death does not signify termination and destruction, rather, the protagonists may "commence new processes of selfhood and, perhaps, fulfilment" through the act of death ("Unbearable" 25). Sihra reads Carr's represented deaths as a step on the long stairs of existence:

> In Carr's theatre, death is not the end, but rather, a way to excavate the life
> that has been lived, and to process experience, as the passage continues
> (34).

Elisabeth Bronfen argues that literary depictions of female voluntary deaths can sometimes be read as acts of self-authorship, whereby the woman imposes her

interpretation of her life through the act of dying. In Chapter Eight of her book, she

considers the deaths of women in Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), Tennyson's "Lancelot

and Elaine" (1859)[54] and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) as acts of self-authorship,

communication and authority. This type of death, Bronfen posits, is exemplary

"because it involves the conscious and explicit choice of death as a strategy for lending

authority to the woman's version of her story" (142).

Through the act of ending her life, Woman writes her own story and gives it

authority – it is a story that recounts her pain and suffering within an institution that

regulated her behaviour stringently while allowing her husband the personal liberty to

behave however he desired. During her lifetime, Woman's experience of her marriage,

her suffering at Him's infidelities, were hidden, half-known, disbelieved or

undervalued. Through her self-engineered death, she draws attention to her viewpoint,

her experiences and her sufferings in her marriage, calls Him's behaviour into question,

and most importantly, lends authority to *her* version of events.

This element of authorship is underlined by the presence of another text within

the economy of the play. This doubling of texts – the text of the dying/dead body and

the text of the letter - follows a convention that Bronfen notes is often used in nineteenth

century narratives of female suicide, who sees it as a double form of signification "by

letter and by body" which serves "to impress her name, her image and her story on to

the memory of her survivors" (153). Woman writes a suicide note in the form of a letter

to her husband in which she includes instructions regarding her funeral arrangements

before launching into a furious and scathing attack on her spouse. She accuses him of

cowardice, recklessness, deceit, egoism, cruelty and incapacity to love anyone other

than himself. She also outlines her suffering in the marriage, her disappointed

expectations of him, her desperate attempts to react to his behaviour and ultimately her

emotional destruction:

> WOMAN. And what drives my hatred now is my … my … my …
>
> SCARECROW. Blindness to what you have …
>
> BOTH. Slowly taken from me down the years, that is, my capacity to love, which was boundless in the beginning, long ago when we walked by the river, too poor to buy a cup of coffee. (55-56)

The letter records Woman's sentiments and rationale in a permanent manner; on paper.

Following the writing of her life through suicide, this epistolary record writes, supports

and solidifies Woman's version of her life with Him in a way that the body cannot. It

functions as supporting evidence for the story that her suicide tells to the survivors.

Furthermore, it may prove to be more enduring than her death in its narrative

persuasiveness. Through the letter, her story is immortalised.

I will now argue that the resistant nature of these suicides is emphasized by the

author's framing strategy of the play's protagonists. Margaret Higonnet's analysis,

"Speaking Silences: Women's Suicide"(1998), focusses on nineteenth-century female

protagonists, such as Emma Bovary, Hedda Gabler and Anna Karenina, who choose to

kill themselves. Higonnet draws attention to the distinct disparity between women's

material lower rate of suicide completion and the predominance of representations of

female suicide in literature (69). Despite this elevated and disproportionate focus on

female suicide, Higonnet argues that such intense attention does not, however, lead to

the increased visibility of the woman involved, but conversely, is marked by the

invisibility of the protagonist. These male writers, Higonnet argues, ''subvert the

heroism of women's voluntary deaths in their focus on social and masculine

victimization" (77). In holding the narrative gaze on the social institutions and norms

that create the conditions for the protagonists' suicides rather than on the women

themselves, male writers, Higonnet suggests, shift the focus from the predicament,

motivations and choices of the woman who decides to die, to the male apparatuses of

society that drive her there.[55] Thus, in the nineteenth-century, she identifies a "male

overdetermination of women's suicides" which are treated "as a virtually involuntary

form of surrender to social forces" (78). The result of such an overdetermination, then, is

the denial of female agency in the act of suicide. We might ask why there is such an

invisibility when the female character is, ostensibly, the protagonist of the piece.

Elisabeth Bronfen offers a potential response to this dilemma:

> the interstice between death, femininity and aesthetics is negotiated over the representation of a dead feminine body clearly marked as being other, as being not mine. To represent *over her dead body* signals that the represented feminine body also stands in for concepts other than death, femininity and the body – most notably the masculine artist and the community of survivors. (xi)

The female body and character, therefore, functions as a sign that points to another, occulted meaning. In Bronfen's analysis, "woman" (and death) stand as cyphers for the male artist and his own preoccupations, as well as wider issues concerning the structure and stability of social order. In this process, the focus shifts away from the woman.[56] Higonnet claims that figures such as Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina act as carriers of meaning pointing to the (male) author's anxieties about himself or androcentric society. Women writers, she contends, write female suicide differently, given that they cannot "other" the protagonist as easily as a male writer. I contend that Carr's and Dante's representations of women's voluntary deaths reverse the process of invisibility outlined by Higonnet by shifting the focus from the social conditions to the woman herself. They do this by placing the protagonist at the centre of the action, utilising a variety of theatrical and structural techniques to focus attention on the protagonist's process towards death and the motives and rationale behind this decision.

To achieve this shift in focus, both Dante and Carr make, as was discussed in Chapter Three, strategic interventions into traditional forms of drama in order to

disrupt conventional readings. Crucially for readings of women's deaths, both

playwrights utilise the strategy of flagging the death of the protagonist *before* it takes

place. In some cases, the imminent death is alluded to and hinted at out throughout the

play, in others the death is explicitly announced either verbally or visually at the

beginning or middle of the action. These announcements and allusions push the

characters destined for death into a liminal space in the audience's mind. Each of their

actions is framed by the spectator's presentiment or knowledge of their imminent

death. The process of death has begun for them, even if the character themself is

unaware of it. The audience are alerted to the impending death of the protagonist, and

such a revelation forces attention onto the female suicide.

Nina's death in *Carnezzeria* is telegraphed at the outset of the play. Dante does

not explicitly announce Nina's end, but rather signals its approach through a series of

images and allusions. The piece is peppered with strong visual and textual indications

that lead the spectator to the conclusion that the protagonist's death is approaching.

Nina's initial entry onstage is a pertinent example of the deployment of such a tactic,

whereby she enters as part of a parade that carries strong connotations of a funeral

procession:

> In processione arrivano Toruccio e Ignazio con Nina in spalla, seguiti da Paride. Nina è vestita da sposa con una croce nera sulla pancia gravida e un mazzetta di margherite bianche tra le mani incrociate. Sembra morta [...] Dopo aver poggiato a terra la salma, eretta e dura come un manichino di carne, i tre sacerdoti addobbano l'altare dentro l'edicola religiosa (Dante *Carnezzeria* 79).

> Toruccio and Ignazio arrive in procession, with Nina on their shoulders, followed by Paride. Nina is dressed in bridal wear, with a black cross across her pregnant belly and a bunch of white daisies in her joined hands. She seems to be dead […] After resting the corpse on the ground, a body that is rigid and hard like a living mannequin, the three priests decorate the altar inside the religious shrine.

Nina is surrounded in the course of the play by imagery of the dead and dying. Her only possessions are the photos of her dead relatives that she carries in her belt; she speaks about them as though they were present and alive:

> NINA. Sono tutti morti. Per questo me li sono portati. Così ci siamo tutti! (87)
>
> NINA. They're all dead. That's why I brought them with me. This way, we're all here!

Thus, Nina is inserted into the company of the dead. Though she is alive, her ontology is ambiguous. The signs surrounding her mark her out as destined for death, and her existence slips into a liminal phase in the audience's eyes. She is no longer perceived as being fully in life; her death process has begun.

Dante's framing of Nina's life and death in this fashion resists the tendency towards invisibility identified by Higonnet. The foreshadowing of Nina's death warns the audience of Nina's approaching demise, pushing her into a liminal condition. The spectator is thus compelled to interpret her actions and intentions through the lens of her approaching death. By following such a strategy, the focus is shifted from the social conditions that give rise to the protagonist's suicide onto Nina herself. Given the

chronological presentation of events however, a reasonable level of doubt remains with

the audience as to Nina's potential fate. This doubt is problematic, as it could prevent

the complete transferral of the audience's attention to the female protagonist. There is

consequently a risk that any significant analysis of Nina's objective situation could be

partially blocked and that the desired repositioning of the audience's focus could

remain incomplete.

Carr addresses, and to a great extent resolves, these difficulties in her approach

to her protagonists' deaths. If we contrast the approach of allusion to the protagonist's

death, with Carr's bolder announcement of death in the course of the play, we

understand the potential of such a strategy to complete the conversion of audience

attention from the social conditions to the motivation and experience of the dying

woman. Hester's death in *By the Bog of Cats…* is announced by a transcendental

character, The Ghost Fancier, "accidentally" at the beginning of the play, while the wet

and dripping corpses of Portia and the Mai are presented onstage in the middle of the

dramatic action of each of the eponymous plays. In the preceding chapter, we discussed

how the presentation of these deaths in a non-chronological manner represents a

disruption to the established canonical norms regarding form. We now note the effect

this revelation of the death of the protagonist has on the spectator, and also on the

narrative focus of the play. When the death of the protagonist is made explicit in the

middle of the play's course, Carr deftly throws the focus firmly onto the female

246

protagonist. By breaking the conventions of the well-made play to insert the death of

her protagonist into the middle-phase of the dramatic action, the author ensures that

the spectators form a relationship with the character, one which undergoes a significant

change when their death is announced. As in Nina's case, the character's ontology

becomes liminal. It is recognised that they have embarked on a process that will lead to

death. Where this approach differs from the telegraphing technique lies in the *certainty*

that the announcement brings. In *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan* the physical presentation

of a lifeless, soaked corpse onstage confirms the fate of the protagonists, leaving little

room for doubt. Thus, the process of examination and review of the suicide's

motivation is completed and intensified. Carr consciously employed this tactic:

> Yes, so you're watching her living, knowing she's dead. Everything you see is
> with that knowledge. It does shift the focus. ("Interview with Mike Murphy" 53).

Cathy Leeney interprets the break with, and disruption of, traditional form in this play

to free "both Portia and the audience from the tyranny of closure in death" ("Ireland's

'Exiled' Women Playwrights" 160). The dramaturgy of the piece, Leeney argues, is

moulded to accommodate Portia's centrality, and in so doing, death is transcended in

performance. Through such a disruption of form and concomitant shifting of

perspectives, Carr manages to deftly sidestep the twin problems of doubt and

invisibility in *Woman and Scarecrow*. The death of the protagonist is announced in the

opening line of the play:

WOMAN. I ran west to die (Carr *Woman and Scarecrow* 11)

In so doing, she immediately establishes that this is an end-of-life narrative –

Woman will die. Secondly, Carr with the aid of a literary motif -the convention of the

deathbed scene – invites the audience to focus their attentions on Woman and to carry

out an extended analysis of her reasons for voluntary death. Traditionally, the deathbed

convention demands a review of one's life, a reordering of things before death and a

settling of personal matters. Thus, choice of narrative convention facilitates a detailed

examination of Woman's motivation for dying.

The deathbed scene is one that has been depicted in the visual arts for centuries.[57]

Traditionally, the deathbed scene is a moment of ritual in which family and friends

gather to bid farewell to the moribund person, to observe and participate in final

blessings, and to hear the final words of the dying. The deathbed is a site of

transformation, a location of possibility, being as it is the site of ritual and not

ceremony.[58] On the deathbed, the person transforms from a living entity to a corpse. In

the early 1400s, the *Ars Moriendi* - a series of books with illustrations on how to die well

- emerged, depicting a dying man in bed, surrounded by living family and friends, but

also angels, devils and other supernatural beings (Virgin Mary, Trinity, Guardian

Angel). The deathbed was a place to confess your sins, review the events of your life

and account for your actions. Carr's deathbed scene, inhabited by living relatives as

well as the supernatural figures of Scarecrow and the Thing in the Wardrobe replicates

this scene in a secular mode. It reimagines the traditional scenes as a space where two

worlds, the non-Christian supernatural and the real co-exist. Within this created space,

Woman is called to account for herself and her choice of death, her motivations and

rationale are examined and contested.

Through the explicit announcement of the protagonist's death and the use of

conventions such as the deathbed scene, the audience is led on a course that demands

that they examine the woman's motives, reasoning and available choices in the time

running up to her decision to die. That is not to say that this will lead to a situation

where the audience agree that she took the right course of action in killing herself, but

rather that they examine her suicide from *her* point of view. In this way, the problem of

invisibility identified by Higonnet is circumvented and inverted; the protagonist is

placed at the centre of the audience's attention, her visibility is restored and her

motivations are critically appraised.

Problematizing Resistant Death
Before we move on to consider how death may be used as a cypher for the authors'

Anxiety of Ontology, we must consider to what extent resistant suicide can be seen in a

positive light. Negative readings of suicide in theatrical representation, I argue, are

understandable, but not always appropriate. The characters mentioned here all exist

within patriarchal family and societal systems which restrict individual choice, regulate

women's sexuality and deny them agency. Within such an oppressive context, I believe

that suicide can be read as resistant when it marks a moment of female power and

control, and an assertion of agency. Thus, Nina's choice to die can be read as a move

towards the attainment of a "new life" on her own terms (whether we agree with them

or not), while Woman's death inscribes her own reading of her marriage onto paper and

onto her body.

In highlighting elements of resistance within these suicides, I by no means intend

to suggest that all such suicides should be read in a positive fashion. Indeed, Carr

presents a nuanced view of such a suicide in Woman, refusing to simply present suicide

the most appropriate solution to the problems of patriarchy. Given the context of the

play's setting, in a modern Ireland that affords some (if not all) rights to women, it

would be difficult to argue that Woman, like characters such as Clarissa, Emma Bovary

and Anna Karenina, has only a limited number of undesirable choices available to her.

Woman could attempt to reject the impositions of marriage in other, less final ways

than suicide. Carr therefore problematizes death as an act of resistance to patriarchy

and as a solution to Woman's problems through her emphasis of Woman's failure to

resist and reject patriarchal and societal convention *during* her lifetime. Scarecrow

repeatedly underlines how Woman had a number of chances to resist the binds

patriarchal culture placed on her life and happiness throughout her life, but when the

crucial moment arrived, she failed to act. One such opportunity was the invitation from

her lover to leave her husband and start a new life with him and her children. In her

rejection of this golden chance, Woman is seen to have lacked the courage necessary to

defy convention and tradition and leave her husband for this new, and kinder, man.[59]

She responds to Scarecrow's revelation that she missed out on her chance at a happy

and truly loving relationship with a frivolous quip, which is reminiscent of an Oscar

Wilde quote:

> WOMAN. So are you saying that I could have turned up at the lover's door with the eight of them?
>
> SCARECROW. I'm saying exactly that.
>
> WOMAN. With what? How? For starters it would have taken two car journeys. I would've had to arrive twice. And to arrive twice at a lover's door is worse than not arriving at all. (66)[60]

Carr implicitly questions Woman's choice of death as resistant by pointing to this less

destructive choice that she failed to take. In so doing, she raises wider questions about

women's complicity in and attachment to traditional patriarchal structures. Thus, while

Carr shows death to be a form of resistance to patriarchy and androcentric society, she

problematizes it as a satisfactory solution.

The works of Emma Dante and Marina Carr show an unusual preoccupation

with the theme of death. As I have shown, death shadows and pervades the plays of

Dante and Carr. In this chapter, we have explored how the female suicides are

presented in a nuanced manner as resistant to the patriarchal system in which they

exist. Through the act of self-death, the protagonists stage a resistance to the barriers and constraints associated with patriarchy and imposed upon them as women. The act of suicide, in this dramatic context, thus becomes a site of self-authorship, self-assertion and agency. I will now argue that this preoccupation is further used by the playwrights as a cypher for their own relationship with the patriarchal world in which they live through a staging of their protagonists' battle with patriarchy.

Chapter Five – "What does a mirror look at?"[61]

> On stage there is nothing more beautiful than looking at the arc of a life and the completion of that life.
>
> Marina Carr[62]

In the preceding chapter, we observed how the theme of death pervades the works of Emma Dante and Marina Carr and, in particular, how the staging of their female protagonists' suicides could be read as a resistant strategy to the constraints placed upon their bodies, identities and desires by patriarchal systems and structures. In this chapter, the presence of death in the plays will postulated as a mirror for the anxieties of the authors. The question of how Carr's and Dante's portrayal of death relates to their ontology as female playwrights will be brought into central focus. I argue that the writers' attention to the theme of death may be present both on a conscious and an unconscious level within the authors' psyche and then manifested in the text. Firstly, the staging of death will be seen to potentially be a philosophical consideration of the significance of death for life, and an element in the process of mourning. Secondly, it may act as a signifier for the playwrights' own preoccupation regarding their precarious positioning, manifested in the Anxiety of Ontology. It will be shown that all of these are processes; by staging death, Dante and Carr work through

philosophical questions, engage in the undertaking of mourning the dead, and digest their own anxieties regarding their professional and artistic condition.

The Figure of the Author

Before we consider how the authors' Anxiety of Ontology may be made textually manifest through the figure of the female suicide in Carr's and Dante's work, it would be appropriate to assess the position of the author in literary criticism to date. For literary theory and criticism, the figure of the author was central to all considerations, right up until the emergence of structuralism and post-structuralism.

Roland Barthes (1915-1980), along with the likes of Foucault and Derrida questioned the idea of a unified subject, the notion of "self" and that of a "centre". They argued that individuals cannot be authors because they lack a unified self or centre from which one could say a piece of literature originates. In his ground-breaking article "The Death of the Author", first published in 1968, Barthes seeks a move away from criticism centred on the revered figure of the literary writer and the explanation of texts through reference to the author's biography. Decrying the figure of the writer as a modern invention, Barthes calls for the removal of such a figure in order to allow a radical transformation of the text. With the distancing of the writer, texts are no longer read in a temporal manner as *before* and *after* the author; therefore the text exists in the "*here and now*" (Barthes 145).Thus, instead of documenting and recording a past, the text

becomes performative (145). Barthes argues that the death of the author should effect a

shift in criticism, away from the lionized writer towards the reader. Barthes sets out his

vision of new writing:

> a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author (148).

The death of the author facilitates, for Barthes, the birth of the reader and concomitant

critical attention to their hitherto neglected experience. This focus on the reader mirrors

a shift that has taken place in theatre studies, where the role and experience of the

spectator is ever more under scrutiny.[63]

Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" followed just a year after Barthes' treatise.

Foucault develops many of the ideas present in the preceding essay, stating that while

the death of the author has already been noted by critics, "the consequences of their

discovery of it have not been sufficiently examined" (Foucault 103). Foucault

systematically examines the history and nature of what he terms the "author-function."

Drawing attention to the distance between the person who performs the writing, and

the figure that functions as an author in discourse, Foucault highlights the ambiguity

inherent in our use of the word author. Significantly, like Barthes, Foucault sees this

figure as an ideological product, one who regulates meaning in texts. He believes that

"the author function will disappear" (119) opening up the discussion to questions on the nature of discourse at play in the text and the possible subjectivities within.

Both Barthes and Foucault comment on the death of the "author" without specifying which categories of writer they refer to. As Terry Eagleton notes,"[m]ost literary theories, in fact, unconsciously 'foreground' a particular literary genre" (44). In fact, in his analysis, Barthes refers predominantly to poets and novelists, with scant mention of playwrights. Adrian Page, in his introduction to his book, *The Death of the Playwright? Modern British Drama and Literary Theory* (1992), argues that Barthes' observation that a text does not contain a single theological meaning, but is rather a complex web of writings which clash, is nothing new in the world of theatre. In theatre, the play text and its variegated signifiers are mediated through the director, the performers and a group of designers, each of whom has an input on the presentation and interpretation of the playwright's work. Page argues that this collaborative medium provides a freedom in regard to the text that readers of prose do not have. Thus, the authority and hermetically sealed unified meaning that Barthes ascribes to the figure of the author cannot be applied to a playwright, as Page puts it "[i]n the sense in which Barthes intends the expression, the playwright has been 'dead' for some time" (Page 1).

Having already noted the limitations of the analysis of post-structuralists like Barthes and Foucault in relation to the theatrical medium, it now seems appropriate to

consider their ideas through the lens of feminist theory. Cheryl Walker's article

"Feminist Literary Criticism and the Author" (1990), summarizes the position of the

deconstructionists in relation to the author and examines the responses feminist critics

such as Toril Moi, Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn, as well as Nancy K. Millar have

made to them.

Noting Moi's concurrence with Barthes' sentiments on the death of the author as

an instrument in the dismantling of patriarchal notions of authority, Walker however

points to Nancy K. Miller's observation on the differences between male and female

writers' subjectivity. Miller notes that the formation of men and women's subjectivity is

constructed differently and therefore, it would be a mistake, in feminist terms, to

proclaim the author dead. Walker reads Miller's analysis to mean that:

> the notion of the death of the author arises because men feel overburdened by
> ego, self, and so on rather than, as Foucault would have it, that the author is a
> function created entirely by the writing self and unlocatable outside it (Walker
> 556)

This reading sees the conditions that led to Barthes' declaration as gendered; he refers

only to male authors, and therefore his analysis does not comprise the experience of

women authors. Walker proposes that, instead of rejecting and suppressing the figure

of the author and her/his biography, that a new theory and vision of the author is

necessary, a "new concept of authorship" (560), which considers the presence and needs

of marginal and non-canonical writer. This new notion would strip the author of the theological reverie associated with criticism pre-dating the post-structuralists in that it would no longer "naively assert that the writer is an originating genius" (560). It would however, adjust the parameters of discussion, by not diminishing "the importance of difference and agency in the responses of women writers to historical formations" (560).

Walker, like Gilbert & Gubar before her, comments on the exclusive use by both Barthes and Foucault of the masculine pronoun throughout their writings on the author, for them "[a]uthors and readers are both masculine" (568). She questions this masculine focus and challenges Foucault's assertion that the writer becomes a "dead man" in the act of writing, in the context of the presence of a variety of subjectivities, noting that "the relation between author and reader differs under different social circumstances" (570). Finally, she concludes that while the erasure of the author may, in a masculine context constitute a liberatory act, in the context of women's writing it would be an act of oppression (571).

At the close of his argument, Foucault asks (after Beckett) "What difference does it make who is speaking?" (Foucault 120) This seems to be the key question from a feminist point of view. Unlike Page, who interprets Foucault's question as a rhetorical one, to mean that in reality it matters little who is speaking, Walker fixes on this question as a site of feminist possibility. She asks us to consider what changes for us, as

critics, readers and spectators, if the figure of the author differs. What difference does it make if a woman is speaking? What difference does it make if a playwright, rather than a poet or a novelist, is speaking?

"I always look in mirrors to find out what's happening to me"[64]

To what extend can we claim that an anxiety contained within the playwright can be discerned in the play text? Scholarly investigation has long noted the textual manifestations of authors' preoccupations, concerns and anxieties within their artistic texts; be they novels, poems or theatrical texts. It is generally agreed that the writer's anxieties can find expression in manifold ways within the bounds of the text, through the medium of language, plot and themes.

