



ABBAY THEATRE

BY THE BOG OF CATS

MARINA CARR
Resource Pack 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Characters	3
2. Synopsis	10
3. Themes	14
4. Interviews	18
5. Comparative Essay	23

CHARAC- TERS

CHARACTERS

Hester Swane

'I was born on the Bog of Cats and on the Bog of Cats I'll end me days. I've as much right to this place as any of yees, more, for it holds me to it in ways it has never held yees.'

Hester is the central character in the play. All of the action, from the opening to the final scene, has a cumulative effect on her. Each moment leads her directly or indirectly to the final, terrible tragedy. Hester is a forty year old traveller woman who has lived her whole life on the Bog of Cats. She is proud and strong willed, living in a community that doesn't fully understand her traditions and won't accept her for who she is. She can see the artifice and greediness behind how the people of the town treat each other and is not afraid to comment on it. She is proud of her heritage and longs for her mother to return. This longing breeds the quiet, jealous rage within her that fuels her passionate and violent acts and creates the tragedy of the play. Her true and deep love for Carthage and their daughter, Josie, ties her to the local community in a fractious bond, pulling at her identity and challenging her wilful independence. Hester represents the 'other', the outsider, and her presence on the bog is an unsettling reminder to the locals that there are some things that cannot be controlled.

By the Bog of Cats

Susan Lynch (*Hester Swane*) in *By the Bog of Cats* by Marina Carr, directed by Selina Cartmell.



Barry John O'Connor
(Carthage Kilbride) in
By the Bog of Cats by
Marina Carr, directed
by Selina Carmell.

Carthage Kilbride

*'I'm up to me neck in another life that can't
include ya anymore'*

Carthage's betrayal of Hester from the outset of the play casts him as the villain, yet her need for his love means he has the potential to be a redeemer. Choosing the young Caroline and a new life of ease and wealth sets the wheels in motion for the action of the play. Yet, the bond between him and Hester goes so deep that his returning to her is the only act that could save her from her fate. Carthage might represent a culture that is moving away from its heritage and roots in favour of modernity and comfortable narrative. Hester's way of life represents a time of raw survival, a history of violence and endurance that is easier to know from a distance. By choosing Caroline, Carthage rejects his past and, ultimately, sacrifices his future as embodied by his daughter.

Selina Carmell, Director: Carthage wants to make a better life for himself with Caroline, he can have more money and this marriage will enhance his social status within the community. He and Hester have this extraordinary relationship; it's animal, it's savage, it's sexy, it's primal and it's heated. That's what makes the stakes so high. That's what fuels the tragedy towards the end of the play and you feel that. She is a woman scorned, and it is a crime of passion.

Mrs. Kilbride

'I've had the measure of you this long time, the lazy shiftless blood in ya, that savage tinker eye ya turn on people to frighten them.'

Mrs. Kilbride, Carthage's mother, is a proud, vain woman. She sees wealth as the only true indication of a person having succeeded in life and is horrified that her son's relationship with Hester has tied her through blood to a traveller. Like most arrogant people she is also desperate for attention and is constantly talking about herself or criticizing others. She shows up to her son's wedding in a white dress and insists on giving a speech about how much he loves her. Mrs. Kilbride is a terrific comedy character because it's impossible to take her self-importance seriously.



Marion O'Dwyer (Mrs Kilbride)
and Elodie Devins (Josie Kilbride)
in *By the Bog of Cats* by Marina
Carr, directed by Selina Cartmell.

Eve Maher (*Josie Kilbride*)
in *By the Bog of Cats*
by Marina Carr,
directed by Selina Cartmell.



By the Bog of Cats

Josie Kilbride

*'Mam, I want to be where you'll be
[...] I'd be watchin' for ya all the time
'long the Bog of Cats. I'd be hopin' and
waitin' and prayin' for ya to return.'*

Josie is a typical seven year old, eager for her mother's attention and excited for any chance to dress up. She is a happy child and enjoys the freedom that growing up on the bog affords her. With the exception of Mrs. Kilbride – whose pettiness makes her mean towards her granddaughter – the characters in the play treat her with care and affection. Josie is named after Big Josie Swane and is the next link in the chain of mothers and daughters that forms the heart of the play.

Elodie Devins (*Josie Kilbride*)
in *By the Bog of Cats*
by Marina Carr,
directed by Selina Cartmell.



Characters

Catwoman

'I know everythin' that happens on this bog. I'm the Keeper of the Bog of Cats in case ya forgotten. I own this bog.'