To ascertain the extent to which anxieties can be considered to be textually manifest, we will return to two theorists who have written specifically about anxieties and texts. As already noted, both in the Introduction and in Chapter Two, Harold Bloom posited that writers (or "poets" as Bloom refers to them[65]) suffer from a deep-rooted anxiety in response to the influence of great canonical writers upon them. To become a writer of worth (a "poet"), each author must engage in an agonistic battle with the writers who have gone before. Poets, according to Bloom, adopt six principal strategies to negotiate the encounter with influence. These strategies are referred to by Bloom as "revisionary ratios" and can be summarized as follows; *clinamen*, where a

poem follows that of the precursor's up to a certain point but then "swerves" in a new

direction (Bloom *Anxiety* 14); *tessera*, where the later poet completes the precursor's

poem retaining "its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor

had failed to go far enough"(14); *kenosis*, "a movement towards discontinuity with the

precursor" whereby the poet empties himself of his afflatus and performs the same

operation on the precursor's poem "and so the later poem of deflation is not as absolute

as it seems" (14-15); *daemonization*, "a movement towards a personalized Counter-

Sublime, in reaction to the precursor's Sublime"(15); *askesis*, "a movement of self-

purgation which intends the attainment of a state of solitude"(15); and finally

apophrades, whereby the later poet "holds his own poem so open again to the

precursor's work" so "the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us […] as though

the later poet had written the precursor's characteristic work"(15-16). Through these

tactics, Bloom asserts the textual presence of the Anxiety of Influence in a number of

writers' work as widely diverse as Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 – 1822) and Sigmund

Freud (1856 – 1939). Bloom delineated these six strategies as clear manifestations of, and

reactions to, the Anxiety of Influence, and he identified its presence in works by writers

such as Dante Alighieri, William Wordsworth (1770 - 1850) and John Keats (1795 –

1821).

The textual manifestation of another anxiety, this time in regard to authorial

authority, is of concern in Gilbert & Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*. As already

discussed, Gilbert & Gubar take Bloom's theory as a starting point, identify it as highly

gendered in its analysis, and develop their own theory of anxiety in relation to female

writers. While Chapters Three & Four of this thesis dealt with manifestations of the

Anxiety of Authorship through differentiated working practices, of interest to this

particular chapter are the textual manifestations of such an anxiety.

Such textual manifestations are the very subject of study in the *Madwoman in the*

Attic. Gilbert & Gubar state that the anxiety is made textually manifest in specific

motifs, themes, plotlines and characterisations in female writers' work. The limited

choices available to female authors in terms of their public presentation - to be

presented as a modest being, apologizing for the inferior quality of her writing or as a

brazen woman insisting she is "as good as a man" (Gilbert & Gubar 64) – created an

anxiety that manifested itself as

> an obsessive interest in these limited options but also by obsessive imagery of
> confinement that reveals the ways in which female artists feel trapped and
> sickened both by suffocating alternatives and by the culture that created
> them(64).

This anxiety revealed itself in a preoccupation around issues of space; in themes

of confinement and escape; which reflect "the woman writer's own discomfort, her

sense of powerlessness, her fear that she inhabits alien and incomprehensible places"

(84). Gilbert & Gubar noted the use of character tropes in the novels, specifically the use

of mad or monstrous figures, a theme we will return to later in this chapter. Another

textual attestation to the presence of the Anxiety of Authority was the apparent

"oddity" of women writers' work within the bounds of a genre that it ostensibly

conforms to. This, again, is "associated with women's secret but insistent struggle to

transcend their anxiety of authorship" (73). Gilbert & Gubar, therefore, argue

conclusively in *The Madwoman in the Attic* that the author's anxieties can be, and indeed

are often present within the text under various guises. Both Bloom's study, and that of

Gilbert & Gubar seem to give credence to the claim that traces of writers' anxieties can

be detected in the text. Having established, then, that a playwright's own anxieties can

be made manifest textually, we are now free to interpret the recurrence of the theme of

death in Dante's and Carr's plays, and consider the meaning of such a motif with

regard the Anxiety of Ontology which may be present.

Many Anxieties in One

We saw in the last chapter how death in the work of Dante and Carr can, at

times, be a signifier for the power of memory and the influence of the past upon the

present, or at others, an exploration of the relationship between the living and the dead.

In other cases, such as in the plays *Woman and Scarecrow* and *Vita mia*, the staging of

death can also function as a modern, secular investigation into new attitudes and

practices of death. In this chapter, however, we shift our focus from the general theme

of death and concentrate on how the anxieties of the authors can manifest themselves in

the work through the signifier of death. Before examining the textual presence of the

Anxiety of Ontology in particular, we will explore how death can also stand as a

signifier for anxieties surrounding the process of mourning and the meaning of death in

the lives of the living.

Emma Dante suffered two significant losses of family members at a relatively

young age. Her brother, Dario, died in a car accident in 1995, just after she had

completed her studies at the Accademia and was working with Gruppo della Rocca in

Turin. The second great loss was that of her mother, who was dying when Dante

returned to Palermo to take care of her in 1999. Both of these losses had a tremendous

impact on the young Dante. She describes the death of her brother in the following

terms:

> Un lutto, un dolore, che mi ha cambiata, che mi ha fatto capire tante cose. Che mi ha forse, con sofferenza, aperto altri orizzonti, perché tutto è cambiato ("La strada scomoda" 35).
>
> A bereavement, a sorrow that changed me, that helped me understand many things. That maybe, through the hardship it brought, opened up new horizons to me, because it changed everything.

It was in the midst of the suffering induced by this double bereavement that Emma

Dante began work on her own unique style of theatre. She credits, in fact, the pain of

grieving with giving her the impetus and strength to take on a new project:

> Quello era il periodo più brutto della mia vita: avevo perso mio fratello, mia madre stava morendo, ero disoccupata, avevo lasciato la casa di Roma, non avevo più niente [...] E allora mi sono detta: «ma è possibile che in tutti questi guai non ci possa essere un miracolo?» Io dovevo trasformare quei guai in un miracolo, quel dolore doveva essere una cosa miracolosa, doveva diventarlo, altrimenti non ne sarei uscita. ("La strada scomoda" 47).

> That was the worst time of my life: I had lost my brother, my mother was dying, I was unemployed, I had left my apartment in Rome, I had nothing left […] And so I said to myself "there must be a miracle to be found amidst all these troubles." I had to change all of those difficulties into a miracle, that pain had to be a miraculous thing, it had to become so - otherwise I would never have come out of it.

The torment of these losses and the disillusionment she felt with her theatrical career to that point gathered within her as anger, and her theatre was born of this fury. Her approach to theatre was marked by a ferocity and reckless abandon that allowed her to free herself of the restraint of convention and tradition. Blinded by rage and grief she began to deconstruct theatre and theatrical conventions ruthlessly in her workshop. This approach led Dante to interrogate all elements of theatricality in her work.

Emma Dante's theatre, then, could be viewed as being born of death. Dante's preoccupation with death became a constant companion after this point. She displays a constant awareness of the transient nature of human life and this is expressed through a sense of urgency in her writing and work practices. Dante demands total commitment from her actors to the work and I witnessed this demand for this level of commitment personally, when I was allowed to observe three days of a workshop carried out with twenty-three actresses in Dante's theatrical space in Palermo, La Vicaria, in July 2011.

There is a clear sense of the awareness of the omnipresent threat of death, and the

concomitant urgency this brings to her every act, when Sabino Civilleri quotes Dante

during a rehearsal as saying, "domani non ci sarà, devi fare bene oggi. Domani

moriamo, quindi tutto quello che puoi fare devi farlo ora" ("there will be no tomorrow,

so you must work well today. Tomorrow we'll die, so you must do absolutely

everything that you can do right now" "La strada scomoda" 178).

> In the *Trilogy of the Sicilian Family*, death is a dominant theme:

>> Se in *mPalermu* la morte è appena accennata, in *Carnezzeria* è già più presente, infine in *Vita mia* è lampante, palese. I tre spettacoli finiscono con una morte' ("La strada scomoda" 57).

>> If in *mPalermu* death is just touched upon, it is much more present in *Carnezzeria*, and ultimately, in *Vita mia* it is evident, glaringly obvious. All three plays end with a death.

The sense of urgency and of anguish, engendered by Dante's personal bereavements

that needed to be processed and released reaches a pinnacle in *Vita mia*. In her

introduction to the play, Dante describes it as "una veglia" ("a funerary wake" Dante

Carnezzeria 138). The focus throughout the play is on the pain associated with grief and

bereavement. In the initial phase of devising this piece, Dante recalls that Chicco was

originally the protagonist, but that the focus later shifted to the mother and her grief at

her son's death. Such a move ensures that grief becomes the protagonist of the play. The

audience gradually become involved and entangled in the mother's pain through the

employment of a series of devices; such as the portrayal of Chicco's childish innocence, the mother's attempts to disrupt the progression to the next stage of the ritual and her inability to detach herself from her son. As spectators, "noi vediamo lo spettacolo con i suoi occhi" ("we see the play through her eyes" "La strada scomoda" 67). Bereavement is an experience common to all adults and, in watching the harrowing unravelling of the mother's pain during the action of *Vita mia*, the spectator is reminded of their own individual losses. The personal pain of the audience members is drawn forth and merges with the mother's furious grief. Our sorrow is tied to hers, and the theatrical and the real worlds collide. Through the observance of the preparation for the ritual of the wake onstage, the audience, in part, relive past sorrows. The audience at the showing of *Vita mia* in Rome that I attended in January 2010 were audibly and visibly sobbing throughout the play, with some people fumbling for tissues to dry their tears, while others sought to hide their faces. The onstage examination, and attempted prolongation of the liminal phase of death through the wake, creates identification with the mother's pain, conjures up the audience's personal grief, and brings a moment of catharsis.[66] Emma Dante herself has defined *Vita mia* as a play unlike any other; describing it as more of "un 'fatto' […] un accadimento" ("an 'actuality' […] an experience" "La strada scomoda" 67) than a performance. The elaboration of the piece was, by all accounts a painful process, one in which Dante did not hide her need "di

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esorcizzare" ("to exorcise") her pain (69). Dante's bereavement and grief is

communicated and transferred through the actors and the play:

> Credo che tutte le volte che fanno questo spettacolo, sentano questo mio lutto, come l'ho sentito io e come lo sentano gli spettatori. Ognuno il proprio lutto, no? O il lutto che verrà ... (69)

> I think that every time they perform the play, they feel my grief, just as I've felt it and just as the spectators feel it. Everyone has their own bereavement, don't they? Or a bereavement that is still to come …

This preoccupation with death and dying, this constant return to the theme of grief

indicates a process of mourning that is rendered public through Dante's work. Though

Dante resolutely refutes any attempt to classify her work as "curative,"[67] her consistent

return to the theme of death can be interpreted as a manifestation of her own grief and

an attempt to come to terms with it. Dante rejects this idea because she understands it to

mean a form of theatre that "ti cura e che ti fa guarire" ("that treats you and that heals

you" "La strada scomoda" 69). In contrast to this, her theatre does nothing to relieve

and remove the pain of her grief, rather, theatre allows her to externalise her pain and

to see it objectively: "[c]e l'ho davanti agli occhi: adesso lo tocco con mano e so di che

cosa sto soffrendo" ("it's right in front of my eyes: I can touch it, and I know what it is I

suffer from" 69). By externalising her grief, Dante not only articulates her sadness but

also shares the mourning process with the actors and, significantly, the audience. The

act of staging her grief through her plays, then, represents a sharing of sorrow - not a

cure for it. As British sociologist Geoffrey Gorer noted, mournfulness is no longer

widely accepted in modern society, it is something that must be hidden and

suppressed. By staging her own (and other's) bereavement in her plays, Dante renders

her mourning process public, and in so doing, shares it with the group of actors and

assembled spectators. As a result of this creative public process she can feel "meno sola"

("less lonely") in her bereavement (70).

While in some ways, Emma Dante shares and manages her grief through her

theatre, there is also another process at work in her return to the theme of death. Both

Dante's and Carr's preoccupation with the meaning of death for the living is made

manifest in their plays. By staging death, these playwrights delve into the depths of

what could be said to be the greatest mystery of humanity; what does death mean and

what significance does it have for our lives? For Marina Carr, it is *the* central

philosophical issue, she states:

> The fact that we are dying probably is the only significant thing for all of us. And
> how we live, and how we die. I think that is so important – how one dies. It is the
> only significant thing about us – that we are going to die, and that we get it all so
> wrong ("Interview with Melissa Sihra" 56).

Both playwrights demonstrate a constant awareness of the imminence of death in

life and this proximity creates a sense of urgency. In Carr, this develops into a keen

sense of the transience and fleeting nature of life, which in turn, drives her individual

characters towards living fully and in a committed manner. In Dante, the same sense of

impermanence is the driving force behind her own work and becomes a signifier for the importance of living boldly.

Carr, like Dante, suffered the loss of her mother at the young age, in her case at seventeen. She remembers her mother's death as being a trauma for her and her siblings. This loss almost certainly had an influence on Carr's view of death and its symbolic meaning. Rhona Trench has commented that such "a dramatic separation from her mother reconfigures throughout much of the spectrum of her plays" (Trench 11). It is an important consideration, especially when approaching the author's relationship to the theme of death in her work. In the context of this investigative process, we might consider this death as a possible catalyst for Carr's preoccupation with death and dying.

Cathy Leeney contends that the representation of death at the closing of Carr's plays "works to intensify life in all its mortality and to extend its meaning" ("Character" 705). Throughout her body of work, Carr ponders on the meaning of death in life, using her plays as a forum for the philosophical investigation of this existential question. It is also central to her writing experience, Carr describes herself as a writer on a journey, "who is trying to figure out what we're here for" ("Interview with Mike Murphy" 48). In this vein then, in her early plays and beyond Carr interrogates notions of life, death, time, eternity and infinity. She holds some unorthodox beliefs regarding

these concepts. For instance, in an interview with Mike Murphy in 2000, Carr reveals

that she believes that there is existence before and after death, a form of reincarnation

("Interview with Mike Murphy" 48), and that she also believes in the presence of

ghosts, who are sometimes able to interact with the living, including herself.[68] We saw

in Chapter Five how Carr creates worlds where the dead, the living and the

supernatural co-exist and interact. In a Carr play, ghosts like Gabriel in *Portia Coughlan*

are ubiquitous in their presence, supernatural creatures like the Ghost Fancier in *By the*

*Bog of Cats…*come to take characters away to the next world and, in the same play,

eccentric characters like the Catwoman converse and interact freely with those residing

and existing in many realities and temporalities.

Carr's wider investigation into the nature of death and life seeks to understand

the meaning of both categories in the binary: living/dead or life/death, to develop her

own vision of the continuum that stretches between the two poles, and to articulate

what significance death can have for the living. In her attempt to "try to figure out what

we're here for" ("Interview with Mike Murphy" 48), Carr appears to conclude that

death is the key through which we can read our own lives. This philosophy is

articulated and developed clearly in *Woman and Scarecrow*.

Carr's understanding of the cycle of death and life is that the "next world has a

claim on us" ("Interview with Melissa Sihra" 57). Woman, on her deathbed, must now

answer this claim and her apparent failure to fulfil her part of the bargain. It is Carr's

belief that there may be a judgement of sorts upon your death, which assesses your

actions during your lifetime. This idea is dramatized in the closing minutes of *Woman*

and Scarecrow when Scarecrow reads a series of "big" questions regarding Woman's life

and choices from a parchment. Woman is shocked by the content of the parchment, as

all the questions pertain to her failures in life, love and family.[69] This scene of judgment,

however, is no longer one of an external force who holds you to account based on a

series of rules external to you, as it was historically portrayed in Christianity.[70] In Carr's

scenario, one is only answerable to one's self:

> WOMAN. These are stupid questions. Who designed this questionnaire?
> SCARECROW. You did (Carr *Woman and Scarecrow* 66).

The proximity of death and the likelihood of just such a judgement, instead of being a

source of fear and anxiety for the living, is transformed by Carr into a site of possibility.

She advocates an awareness of death and the eventuality of such an appraisal as a route

to self-evaluation throughout one's life. Through such self-awareness, one can be bolder

and more determined, and ultimately, happier.

> I think you have to open the book of life while you are here, if you can, and say
> "What have you done?" and "What are you doing?" ("Interview with Mike
> Murphy" 57).

Her investigations seem to point to one conclusion; that because of the imminence and transcendence of death, it (and it alone) can teach us how to live well and fully. A sense of death can spur us on to significant action, thus avoiding the trap of simply "existing" instead of "living:"

> I have the greatest respect for people who make a mark, no matter what it is, just having the courage to do it, do it, do it – to get it done and then move on to the next thing, but just do it. There is so much vacillation that will finally mean nothing in eternity. There will be no book of life about our vacillation or our intentions ("Interview with Melissa Sihra" 59).

This is a trap, Sihra proposes, that many of Carr's characters, such as Portia, and Bender (*Low in the Dark*) have unwittingly fallen into ("Unbearable" 25-26). Such individuals are in a state of living death, the "death of self that occurs through lack of fulfilment in life" (22). Sihra advances the idea that through the act of death Carr's characters are provided with the opportunity to "commence new processes of selfhood" (25). I propose that by staging such interactions with death, by demonstrating the potential transformative power of death, by extricating the possible lessons it holds for the living, Carr proffers death as an interpretative key for living a fulfilling life characterised by an exuberant selfhood.

The preoccupation with the meaning of death for the living is a theme that is evident in Emma Dante's life and work. Where Carr expresses her belief in an afterlife, Dante shares no such belief; for her, everything ends with death: "non credo che ci sia

nient'altro dopo la morte" ("I don't believe there is anything after death" "Le famose").

Despite these divergent beliefs, Dante also contends that the imminence of death for

each of us holds the key to understanding life. The sense of urgency that drives her

work and life is derived specifically from this awareness of the proximity of death. In

the preparations for *mPalermu*, Dante's approach to work was conditioned by this

urgency:

> Ho detto: «o fate come dico io o vi ammazzo». E loro ci hanno creduto, perchè avevano paura di morire! Io l'ho sentita davvero, in loro, la paura di morire. Ho sentito la paura di perdere la vita [...] I nostri primi approcci al lavoro sono stati terribili, perchè c'era davvero un "pericolo di vita" per tutti noi, qualcosa che ha portato la nostra storia ad essere esclusiva e assolutamente prioritaria rispetto anche al mangiare e al bere (Porcheddu *Palermo dentro* 54).

> I told them "either you do what I tell you, or I'll kill you." And they really believed me, because they were afraid of dying! I absolutely sensed in them the fear of death. I sensed the fear of losing your life. […] Our first attempts at work were terrible, because each of our lives was "in danger." This transformed our relationship to make it exclusive and to the point where it became prioritized over eating and drinking.

Dante's work practices, then, are shaped by the consciousness of the inevitability

of death and the transience of life, giving them an urgency and immediacy that they

would not otherwise have. In *Vita mia*, the mother's overprotectiveness towards her

sons leads to the death of her youngest. Afraid of what dangers they may encounter out

on the street, the mother doesn't allow her three sons to cycle outdoors; as a result, they

cycle inside the house. Despite her best efforts to keep them safe, she loses her youngest

son Chicco in an accident caused by the bicycle at home. Dante states clearly that living

a restricted life through fear of death is not only inadvisable, but dangerous:

> Se tu chiedi di rinunciare alla vita, la vita non ti preserva, comunque ti uccide: non puoi rinunciare per paura di perderla. ("La strada scomoda" 68)

> If you decide to give up on life, life won't protect you - it will kill you anyway. You can't renounce life for fear of losing it.

The mother's case in *Vita mia* functions as a cautionary tale for those of us who are

scared into paralysis by the terror of approaching death. Dante, closely aligning herself

with Carr's sentiments, tells us that death can be instructive for the living; driving us on

to lead fuller lives, and avoiding the trap of fossilising in living tombs. Like Carr, Dante

seems to say that we should live in the awareness of death, but not in fear of it. This

transforms death from a lurking and threatening presence into a concept that provides

the possibility for learning.

Negative Readings of Voluntary Death

If the textual manifestation of death can be read as an indication of the anxieties

Dante and Carr may have about the process of bereavement and the meaning that death

can have for the living, what then might its relationship be to the playwrights' Anxiety

of Ontology? The key to answering this question could lie in the portrayals of the

female protagonists' suicides in a number of Dante's and Carr's works.

There has been a long, if little studied, tradition of female authors of different forms writing about the theme of suicide. In light of Higonnet and Bronfen's observations on invisibility[71] and the distinction between the female and male writer's relationship to the female dead or dying body,[72] this section will focus on portrayals of female suicides in works written by women.

An early example of such a work within this tradition would be Kate Chopin's (1850-1904) *The Awakening.*[73] This novel, about a woman frustrated by marriage and domestic life and first published in 1899, ends with the suicide of the protagonist, Edna Pontellier. Sylvia Plath's (1932-1963) well-known novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963) also recounts the suicide attempts of its protagonist, Esther Greenwood, though it does not end with the protagonist's death, while Anne Sexton's (1928-1974) poems *Sylvia's Death* and *Suicide Note* express in poetic form a desire for death. In theatre, the theme has featured regularly with early examples including Victoria Benedictsson's (1815-1888) *The Enchantment* (1888)[74] and Gabriela Zapolska's (1857-1921) *Małka Szwarcenkopf* (1897).[75] Bearing in mind the recurrence of this theme among women writers, it seems appropriate to ask; when women writers write about suicide, what does it signify? This chapter will argue that the theme of suicide can harbour multiple meanings when written by women; whether it functions as a direct expression of the author's own desire to die, a vehicle to carry meanings that address social concerns, a commentary on

the position of women in a patriarchal society, or significantly for this chapter, a cypher

for the author's anxiety regarding her own professional position.

Desire to Die?

A modern example of women authors writing suicide in the realm of theatre is

British playwright, Sarah Kane (1971 - 1999). Kane produced a body of work during her

short lifetime that divided commentators and attracted criticism for its portrayal of

onstage violence. Kane's final play, entitled *4.48 Psychosis* and first produced

posthumously in 2000, is a harrowing depiction of the state of mind of a person lost in

the profound depths of a severe depression. The piece is fragmented and non-linear,

having no clear setting, stage directions, characters or plot. It unravels the sentiments,

doubts, pain and suffering of a person affected by clinical depression, and ultimately

ends in a self-death induced by overdose.

> I have no desire for death
> no suicide ever had
>
> watch me vanish
> watch me
>> vanish (Kane 42)

Kane's play charts the alternating mental confusion and lucidity characteristic of

depression, which in this case leads onto death. Kane herself suffered from clinical

depression and, in fact, killed herself before the production of the play. This coincidence

of artistic subject matter and unfortunate actuality prompted leading British theatre

critic Michael Billington to describe the play as "a 75-minute suicide note" (Billington).

A similar synchronicity occurs in Sylvia Plath's work, with her final poem *Edge*, written

just days before her own death by suicide having all the appearances of a farewell to

life. In the poem, Plath describes a woman as "perfected" in death, her dead body

wearing "the smile of accomplishment" (85). This last poem, when viewed in the

context of Plath's suicide, and her other works that treated the theme of self-death such

as *The Bell Jar* (1963), urge readings of the oft-visited theme of suicide in her work as a

direct expression of her own suicidal tendencies.

Both Kane and Plath, then, have used the theme of suicide in their work in a

(semi-) autobiographical manner. The recurrence of the theme reflects their own

personal desire to die by their own hand, and this use of the motif necessarily renders

the lines between the author's personal life and the autonomous life of their fictional

characters (or in Plath's case, her poetry) indistinct. The threshold between art and life

is thus dramatically blurred and obscured; the reader or spectator cannot distinguish

between the two. Theatre critic Michael Billington seemed ill-equipped to navigate

these waters when asked to review the first production of Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*. Unable

to differentiate Kane's real life desire to die and the sentiments expressed in the text, he

titled his review, "How Do You Judge a 75-minute Suicide Note?" Kane's play text so

obscured the dividing lines demarcating fact from fiction, art from life that Billington, unable to resolve such fraught tensions in the recent wake of the playwright's death, limited himself to making a few comments on the production, Kane's wit and the manner of her death. To comment on the represented matter might have seemed like a comment and judgement on Kane's own person.

At this point, then, it would be useful if a distinction could be made between the (semi-) autobiographical writings of Kane and Plath and other female writers who use the theme of suicide with differing intentions. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a widely-held perception that the death of the protagonist can be interpreted exclusively as a negative outcome. There are a series of cultural and historical reasons for this interpretation; suicide was historically considered a dereliction of a citizen's duties, it was seen as a challenge to the state's power over its people, it became linked with mental illness, and mostly pertinently, to the pain of personal experience associated with the loss of a loved one to suicide. However, the traditional interpretation of all representations of suicide as intrinsically negative must be challenged. The tendency towards negative readings of represented suicide has, I believe, been further strengthened by the perceived link between textually or theatrically represented suicide and the actual suicide of the author.

There has long been a tradition linking creativity and madness, often leading

onto death. As James C. Kaufman points out, while many psychological studies have

been carried out on the subject, none have proved conclusive ("Sylvia Plath" 39).

Kaufman was the originator of an idea called "The Sylvia Plath Effect", which theorises

that female writers, but poets in particular, are more likely to suffer from mental illness

than male writers and the public in general. Kaufman's study and the one that follows it

("I Bask") provide fascinating empirical evidence on the mental circumstances of

women writers and raise valuable questions on the conditions necessary for the

successful production of writing. In the context of the persistent connection drawn in

the collective imagination between writers and mental illness, Kaufman's theory, in

providing evidence for such an association, strengthens the perception that represented

suicide, real-life mental illness and suicide are closely related. Certainly, as I have

argued above, in cases such as those of Plath and Kane, the represented suicide carries a

strong link to the real-life desire of the author to die. Although a noted phenomenon, it

would be a mistake to presume, however, that this is *always* the case. It is not so. In

many instances, the author who writes a suicidal character does not experience any

personal desire to replicate her protagonist's behaviour and is merely utilizing the motif

as a signifier for other meanings. Critics, commentators and spectators alike should,

therefore, recognise that represented suicide is not always a direct signifier for real

suicidal tendencies in the author. If we free ourselves from this pervasive

preoccupation, the way will be cleared to read represented suicide in other, more nuanced, terms. Following on from this rationale, suicide I will argue, in Emma Dante and Marina Carr's work, stands for a measure and expression of their anxiety surrounding their precarious professional position.

The Possibility of Other Readings?

In cases where the theme of voluntary death does not reflective the author's own suicidal tendencies, it is reasonable to posit that it may function as a carrier for a number of other meanings. In these cases, we may consider it to stand as a signifier for a desire to comment on the position of women in patriarchal society, or perhaps it acts as a cypher for the author's anxiety regarding her own professional position.

Marsha Norman's (1947 -) Pulitzer Prize winning play *'night, Mother* is an existential exploration of the issue of suicide and deals with the planned voluntary death of protagonist, Jessie. A middle-aged, separated mother of a troublesome teenager, Jessie decides to kill herself on the evening on which the action of the play takes place. What is unusual about Jessie's death is that she decides to reveal her plans to her mother, with whom she lives. Over the course of the evening, the mother seeks an explanation for Jessie's desire to die, tries to dissuade her and eventually comes to some kind of resigned acceptance of her daughter's choice. Norman's approach to the subject is nuanced, careful and considered. This is in no way a stereotypical portrayal of

an impulsive, despairing or desperate suicide; Jessie has been considering suicide for

over ten years,[76] she has reorganised the house to make it more accessible to her

mother's needs after her death, prepared a box with gifts for her relatives (Norman 84-

86) and she has specific instructions for her mother as to the organisation of her funeral

(80-82). On the first viewing/reading of the play, the reader/spectator is caught up in the

suspense – wondering whether Jessie will go through with her plan. Subsequent

readings however, uncover a compelling argument for Jessie's death. She has lived a life

of seclusion due to recurring epileptic seizures, was married and later betrayed by her

husband after which she returned to her mother's home, and she has also seen her son

steal from her to feed a drug habit. In light of these events and other facts, Jessie finally

decides that she would prefer not to live. It is not a question of a lack of courage: "it's

really a question of where I'd rather be" (74). What Norman does skilfully, in her

portrayal of Jessie, is lucidly and unsentimentally pose the question, "is life *always*

worth living?" Unwavering throughout the action of the play in her steely

determination to die, Jessie seems to answer this question in the negative.

Undoubtedly, pain, sadness and sorrow pervade the play, but in consistently and

doggedly justifying Jessie's choice throughout, Norman seems to point to death itself as

the principal source of this anguish, and not the fact that the death was a voluntary one.

Throughout their lengthy dialogue, Jessie answers her mother's doubts, assuages her

anxieties, relocates the blame for her death onto herself, and explains her reasoning.

This process removes much of the added anguish a suicide can provoke, by draining it of its characteristic sense of mystery, and most importantly removing the sense of blame from the survivors. When stripped of these extraneous elements, what remains is the pain of death and the grief of losing a loved one.

According to my research, Marsha Norman does not appear to suffer from any mental illness, nor is she suicidal.[77] Since winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 for '*night Mother*, Norman has gone on to work successfully in the realms of musical theatre and television. There appears to be no direct link between her representation of suicide and her own experience of life. Norman's approach to the subject can be seen therefore as an existential investigation into the theme of the sanctity of life and the belief that life must be preserved at all costs. Jessie's narrative counters such notions by introducing questions of choice and agency.[78] Norman's play, while sad (as the death of a loved one inevitably is) questions our persistently negative interpretation of suicide as a negative signifier and stands in marked contrast to the tragic representations offered by the likes of Kane and Plath.

Similarly, if we consider an older literary representation of female suicide, Kate Chopin's novel, *The Awakening* we note that Chopin herself was not suicidal and died a natural death at the age of fifty-three in 1904. *The Awakening*, recounts protagonist Edna's emotional and sexual awakening from the stupor induced by the binds of

patriarchal American society and her marriage. It is an exploration of the situation of women under patriarchy. Prompted by the attentions of a young man she meets in her summer home, Edna begins to discover her desires and her own identity outside of the demands placed upon her by societal conventions. Unhappy with the established gender norms, which trapped a woman into the unbreakable bind of marriage and required that she put her children before herself, Edna attempts to create a new life for herself, separate from her family by moving into an apartment of her own while her husband and two sons are away. In love with this younger man, it is his insistence that any relationship between them would be socially unacceptable that ultimately leads her to her death by drowning.

As in Norman's case, Chopin's representation of Edna's suicide should not be read then, as a direct expression of the author's desire to leave this life. A more sensible reading of the piece would be to see Edna's suicide as the final act in her rebellion against a society that sought to prescribe her role as wife and mother, as well as proscribe behaviours centred on desire and sexuality. Like the deaths of the resistant suicides discussed in the previous chapter, Chopin dramatizes the predicament of a free-thinking woman living under the restrictions of patriarchy and represents her death as Edna's chosen solution to a problem that narrowed the number of available choices.

These two examples could provide the basis for an argument that seeks to sever the link that unquestioningly and consistently binds represented female suicide to negative signifiers. If we can move away then, from the direct link between represented voluntary deaths and actual suicide - recognising that while at times, suicidal protagonists can be an expression of the author's desire to die, this is not always the case – there comes available a space in which we might see how the death of the protagonist may function in other ways. We have seen above how the motif of female suicide can signify multiple meanings such as preserving life at all costs and an exploration of the condition of women under suicide; we will now consider how it may function as a manifestation of the author's anxiety. In this section we will examine, first, the position of the figure of the author in literary criticism and how this relates to female writers. Secondly, I will outline how the figure of the female suicide in Dante's and Carr's work functions as a cypher or double for their anxiety regarding their unstable position as playwrights. Finally, I will explore the reasons for this doubling and the consequences of it for the playwrights' creativity and ontology.

The "Double" and the Anxiety of Ontology

Having established that we may, in the context of writing by women, speak about the figure of the author, we will now look at how the author's Anxiety of Ontology may be made manifest in the text. In their Introduction to the edited

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collection, *Death and Representation*, Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen state

that every "representation of death necessarily represses what it purports to reveal. It

also necessarily serves other purposes that may or may not be overtly acknowledged"

(19). Following my hypothesis of the Anxiety of Ontology, it is my contention that the

recurring and repeated representations of death, in particular the depiction of the

female protagonist's suicide, in the work of Marina Carr and Emma Dante point to just

such a meaning that is not overtly declared – the anxiety felt in regard to their

precarious professional and artistic position.[79] Although some may argue that the

playwrights' personal experiences with death are enough to account for their recurring

interest in the theme in their work, it seems to me that this focus on moribund and dead

figures is also influenced by the Anxiety of Ontology. If dead and dying figures can be

read in other writers as reflections of their preoccupations with mortality, art and the

life of an artist (Bronfen 3-15), then it seems likely that such figures in Dante's and

Carr's work would lend themselves to similar types of readings.This section

investigates how Dante's and Carr's own unease about their position may seep through

into the text and configures in a series of dead and dying figures.

We saw in the previous chapter how Carr's and Dante's representations of death

may fulfil a series of functions; an exploration of the role of memory in our lives and the

influence that the past can wield upon the present, an enquiry into the relationship

between those who are living and the dead, or a post-Catholic secular ritual exploring

modern attitudes and practices of death. The phenomenon of "resistant suicide" was

also examined and outlined. Such representations of dead and dying figures may be

read as symptomatic of the playwright's concern regarding her position. It is, however,

in the examples of resistant suicide outlined in the previous chapter that, I believe, the

link between the playwright's anxiety and represented death is most explicit. The

female protagonists whose suicides can be categorised as resistant, instigate their own

demise as acts of agency, resistance and subversion against the patriarchal society

which curtails their freedom and expression. It is my contention that these figures can

be read as the textual doubles of Dante and Carr, in that they can be seen to reflect the

playwright's own struggle with the conditions facing them as female exceptions in a

professional and artistic field dominated by males. Just as Gilbert & Gubar interpreted

the woman writer's battle with her precursor as a revisionary struggle "against his

reading of her," in which she seeks out a female precursor who "proves by example that

a revolt against patriarchal authority is possible" (49), so too do Carr and Dante

produce models of female rebellion and agency in their female characters in what can

be read as an attempt to reflect and contemplate their own status as professionals and

artists. This is not a new strategy; it is one that was noted by Gilbert & Gubar with

regard to nineteenth-century female writers:

> even when they do not overtly criticize patriarchal institutions or conventions
> […] these writers almost obsessively create characters that enact their own,
> covert authorial anger (77).

I will now argue that Carr and Dante, through the use of a mirroring mechanism can be seen to create a double for their own anxieties in the text. Into these "doubles" they may channel their preoccupations and anger, which results from their marginalised and threatened position as female playwrights.

The title of Gilbert & Gubar's book, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, follows Freud's theme of doubling, referring to the figure of the "madwoman" that acts as the nineteenth-century female writer's double within the bounds of the text. The "madwoman," they contend, reflects the woman writer's Anxiety of Authorship; her worry that she cannot create and that the act of creation may somehow be responsible for her destruction. These anxieties are embodied metaphorically for Gilbert & Gubar in the recurring presence of the madwoman, typically represented for them by Edward Rochester's first wife, who is locked in the attic, in Charlotte Brontë's famous novel *Jane Eyre* (1847). The madwoman, Gilbert & Gubar argue, in women's literature usually functions as "the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage" (78). If we agree that the double represents that which is repressed within the author, Gilbert & Gubar propose that the authors in question project their own despair, fear and anger into "passionate, even melodramatic characters who act out the subversive impulses every woman inevitably feels when she contemplates the 'deep-rooted' evils of patriarchy" (77). Through the creation of characters that struggle, fight and despair

under patriarchy, the female author reflects and dramatizes her own struggle and negotiation with patriarchal structures and systems.

The figure of the madwoman is problematic, in that it locks women into a circular and closed movement - of dissatisfaction, anxiety, illness and confinement - that promises no escape. Given the nineteenth-century historical context and focus of Gilbert & Gubar's study, this emphasis on madness and insanity is unsurprising. The nineteenth century was a time when to be a "fiercely independent" character who seeks to "destroy all the patriarchal structures which both their authors and their author's submissive heroines seem to accept as inevitable" (78), meant to live so far outside the margins of society that one was consequently either categorised as "mad" or eventually became so.[80] The social context in which Dante and Carr are writing differs considerably from that of the authors featured in Gilbert & Gubar's study, and with it, the selection of mirror changes. Significant social and legislative progress has taken place in the interval since the nineteenth century in which Gilbert & Gubar's writers lived, and although an end to patriarchy and androcentrism has not been brought about, it has lowered the penalties for women who defy patriarchy's normative influence. In my reading, Carr's and Dante's works, then, do not employ the device of the madwoman as their looking-glass, instead, they use the presence of dead and dying figures, particularly those of female suicides, as a double for their own artistic anxieties.

Freud believed that the double represented the repressed self, that the super-ego projects all the things it represses onto the primitive image of the double. In fact, his essay "The Uncanny" (1919), deals specifically with the topic of anxiety in relation to aesthetic production. Freud posits the double as the paradigm of the uncanny. But he also relates the double to the formation of the super-ego, which projects all that it represses onto what Freud refers to as the primitive image of the double. The double can also represent all the ego's negative traits that are unacceptable to it, or it can embody utopian dreams, wishes and hopes that are suppressed by the reality and by the encounter with society (Freud *Uncanny* 142-143). Do Carr and Dante, in repressing their Anxiety of Ontology, transfer it into their female protagonists, which function as the playwrights' own double?

If, as Freud suggests, the double is the site of repression, then we could argue that just as the nineteenth-century writers projected "their rebellious impulses" into mad or monstrous women, so too do Dante and Carr project their unease with a position as an artist and a professional that is unstable, threatened and precarious into the figure of the double: the resistant suicides.[81] Just as Woman demands a mirror of Scarecrow: "I always look in mirrors to find out what's happening to me" (Carr *Woman and Scarecrow* 21), so too might Carr and Dante look to their likenesses in the text to reflect, project and initiate a process of understanding of their own ontology. Their struggles, exemplified by those of Nina and Woman, could be understood to mirror

Carr's and Dante's negotiation with patriarchy, not in the personal realm, but in the professional and artistic sphere, where in virtue of being a female playwright, their position is less secure than that of their male colleagues. The parallels between author and character lie in their common negotiation of the tension between their own desires and the limits imposed upon them by a patriarchal society. Just as Woman and Nina struggle with the institutions and conditions of family, marriage, pregnancy and motherhood, in order to find a satisfactory outcome for themselves as individuals, so too, we could argue, do Carr and Dante struggle and negotiate with a system that discriminates against them in their professional and artistic positions.

Why do Carr and Dante choose the motif of female suicide as a signifier for their own anxiety? A clue to the answer to this question may be found in Anne Sexton's poem *The Red Shoes*. Originally a fairy-tale by Hans Christian Andersen which tells of a young girl's attachment to a pair of red shoes that cause her to dance uncontrollably, Sexton takes up the theme of dancing and links it to female creativity. Gilbert & Gubar see in Sexton's poem a manifestation of the anxiety of authorship in the form of "a feverish dread of the suicidal tarantella of female creativity" (56). They note how, in dancing the dance of death, Sexton's girls' bodies fall apart leading to their excruciating destruction. There has long been a tradition that links female creativity to death and suicide, and Sexton identifies the link in her poem whereby female creativity led inevitably to the destruction of the individual:

They could not listen.

They could not stop.

What they did was the death dance.

What they did would do them in. (Sexton)

Sexton thus links the fates of the women who wore the red shoes (that is, expressed

their creativity) to their ruin and death ("what they did would do them in").

As previously discussed, the tradition linking female creativity and death is

present even today, with the deaths of prominent female writers like Sexton herself,

Sylvia Plath, Sarah Kane and Carolyn Heilbrun. This tradition and these deaths

strengthen the link between notions of female creativity and suicide, and are reinforced

by a number of studies like Kaufman's "The Sylvia Plath Effect," which formalise the

link. Against the backdrop of a cultural context that links female creativity, death and

suicide, Dante and Carr can be seen to work within and against this tradition.

Undoubtedly, their portrayal of several protagonists who commit suicide superficially

conforms to the tradition. However, I argue that what is really being represented

through the suicidal figures is not a fear that creativity will kill the author, but rather a

fear of creative death.

The link between female creativity and madness or death is a historical one, and,

as such, is of its time. Whereas in the past, the expression of creativity for women had

serious material circumstances such as repression, confinement and madness, in a modern context, the consequences cannot be said to be of equal gravity. Most female artists in modern, Western societies are now free to express their art without the threat of institutional or social censure. I therefore propose that what Dante and Carr may express through their depiction of female suicides is not a fear that their creativity will lead them on a dance of death, but rather a fear that their creativity is not sustainable – in short, a fear of creative death.

What are the origins of this fear of creative death? The Anxiety of Ontology concerns a series of fears relating to their status as playwright; that their career may never take off, that if successful, the success cannot continue and they may fall out of critical favour, that they may not continue to receive commissions or funding and that they are disadvantaged in comparison to male playwrights. At the zenith of the accumulation of all these fears is that of creative death. Our female playwrights may feel apprehensive that due to their precarious position, they may be prevented from creating plays in the future, that their work will no longer be produced, and that they will fall from favour and be forgotten. Eventually, their creativity will have no outlet and may, therefore, perish. It is this fear, along with accompanying anxieties that, it could be argued, are made manifest in the playwright's doubling in her female protagonist.

In Gilbert & Gubar's analysis, writing for women is often a search for self-definition, self-individuation (76). Through story-writing, the author attempts "to make herself whole by healing her own infections and diseases" (76). Despite the seemingly positive trajectory of this movement –towards healing through writing - Gilbert & Gubar's study negates the transformative power of art through its strong and insistent emphasis on illness, disease and madness. Medicalised and pathological language predominates, making the destiny of the female writer, as doomed to isolation, illness and contagion, seem inevitable. This project, therefore, seeks to reframe that quest, and women playwrights' experiences, as a movement towards the shedding of the dramatists' anxieties through writing. Both writers have expressed sentiments that indicate a process of liberation, casting off and extrication is implicit in the act of creating for theatre. We have already seen how Emma Dante uses the theatre as a tool through which she externalises the pain of her bereavements. I now propose that the manifestation of fears and anxieties through the dramatic text and performance can represent a process of liberation for the playwright.

Although adamant that her theatre should not be seen as in any way therapeutic Dante, nevertheless, sees the process of making theatre as an undertaking with a liberating potential. She describes the first and last shows in *The Trilogy of the Sicilian Family* (*mPalermu* and *Vita mia*) as "i due spettacoli che mi hanno permesso di liberarmi di me stessa" ("the two plays that allowed me to liberate me from myself" "La strada

scomoda" 69). Dante asserts that working on those particular plays facilitated a casting

off of anxieties, worries and preoccupations, "mi hanno permesso di togliermi di dosso

questo incubo che è stata la mia vita" ("they allowed me to strip myself of the

nightmare that has been my life" 69). Although emancipatory, this shedding process is a

difficult one that implies suffering; "tutte le volte che vedo questi due spettacoli,

invecchio, mi tormento, però mi sento più libera..." ("each time I see those two shows, it

ages me, I am tormented, but I feel freer…" 69).

Melissa Sihra has commented on how, in Carr's theatre, death does not signify

the end, but rather a transformative step in the process of existence "as the passage

continues" ("Unbearable" 34). Read in this vein, represented death is part of a wider

cycle of actual and creative existence. Carr herself has commented on the relationship

between her theatrical writings and characters, and her own creativity. With regard to

the deaths of her heroines, the Mai and Portia Coughlan, she states:[82]

> I would like to write a play where I don't have to kill off the heroine. I've killed
> them all off, so I can go on healthier and freer ("Interview with Stephenson &
> Langridge" 151).

It could be said therefore, that a clear and direct link is thus drawn between the

represented suicides of Carr's female protagonists and the playwright's artistic

anxieties. Under this lens, the deaths of her heroines can be read as a metaphorical

killing off of parts of herself. Considering these comments from both playwrights in

light of my theory of the Anxiety of Ontology, I posit that Dante and Carr, in eradicating their characters (specifically their female protagonists) may engage in a potentially transformative process that attempts to erase the author's own Anxiety of Ontology, if present. The orchestration, on the playwrights' behalf, of the heroine's self-death may put in motion a process whereby the authors confront, externalise and process their own anxieties. In so doing, they could complete the movement towards "healing," identified by Gilbert & Gubar; freeing themselves from the anxiety. While Carr and Dante must continue to wrestle with the challenges posed by working as professional, female playwrights, they could do so without carrying the accumulated weight of a debilitating Anxiety of Ontology. Without the burden of such anxieties, they would undoubtedly be freer to create, write and dramatize the themes that are most important to them.[83]

The sustained presence of death, dying and dead figures across the works of Emma Dante and Marina Carr can be interpreted as a mirror which reflects the anxieties of both playwrights. Carr's and Dante's portrayal of death relates to their ontology as female playwrights as it functions as a textual manifestation of a number of anxieties. Firstly, the dramatizing of death in Carr's and Dante's plays represents a philosophical consideration of the significance of death for life and a stage in Dante's process of mourning. Secondly, it may function as a cypher for the playwrights' own preoccupation regarding their precarious professional and artistic positioning,

manifested in the Anxiety of Ontology. In staging death, the two playwrights examine

some of the most pertinent existential questions available to humanity, the act of

mourning the dead and their own Anxiety of Ontology. The representation of death,

especially female suicide, may constitute a liberatory, transformative process whereby

the playwright externalizes her anxiety and in so doing, frees herself from its weight.

Chapter Six – Concluding Remarks

> A theatre that is missing the work of women is missing half the story, half the canon, half the life of our time. That is the situation we have now.
>
> Marsha Norman[1]

If, as American theatre critic John Lahr puts it, a "play is for every playwright a journey into the unknown, a trip for which each has his own idiosyncratic method and mission" (xii), then every thesis could be said to represent a similar experience, following its own uncertain and often changing trajectory, in which the voyager must keep an eye fixed firmly on the destination. The path that one must follow in search of the discovery of the unique ontology of female playwrights is a winding one, marked by twists and turns, leading the scholar at times to unexpected discoveries and other times to dead ends. On entering the labyrinth of women dramatists' experience, one soon discovers that, contrary to the widely held opinion that women and theatrical writing have traditionally resided in separate categories, the history of women writing for theatre is, in fact, a long and colourful one, although at times the machinations of culture, religion and societal norms have worked to diminish, obscure and obliterate their story. A new vista of a rich and fertile expanse of texts penned by women unfolds itself before the scholar's eyes. Voices that were long unheard, such as those of historical

dramatists Eva Gore-Booth and Antonia Tanini, can be discerned in whispering

dialogue with modern women playwrights and practitioners.

This thesis is in part about discovery, principally about clarification and

extraction, and somewhat about dissemination. By clarification I intend a process

whereby the playwrights' position on feminism, which to date, due to a series of

seemingly conflicting and contradictory statements and representations, has remained

ill-defined and confused. It also denotes an attempt to throw light on the unique

ontology of female playwrights by differentiating them from other playwrights and

writers (be they male or female) in different forms. This is an essential undertaking, as

thus far in commentary, the specificity of being a woman playwright is often lost in a

sea of generalisations about authors and playwrights. By extraction I mean the teasing

out of meanings from the plays that could have significance in gender terms, as well as

the recognition of interventions that could be considered feminist in the reformulation

by Carr and Dante of traditional male genres, plots, characterisation and themes. Such a

drawing out of meaning, along with the identification of seemingly feminist

interventions into theatrical structures, provide the means to arriving at a more

profound understanding of the playwrights' relationship with both feminism and

patriarchal structures. Dissemination, finally, is the ultimate aim of this thesis; emerging

from a distinct desire to raise awareness of the wonderful work produced by these two

independently minded and innovative artists, and to draw a line that links their

alternately diverging and overlapping sentiments, approaches, techniques, meanings and interests.

Why choose to study female playwrights in particular? The writing of this thesis was dually prompted by personal motivations and external factors. On a personal level, the common and recurring feature of my studies in theatre at undergraduate level (as well as in other theatrical contexts) of the endless search for suitable parts for females, was a prime motivator. Despite the majority of women participating, it was inexplicably difficult to find plays that featured multiple, complex parts for women. Several outcomes resulted; cross-casting was employed where women played male roles, intensive searches were launched to locate works by lesser known authors whose plays featured multiple female roles, and in the cases of theatrical productions, the males were often cast in the major roles while women were assigned minor roles, or accommodated with tasks in the areas of stage management and production. Such an unsatisfactory status quo led me to an early questioning of the gender dynamics at play in drama and the politics of authorship.

Externally, in the years between 2008 and 2012, the world witnessed an extraordinary and unparalleled economic crash. The consequent recession and crisis has instigated a period of instability and adversity, but alongside the hardship there has emerged a new political sensibility. Across the world, seen most clearly in the events of

the Arab Spring, people are reviewing their material and social circumstances and demanding change. Ireland and Italy have seen the dramatic fall from grace and power of the Fianna Fáil and Berlusconi administrations; the former had occupied a dominant position in Ireland since 1932, the latter had exerted control over all areas of Italian political life since 1994. Contemporaneously with these political changes, a renewed interest in feminism, feminist thought and action among young women suddenly materialised. Women, whose voices had remained relatively silent during the period of unprecedented affluence, began to vocalise their concerns, complaints and queries about their position in a democratic state that not only permitted, but sometimes perpetuated gender discrimination. New organisations and political movements were born to facilitate this new wave of thought and expression.[2] Bolstered by such a surge in women's issues, this project took on a new sense of urgency and relevance. It engendered an acute sense that we need, as a theatrical community and society, to understand why women are underrepresented in theatre writing, a realisation that we need to find innovative ways for them to bring their voice to speak to the hushed auditoriums filled with Irish and Italian spectators, and a consciousness that as scholars we need to ceaselessly insist on the vital importance of those voices being heard. The struggle for recognition of women's writing in the theatre is one that requires constant application.

This thesis has focussed on the interface between ideology, culture and theatre in the work of two outstanding contemporary Irish and Italian playwrights. Emma Dante and Marina Carr are extraordinary in their attainment of the position of professional playwright, a role that has traditionally been defined and understood in masculine terms. This project sought to identify and understand the particularities of such an achievement in order to lay the foundations of a greater understanding of the difficulties that face women who write for the theatre and, perhaps in the future, smooth the way for other women playwrights.

Approaching the end of our investigation, it seems pertinent to ask to what extent the work of Marina Carr and Emma Dante can be evaluated in feminist terms. Jill Dolan's taxonomy of feminisms in theatre - encompassing the categories of Liberal, Cultural and Materialist feminism - provides a convenient framework from which to survey their work (*The Feminist Spectator as Critic* 3-18). The liberal project of feminism, which seeks to reform rather than transform the existing system in order to include women, has according to Dolan, helped women enter the theatre in greater (if insufficient numbers). Marina Carr can be clearly read as operating within this ambit, staging her work predominantly on the Irish national stage – an arena that has long been dominated by male playwrights and androcentric discourses- and working with traditional institutions. Her presence on such platforms can be interpreted as an attempt to change the system from within, and is significant in its placing of women's

experiences at the centre of Irish theatrical and cultural discourse. Dolan warns of a

process of backsliding inherent in such liberal feminist strategies, however, where

female playwrights who have attained a place in the mainstream do not wish to be

"particularized as women" (*The Feminist Spectator as Critic* 5). This distancing and

alienation from the identification with the tags of woman/female/feminist writer was

discussed in relation to Carr's and Dante's refusal of such a nomination. Dolan reads

this refusal as a betrayal of sorts, a negation of the work of feminist foremothers. She

also claims that the entry into the mainstream can compromise female playwrights:

"[t]heir desire to become part of the system that has historically excluded them forces

some liberal feminists in theatre to acquiesce to their erasure as women" (4). While, in

some cases Dolan's reading is undoubtedly accurate, in Carr's and Dante's cases, it is

possible to read such a negation, less as an effacement, and more as a rejection of

dominant culture's attempts to further side-line, marginalize and diminish the value of

women writers by segregating their work through the addition of a qualifying adjective.

Contrary to Dolan's contention that on entering the hallowed halls of theatrical success,

women playwrights succumb to a loss of identity, or a process of androgyny, I have

argued that by privileging the female in her work Carr is instead underlining and

foregrounding it. Conversely, Emma Dante cannot be considered under the banner of

Liberal feminism given her refusal to treat with state institutions and theatres – a

strategy which keeps her outside the bounds of the theatrical centre in Italy. Another of

Dolan's assertions regarding Liberal feminism deserves more attention and consideration, however. She claims that the entry of women into the sacred corridors of mainstream discourse does not bring about the expected profound change, instead "[l]ittle changes, even as stronger women characters are written into their plays, because the universal to which they write is still based on the male model" (4). Dolan seems to imply here that the dominance of masculine systems, discourses, symbols and myths needs to be addressed if women are to have a significant impact on the world of theatre and performance. Thankfully, some work on this vital project has already been initiated, and is evinced through the writings of feminists like Adriana Cavarero, whose monograph *In Spite of Plato* (1995) attempts to revise and reimagine classical female mythical figures in order to provide an alternative to the androcentric and misogynistic tradition. In her "Foreword" to the volume, Rosi Braidotti describes Cavarero's project as a "careful rewriting of some of the central figures in Greek philosophy, such as they appear in Plato's texts and in surrounding myths: Penelope, the Thracian maidservant, Demeter, and Diotima" (xii). Through this process of rewriting and reimagining, Cavarero hopes to delineate a female symbolic tradition which could potentially contest the dominance of the masculine systems.

Dolan's description of Cultural feminism as a line of thought that "proposes that there are, and should be maintained, clear differences between men and women which might form the basis of separate cultural spheres" (*The Feminist Spectator as Critic* 5), is a

model roundly rejected by both playwrights. Neither Dante nor Carr appears to believe

in absolute gender categories. Indeed, as demonstrated in Chapters Two and Three, the

playwrights reject some of the basic tenets of Cultural feminism such as the emphasis

on sexual difference, and the glorification of motherhood.

In their critique of gender norms and, in particular, Dante's deconstruction of the

gender binary, both playwrights demonstrate some prominent features of materialist

feminist thought. In its deconstruction of the mythic subject "woman", Materialist

feminism finds echoes in Carr's presentation of desperate, bold, defiant women, who

are sometimes selfish mothers and violent partners. In its insistence on looking at

women as a class oppressed by material conditions and social relations, this materialist

feminist line finds resonance in Dante's depictions of women who are doubly

oppressed by economic poverty and gender discrimination. Most resonant of all is

Dante's deconstruction of gender in her plays with an LGBTQ focus, which in keeping

with Judith Butler's theories of performativity, reveal gender as a construct and

performance with fluid edges – something which was also a feature of Carr's early

"experimental" plays. However much their attempts at challenging and deconstructing

the basis of the gender binary may conform to the materialist feminist project, Carr's

and Dante's theatre cannot be said to entirely fulfil Dolan's contention that a major part

of the materialist critical project '"is to denaturalize the psychological identification

processes implicit in representation" (14), as neither playwright expressly seeks to

foreground and expose the representational apparatus in an attempt to demystify the plays' latent ideology. In theatrical terms, the practitioner most known for such foregrounding techniques is Bertolt Brecht. Brecht sought to highlight the representational apparatus of the theatre and performance through his Epic Theatre and specifically verfremdungseffekt (or alienation effect), in order to distance the audience emotionally from the events depicted. This distance, Brecht argued, made spectators more likely to consider the social and political ramifications of what they saw, rather than simply being flooded with emotion. This was achieved by techniques such as actors breaking character and the fourth wall, strategic interruptions to the action, the use of simple and basic sets, comedy and pre-announcements of the impeding action (Benjamin 1-23). While Dante's theatre does display some elements that could be said to borrow from Brecht's technique (such as the frequent breaking of the fourth wall, the emphasis on simple and non-realist sets), and Carr may achieve some similar effect through the mise-en-scène of the writing during production, it would be difficult to claim that either writer specifically and directly seeks to draw attention to the representational apparatus in their work.

To a greater or lesser extent, Carr's work can be said to engage with the liberal and materialist elements of feminism, while Dante's theatre coincides particularly with the aims of Materialist feminism. Carr's work shows elements of the liberal agenda, in her attempts to introduce her work into the existing systems of theatre, while Dante,

eschewing the liberal line engages with parts of Materialist feminism in her dogged

undermining and deconstructing of the gender binary. Although neither playwright

wishes to be identified as a feminist, or indeed, woman writer, their work nevertheless

raises issues of feminist significance and dramatizes some salient features of feminist

philosophical and theoretical discourse.

Gender discrimination in theatre is both a historical fact and a contemporary

reality. Although actresses have a recognised history in the world of dramatic

representation, women playwrights have also written over the centuries for theatre. In

assessing the interaction of women playwrights and the literary and theatrical canon,

this thesis has confirmed that women do indeed have a history in theatre, even if the

gatekeepers have often sought to obscure, conceal and deny it. The recovery and

rehabilitation of "lost" playwrights by feminist scholars marks a milestone in the

history of theatre and has paved the way for other scholars to investigate the past, and

for women playwrights to write within the continuum of a historical context that

accommodates women's point of view.

Despite such sterling work, however, the current continuing gender imbalance in

playwrighting demands that scholars and practitioners renew their efforts to address

on-going discriminations. Today in Italy, Ireland, across Europe and the Americas,

women are significantly underrepresented within the profession of playwright. In

keeping with a general neglect of the area, statistics on the gender balance in submissions and productions are scarce and hard to find. A recent study, carried out by Princeton student, Emily Glassberg Sands entitled, *Opening the Curtain on Playwright Gender: An Integrated Economic Analysis of Discrimination in American Theater* (2009) sought to quantify, using economic measures, the level of gender discrimination in American theatre. The results were damning. Glassberg Sands found that women who write for theatre operate in a general climate of discrimination where they must contend with "taste-based gender discrimination" (104). According to the study, scripts bearing female names are "deemed by artistic directors to be of lower overall quality and to face poorer economic prospects" than identical male-authored scripts. This, despite another of Glassberg Sand's findings that female-written plays "averaged significantly higher revenues" than their male counterparts (105). Significantly, women who wrote female characters experienced greater discrimination than those who wrote male characters (104). Unfortunately, no similar study exists in an Italian or Irish context, but such an investigation, should some scholar decide to undertake it, would prove an invaluable tool in assessing the current status of women playwrights. From the non-empirical evidence that is currently available (unsatisfactory as it may be), there seems to be little indication that the situation in Ireland or Italy is significantly better than in the United States of America, and given the level of gender discrimination present in both countries, one would be inclined to suppose it worse.

Amidst this climate of discrimination, isolation and underrepresentation, there is however, much to be hopeful about. Encouraging signs of women's participation in theatrical writing and creation are emerging. The recent Absolut Fringe Festival held in Dublin in September 2012, prominently featured a variety of up and coming female writers, directors and performers, with Una McKevitt's take on verbatim theatre in her play *Singlehood*, choreography by Emma Martin Dance and Paperdolls, and one-woman shows by Stephanie Preissner and Ruth Lehane. The annual Santarcangelo Festival,[3] held near Rimini, this year featured choreographed performances by Barokthegreat[4] and the dramaturgy of Mariangela Gualtieri in Teatro Valdoca's *Le case dei sogni di John Cage* ("John Cage's House of Dreams").[5] Initiatives that seek to promote women in theatre, such as the Donnadiscena prize in Italy, inaugurated in 2004 by Alessandra Gatto, and the Susan Blackburn Prize for plays of outstanding quality written for the English-speaking theatre, also function to encourage female playwrights and promote their work.

Despite a seeming flurry of activity in the realm of women creating for the theatre, it behoves the scholar to read such developments with caution. Similar periods of intense activity, with women's writing appearing more and more on stages, have been born, only to burn out prematurely among the crowd of playwrights that make up the firmament. Marsha Norman tells of one such period:

> In the late '70s, when I came of age as a playwright—along with Beth Henley, Wendy Wasserstein, Tina Howe, Paula Vogel and Ntozake Shange—we thought the revolution would be over by now. We thought we were changing things, that regional theatres and New York institutional theatres would soon be presenting seasons filled with plays by women. But that did not happen.
>
> The regional theatre movement spun out into a new-play gold rush. Theatres deserted the writers they had just discovered, seeking fresher, newer faces. Even today, newly discovered writers of all kinds find themselves forgotten all too soon, in the theatre's version of Warhol's 15 minutes of fame. This has been hard on all writers, but it has been hardest on women. (*Not There Yet*)

On the basis of such anecdotal testament, one must resist facile predictions of an imminent wave of female playwrights that will soon make a permanent break into the hallowed halls of our prominent national theatres. A renewed interest in writing by women for theatre does not guarantee any degree of permanent acceptance. Perhaps what is needed, as Jill Dolan implies, is a radical redrawing and reimagining of the universal (19-40)[6] that underpins all theatrical writings; only this revision can challenge the dominance of masculine systems, discourses, symbols and myths that inform the expectations, views and critical principles of theatre's artistic directors, producers, directors, critics and audience members.

It is inevitable, therefore, that in a climate of continuing gender imbalance and inequity, in a context where theatre fails to value the voice of women playwrights, that anxieties, pressures and insecurities emerge. The consolidation of these anxieties with a historical suppression of female playwrights' work and the persistence of the singularity myth, I have proposed, may give rise to the Anxiety of Ontology within the

female playwrights studied. Because the playwrights may perceive the exceptionality of their position, there issues forth a fear that their position is precarious and untenable, that their artistic creations will not attain their deserved success, and that the playwright is at risk of creative death. This anxiety may be made manifest through distinct approaches to working processes and especially in the written and performance text. Although the presence of anxiety could potentially be read in negative terms, this project unlike Gilbert & Gubar's study which, I contend, tended towards a pathologization of female writers, emphasises the transformative potential of writing and creating theatre. Writing for theatre, in this interpretation, plays a crucial role in processing the anxiety, and ultimately offers the possibility to the playwright of freedom and liberation from such preoccupations.

Chapter One outlined the projected path my investigations would follow, setting out the aims of identifying the current status and conditions of female playwrights Emma Dante and Marina Carr, detecting the unique difficulties they may encounter as women writing for theatre, discerning strategies they can adopt that challenge and contest androcentric forms and content, locating death along the diverse spectrum of possible meanings as a site of resistance, and finally reading represented female suicide as a reflection of the playwrights' anxiety regarding their artistic and professional status and position.

In assessing the impact on female playwrights of working within a system that defined the role in masculine terms, Chapter Two examined how Dante and Carr employed differentiated working processes in response to external and internal pressures. It was seen that in cases where the Anxiety of Ontology is present, the playwrights may employ altered working, collaborative and positioning methods as a consequence. It was proposed that working in an environment that is not sympathetic to your situation as an individual who is not part of the dominant group in society can effect changes in the way playwrights work, perhaps discouraging them to work in collaboration with other artists, pushing them towards a search for female precedents in theatre history or a wholesale rejection of the legacy of the past, impelling them to a spurning of the potentially marginalising nomination of "feminist", and prompting them to assume a central or peripheral location in relation to the loci of cultural and political power, funding and influence.

If, as argued in Chapter Two the Anxiety of Ontology alters Dante's and Carr's approach to their working process, then Chapter Three delineated the potential presence of anxiety within the bounds of the creative piece. A calculated and persistent disruption and contestation of traditional theatrical forms such as genre conventions, plotlines and linear chronology, as well as a reimagining and redrawing of content such as female characterisation, choice of themes and a rejection of the traditional privileging of the male perspective, may be read to constitute an expression of the playwrights'

anxiety and a consequential negotiation with such a preoccupation. Disruption and resistance of form and content may communicate Dante's and Carr's disaffection with the available palette of established theatrical forms, themes, plots and characters and their incompatibility with their own artistic ends as women who write for theatre. It was posited that both Carr and Dante bend and reconfigure existing patterns of form, disrupting the anticipated course of the play, as an exercise in unconventional dramaturgy.

It is my contention that Dante and Carr legitimate the role of women in theatrical discourse and inscribe women's perspectives into the heart of the phallocentric discourse that dominates theatre today. Although I argued that the theatrical canon's representation of female figures was male-authored, inadequate, incomplete and with polarising tendencies, it would appear that the problem extends far beyond the realm of drama and performance. Adriana Cavarero, writing on the myths that form the basis of all philosophical and literary thought, contends that "in the large range of samples available within the tradition, one cannot find a single figure that adequately meets the declared needs of female subjectivity" (4). Where such a subjectivity exists, it is buried under tropic figures of "hyper-masculine men, and by figure of women constructed by men" (4). Dante and Carr expand the range of possibilities for onstage female characters within the sphere of theatre in their off-centre depictions of women and gender relations. Carr's women break the mould for dramatic characters in an Irish context,

confounding the often polarized and hollow depictions strongly influenced by the

ideals propounded by Catholic social policy that have been the norm until recent times,

instead proposing women who are strong, powerful, defiant and sometimes selfish. The

female characters that inhabit the hostile worlds of Emma Dante's plays, unlike Carr's

fierce women, are often powerless victims who are "sfruttate e violentate senza pietà"

("mercilessly exploited and violated" Dante "La pratica" 196). However such a

depiction is framed by a wider critique of the system of binary gender that is culturally,

socially and legally inscribed into modern Italy and Ireland (as well as elsewhere). The

thematic insistence on male-centred issues such as paternity, the father-son relationship

and the world of work throughout the theatrical canon is challenged in Dante's and

Carr's work. Dante takes on and undermines the most sacrosanct of all institutions in

Italy, the family, in her searing deconstructive and dystopian representations of violent,

suffocating and oppressive family units, while Carr's focus is set firmly on the

restoration of themes pertinent to women to the stage and the reconfiguration of

established concerns such as marriage and motherhood.

It was established, then, in Chapters Two and Three that the Anxiety of Ontology

may be expressed through the playwrights' differentiated working strategies, as well as

deliberate interventions and disruptions of traditional theatrical forms and content.

Chapter Four moved towards a tighter focus on textual matters and particularly the

elusive, yet all-pervading theme of death. Elisabeth Bronfen states: "[n]arrative and

visual representations of death, drawing their material from a common cultural image

repertoire, can be read as symptoms of our culture" (xi). The theme of death, drawn

from the well of common cultural imagery, returns again and again in plays that span

the *oeuvre* of Dante and Carr. The variegated meanings that can emanate from the death

motif are infinite, given its extensive reach and its common employment by writers as a

symbolic device. Unlike many representations of death in visual and narrative history

where a dead woman, as the ultimate site of alterity, is objectified and "stands in for

concepts other than death, femininity and the body – most notably the masculine artist

and the community of survivors" (Bronfen xi), Carr and Dante eschew a lingering focus

on the female cadaver, concentrating instead on dying figures, revenant characters and

supernatural beings. Among the possible readings of the signifier of death in their

works, this thesis read Carr's and Dante's works to be an exploration of the influence

exerted by those who have passed on upon those still in life, to propose the process of

making drama and dramatic writing as a key stage in mourning, and to enact a public,

secular ceremony of death. The culmination of these diverse functions is to reintroduce

what Ariès argued had become a taboo subject in modern times back into the public

sphere and discourse.

Against the backdrop of traditional negative philosophical, religious, legislative

and feminist readings of suicide, the enacted self-deaths of Emma Dante's protagonist

Nina and Marina Carr's Woman were read as acts of agency, individual will and

defiance. In choosing death, the female protagonists may be seen to reject the material conditions enforced upon them by a patriarchal system. Instead of settling for the "least worst" option made available to them, they choose to bring about their own deaths in an attempt to "author" their own lives on their own terms. This "resistant suicide" could be understood to reframe voluntary death and transforms it from previous readings of it as defeatist and defeating gesture, into one of authority and choice.

In the Chapter Five, the repeated death motif is read as a manifestation of the playwrights' own anxieties, whether they concern the author's own grief, existential issues or their precarious position within the profession of playwright. It was suggested that Emma Dante utilises the theatre and performance to give voice to her own personal pain and grief, induced by the deaths of her brother and mother. Performance is thus endowed with a restorative role whereby sorrow and pain can be rendered public, shared and communal, if not expunged. For Marina Carr, instead, theatre writing is seen to provide a forum in which the playwright is facilitated in the exploration of the existential questions of life and death. Through her plays, Carr dramatizes the possible boundaries and categories that lie on the continuum that arcs between the states of alive and dead.

Suicide, as discussed in Chapter Four, has generally received a negative treatment by philosophers, critics, legislators and moralists over the centuries. No

wonder then that the hermeneutics of represented suicide have often been negative in nature, something that has not failed to influence feminist critical thinking on the matter. This chapter proposed that while such interpretations of female suicides in drama are valid and relevant, feminist scholars should not exclude *a priori* any readings that deviate from them.

Finally, writing and creating for theatre was advanced as a potential means for the playwrights of exorcising their muffled anxiety about their precarious position. Where Gilbert & Gubar suggested that the madwoman that featured so prominently in the novels of the nineteenth-century writers they studied functions as the writer's own double, communicating her own frustration, suffocation and anxieties - this thesis reads the figures of female suicides as playwrights Carr's and Dante's doubles. Bronfen tells us that, "[m]uch like the corpse, empty of its soul, representations of death refer to the absence of full meaning by signalling the presence of meaning elsewhere" (85). In the plays selected the presence of death was understood to point not only to the significances mentioned above, but also, vitally, to another meaning – the potential existence within the text and the playwright of the Anxiety of Ontology. Having read the suicides of Dante's and Carr's female protagonists as acts imbued with opposition and resistance to the poor material and psychological conditions that result from living in a patriarchal society hostile to a woman's emotional, sexual and professional needs, Chapter Five advances the notion that these deaths may act as mirrors for the

playwrights' own battle with patriarchal forces. Creative death was presented as the

fear that lies at the pinnacle of the interactions of anxieties that form the Anxiety of

Ontology, and this chapter explored how such a base fear may be placated, negotiated,

and eventually dissolved. The act of writing for theatre, in its interplay with the anxiety,

takes on a progressive and transformative aspect, as the means through which the

playwrights might attain deliverance and emancipation from such preoccupations. The

orchestration of the deaths of their suicidal characters, specifically their female

protagonists, engages Carr and Dante in a process that carries with it the potential to

unshackle themselves from the Anxiety of Ontology. The represented deaths could

initiate a process that confronts, externalises and reconciles the playwright to their own

anxieties. Writing for the theatre was therefore emphasized as a transformative

undertaking because of its potential to rid the playwright of the anxieties associated

with living with the oppression and discrimination of patriarchal culture.

What is the future for female playwrights like Emma Dante and Marina Carr?

With a history of suppression, denial and singularity behind them, one would hope that

the future prospects could be brighter; that more women will write and submit plays,

that those plays would be produced at the same frequency as male playwrights, that

they would contain more female characters, and that critical reaction would show no

gender discrimination in its evaluation of the play's worth. What would constitute a

desirable future for female playwrights is obvious, what is needed to achieve such aims is less clear, however.

Firstly, this thesis proposes that a more nuanced understanding of the position of female playwrights, and the unique challenges, obstacles and anxieties that they encounter, is necessary to the development of any policy or strategy that seeks to encourage their writing. If institutions, theatre companies and practitioners cannot comprehend potential differences that female playwrights may present, then the project of promoting and fostering their art is bound to either partial success (as I believe we are seeing now) or complete failure. Understanding is the first step in any potential process of advancement.

Secondly, although individual initiatives on the behalf of artistic directors, literary directors, organisations and theatre companies seek to promote women playwrights and their work, many of these enterprises and schemes exist in isolation. If what is needed to establish writing by women as a mainstream product is an overhaul of our fundamental understanding of universals, then I fear that many groups working in isolation will prove incapable of taking on such a gargantuan task. It is my view that these initiatives must work together in a collective and concerted effort to change not only the perceptions of playwrighting by women, but also the material reality of their production and reception. The fact that many groups and individuals now work

separately does nothing to correct the perception that women's writing is a marginal issue. Women's writing needs to become central to Irish and Italian theatre, to do so these groups will need the strength that lies in numbers.

Finally, the gaze of academic criticism will be vital to the project of the establishment of women's playwrighting as central to theatrical discourse. Feminist scholars have already effected tremendous change in the perception and history of women who write for the theatre through their salvaging of forgotten figures. This work should be continued not only in a historical context, but also in a contemporary setting. The critical attention afforded by academic scholars to contemporary female playwrights is inscribed forever in the annals as a record of their work, it draws others' interest to their plays, and through inclusion in anthologies, can make some steps towards ensuring an inter-generational permanence that might otherwise be unavailable to such writers.

This journey began with a number of assumptions on the scholar's behalf; that women playwrights are a rarity, that they have no tradition to speak of in theatre writing, that they write for theatre less than women write poetry or novels, that they are new to it as an art form, and that there are fewer parts for women in plays. These and a number of other assumptions about women and their relationship to writing for the theatre informed my thinking during my studies. Perception ceded to actuality and

facticity as many of these preconceptions were exposed as fictions. I discovered that

women have a long and auspicious history of writing for the theatre, even if that history

has at times been deliberately suppressed by the dominant intellectual culture with its

fluctuating moral compasses. Contrary to popular opinion, there are in fact, many

women today who write for theatre, whether their work overcomes the obstacle of

achieving a production or remains on the page. But, it proved to be true that there are

fewer parts for women in plays, though women writers do write more female

characters.

The playwrights that inspired the writing of this thesis have created theatre

pieces that, through writing and representation, to borrow Ellen Moer's terms, *protest* at

the hegemonic dominance of patriarchy both in women's lives and in theatrical

representation, *innovate* the representation of women onstage by proposing new, active

and complex female characters as well as manipulating existing forms to suit the needs

of their art, and finally, *confront* the audience and critical expectations through a

defiance of traditional form and content, along with their own anxieties around their

ontology. This thesis sought to draw attention to what has been a much neglected area

in theatre studies, the figure and position of female playwrights. The specificities of

such playwrights have often been subsumed into the broader categories of

"playwrights" or "women writers" and consequently their unique status has been

ignored and unknown. In investigating Emma Dante and Marina Carr's work, through

the lens of the Anxiety of Ontology, this project has sought to understand the particular

difficulties faced by such playwrights, the influence of a climate of discrimination upon

their work and its variegated manifestations. Such a detailed and penetrating

understanding, it is hoped, will inform those who seek to promote women playwrights

and their work, and provide useful tools with which to take action to address such a

pronounced gender imbalance in the field of playwrighting. Female playwrights have

much to offer theatre in Italy and Ireland. Female voices can provide a compelling

alternative to hegemonic masculine discourses and their plays can provide a site where

the realities of gender-equality can be explored. This thesis wholeheartedly aspires to a

day when, in the context of greater gender equity in society and equal gender

representation in the ranks of playwrights, the Anxiety of Ontology will cease to exist or

have effect. Only in such a context will women playwrights be as free as their male

counterparts to create theatre after their own fashion, with no concerns or anxieties

about gender discrimination. Only then will we be in position to reformulate Marsha

Norman's statement, which opened this chapter; only then will we have a theatre that

includes the work of women, a theatre that tells the whole story, that encompasses the

entire canon and recounts all of the life of our time. It is a theatre that I wish to live to

see.

Notes

Chapter One

[1] ("dramatic writing involves playing with time, the anticipation and postponement of a sensational event like death." 67) Emma Dante from an interview with Andrea Porcheddu and Patrizia Bologna, "La strada scomoda del teatro" published as part of the edited collection *Palermo dentro* (2006). Porcheddu is also the editor of the collection.

[2] Marina Carr from an interview with Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge published in *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting* (1997).

[3] Glasshouse Productions was set up in 1990 by four women in Dublin to perform the work of Irish women playwrights.

[4] Hrotsvit von Gandersheim was a tenth-century German secular canoness and is considered to be the first known female playwright. Note that Gandersheim was not Hrotsvit's surname but is rather a reference to Gandersheim Abbey, and its surrounding areas, where she lived and worked. For more see (Aston 21-22), (Case *Feminism* 32-36) and particularly (Case "Re-viewing Hrotsvit"). Sue Ellen Case, however, proposes that Roman actress-courtesan Theodora, who lived in the fifth century A.D. could be considered the first female playwright, if we also accept women theatre practitioners as "playwrights," and not exclusively women who *write* for theatre (Case *Feminism* 31).

[5] Elaine Showalter suggests that this move towards recuperation of forgotten women writers was prompted by Per Seyersted's studies of Kate Chopin's work in the mid-1960s (Showalter *Literary Criticism* 442).

[6] Christina Reid (1942-) is a Northern Irish playwright whose plays provide a working class, female and Protestant perspective of Northern Irish society. Among her noted works for theatre are; *Tea in a China Cup* (1983), *Joyriders* (1986) and *The Last of a Dyin' Race* (1987).

[7] Anne Devlin (1951-) is a Belfast playwright who has written about women's experiences in the context of the Northern Irish "Troubles" in plays such as *Ourselves Alone* (1985) and *After Easter* (1994).

[8] Emma Donoghue is a well-known Irish novelist, but she has also written for the stage. Her plays include *I Know my Own Heart: A Lesbian Regency Romance* (1993), *Ladies and Gentlemen* (1996), and most recently at the Dublin Theatre Festival, *The Talk of the Town* (2012).

[9] Stella Feehily (1969-) is a London based Irish playwright whose plays have mainly been produced by Out of Joint Theatre Company. Her major works include *Duck* (2003), *O go my Man* (2006) and *Dreams of Violence* (2009).

[10] Dacia Maraini (1936-) is known principally as a novelist, but has written many works for theatre and was a founding member of the women-only Maddalena theatre in 1973. Her plays include *Dialogo di una prostituta con un suo cliente* (1973), *Maria Stuarda* (1975), *I sogni di Clitennestra* (1980) and *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* (1991).

[11] Franca Rame (1929-) is a playwright, actress, wife and collaborator of Dario Fo. She was responsible for a series of feminist monologues presented under the name *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* (1977) including *Lo Stupro* and *Medea*. She has also been instrumental in the

development of all of Fo's work, though most of the plays are published with only Fo listed as the playwright.

[12] Barbara Nativi (1951-2005) was a dramatist, director and co-founder of the Teatro della limonaia in Florence. Her plays include *Dracula* (1995), *Resistere* (1995) and *Ritratti di Fine Secolo* (1999).

[13] Letizia Russo (1980 -) is a young playwright whose style is often compared to Sarah Kane's. Her plays include; *Tomba di cani* (2001), *Babele* (2004), and *Binario morto* (2004).

[14] It seems that contemporary theatre has failed to secure a place for women's writing, given the imbalance in gender representation in playwrights that are produced. Given such a numerical difference, it would seem incumbent upon such institutions to take action to rectify a situation in which women playwrights are so terribly under-represented. However, apart from a few worthy and committed programmes, such as Literary Director Aideen Howard's efforts in the Abbey Theatre, this problem has been largely ignored or unaddressed by theatres and theatre companies.

[15] Teresa de Lauretis' delineated deployment of the terms "woman" and "women" in feminist criticism in film will be emulated in this thesis. For "woman" de Lauretis intends "a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western culture (critical and scientific, literary and juridical discourses), which works as both their vanishing point and their specific condition of existence" (5). "Women", on the other hand, means "the real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside of those discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain" (5).

[16] See Leeney's discussions on Eva Gore-Booth's redrawing of the mythical Deirdre figure (*Irish Women Playwrights* 86-92) and Teresa Deevy's unconventional character, Katie Roche (180-183).

[17] The question Gilbert & Gubar posed was as follows; "what does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are … both overtly and covertly patriarchal?' (Gilbert & Gubar 45-46). The authors considered the effect of living under a strict and repressive patriarchal system had on the literary output of women such as Charlotte Brontë, Jane Austen and George Elliot.

[18] While some may argue that the observed disparity in numbers between female playwrights and their male counterparts may be explainable by differences in the distribution of artistic endeavour, in line with my materialist feminist stance (which will be further outlined below) I do not consider there to be significant innate differences in talent, disposition or capabilities between the sexes. While a cultural feminist perspective, with its emphasis on sexual difference, could potentially accommodate such a view (though even this this doubtful, given Cultural feminism's emphasis on equality), Materialist feminism sees any potential differences as minor, and focuses its attention on what it considers the more important factors of social conditioning, cultural norms and logistical considerations. This thesis will therefore investigate the elements at work in preventing women's writing coming to the stage with a heavy emphasis on the material, logistical and discriminatory conditions in which the female playwrights work.

[19] Throughout the thesis, I will use the word "cypher" to indicate a coded sign within the texts studied. These are signs that can be read superficially as one thing (character, theme etc) but

which contain another, concealed meaning or message. I also note that the word can also have negative connotations in other usages, but in this case, it is used in a neutral fashion.

[20] According to Galligan, the movement had its roots in "the political activities of a small number of women's groups which articulated a feminist agenda long before the advent of second-wave feminism (49). The campaigns of Women's Workers Union in the early 1900s for equal pay and improved working conditions are seen to be important in this regard.

[21] Set up in 1970 with the goal of gaining equality for women, the Commission published its first report in 1972.

[22] The Irish Women's Liberation Movement's manifesto called for a number of measures to address the issue of women's inequality such as equal pay, an end to the marriage bar, equal rights in law, justice for widows, deserted wives and unmarried mothers, equal educational opportunities and access to contraception.

[23] In 1971 The Irish Women's Liberation Movement brought the issue of the availability of contraception in Ireland to public attention when forty-seven women, including journalist Nell McCafftery, travelled by train to Belfast where they pruchased a number of contraceptive devices legally on sale there. On their return to Dublin they challenged customs officers at Connolly train station to arrest them for illegal importation of contraceptives, a crime in the eyes of the government and one punishable by a prison sentence. No arrests were made.

[24] Robinson's election in 1990 was remarkable on many levels; her track record on challenging the state with regard to laws that restricted the sale of contraceptives and the criminalisation of homosexual activity; her non-affiliation to any political party, and her explicitly feminist stance.

[25] A period of unprecedented and rapid economic growth that took place in the Republic between 1995 and 2007 and ended in the economic crash in 2008 and eventual entry into the International Monetary Fund bailout programme in 2010.

[26] Exporting women's problems is a symptom of successive governments' reluctance to confront female issues. This failure to legislate for women's issues was commented on by Scannell in 1988: "it is difficult to identify any major piece of legislation relevant to the rights of women that was not forced on our representatives by the courts, the women's movement or the EC" (76), and continues today, as evidenced by the recent judgement by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on abortion. Since the X Case in 1992, governments in Ireland have failed to legislate for the type of abortion that is provided for under the Irish Constitution where the woman's life is deemed to be in danger.

[27] The current Fine Gael/Labour coalition government has set up an expert group to examine the ruling of the ECHR ruling and potentially to recommend legislation for abortion which is due to report on the issue soon. Many Irish members of parliament have come out ahead of the report of the expert group, against any form of legalised abortion -even in the case where the mother's life is in danger.

[28] The Global Financial Crisis, which began in the period 2007-2008, has come to be considered by many economists as the worst crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. In many countries, it resulted in the threat of the collapse of large financial institutions, the bailout of banks by national governments, and downturns in stock markets. In many countries, including Ireland, the housing market was the area most effected, resulting in evictions. In a European

context, one of the greatest negative effects has been a staggering increase in unemployment, particularly among young people.

[29] This constitution of the newly unified Italian state was the adopted Statuto Albertino ("Albertine Statute"). This statute was originally introduced by King Carlo Alberto di Savoia to the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia on 4 March 1848 and later became the constitution of the unified Italy. It remained in force, with changes, until it was replaced on 1 January 1948. The later constitution recognised all religions in Article 8, but Article 7 also recognised the Latern Treaty (1929) between the Catholic Church and Italian State, potentially awarding a special status to the Church (La Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana).

[30] Historian Paul Ginsborg sees gender as the site of contradictions in Church teachings and policy; while under Pope John Paul II's direction from 1978 to 2008, for example, the Church stressed the importance of equal dignity for men and women, legislative and employment equality for women. It preached equality while simultaneously insisting on the primacy of woman's role as mother and denying women entry into their own hierarchal and patriarchal institutional structures (Ginsborg 132).

[31] See De Giorgio (20-26) for more on this.

[32] The continued use of this gendered stereotyping in advertisement after the Fascist period has been documented by Luciano Cheles in his article "Dolce Stil Nero? Images of Women in the Graphic Propaganda of the Italian Neo-fascist Party" (64-95).

[33] The concept of an honour crime allowed for reduced sentencing in cases where the motive of the perpetrator was to protect one's honour, for example, the murder of a spouse, or their lover, in a case of infidelity. This was revoked with Legge n.442 in 1981, though the idea of infidelity as an extenuating factor in cases of murder, (specifically of women) continues today. On the 28 April 2012, feminist organisations, Se non ora, quando? and Il corpo delle donne, launched a campaign against the widespread problem of femicide in Italy and especially the media's reporting of the issue. According to their online appeal, the media tends to characterise these murders as "omicidi passionali, storie di raptus, amori sbagliati, gelosia" ("crimes of passion, fits of homicidal madness, romances gone wrong, and cases of jealousy"), thus diminishing the seriousness of the crime (Lipperini & Zanardo).

[34] Common moniker for Berlusconi meaning "The Knight."

[35] The most notorious of these was Mara Carfagna, former topless model and self-confessed anti-feminist, became the Minister for Equality in the Berlusconi government 2008-2011. See also (Soffici 79-100) for more on this phenomenon.

[36] Due to a "marriage bar" being in place, women were often required to leave their jobs on getting married. This requirement was introduced in Ireland in the 1930s and applied mainly to women in professional positions, rather than to lower-level industrial or service occupations. The marriage bar was abolished in the public sector in 1973, on entry into what would later become the European Union (Galligan 30).

[37]Some of the inequalities that Banyard outlines are: "Women in the UK are paid 22.6 % less per hour than men [...] At least 100,000 women are raped each year in the UK and the rape conviction rate is 6.5%. [...] During the 1990s the number of men paying for sex acts in the UK doubled" (2).

[38] Italy is in fact second last on the table, with only Malta having a lower female employment rate of 39.3%.

[39] Istituto nazionale di statistica (ISTAT), the Italian National Institute of Statistics.

[40] Central Statistics Office (CSO) Ireland.

[41] Compare: Italy legalised divorce in 1970, Ireland in 1996; Italy legalised abortion in 1978, but Ireland has so far failed to legislate for abortion even in the circumstances legitimised by the Supreme Court in its 1992 judgement; homosexuality has been legal in Italy since 1887, while it was decriminalised in Ireland only in 1993. However, Italy has yet to introduce legislation regarding civil partnership or gay marriage, whereas Ireland introduced civil partnership legislation in 2010.

[42] The gender wage gap according to the OECD in 2009 was 10.4% in Ireland and 11.8% in Italy.

[43] In his contribution to the book entitled "La tribù tragica di Emma Dante", Porcheddu analyses Dante's work through a post-modernist lens and finds that her families are a post-modernist expression of Mafessoli's tribal culture. He also sees her families as micro-societies that live by their own rules in the absence of a strong Italian state. Gerardo Guccini, in the same publication, places Emma Dante's work in the context of *the teatro di innovazione* ("theatre of innovation") beginning in Italy in the 1980s, comparing her work to that of others such as Alfonso Santagata and Marco Baliani. Renato Palazzi examines the role that ritual and religion plays in Dante's works. He finds that her use of religious symbols is linked not to the Catholic religion, but rather to an older, pagan tradition in Sicilian culture.

[44] I have yet to find any peer-reviewed articles on Emma Dante in Italian. Non-peer reviewed cultural reviews have critiqued Dante's work such as *Hystrio,* an authoritative theatre quarterly, and *Lo Straniero* a monthly review of arts, literature and theatre edited by Goffredo Fofi.

[45] This is not to suggest that all women who write are feminists, however. A feminist analysis of a work can be carried out on work that is in pointed conflict with the ideas of feminism, with Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* being a case in point. In Chapter Two, I will examine Dante's and Carr's relationship to feminism and their rejection of identification with the term "feminism" in more detail.

[46] Thanks to Donna Canada-Smith for her help in translating these passages from the French original.

[47] Dante's first contact with theatre was when she frequented a drama school in Palermo, *Teatès* [sic], directed by Michele Perriera, in 1986 for the period of one year.

[48] Accademia Nazionale di Arte Drammatica Silvio d'Amico is a national drama school in Rome. Founded in 1936 by theatrical theorist, critic, and writer Silvio d'Amico, the academy is the only state school for the training of actors and directors. It is a prestigious school and it counts figures such as Anna Magnani, Vittorio Gassman and Carmelo Bene among its alumni.

[49] Founded in 1970, Gruppo della Rocca was the first Italian co-operative theatre company. They have been based in the Teatro Asta in Turin since 1998. Dante worked with them from 1993-1995 and left the group because she felt they had lost their direction: "Era un gruppo importante: ma quando sono arrivata erano già piuttosto incerti. Anche la scelta dei testi non seguiva un indirizzo ben preciso. E lasciai perché non capivo più niente" ("They were an important group; but when I arrived they were quite uncertain. Even the selection of texts

failed to follow a clear line. And I left because I no longer understood what was going on." "La strada scomoda" 35).

[50] Gabriele Vacis is a prominent Italian director. He was one of the founders of Laboratorio Teatro Settimo. His productions are generally interpretations of classical and contemporary texts. Dante worked with him over the period 1995-1998 (Barsotti 220).

[51] For a comprehensive description of the initial formation of the group see Barsotti (133-134).

[52] For more information on the professional formation of individual actors see Barsotti (125-131).

[53] All play titles will be referred to in the original Italian with an English translation provided at the first mention only. All translations are my own.

[54] This show premiered in Teatro delle Briciole (Teatro al Parco di Parma) in November, to great critical acclaim. It was also awarded the Ubu prize in 2002, for new Italian work.

[55] Note that by "stranieri" ("foreigners") in this case, Dante refers to Italians living on the mainland.

[56] The word "carnezzeria" is used in Palermo to refer to a butcher shop. Although "The Butchery" could be a suitable translation (given the violent context of the play), I feel that the English "The Butcher's" is a closer match with the original and still carries the connotation of murder through its association with mass-murderers such as Fritz Haarmann, known as The Butcher of Hannover, and Ratko Mladic, known as The Butcher of Bosnia.

[57] Again this title proves a challenge in translation terms. Literally meaning "my life," the term is used as an affectionate addition to phrases, often tagged on at the end. Given Dante's focus on the body and her tendency to draw on Christian symbolism, I have chosen "my flesh and blood, " as an appropriate translation (if one that involves translation loss).

[58] Dante is currently reported to be directing the film version of her 2008 novel, *Via Castellana Bandiera*.

[59] See Daniela Cavallaro's essay "Giving Birth to a New Woman: Italian Women Playwrights' Revisions of Medea" (195-208) and ("La strada scomoda" 70-72) for more on Dante's version of *Medea*.

[60] LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) is the initialism that refers to those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or are questioning their sexual identity.

[61] This is an annual festival held in Rome and organised by Rodolfo Giammarco, which seeks to celebrate and promote gay theatre. It seems to have taken its name from the Italian translation of the title of the English language film, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (1960).

[62] This cabaret-style performance took place in Villa Pantelleria in Palermo on 17 June 2012.

[63] For a comprehensive account of Dante's biography and artistic path see Barsotti (219-227).

[64] The translation of this title involves a moderate amount of translation loss. While "Il festino" (literally meaning "the little party") can be adequately translated as "The Party", the term in Sicily also connotes the annual celebration held for the patron saint of Palermo, Saint Rosalia. This meaning cannot efficiently be carried into the English.

[65] A film of this performance, recorded on 19 July 2008, is available to view on the YouTube platform online.

[66] For more on this see Nicola Viesti's article, "Una Cenerentola palermitana a 'Maggio all'infanzia'" in *Hystrio* 3 (2010), page 33.

[67] The CRT (Centre for Research in Theatre) was founded in Milan in 1974 and it has since established itself as one of most important Italian centres for theatrical experimentation and practical research.

[68] Increasingly, Sud Costa Occidentale receives funding and production support from sources in France and Belgium.

[69] Events include twice weekly theatre workshops for children, and an annual festival entitled *Onora i giorni di festa* ("Observe the Feast Days") which comprises of book launches and readings, theatrical performances and music.

[70] Sicily can be considered part of the "mezzogiorno" region in Italy. Traditionally, the mezzogiorno encompassed the southern part of the peninsula, as well as the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. These regions roughly compare to the Kingdom of Two Sicilies that was in power from 1816 to 1860, when it became part of the new Italian state. Significant differences separate the North of Italy from the South, and these consist in economic, cultural and social disparities, with the South considered to be less developed in many aspects. Indicative of historical aspect to these perceived differences is historian Denis Mack Smith's description of the situation in the period around unification; "[t]he islands of Sardinia and Sicily were distinct regions by reason of climate and history and by the character of their people. This difference between North and South was fundamental. For many years after 1860 a peasant from Calabria had little in common with one from Piedmont, and Turin was infinitely more like Paris and London than Naples and Palermo, for these two halves of the country were on different levels of civilisation [...] most southerners lived in squalor, afflicted by drought, malaria, and earthquakes" (4). After unification, alongside the advent of modernisation, the regions came closer in some cultural aspects, but nevertheless, significant differences persist. Levels of unemployment and poverty are generally higher in the South, as are those of organised crime and these difficulties are compounded by a lack of physical and institutional infrastructure. For more on organised crime, corruption and decline specifically in the Palermo area of Sicily, see anthropologists Schneider & Schneider's *Reversible Destiny: Mafia, Antimafia, and the Struggle for Palermo* (2003). The Schneidners trace the history of the Sicilian mafia (Cosa nostra) back to its nineteenth-century roots, sketch out its development and go on to examine its late twentieth-century involvement in the modern economy through investment in urban real estate and construction, racketeering and drug trafficking. For more on general culture and politics in Sicily see Schneider & Schneider's *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* (1976).

[71] Note that although Dante often works in Sicilian dialect, her plays sometimes include other dialects such as Neapolitan.

[72] See the special edition of *Hystrio* 1 2008, which was dedicated to new Sicilian theatre and features artists such as Spiro Scimone from Messina, Davide Enia from Palermo, as well as Emma Dante. Andrea Porcheddu in this issue described the importance of Sicilian theatre to the Italian theatrical scene:"negli ultimi anni la Sicilia si è messo in moto – teatralmente parlando – e ha sfornato una ridda di talenti e certo il teatro italiano oggi, senza i siciliani, sarebbe molto più povero" ("in the last few years, Sicily has got its act together theatrically speaking, and has turned out a whole range of talented artists. Without the Sicilians, Italian theatre today would certainly be much poorer" "Da una costa" 22).

[73] Translations of Carr's works into Italian are available in *Teatro: Donna e spaventapasseri-Il sogno di Cordelia-Marmo* (2011), which contains translations of *Woman and Scarecrow*, *The Cordelia Dream* and *Marble* and in *Porzia Coughlan* (2010), all translated by Valentina Rapetti. Also available is *Ariel* (2007) translated by Sara Soncini and Maggie Rose.

[74] She would later begin a Master's course specialising in Beckett, but abandon it to concentrate full-time on her writing career.

[75] For more on *Low in the Dark,* see Sarah Jane Scaife's article, "Mutual Beginnings" (Leeney & McMullan). Bernadette Sweeney's *Performing the Body in Irish Theatre* (2008) and Rhona Trench's *Bloody Living: The Loss of Selfhood in the Plays of Marina Carr* (2010).

[76] For an extensive overview of Carr's artistic development see Sihra's article "The House of Woman and the Plays of Marina Carr" (*Women in Irish Drama* 201-218).

[77] This reading contrasts Victor Merriman's view that Carr's plays and settings do not contain relevant social criticism or actively take part in the process of decolonisation and therefore merely reproduce in theatrically impressive forms the tropes of colonialism (Leeney & McMullan 145-195).

[78] See Brian Arkins' essay "Three Medeas from Modern Ireland" (186-194) for more on Carr's adaptation of *Medea* and its relationship to other modern Irish versions of the same myth.

[79] The Ark is a cultural centre for children, located in Temple Bar, Dublin.

[80] The *Aosdána* are a group of peer nominated artists who are considered to have made a significant and exceptional contribution to artistic life in Ireland.

[81] The literary nature of Irish theatre was first promoted by the founders of the Abbey Theatre, Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats. It has proved an accurate description of the general features of Irish theatre since.

[82] Note that Carr has not always worked in this format. Her collaborative experiments will be discussed in Chapter Two.

[83] "wright *n*. (now usually in combinations) a maker of something, as in *wheelwright*, *playwright*. (*Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*).

[84] Case proposes that such a use of the term extends the search for women playwrights to other forms of performance such as mime and street performance (29).

[85] While my thesis examines the playwrights' work primarily from the point of view of Materialist feminism, it should not be thought that only a purely feminist analysis could bear fruit; both Dante's and Carr's work readily lends itself to many other forms of theoretical and practical analysis. Indeed, Carr's work has already been examined under the varied lenses of post-colonial theories (Merriman) and Irish studies (Harris), while Dante's work has been subjected to post-modern analysis (Porcheddu "La tribù tragica di Emma Dante.") and historical literary analysis (Barsotti).

[86] There are indications that Bloom may have softened his stance somewhat on the merits of cultural theory.

[87] Bloom repeatedly denies the Freudian model in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1997). In *The Anatomy of Influence* (2011) he says "[m]y ways of writing about literary influence have widely been regarded as relying upon Freud's Oedipus complex. But that is just wrong, as I have explained before, to little avail. Freud's Hamlet complex is far closer" (9). Unfortunately, he fails

to explicate the relationship (or otherwise) between his theory and Freud's, relying on a repeated denial of such a link to distance his work from Freud's Oedipus Complex.

[88] Bloom revisited and revised his theory in his later publications *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (1994) and in *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life* (2011).

[89] Bloom states that "influence-anxiety does not so much concern the forerunner but rather is an anxiety achieved in and by the story, novel, play, poem or essay. The anxiety may or may not be internalized by the writer, depending upon temperament and circumstances, yet that hardly matters: the strong poem is the achieved anxiety" (*Anxiety* xxiii).

[90] Well known novelists, Charlotte (1816- 1855), Emily (1818 - 1848), and Anne (1820 - 1849).

[91] Since Derrida critiqued binary oppositions, observing that one is defined as primary and self-sufficient while the other is secondary and supplementary, feminist scholars have applied themselves to deconstruction the binary of male/female. See Toril Moi for a feminist deconstructionist analysis of *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Moi 56-67).

[92] See Adrienne Rich's article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) for more. Significantly, this essay introduced the notion of compulsory heterosexuality as a key social institution to feminist discourse.

[93] See bell hooks' renowned work *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism?* (1982) where she challenged the exclusivity of some feminist discourses, and rejected the idea of a common female identity that did not recognize difference as a category.

[94] This is Dolan's reading of Cixous' theory, which links Cixous' ideas on writing to a presumed biological facticity of the female body. Dolan's main difficulty with such a theory seems to be its assumption of a single, definable female body. There are other possible readings of Cixous' theory, however, that consider Cixous' body not one defined in falsely universal terms, but as bodies that are culturally and historically inscribed.

[95] Butler coined the phrase "gender performativity" in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), a term that has subsequently become central to materialist feminist discourses and which has also been used in a variety of other academic fields. In "performativity," a series of repeated gestures and speech express not an interior identity; but rather they perform and construct that very identity. According to Butler, "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender;" she claims that "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Gender Trouble 25). "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (*Gender Trouble* 25).

[96] The founder of the field of enquiry surrounding "ontology" is considered to be Parmenides of Elea, in the fifth-century B.C., whose metaphysical poem, *The Proem*, which describes a metaphorical journey he made to the home of a divinity, seeks to distinguish between diverse modes of being and to identify and define the attributes of what can be said to exist. Paramenides was followed in his ontological considerations by philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle.

[97] Aristotle was the first philosopher whose works became known under the title of *Metaphysics*. Previously, in his earlier work, *The Categories*, he gave a general account of the

things there are, of beings. In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle turns his attention to substance, matter, subject and essence.

[98] A study on the processes through which the playwrights came to consider themselves as playwrights would be interesting, but is unfortunately beyond the scope of the current thesis. Such a process in relation to the broader field of writing is documented in Hélène Cixous' essay *Coming to Writing* (1991).

[99] For references to Aphra Behn in Gilbert & Gubar see (63) and for Dickinson see (34, 53).

[100] See Sue Blundell's *Women in Ancient Greece* (1995) for more on the gendered division between *polis* and *oikos*. Blundell states that "[w]ithin the *polis*, women's social role was increasingly limited to that of reproducing the *oikos*, whose economic independence was considered crucial to the stability of the state [...] Women were seen as being economically unproductive, and therefore as having no significant role to play in the functioning of society." With the emergence of the *polis*, Blundell argues, "[t]he city rather than the home became the focus for the conduct of social life. This, coupled with the restraints on the behaviour of women, would have produced a sharper division between private and public spheres. The institutions which grew up in the city were male-dominated and revolved around characteristically male activities – politics, warfare, athletics and drinking parties [...] The home was increasingly seen as the woman's domain, while at the same time male domination of the *oikos* was regarded as a key element in the maintenance of social and political stability" (76). Hanna Scolnicov picks up this point in relation to theatrical space in her book, *Woman's Theatrical Space* (1994) in which she examines spatial conventions in theatre with regard to women from classical theatre to Renaissance theatre, and to modern, naturalistic drama. Scolnicov discusses the development of the gendered spaces of the *oikos* and *polis* within Greek theatre, attributing it in large part to in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, and the emergence of the skene onstage. This gendered spatial arrangement "came to dominate the theatre, pre-determining the dramatic structure of many other tragedies" (13).

[101] An exception to this would be closet dramas or other types of what Sue Ellen Case terms "personal theatre" in Chapter Three of *Feminism and Theatre* (2008).

[102] Timberlake Wertenbaker (1951-) is a London-based playwright. Her works include; *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (1985), *Our Country's Good* (1988) and *Credible Witness* (2001).

[103] Sir Tom Stoppard (1937-) is a British playwright. Among his major works are; *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968) and *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979).

[104] Sam Shepard (1943-) is an American playwright. His most important works include; *Buried Child* (1978), *Curse of the Starving Class* (1978) and *Fool for Love* (1984).

[105] Sarah Daniels (1957-) is a British dramatist. Among her important works are; *Neaptide* (1984),
Byrthrite (1986) and *The Madness of Esme and Shaz* (1994).

[106] Spencer comments on how the relationship with the director "will probably prove to be either the closest and most rewarding, or the most troublesome" (317). He also stresses the need to agree with director on the core theme or idea of the play (318-319).

[107] Karen Ardiff, writer of *The Goddess of Liberty* has commented on her experience of the different demands that theatre places on a playwright during the writing of her play, when

compared to her experience of writing a novel, "[c]ollaboration. I was completely alone writing the book until it came to the editing stage, and that involved very little intervention. In this, as I've been mentioning, there were drafts and readings and meetings and dramaturgy, because a play is a collaboration and a novel is essentially private. I know of course that many playwrights write completely privately until they deliver the script, but I don't know any that write only one draft."

[108] "Norman did have a specific plan for the reception of her play. But her collaborators, in the process of reading and reconstructing her text as their production, imposed their own meanings" (*The Feminist Spectator as Critic* 22).

[109] Changes to the playwright's original text and envisioned staging of the play do not only happen in these circumstances and can, of course, take place in other cases. Translator Kirsten Nigro writes how a Mexican play *Muerte súbita* ("Sudden Death") by Sabina Berman, was altered in translation to adapt it to the differing cultural expectations of a U.S. audience. It should be noted, however, that in this case the changes effected were carried out in conjunction with the author and, according to Nigro, were intended to clarify the author's original intent rather than impose an outside interpretation on the work. Nigro believes that "these have strengthened the playtext overall for future U.S. audiences" (124).

[110] OECD is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, an international body which promotes policies that could improve the economic and social well-being of people all over the world. Part of their work includes the compiling of statistics from many countries internationally.

[111] Findings of OECD 2009 report *Society at a Glance*, which measures among other things, the amount of leisure time men and women have. It found that "Italian women have nearly 80 daily minutes less leisure time than men" (13).

[112] Kate Wilhelm (1928-) is an American writer whose works include the genres of science fiction, mystery, and fantasy.

[113] For more on the negative impact women's responsibilities in the domestic sphere can have on their creative and artistic output, see (Russ 7-10). Russ also carries out an interesting discussion on the significant impact poverty has had on women writers in the past.

[114] The term "exclusion" from the canon is often used in feminist writings, LGBTQ critiques, as well as in commentaries that deal with the issue of race in relation to the canon. "Exclusion" should not be read to mean that representatives of any of these groups have been completely eliminated from the literary or theatrical canon, but rather that they are severely under-represented and that this under-representation relates to their difference. Thus, it is possible to find examples of women writers from as far back as Greek times in the literary canon, but, as a general rule, women (alongside other groups) struggled to be accepted into the canon, and works dealing with particular issues related to their experience as women (or as homosexuals or black people) did not find favour among those compiling anthologies. It is true that poets such as Sappho (c. 613BC-570BC) and Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), and novelists such as Jane Austen and Emily Brontë can be considered canonical writers, but their inclusion in the canon is very much an exception. See Russ for more on the processes that are employed in this exclusion.

[115] Some of the studies carried out since the Second Wave of feminism in this area have uncovered a wealth of previously unknown or "lost" women playwrights in a variety of cultural contexts. Elissa Weaver's *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy: Spiritual Fun and Learning for Women* (2002) recuperates and reviews the work of playwrights such as Antonia Tanini (1452-1501) who although there was already a tradition of women playwrights in convents, became an important model for other female playwrights who followed; women such as Raffaella de' Sernigi (c. 1473-1557) and . Virginia Cox's *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (2011) includes a section on women's writing in drama during the early sixteenth century and discusses tragic and comic works by playwrights like Valeria Miani (c. 1563–1620), Barbara Torelli (c. 1475–1533) and Isabella Andreini (c.1562-1604). Meanwhile, in a Spanish context, Teresa Scott Soufas' *Dramas of Distinction* (1997) covers much similar ground, as does Pilar Cuder-Dominguez's *Stuart women playwrights, 1613-1713* (2011) in an English context. *Women Playwrights in England, Ireland and Scotland 1660-1823* (1996) is of particular relevance and interest to anyone studying women playwrights in an Irish context.

[116] Aphra Behn (1640 - 1689) was a British playwright whose plays were very successful in London in the seventeenth century. She is known as the first English professional female literary writer. For more on Behn's life see *The Passionate Shepherdess : The Life of Aphra Behn, 1640-1689* written by Maureen Duffy and published in 1989. For an overview of her life and works see (Aston 22-23) and (Case *Feminism* 36-39).

[117] Kerry Powell notes that often women's scripts were rejected for production. Those that weren't often didn't earn from profit-share arrangements as "the woman playwright was on uncertain ground and thus unable to deal from a position of strength and experience" (82). In a climate where only plays mounted on the West End were considered worthy of critical engagement, "plays by women were more often than not mounted at theatres outside the West End" (83).

[118] Lyons & Morgan describe this cult as "defining as particularly worthy in a woman attributes perceived as generally less valuable in people at large" (ix). It was, according to them, "the requirement that a female writer be conspicuously 'feminine'" the deciding factor in Behn being cut out of English literature (ix).

[119] See Steve Wilmer's article "Finland" in the *Cambridge Companion to Theatre History* (2012) edited by David Wiles and Christine Dymkowski, for more on women in Finnish theatre, and his book on the same subject *Portraits of Courage: Plays by Finnish Women* (1997).

[120] To conclusively make such an assertion would require extensive comparison between the social and legislative conditions in Finland, Italy and Ireland, and as such, is beyond the scope of this study. However, it does seem that Finnish women have borne a lighter load in terms of discrimination and oppression historically. For example, a small proportion of Finnish women were able to vote as early as 1869, and in 1906 they became the first women in the world to have unrestricted rights to vote and stand as a public representative in parliament (Korppi-Tommola 47-59).

[121] Leonardo Sciascia (1921-1989) was a leading Sicilian novelist and intellectual. Among his major works are; *Pirandello e il Pirandellismo* (1953), *A ciascuno il suo* (1966), *L'affaire Moro* (1978) and *Il cavaliere e la morte* (1988).

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[122] Edward Christie Banfield (1916–1999) was an American political scientist and carried out a sociological study of the South of Italy, published as *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (1967).

[123] See Ginsborg (97-100) for a discussion on the history and use of this term.

[124] The Second Wave of feminism began in the U.S.A. in the early 1960s before spreading to many other countries, Ireland and Italy included. It was a successful political and social movement that sought to address and remedy legislative, social and cultural discrimination against women in areas such as employment, reproductive health, sexuality and violence. In an Irish context, the main achievements of Second Wave feminism can be considered to be the incorporation of women into policy-making decision (however incomplete that project may remain today), employment equality in legislative terms (for example the removal of the marriage bar in 1973), the legalisation of contraception (with the 1980 Health [Family Planning] Bill and subsequent legislation) and the reform of Family Law (significantly sowing the seeds for the introduction of divorce in 1996). In an Italian context, campaigns were fought and won in the areas of Family Law (female adultery was decriminalised between 1968 and 1969, divorce was legalised in 1970), reproductive rights (contraception was legalised in 1970 and abortion in 1978) and childcare. Other than these vital legislative changes affected by Second Wave activism, which had tremendous material effects on women's lives, the movement worked on a number of other fronts. Some of the most significant accomplishments lay outside legislative change; women were encouraged to rethink and reimagine their lives, leading to the opening up of new intellectual, creative, social and professional possibilities to them.

[125] It must be noted that the Abbey are making an effort towards including women's writing on the National Stage under Literary Director Aideen Howard's initiative; four of the six writers included on their New Playwrights Programme Pilot 2009 were women.

Chapter Two

[126] What remains to be clarified is the timing of the deployment of these strategies. While one is tempted to connect them to the creative and compositional process of the playwrights, it seems clear that some strategies (such as those related to positioning) may be made outside of such processes.

[127] (Carr *Plays* 275).

[128] Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics*, first published in 1964, was one of the first to reread and deconstruct classics by canonical writers such as D.H. Lawrence and Henry Miller from a feminist viewpoint and, in her analysis, vividly illustrated the way these canonical works undermine and subjugate women.

[129] Many scholastic works have been dedicated to recuperating lost or excluded female writers and adding them to the existing canon. In an Irish context, Teresa Deevy's plays, which had been denied canonisation despite her success during her lifetime, have been returned to mainstream scholarship through the efforts of writers such as Cathy Leeney (*Irish Women Playwrights*) and Lisa Fitzpatrick ("Taking Their Own Road"). The expansion of the canon as a

strategy, while boasting some such positive outcomes is, nonetheless problematic, as it fails to question the basic assumptions of universality and truth underlying the traditional canon.

[130] As early as 1983, Lillian S. Robinson called for an interrogation and deconstruction of those criteria, a review of the very terms by which we understand the canon. These challenges can be seen in the blurring of distinctions between "high" and "low" art and the consideration of writing forms such as epistolary writings for canonicity.

[131] A collection that sought to catalogue the universally relevant canonical works of the Western world was Dr Charles W. Eliot's *Harvard Classics*, first published in 1909. It is a good example of the canonical anthology, as it records "what President Eliot's America, and his Harvard, thought best in their own heritage" (Kirsch 52). The anthology was composed of a series of excerpts and full-length texts designed to fit on a five-foot shelf and contained six "courses" that anybody could follow on the history of civilization, religion and philosophy, education, science, politics and literary and fine art criticism. It was, according to Kirsch, intended as "a portable university" (52). Casting an eye over the selections chosen for inclusion in the collection, it becomes clear that the choices are dated, but what also becomes immediately evident is how the texts reflect a certain restricted world view. It contains "blind spots in the Victorian notions of culture and progress" (52). Not only did it reflect Victorian society's values and ideas, it also reflects those of the editor and his Harvard colleagues - an elite group, by anyone's standards. The collection includes almost no female writers and no representatives of minority groups, and so it can be argued that it promotes an ethnocentric, masculine, middle-class view of the world. If, as in this case, representatives of certain groups, such as women, black or Asian, LGBTQ people, are absent from the list of the greats, the implication is that these categories cannot equal greatness.

[132] *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary Irish Playwrights* (2010) edited by Martin Middeke and Peter Paul Schnierer features twenty-five playwrights, five of whom are women. While the *Methuen Drama Anthology of Irish Plays* (2009) edited by Patrick Lonergan lists one female playwright, Christina Reid, out of five featured.
John P. Harrington's *Modern Irish Drama* (1991), lists one female playwright, Lady Gregory, of a selection of six.

[133] W.B Yeats (1865 – 1939) was an Irish poet, playwright and a founding member of the Abbey Theatre. Among his works for the stage are O*n Baile's Strand* (1904), *At the Hawk's Well* (1916) and *Purgatory* (1938).

[134] Lady Augusta Gregory (1852 – 1932) was a theatre manager, dramatist and founding member of the Abbey Theatre. Her works for theatre include *Dervorgilla* (1907), *The Rising of the Moon* (1907) and *Shanwalla* (1915). It is said that she wrote Cathleen Nì Houlihan in collaboration with W.B. Yeats, though for decades her part in the collaboration was overshadowed by Yeats' role (Sihra *Women in Irish Drama* 6).

[135] John Millington Synge (1871 – 1909) was an Irish playwright and co-founder of the Abbey Theatre famous for plays such as, *Riders to the Sea* (1904) *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and *The Tinker's Wedding* (1909).

[136] Seán O'Casey (1880 - 1964) was a Dublin dramatist. Among his plays are *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) and *The Silver Tassie* (1929).

[137] Samuel Beckett (1906 – 1989) was a playwright and novelist. Among his works for theatre are *Waiting For Godot* (1953), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *Not I* (1972).

[138] Brian Friel (1929 -) is a contemporary Irish playwright known for works such as *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964), *Translations* (1980) and *Dancing At Lughnasa* (1990).

[139] Tom Murphy (1935 -) is a Galway playwright whose works include *Famine* (1968), *Bailegangaire* (1985) and *Conversations On A Homecoming* (1985).

[140] Frank McGuinness (1953 -) is a contemporary playwright. Among his works for theatre are *Baglady* (1985), *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) and *Mary and Lizzie* (1989).

[141] *Twentieth Century Italian Drama*, edited by Jane House and Antonio Attisani, contains the work of thirteen writers, all of them male. While *A History of Italian Theatre* (2006) edited by Joseph Farrell and Paolo Puppa, names thirteen in the chapter title, all of whom are male.

[142] Ludovico Ariosto (1474 – 1533) was an Italian poet and writer for theatre. Among his comedies are *Cassaria* (1508), *I suppositi* (1509), *Il negromante* (1520) and *La lena* (1529).

[143] Niccolò Machiavelli (1469 – 1527) was an Italian writer, poet, philosopher and dramatist. Plays of note include *Comedia di Callimaco: E di Lucretia* (1518) and *La Clizia* (1525).

[144] Ruzante, the name in art of Angelo Beolco (c1496 – 1542) was a Venetian actor and playwright. His plays, mostly written in Venetian dialect include *La Piovana* (1532) and *La Vaccaria* (1533).

[145] Carlo Goldoni (1707 - 1793) is the dramatist who is credited with revolutionizing Italian theatre. Among his most famous works are *Il servitore di due padroni* (1745), *Il bugiardo*(1750) and *La locandiera* (1751).

[146] Giovanni Verga (1840-1922) was a Sicilian novelist and dramatist. His works for theatre include *Cavalleria rusticana* (1884), *In Portineria* (1886) *La Lupa* (1896).

[147] Luigi Pirandello (1867 – 1936) was an Italian dramatist who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1934. His plays include *Sei Personaggi in Cerca d'Autore* (1921), *Enrico IV* (1921) and *Ciascuno a Suo Modo* (1924).

[148] Dario Fo (1926 -) is an actor, dramatist and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1997. Among his works are *Mistero buffo* (1969), *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* (1970) and *Coppia aperta* (1983).

[149] On this point, it may be relevant to note a recent campaign, initiated by Laboratorio di studi femministi Anna Rita Simeone (Anna Rita Simeone Feminist Studies Group), based in the prestigious La Sapienza University in Rome. The campaign, entitled *Che genere di concorso?,* was in reaction to the absence of women from the lists of required reading for state exams to become school teachers. The campaigners highlighted the lack of representation of women writers in the field of literature, as well as women in the fields of philosophy, history and geography.

[150] Risorgimento, meaning the "Resurgence," was the political and social movement that brought together the many different independent states located on the Italian peninsula culminating with the formation of a unified Italian state in 1861. See Mack Smith (7-18) for more.

[151] In keeping with this failure to incorporate feminist thought into studies of literature in an Italian context, Anna Barsotti analysis of Emma Dante's theatre places it within a theatrical

genealogy of Sicilian theatre that is entirely male. Barsotti fails to consider how Dante's status as female differentiates her experience from those of canonical writers like Luigi Pirandello and Giovanni Verga.

[152] This relationship is elucidated in detail in the preceding chapter.

[153] For more on Hester's relationship with her mother, see Wallace ("Tragic Destiny and Abjection" 447-448) and Leeney ("Ireland's 'Exiled' Women Playwrights" 160).

[154] In Italian "teatro di ricerca" is a phrase commonly used to describe a type of theatrical practice that is actor-centred and which creates theatre through the body of the actor in a process of devising and creation, rather than through the adaptation and interpretation of a written script. Emma Dante sees her theatre as conforming to this line of theatre, which has its beginnings in practitioners such as Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, Jerzy Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor.

[155] See Mária Kurdi's interview with Marina Carr "'I was tired of the sentimental portrayal of mothers': A Talk with Marina Carr" in *Modern Filogiai Kozlemenyek* 5.2 (2003), for more on her view of female playwrights and the canon.

[156] Later published in the *Irish University Review* in 1998 (see Works Cited).

[157] Tinderbox, a theatre company dedicated to new writing, was formed in Belfast in 1988 and is still active. Pigsback was renamed Fishamble in 1997, it is still active in Dublin, promoting and producing new Irish writing.

[158] Private conversation with Melissa Sihra, Trinity College Dublin, February 2012.

[159] This tour, in particular, seems to mark a turning point in Dante's artistic development: "[a]bbiamo fatto oltre 300 repliche con *La rosa tatuata* e a me ha sconvolto la macchina della 'compagnia di giro' [...] Mi sono demoralizzata, e mi sono detta «io proprio non ce l'ho la testa per fare questa cosa qua».' ("[w]e did over 300 performances of *The Rose Tattoo* and the mechanisms of a touring company really shocked me […] I became demoralised and said to myself 'I am really not suited to this thing.'" "La strada scomoda del teatro" 40).

[160] Both appeared as principal characters in *mPalermu*, *Carnezzeria*, *Cani di bancata*, *Le Pulle* and *Ballarini*, as well as playing minor roles in other plays.

[161] The Living Theatre is an American theatre company founded in 1947 by Judith Malina and Julian Beck. Based in New York, the group was strongly influenced by the theories of French playwright Antonin Artaud. See Carlson's *Theories of the Theatre* (419-420) for more.

[162] Théâtre du Soleil is a Paris-based experimental stage ensemble founded by Ariane Mnouchkine and Philippe Léotard in 1964. The group works in a collaborative and democratic manner, making decisions together and choosing to forgo the presence of a distinct leader. See *Collaborative Theatre: The 'Theatre du Soleil' Sourcebook* (1999) by David Williams for more.

[163] Anna Barsotti terms this as "famiglia-compagnia" ("family-company" 131).

[164] Dante states: "[p]oi, dopo le improvvisazioni fatte assieme, torno a casa e scrivo […] Cioè formalizzo, da sola, quello che abbiamo fatto insieme" ("[t]hen, after the improvisations done together, I go home and write. [...] That is, I formalise on my own, the work we have done together" "La strada scomoda del teatro" 57).

[165] While it would ostensibly seem that the practice of using pseudonyms is less common, nevertheless, publishers still encourage novel writers to alter their names in the interest of catering to the audience's perceived tastes, or discriminations. It has been widely reported that

the author of the Harry Potter books, Joanne Rowling was encouraged by her agent and perhaps publisher to use her initials (J.K.) and make rewrites of the book to cater for her expected young male audience. It should be noted that this practice of disguising the author's gender also affects men who write in genres that are perceived to be women's genres. Irish writer Colm Liddy was advised by his publisher, Penguin, to replace his first name with the androgynous Cee, when publishing his book *A Fairytale for the Real World* (2012), in an effort "to tone down [his] maleness somewhat" (Liddy).

[166] This observation echoes Joanna Russ' analysis of one of the strategies employed to suppress women's writing; "pollution of agency." Russ argues that while literary history recognizes that women have written some works, their credibility is called into question through a process whereby the woman writer can be characterised as an undesirable individual; promiscuous or immoral, improper or unsavoury (Russ 26-29).

[167] There is certainly potential for an extended study of how female playwrights are portrayed by the media and what control the playwrights have over their public image. However, these considerations go beyond the scope of this particular study. Some aspects of Marina Carr's positioning as an artist are dealt with by Clare Wallace in her article "Authentic Reproductions: Marina Carr and the Inevitable" (55-58).

[168] I thank Brian Singleton for this observation.

[169] The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, established in 1978, is awarded annually to women who have written works of quality for the English-speaking theatre. The Prize currently awards $35,000 annually to the Finalists: Winner- $20,000, Special Commendation-$5,000, and other Finalists- $1,000. Finalists are the top ten plays. Marina Carr was awarded this prize in the year 1996/97. <http://www.blackburnprize.org/prize.htm> 16 April 2012.

[170] *Donnadiscena* is a cultural project that seeks to underline female creativity in a number of areas such as culture, cinema, theatre, music and dance. Based in Siracusa, Sicily, it is run by Alessandra Gatto. The prize was last awarded in 2010, with some uncertainty about its future. Emma Dante was awarded a National Prize for Directing in 2004 in this competition. <http://www.donnadiscena.it/index.html>. 16 April 2012.

[171] Though women writers are awarded these prizes, which were often founded with a feminist intention, the writers may still reject the label of feminist.

[172] It is a challenge to identify the source of such negative perceptions and associations with feminism. It is possible that some women felt alienated by the sometimes forceful tone of the more radical elements of the Second Wave, which may have been perceived to be prescriptivist at times.

[173] See *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice* (2002) edited by Graziella Parati and Rebecca West for more on the tradition of Italian Feminist thought.

[174] Despite her assertions of being gender-blind when watching plays, this statement is determinedly ambiguous. While Dante claims that there is no difference between a play written by a male or female writer, in the same breath she laments the fact that she rarely sees plays by women. One can detect a certain determination to distance herself from language that would seek to categorise any woman's theatre in gender terms, yet she is clearly aware of the imbalance in representational terms. Perhaps the cause of this ambiguity lies in a belief that defining theatre by women in gender terms may serve to pigeonhole and further marginalise

such types of performance. In some ways this comment, and its inherent contradiction, mirror Dante's own equivocal position on feminism and women's issues already outlined in this section.

[175] Though Wallerstein's analysis was essentially of an economic and political nature, I believe it lends itself to a cultural application here.

[176] Wallerstein argues that the "division of a world-economy involves a hierarchy of occupational tasks" (350), and the centres of Italy exploit peripheries like Sicily for the products of lower occupational tasks such as agricultural production and oil refining. Cultural products emanating from Sicily are generally not included in this process. Dante's insisted focus on the periphery, both in material terms through her geographical location in Palermo and through her representations of what she terms "il sud del mondo" ("the south of the world") in her theatrical world represents an outright challenge to the hegemony of the particular world system at play in Italy.

It should also be noted that Jane and Peter Schneider in their many works have applied Wallerstein's theory to analyse Sicily as a periphery region within the world system. See Schneider & Schneider's works listed in the works cited section.

[177] Porcheddu sees this distance as indicative of a rejection on the part of the official apparatus of theatre in Sicily of the talent of Dante and artists like her, to him the official theatre "sembra snobbare, se non osteggiare, queste creatività" ("seems, though not directly hostile, to snub this creativity" "Da una costa"24).

[178] Societas Raffaello Sanzio was founded in 1981 by Romeo Castellucci. MOTUS is a theatre group, formerly named Opere dell'ingegno, founded in Rimini in 1992. Fanny & Alexander is a workshop founded in Ravenna in 1992 by Luigi de Angelis and Chiara Lagani.

[179] See Emma Dante's article ("Il mio dialetto bastardo").

[180] It should be noted that Dante's play, *Carnezzeria*, is written almost exclusively in Italian, with some forays into dialect. For more detailed analysis see Barsotti (79).

[181] There are interesting parallels between Dante's use of Sicilian dialect instead of standard Italian and Marina Carr's use of non-standard English. Carr, particularly in her early plays, and most notably in *Portia Coughlan*, used an idiosyncratic "Midlands dialect" which was very specific to a geographical location around the County Offaly location where she grew up. After *Ariel* there was a clear move, however, away from this non-standard, regional Hiberno-English towards a more standard form. These similar linguistic choices invite further analysis in dramaturgical and reception terms.

[182] Andrea Porcheddu comments on the difficulties of the dissemination of Dante's theatre in ("Da una costa" 24) and ("Le sfide" 112).

[183] It is difficult for an academic scholar to assess the intensity of such institutional pressures on an individual playwright in any given context. It is possible that there are more such pressures in an Italian context, but impossible to state such a thing conclusively. What is perhaps of more importance is the pressure that Emma Dante *feels* is present. Her move away from such institutions can be read as a measure of the pressures she perceives there to be on the independence of her artistic voice. We simply do not know whether Marina Carr feels that she is under pressure to write about some matters and not write about others. However, in the absence of any statements on the matter from the playwright, we can observe that despite her

central placing, Carr has not shied away from controversial topics, themes and subjects in her work to date. The example of *On Raftery's Hill* is relevant in the context of such a discussion. The play deals with a household characterized by emotional and physical violence, as well as incest. Staged in 2000, just seven years after the notorious Kilkenny incest case where a father was jailed for the rape, incest and assault of his daughter over a 15-year period, the play dealt with such sensitive and topical subjects head-on. Reception to the piece was mixed, especially when the show travelled to the U.S.A. For more on the relationship between Carr's plays and perceptions of Irishness see Harris (216-232). Despite negative reactions to the subject matter of *On Raftery's Hill*, Carr has continued to tackle controversial subjects and the issue of familial violence (especially in *Ariel*), thus indicating a certain freedom from outside influences in her position.

Chapter Three

[1] Taken from Carr's *Marble* (19).

[2] By the term "dramaturgy," I intend the theory and practice of dramatic composition, and the manipulation of the dramatic structure of a play by a playwright.

[3] "Theme," in this thesis will refer to an idea that recurs, or pervades, a play.

[4] This return to Greek tragedy should be seen as part of a wider tradition in Irish theatre which tends to revive and reimagine Greek plays. One of many examples of this are Seamus Heaney's adaptation of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, performed in Derry's Guild Hall as *The Cure at Troy* (1990) and his version of *Antigone*, *The Burial at Thebes*, performed in the Abbey Theatre in 2004; Ellen Cranitch & Hilary Fannin's version of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Phaedra, was performed in the Project Arts Centre (2010) and Frank McGuinness' own version of the same play, also entitled *Phaedra* (2006) is another example. For more on this tradition see below.

[5] Steve Wilmer notes in an article, "Prometheus, Medea and Antigone: Metaphors for Irish Rebellion and Social Change" *Didaskalia* 3.1 (Spring 1996), that there has been an upsurge in interest in reworkings of Greek tragedies in Ireland starting in 1986. See also Sihra ("A Cautionary Tale" 257) and Arkins "Irish Appropriation of Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Philocetes*" (167-178) for an overview of Irish treatments of these two plays and, specifically, "Three Medeas from Modern Ireland" (186-194) for more on versions of *Medea* (including a section commenting on Carr's *By the Bog of Cats…*).

[6] Autolycus was a figure in Greek mythology who was known for his ability in thieving.

[7] Rhona Trench identifies some elements in Carr's works that can be said to display a continuity with the Irish canon, particularly the work of Synge, O'Casey and Beckett: "devices of storytelling, fantasy, the split self, dreams, self-conscious performativity, re-enactments and concerns with identity, place, authority, exclusion and home" (8).

[8] This episodic structure, where a series of episodes are tied together to form a complete show, is evident in plays such as *Vita mia*, *Cani di bancata* and *Le Pulle*.

[9] *Maria alla croce* is an episode of *Mistero Buffo* first performed in 1969.

[10] It should be noted that Carr wrote another play in this period, *The Deer's Surrender* (1990) which has not been published or made available to the public.

[11] See Sweeney (168-193) for a description and analysis of *Low in the Dark*. See Sihra (*Women in Irish Drama* 201-204) for more on all three plays.

[12] David Nowlan described Ullaloo as "pretentious vacuity" (Nowlan). Gerry Colgan while praising "the sheer novelty of the scenario" and underlining Carr's potential as a writer, nonetheless described *Low in the Dark* as "little more than an accumulation of unsophisticated jokes" (Colgan). For more on the critical reaction to *Low In the Dark* see (Sweeney 172-173).

[13] Eugène Scribe (1791 – 1861) formulated the idea of the well-made play in the nineteenth century. According to Marvin Carslon "[t]he realistic dramatists of the later nineteenth century – most notably Ibsen – drew upon his technique of careful construction and preparation of effects, and through their example the well-made play became and still remains the traditional model of play construction" (Carlson *Theories* 216).

[14] For more see Sue Ellen Case's "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" (1988), Jill Dolan's chapter "Feminism and the Canon" in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (19-40) and Laura Mulvey's essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975).

[15] See Marvin Carlson's commentary on George Bernard Shaw's assessment of Ibsen's innovatory approach to Scribe's structure of the well-made play in *Theories of the Theatre*. According to Shaw, Ibsen's greatest technical novelty was to alter traditional dramatic structure to reflect his didactic aim. Quoting Shaw, "[f]ormerly you had in what was called a well-made play an exposition in the first act, a situation in the second, an unraveling in the third. Now you exposition, situation, and discussion; and the discussion is the test of the playwright" (qtd in Carlson *Theories* 237).

[16] Medea, protagonist of Euripides' eponymous play (c. 431) and Antigone, protagonist of Sophocles' eponymous play (c. 441).

[17] Portia is one of the principal characters in Shakespeare's classic, *The Merchant of Venice* (1605). This character was also the inspiration and starting point for Carr's protagonist of *Portia Coughlan.*

[18] Salome was the protagonist of Oscar Wilde's controversial play, *Salome* (1896).

[19] The protagonist of August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1888).

[20] The protagonist of Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1890).

[21] Russ also comments on the importance of adequate female characters and representations within literature. In her analysis, women authors are often negatively impacted by the cultural messages, models and ideologies that such representations can carry (Russ 14-15).

[22] By no means do I wish to suggest, however, that all previous depictions of women in theatre have been mere tropes. Many convincing and challenging representations of female characters have been written in the past. One need only think of Ibsen's Nora (*A Doll's House*) or Samuel Beckett's Winnie (*Happy Days*, 1961) for examples of presentations of female characters that resisted theatrical and literary convention and precedent.

[23] A number of studies have already noted the focus in Carr's plays on the female perspective, especially her presentation of numerous generations of women onstage (Ní Dhuibhne "Playing the Story: Narrative Techniques in *The Mai*" 72), consequently this project will concentrate on the challenge to tropic representation of women in her work.

[24] See Sihra (*Women in Irish Drama* 1-20) for more on how women have been represented in Irish theatre history.

[25] See Barsotti for more on the depiction of women in Sicilian theatre specifically (18-20).

[26] Despite a number of attempts to introduce legislation regarding the formalisation of homosexual unions through civil union and marriage legislation, Italy's parliament has not ratified such legislation. Italy remains one of the only countries in the EU with no civil registration or marriage provisions for gay couples.

[27] This quote comes from a piece written by Fr. D. Barry in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* (1909) in which he claimed that women's suffrage was incompatible with women's duties under the principles of Catholic social policy.

[28] See Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949).

[29] Previous plays, starting from *The Mai*, had been set in the Midlands' countryside, generally in rural locations.

[30] Catherine's action echoes Sibilla Aleramo's real-life experience of leaving her husband and child, recounted in her 1906 work, *Una donna*.

[31] See Barsotti (135) for more on the group's early, experimental performances and their depiction of gender.

[32] Mimmo and Rosalia are cousins. Rosalia is Zia Lucia's daughter. Rosalia's husband is Giammarco's brother (therefore he is not a blood relation). The relationship between Nonna Citta and the others is unclear; she could be Zia Lucia's mother or mother-in-law, or grandmother/grandmother-in-law. Everyone calls her "Nonna" ("grandmother"). It should be noted that familial titles such as nonna and zia ("grandmother" "aunt") are often used loosely and outside the family,and so do not necessarily indicate the specific relationship that exists between interlocutor and the person addressed.

[33] Barsotti reads Dante's work as sharing some elements characteristic of Sicilian literature, among them is the quality of "chiusura nel isolamento" ("enclosure in isolation" 20). This idea could be linked to the Carollo family's enclosure within the confines of their home.

[34] Although the striptease lies outside the accepted and acceptable gender behaviour within the social grouping of the family, it must be noted that such acts of exposure of the female body have a long history in theatrical and performance terms, to the point of rendering the striptease a cliché. This is especially the case in an Italian context, if we consider the contemporary representation of women on Italian television as described by Lorella Zanardo, whereby women are frequently presented in various states of undress in the most unlikely contexts. Dante may have intended to stage Rosalia's resistence through her transgression of socially acceptable norms and behaviours, but this becomes problematic in a context whereby women in performance are expected to display such behaviours (although usually outside the family context). This tension forms part of a continuing wider discussion in feminist circles that debates the possibility of a latent liberatory power of a woman removing her clothes in public. The current debate between feminist group Femen and Islamic feminists on the use of nudity for feminist ends (see Nagarajan and Shevchenko).speaks to this debate, as well as books such as Jackie Willson's *The Happy Stripper : Pleasures and Politics of the New Burlesque* (2008).

[35]In contrast to the indifference with which her words are met, the action of removing her clothes provokes not only Mimmo, but the entire family into immediate action; *Mimmo e zia Lucia si lanciano su di lei per coprirla. Giammarco trascina nonna Cita sulla ribalta e per ammucciàre la vergogna racconta un aneddoto* ("Mimmo and Aunty Lucia throw themselves

onher to cover her up. Giammarco drags Granny Cita to the front of the stage and, to distract from the shame of the incident, he tells a story" 37).

[36] Nina carries out much domestic work without which the brothers would be at a loss: "[c]ome farete senza di me? Mischinèddi! Chi ve le lava le mutande, e chi vi cucina?" ("[w]hat will you do without me? You poor things! Who will wash your underpants, who will cook for you?" Dante *Carnezzeria* 127), Nina also appears to be confined to the home: "[n]ella casa dove andrò non le voglio le chiavi alle porte e le finestre le voglio sempre aperte" ("[i]n the new house, I don't want the doors locked and I want the windows open all the time" 126).

[37] Nina underlines the length of the journey they have made to come to this place, taking the ferry from Messina: "[a]bbiamo fatto un viaggio lungo per venire fino qua e io la strada all'incontrario non la so rifare. Abbiamo preso il traghetto." ("[w]e came on a long journey to get here and I wouldn't know how to get back. We took the ferry." *Carnezzeria* 86). The invented marriage was organised by her brothers: "[i] miei fratelli me l'hanno combinato questo matrimonio!" ("[m]y brothers arranged this marriage for me!" 86) in an effort to hide her incestuous pregnancy.

[38] This ideal was propagated and diffused especially during the Fascist period in Italy (Bellassai 2005) and formed the central theme of Vitaliano Brancati's 1949 novel set in Catania, *Il bell'Antonio*.

[39] Toruccio relives his sexual abuse on stage in a scene that returns him in a trance-like state to the moment (*Carnezzeria* 100-104). As the abusive act ends, Toruccio is heard to say "Paride tocca a te!" ("Paride, it's your turn!" 104) Ignazio was also abused: "'gnazieddu, se lo ricorda quando 'u papa 'ni pigghiava 'I misure e 'ni cuntava sempre che a Ignazio la minchia non gli cresceva neanche quando gli faceva guardare i giornaletti porno?' ("does Ignazio remember when dad used to measure him and he always told us that Ignazio's dick never got any bigger, even when he showed him porno magazines?" 106).

[40] Lisa Fitzpatrick analyses the negative reactions received by Glasshouse Productions' *There Are No Irish Women Playwrights!* and notes that the themes presented were "simple reorientations of the standard dramatic conflicts" (Fitzpatrick "Disrupting Metanarratives" 322). The conflict lies, according to Fitzpatrick in the critics' perception that such pieces were "plays *for* women" (322).

[41] Mothers have traditionally been portrayed as figures symbolic of the Irish nation (as in Yeats' Cathleen Nì Houlihan) and as self-sacrificing martyrs (in O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*).

[42] See Sihra's analysis in ("Playing" 168).

[43] See Sihra's analysis of Big Josie Swane as a foil for the image of woman as Mother Ireland in Yeats' and Gregory's Cathleen Nì Houlihan in ("A Cautionary Tale" 260).

[44] See Sihra in (*Women in Irish Drama* 280).

[45] For more analysis of this play see Sihra (*Century* 201-215), Trench (2010) and Sweeney (2008).

[46] Leeney identifies this refusal to name the central characters in this piece, stating that "the function of the players is abstracted" by such a process ("Character" 712). It should also be noted that the protagonists of *Woman and Scarecrow* and *The Cordelia Dream* are both named "Woman."

[47] The latter will be examined below.

[48] For more on Carr's depiction of motherhood in *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan* see Anna McMullan ("Marina Carr"), and in Portia Couglan (Sihra *Women in Irish Drama* 210-212).

[49] Exceptions such as Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903).

[50] I find Matt O'Brien's article "Always the Best Man, Never the Groom: The Role of the Fantasy Male in Marina Carr's Plays" in McMullan & Leeney (2003) quite an interesting analysis on this particular point. O'Brien identifies a tendency in Carr's plays for the female protagonists to cast the men in their lives (often not present onstage) as "the Best Man". These men "have a number of characteristics desired by the female protagonists, a combination of gentleness, faithfulness, strength, herosim" (202). He notes that such men are never direct players in the onstage action, and their absence overshadows and diminishes those men who are present, who consequently seem "puny in comparison" (202).

[51] Clare Wallace discusses men as objects of desire of the female protagonists in *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan* and *By the Bog of Cats...* ("Tragic Destiny and Abjection" 445-447). Though much of Wallace's analysis in this article is tied to Julia Kristeva's idea of abjection, Wallace identifies the important role of the absent male in Carr's plays. She notes that the female protagonists (the Mai and Portia Coughlan) idealize the men, and that the men are ghost-like and inhuman (445).

[52] Anthony Roche in "Woman on the Threshold" in Leeney & McMullan draws a link between Synge's play, the work of Teresa Deevy and Carr's *The Mai*.

[53] Catherine leaves her marriage alone, with no expectation that Art will join her. Art later decides to leave his wife Anne and go with Catherine.

[54] Goffredo Fofi (Porcheddu *Palermo dentro* 141) "la famiglia da cui siamo protetti e di cui siamo prigionieri" ("the family which protects us and renders us prisoners").

[55] The notable exception here is the family presented in *Vita mia*, where although the mother is suffocatingly over-protective, there is no atmosphere of abuse and violence.

[56] Similarly neglected, side-lined and unloved children appear in Carr's *Porta Coughlan*, *On Raftery's Hill* and *Ariel*. Portia's relationship with her children is fraught and anguished, she does not feel up to the task of caring for them; "PORTIA: I never wanted sons nor daughters and I never pretended otherwise to ya; I told ya from the start. But ya thought ya could woo me into motherhood. Well, it hasn't worked out, has it? You've your three sons now, so ya better mind them because I can't love them, Raphael. I'm just not able" (Carr *Plays* 221). In *On Raftery's Hill*, the son and daughters of patriarchal father, Red, are psychologically, physically and in the daughters' cases sexually abused, while the Fitzgerald family in *Ariel*, is characterized by a violence that eventual tears the family apart.

[57] It should be noted that in Italy and abroad the family has an importance in industrial, economic, institutional and political terms that is notable. Ginsborg notes how the family remains at the base of modern, Italian industry (14-15) and how a policy of familism is a strong force in political and social terms. In Sicily in particular, the family is often used as a metaphor for illegal, mafia organisations and Dante later considered this metaphorical family in her play *Cani di bancata*. But, there is also a sense that Dante employs the family unit as a metaphor for the wider Italian state and institutions, and indeed for the structure of Italian society.

[58] Translation by Archibald Colquhoun and Arthur Oliver, taken from page 95 of *The Day of the Owl* (2001).

[59] Similarly neglected, sidelined and unloved children appear in Carr's *Porta Coughlan*, *On Raftery's Hill* and *Ariel*.

[60] Supporting the latter thesis is an image presented onstage during the scene where Toruccio relives his abuse at the hands of his father. While Toruccio re-enacts the abuse, Nina can be seen to breastfeed her unborn child. The presence of such a motherly figure at the same time as the abuse is taking place could suggest that the Cuore mother, while perhaps not physically present: "[l]a mamma è uscita" (Mum has gone out" *Carnezzeria* 102) during the abuse was somehow complicit or aware of it.

[61] It should be noted that Carr's plays, *Ariel* and *On Raftery's Hill* contain families in conflict and that are governed with an iron fist by a violent, patriarchal father who acts as authoritative head of the family.

[62] Barsotti notes how this final comment draws attention to his socks which, coloured pink, "inficiano la virilità" ("invalidate his virility" Barsotti 148).

[63] The location of their home and its proximity to the town is made explicit when Nina shows a photo of their village saying: "[i]l paese è vicino" ("The town is nearby" *Carnezzeria* 85).

[64] Although the nuclear, patriarchal model of the family is the one favoured and espoused by the Catholic Church, I do not wish to suggest that the Church in any way promotes or condones familial violence, sexual abuse or incest. On the contrary, such acts are considered sins in the Catholic Church doctrine.

[65] It should be noted that *Le Pulle* is written with sections in Dante's Sicilian linguistic mix but also in Neapolitan dialect, according to the provenance of the actor. In this particular case, the part of Stellina was played by Carmine Mariangola, an actor of Neapolitan origin and so the extract reflects this linguistically.

Chapter Four

[1] *Death, the One and the Art of Theatre* (2005), page 1.

[2] It should be noted that this study deals specifically with what Gilbert calls "the fantasy of self-inflicted death" (248) within the limits of the theatrical medium and not the real act of suicide.

[3] Just as Gilbert & Gubar show that Christina Rossetti's "mortuary verses" like *After Death* (1862) and *Dead before Death* (1862) mourn the limitations of the range of creative alternatives available to women.

[4] In a departure from the tradition identified by Witoszek and Sheeran, where the revenant figure is often a father (30), Carr's relatives are brothers and daughters, and only in one case, a father. It is also worth noting that Witoszek and Sheeran's analysis is a gendered one, with most of the attention unquestioningly given to male authors.

[5] Joseph Swane is Hester's brother in *By the Bog of Cats…* who met his death after Hester slit his throat on a boat. He had searched for her after the death of their mother with the intention of dividing the inheritance with her. He knows that he is dead, but wishes to return to life (Carr *Plays* 300). He seems to be trapped in a tiring and unsatisfactory liminality where one is forced to wander and walk eternally; he is the stock lost and wandering ghost that can find no rest. The picture Joseph paints of the "other world" is unappealing and lonely. He hasn't spoken to

anyone since his death, he walks continuously, cannot rest, exists in a nothingness, a darkness. Joseph, who Hester describes as gentle, lost and softly spoken (334) and seems to be an amiable kind of a ghost, does not return to to remind his sister of the brutal deed she committed, but rather for a visit; for some company to assuage his lonely existence. Hester, however, is assailed by the bad memories of his passing when she meets him and his presence nevertheless serves as a reminder of her crime.

[6] The revenant figure of Ariel serves to remind father Fermoy of the terrible murder he committed. Ariel's voice reappears as a ghostly presence in Act Two, on the tenth anniversary of her death. She is distressed and unhappy and wishes to return home. She seems to be trapped in an unpleasant liminal space since her death, where there is no rest. It seems to be torturous: ARIEL. Come and get me, will ya? Ud's awful here, ud's awful. There's a huge pike after me, he lives in the belfry, two rows of teeth on him and teeth on hees tongue, bending back to hees throah. He won't rest till he has me. Come and get me, will ya? (Carr *Ariel* 56).

[7] After his death at his wife's hands and her subsequent interference at his burial site, a bloodied Fermoy returns in Act Three as a ghostly apparition to his youngest daughter Elaine. Though she worshipped her father in life and death, Elaine is petrified of Fermoy's ghost and refuses to give him her name (Carr *Ariel* 74). Like the ghost of Hamlet's father, Fermoy's return proves a catalyst for murder to avenge his death (although he does not make a direct request for revenge). Carr's character Elaine, contrasting Shakespeare's wavering protagonist Hamlet, is decided and swift in her vengeance. Prompted by the vision of her dead father, she does not hesitate or vacillate over the task, but rather murders her mother just seconds after the vision of her father's ghost (75).

[8] The attachment Gabriel and Portia share is morbid; surpassing that of normal close twin bonds. In Act Three, there is a sense that Gabriel is teasing Portia, playing hide and seek with her; he appears briefly onstage by the Belmont River and disappears just as Portia arrives out of breath, running to the river in an attempt to find Gabriel (Carr *Plays* 235). Later, Gabriel's voice is heard very faintly, making Portia strain to hear him (247). Portia's thinking becomes increasingly clouded as Gabriel's influence grows, leading her to her eventual suicide. Finally, she decides that she cannot live without her twin and heads towards her death by drowning. This is the final moment in the play and Gabriel is the last voice to be heard – he is singing triumphantly (255). Portia dies because of her uncontrollable and infinite love for Gabriel, but it seems that Gabriel seeks her death as a form of revenge.

[9] The photographic images are commented upon and a character sketch of each calls up both the image and presence of the relative in question. The figures become real onstage presences for the audience, who hear the descriptions of the people and, in some cases, can see the actual photograph. Some of the evoked figures are harmless, if not particularly agreeable: NINA. La nonna Carmela! Mii … che era tinta! Quando prendevi una cosa dalla credenza: ppem! Ti faceva saltare le dita. Chiudeva a chiave le caramelle, i biscotti di pasta frolla, il cioccolato … ("NINA. Nana Carmela! She was *really* mean! When you tried to take something off the dresser. BAM! She'd smack the fingers off you. She locked up all the sweets, shortbread biscuits, the chocolate …" Dante Carnezzeria 87).

[10] Sabino Civilleri played the character of Toruccio in the original production.

[11] Barsotti comments in detail on the differences between this published version, the unpublished scripts and the performance (68, 185-188).

[12] The Ghost Fancier enters "too previous" (Carr *Plays* 266) in order to bring Hester to her death, mistaking dawn for dusk and returns at the play's close, when he plunges a fish knife into Hester's heart and kills her (341).

[13] This description recalls the title of W.B. Yeats' poem "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" (1928). *Woman and Scarecrow* carries many echoes of Yeats' poetry, particularly "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928). The figure of Scarecrow seems to echo the poem's description of the aged poet as "a tattered coat upon a stick" (Yeats). A study of the resonances of Yeats in Carr's work would be interesting, but is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis.

[14] SCARECROW. I was there before you and I'll be there after … I'm through with you. I'm just
        going through the motions. I'll find someone else (Carr *Woman and Scarecrow* 20).

[15] SCARECROW. Well, I've got news for you. You're not dying for him. You're leaving this earth because I have given up (51).

[16] For more on Dante's use of Christian symbols see "Conversando" (46-47).

[17] Examples include Auntie Ah's insistence on saying the rosary at Woman's bedside in *Woman and Scarecrow* (45), and the onstage presence and use of the crucifix by the mother in *Vita mia* (147-148).

[18] In the same section we find an entry dated 10 May 1977 that states, "[t]here is now a special branch of learning called 'Thanatology', and historians of death, like Philippe Ariès or Michel Vovelle, have suddenly appeared on the scene."

[19] See especially Geoffrey Gorer for an analysis of the sociology of death and mourning practices. His essay "The Pornography of Death" (1955) and book *Death, Grief and Mourning* (1977) put forward the theory that death and mourning had become taboo subjects in society. Also Jessica Mitford's insightful book, *The American Way of Death* (1998), examines the consumerist and profit-driven nature of modern American funerary practices. For a feminist sociological analysis of death practices, see Sally Cline's book *Lifting the Taboo: Women, Death and Dying* (1995). Cline notes that in the mountains of research done on death, few attempts have been made to address the issue with particular regard to women.

[20] See Phillipe Ariès' influential, wide-ranging and minutely detailed works on the history of death, specifically, his key works *Western Attitudes toward Death* (1976) and his study of death in numerous western cultures, *The Hour of Our Death* (1981).

[21] For an excellent analysis of philosophy's position on death throughout the century see Jonathan Dollimore's book, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (2001).

[22] See Sigmund Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), where Freud attributes mourning to the inability or unwillingness of the libido to detach from the loss object of desire and attach itself to a new one. Freud characterises mourning as a normal reaction to a loss, whereas melancholy is a pathological reaction. See also Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), in which he developed the most renowned psychoanalytic intervention on death; the death-drive theory. Here, he formulated that there was a general impulse to return to the former state of things.

[23] Dollimore tells us that a lost text (dated the end of the third millennium B.C.) entitled '*A Dispute over Suicide*' shows us that the death wish found cultural expression over four thousand years ago (40).

[24] The writings of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas reject suicide as contrary to God's law.

[25] The act of suicide ceased to be illegal in Ireland in 1993 and in Italy as early as 1889 (with the introduction of the Codice Zanardelli).

[26] Donne believed that the desire to die was in our very natures and that death gave the chance of the transcendence of the self in the afterlife, while Hume attacks the seemingly arbitrary and contradictory notions of natural law used to condemn suicide.

[27] Sophocles' *Antigone.*

[28] Shakespeare's *Hamlet.*

[29] The protagonist of Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa* (1748).

[30] The protagonist of Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* (1856).

[31] The protagonist of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (First published in instalments between 1873-1877).

[32] The protagonist of August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1888).

[33] The protagonist of Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1890).

[34] See Canetto and Fernquist.

[35] For other criticisms of Bassein's overall approach, see Sharon O'Brien's review. O'Brien criticizes the book's overly-ambitious scope, leading Bassein to assume "an unchanging continuity from the Middle Ages to the present in cultural attitudes toward 'the inseparable triad: woman, sex, death.'" For O'Brien, Bassein provides an ahistorical argument, which fails "to account for changing ideologies as well as for varying social and historical contexts."

[36] McMullan refers here particularly to the plays, *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, *By the Bog of Cats…* and *On Raftery's Hill*.

[37] Gilbert gives a brief description of each type. *Erotic* – the author/protagonist may "yield to the voluptuous importunings of a symbolic lover who promises narcotic or even orgasmic release from suffering". *Sacrificial* – she may "acquiesce in cultural imperatives that counsel self-abnegation, self-immolation, self-sacrifice". *Self-loathing* – she may "struggle to articulate a culturally defined self-loathing, a disgust with self and body that becomes a disgust with life itself". *Mimetic/competitive* – she may "sentimentally or competitively imitate the death of another who functions as a role model" (251). When compared with Emile Durkheim's taxonomy, published in *Suicide* (1897), of altruistic, egoistic and anomic suicide, only Gilbert's *Sacrificial* and Durkheim's *Altruistic* are comparable.

[38] I have, to some degree, been influenced in my thinking on this, by Huey P. Newton's notion of revolutionary suicide, expounded in *Revolutionary Suicide* (1973).

[39] In the interests of avoiding laborious repetition of the same term, I will use the terms, "suicide," "voluntary death" and "self-death" interchangeably throughout this section. I wish to emphasize that my use of these terms, particularly in the phrase "resistant suicide," refers to an act that ends an individual's own life through the deployment of their agency. In this sense, the words indicate choice, agency and acceptance.

[40] It is important to stress this point, as I have noted in some studies such as Sandra Gilbert's, that the difference between literary representations and actual suicides is sometimes elided.

Gilbert refers to the literary representations of women, the suicides of female writers "from Teasdale and Woolf to Arbus, Plath and Sexton" (253), as well as public suicides such as the first victim of Dr. Kevorkian, Janet Adkins without any particular distinction. I wish to highlight my desire to only deal with narrative and theatrical representations that remain in the spheres of art, imagination and creativity.

[41] From *Carnezzeria*: NINA. "Una notte ho fatto un sogno: ho sognato delle grandi ali dorate" ("One night I had a dream: I dreamt of big wings of gold" 125). The phrase also echoes the opening lines of Giuseppe Verdi's "Va pensiero" ("Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves"), taken from the third act of his opera Nabucco (1842). The chorus opens with the words: "Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate" ("Fly, my thoughts, on wings of gold"). The chorus narrates the yearning of enslaved Jews for their homeland and freedom.

[42] It should be noted that, in the case that this ending is for some reason not possible onstage, Dante has envisioned an alternative ending whereby Nina initiates a blackout onstage. Dante, however, prefers the ending outlined in this thesis (Dante "La strada scomoda" 64) and (Barsotti 197-198).

[43] On four separate occasions they try to leave but their exit is thrice prevented by Nina who follows them; "[i] tre fanno per andare ma Nina li segue ("[t]he three start to leave, but Nina follows them" 81), and again on (82);'[i] tre fanno per scappare ma Nina li segue ("[t]he three try to escape, but Nina follows them" 82); and finally by the unborn child who violently seeks his/her own birth, "Paride fa capire ai fratelli che è meglio andarsene in fretta [...] Ma un movimento improvviso della pancia fa fare a Nina un salto un metro [...] è in procinto di sgravare ("Paride indicates to his brothers that it would be better to leave in a hurry [...]But, a sudden movement of her belly throws Nina back a metre [...] she is about to give birth" 116).

[44] Dante has made provision for an alternative ending, in the unlikely case where the veil gives way, or does not function in the way intended. She and actress Manuela lo Sicco have agreed on another ending that involves Nina switching off the ceremonious religious lights that festoon the stage; "Nina si sarebbe spenta la luce da sola: si sarebbe sucidata così, spegnendo le luci" ("Nina would turn the lights off herself, she would kill herself like that, by turning off the lights" "La strada scomoda" 64). In this ending, Nina uses her agency in deciding to darken the stage, thus symbolically signalling her voluntary death.

[45] "la demente gira su se stessa in preda al delirio. Il guinzaglio si attorciglia al collo e le accorcia la strada" ("the lunatic spins around in the grip of a state of frenzy. The leash coils itself around her neck and it restricts her movement" 131).

[46] NINA. La casa è in città, vero? ("The house is in the city, isn't it?" 130).

[47] Another possible reading would be the bird as a signifier for death. Rhona Trench reads birds in Carr's works in this manner (Trench 12).

[48] (Carr *Woman and Scarecrow* 11).

[49] WOMAN. Could we change our minds? *Un*-die as it were? (Carr *Woman and Scarecrow* 19).

[50] Him describes his infidelities as "roving" (39).

[51] WOMAN. You've just been with her. HIM. Alright, you want the unvarnished truth. Yes, I've just been with her. She's parked up the road (37).

[52] HIM. The whole point of a woman is not so much wanting her yourself, that waxes and wanes, but that no one else can go near her (61).

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[53] SCARECROW. Do you still love him? WOMAN. I don't know … Yes … I adore him (24).

[54] A narrative poem included in Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* published between 1856 and 1885.

[55] This effect is illustrated for Higonnet in Emma Bovary's death: "Emma dies not so much by her own choice as by the victimizing effects of a society that imprisons young women in convents and then in traditional families and perverts their hopes for individual self-fulfillment through an ideology of romantic love and bourgeois consumption" (77).

[56] *Over Her Dead Body*'s second chapter deals with the phenomenon of the disappearance of the dead woman, who loses her individuality and becomes simply a vehicle for the male meaning that is later attached to her. Bronfen illustrates this using the real-life example of the death of Freud's daughter, Sophie Freud-Halberstad. Bronfen claims the famed psychoanalyst read this event "as a sign for his own vulnerability and mortality" (15) and she claims it may have been an unacknowledged source and inspiration for his development of the theory of the death drive.

[57] See Philipe Ariès' *The Hour of Our Death* (1981) which discusses representations of the deathbed over time.

[58] Turner distinguishes between transformative ritual and confirmatory ceremony (95).

[59] SCARECROW. He loved you. More than he loved me. He saw past your tattered hide. He saw you as you should be seen (29).

[60] This humorous retort is reminiscent of Lady Bracknell's famous response to Jack's explanation of his orphan status in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* "To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness" (369).

Chapter Five

[61] From Frank Herbert's *Chapter House: Dune* (1985), page 204.

[62] Marina *Carr* ("Interview with Melissa Sihra" 56).

[63] For more on the issue of spectatorship in theatre see *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009) by Jacques Rancière. See *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1991) by Jill Dolan for a feminist perspective on spectatorship.

[64] (Carr *Woman and Scarecrow* 21).

[65] Martin Coyle, in the *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism* (1990), notes how critics bestow the title of "poet" to signify "writer" in discussions where the author is given a high status. The term is used "in general theoretical discussions or apologias for 'Literature,' regardless of genre or metrical form" (17).

[66] In line with Dante's idea on her theatre not offering a "cure" for grief, the audience here feels a release and sharing of sorrow and bereavement. The process does not, however, represent an elimination or erasure of the grief, rather a sharing of it.

[67] See ("La strada scomoda" 69-70).

[68] "I had a fist-fight with a ghost one time. I think at certain times in your life you can be visited by presences, and the temperature at which they visit you depends on what you are in yourself.

I don't know what kind of state I was in, but one night I had an argument, came to blows with this presence, and it just engulfed me. I was fighting to get at the light and turn it on, and it took me ages. I did eventually and the presence went away" (Carr "Interview with Mike Murphy" 49).

[69] The contents of the document advance five main criticisms; that she was intelligent, but failed to use her intelligence; that she stopped seeking and searching; that her love had ended, but she wouldn't accept it; that she missed out her one chance at real love; and finally, that she used her children as a shield (Carr *Woman and Scarecrow* 65-66).

[70] See Philippe Ariès (1976 & 1981) for more on the Last Judgement and the changes in Christianity's teachings on what happened after death.

[71] As discussed in Chapter Four, Higonnet has claimed that male writers tend to make their female suicides invisible.

[72] See Bronfen (3-15) for more on relationship between male artist and depicted female death.

[73] Chopin's novel was recovered from literary oblivion in the 1960s by a Norwegian scholar named Per Seyersted (Showalter "Literary Criticism" 442).

[74] Of Benedictsson "it is said that Strindberg based the character of Miss Julie on her, and that Ibsen's character Hedda Gabler was influenced by her" (Bayley vi).

[75] See also *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* (1976) by Pam Gems.

[76] MAMA. How long have you been thinking about this?
JESSIE. Off and on, ten years. On all the time, since Christmas (Norman 29).

[77] It is difficult to make any conclusive pronouncements on this at this stage, as mental illness can often be hidden or unreported during a person's lifetime.

[78] Many feminist commentators find it difficult to entertain the idea of choice in the context of suicide. See (Gilbert) and (Holst-Warhaft).

[79] Of course this is just one possible reading among many potential readings of such figures.

[80] Gilbert & Gubar deal with the negative effects that patriarchal systems can have, and did have in the nineteenth century, on women's physical and mental health in some detail (Gilbert & Gubar 53-55).

[81] Note that while the nineteenth-century writers chose to dramatize their inner conflict, their "own self-division, their desire both to accept the strictures of patriarchal society and to reject them" (78) not through their protagonists, but through minor or secondary characters, Carr and Dante choose their protagonists, major characters, as their mirrors and as the sites where the authors' personal conflict with patriarchy will be played out.

[82] Note that this interview was published in 1997, after *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan* were produced and before *By the Bog of Cats…* was first staged in the Abbey Theatre in 1998.

[83] In Dante's staging of her own personal pain and bereavement, I argue that she externalises her grief as a way of sharing her sorrow, not as a form of therapy or curative. In the case of the Anxiety of Ontology, however, I argue that both playwrights, by staging the suicidal figures in question, dramatize their own struggle with the anxiety. This latter process involves a certain level of externalisation, but vitally, goes beyond sharing in its latent potential for liberation from that same anxiety. The first process is a simple exercise in sharing and externalising, while the second holds the promise of a casting off of the anxiety that provokes it. Grief, I argue,

cannot be exorcised fully or "cured" by theatre, but in the case of the anxiety, there is a chance of liberation through the processes of drama.

Chapter Six

[1] From Marsha Norman's article "Not There Yet" (2009).

[2] As discussed in the Introduction, a new feminist sensibility has, since 2008, begun to sprout in Italy, Ireland and many other countries across Europe and beyond. This new interest has led to the formation of new movements with a focus on women's issues, such as the Irish Feminist Network (IFN) in Ireland and Se non ora, quando (SNOQ) in Italy. These groups are tackling issues that affect women, such as budgeting equality (a project led by the Irish Feminist Network) and the issue of femicide by Se non ora, quando.

[3] Of note is the fact that since 2012 this national festival has a woman, Silvia Bottiroli, at the helm as artistic director.

[4] Barokthegreat, set up in 2008, is directed by musician Leila Gharib and performer-choreographer Sonia Brunelli. The group operates within the vast range of the performing arts, with a particular focus on movement, physicality and the ritual function of music.

[5] Teatro Valdoca was founded in 1983 in Cesena, in the Romagna region, by director Cesare Ronconi and dramaturge Mariangela Gualtieri.

[6] Dolan discusses the limits of the Liberal feminist project in theatrical terms, noting that although more women enter into the mainstream of theatre, that little change is evident because the universal they write to is still based on the male model (*The Feminist Spectator as Critic* 5). This, and her analysis of Marsha Norman's success with her play *'night Mother*, underlines the importance of the themes, subjects and character types that are considered "universal" to the success or otherwise of a play (19-40). If these universals have traditionally been characterised as male, then it would seem that a significant re-evaluation of them in necessary. As mentioned above, Cavarero's work seems to go some way to addressing this issue.