Catwoman is an intriguing character. She lives a rugged life on the bog and survives by her own rules. Her blindness seems to afford her an inner sight, the ability to speak to ghosts and an instinct for seeing the future. The people of the town respect and fear her so she is always invited to special events to offer a blessing. From the beginning of the play she seems to understand that something terrible is catching up with Hester and that the day will end in tragedy. She tries her best to get Hester to leave the bog but even her warnings fall on deaf ears.

Monica Murray

'They'll skin ya alive, Hester, I'm tellin' ya, they'll kill ya... I stood up for ya as best I could.'

Monica is a caring neighbour to Hester and Josie. She has watched them both grow up and is protective of them. She is a character with integrity, reminding people of things from the past that they have wilfully forgotten in the hopes they will avoid the same mistakes. For Hester, Monica is a friend and link to her mother; she is the only one who manages to soothe Hester's rage in the final act.

Caroline Cassidy

'You and Hester has a whole history together, stretchin' back years that connects yeas and that seems more important and real than anythin' we have. And I wonder have we done the wrong thing.'

Caroline is the opposite in almost every way to Hester, having lived a very sheltered life of wealth and privilege. Her innocence and youth are attractive to Carthage as an opportunity to start again. When her wedding day arrives she is filled with naive optimism but also knows that a bond remains between Carthage and Hester. Visiting Hester on the bog to beg her to leave is as brave an act as Caroline could attempt, but it is not enough. She doesn't stand a chance in the face of Hester's passion.

Xavier Cassidy

'There's nothin' besides land, boy, nothin'! A real farmer would never think otherwise.'

Xavier Cassidy is a powerful man in the town. His land is worth a lot of money and affords him reputation and influence over others. Most of his interests are business based but he has a callous streak that makes him unpredictable and sometimes violent. When he confronts Hester it is sexually threatening and alludes to his having been the reason her mother left.

Father Willow

*They've never listened to me, sure they even lie in the Confession box.
Ya know what I do? I wear ear-plugs.'*

Father Willow is an ineffectual spiritual leader for the local community and his frailty and confusion mean the church has less of an influence than it might. This leaves space for more pagan ideas to co-exist and fosters a connection with the spirit world through Hester and Catwoman. His speech at the wedding provides light relief for the audience and playing the part requires excellent comic timing.

The Ghost Fancier

'Where there's a ghost there's ghost fanciers.'

The Ghost Fancier is a menacing presence at the beginning and end of the play. He is an agent of another world who appears on the bog at dawn having trailed Hester Swane. He realises he has arrived too early when he discovers that she is still alive, promising to return at dusk. The Ghost Fancier is a guarantee that the day will end badly for Hester unless the course of fate is disrupted.

The Ghost of Joseph Swane

'It's fierce hard to knock the best out of nothin', fierce hard to enjoy the darkness the whole time. Can't I just stay here with ya, talk to ya a while?'

Joseph is Hester's brother and the victim of her worst act of violence. He wanders in a lonely limbo and hopes to find some comfort by speaking to her again. She is haunted by the memory of murdering him because she knows he was innocent. Her rage was fuelled by a jealous notion that her mother loved him more. Joseph's lonely wanderings in death are paralleled by Hester who has been denied the only love she ever really wanted, the love of her mother.

SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE

Dawn on the Bog of Cats. Hester Swane has found the body of a black swan, known as Black Wing, frozen on the ice. She knows it is an ill omen for her but she remains defiant. A ghost fancier, drawn to a place where a ghost will appear, meets Hester. When he sees she is still alive he realises he is too early and promises to return that evening. Unsettled but undeterred, she continues on towards the caravan.

Hester buries Black Wing when Catwoman arrives. She is a blind woman with a spiritual link to the bog and she can read terrible signs in the death of the swan.

That afternoon Caroline Cassidy, Carthage's betrothed, appears in her wedding dress. She stakes her claim on the house that has been bought for the new couple but when Hester refuses to move out, Caroline

threatens her and then tries to bribe her. The young woman's desperation is no match for Hester's anger and she leaves in tears.

Carthage arrives to confront Hester about upsetting Caroline. She begs him to come back to her, reminding him of the passion they share and the love they once had but nothing works. He leaves and Hester is heartbroken.

Caroline returns with her father Xavier. Hester is drunk. Xavier reminds her that she has signed away her rights to the house and must leave. Desperate, Hester invokes the memory of her mother and their primal connection to the bog. It was rumoured that Xavier once loved Big Josie Swane but he denies it here, describing how she neglected Hester, leaving her alone and unwashed. These accusations seem to cut Hester worst of all.



David Shannon (*The Ghost Fancier*) and Susan Lynch (*Hester Swane*) in *By the Bog of Cats* by Marina Carr, directed by Selina Cartmell.

ACT TWO

It is the evening of the same day at the Cassidy house. Catwoman is drinking alone at the reception for Carthage and Caroline's wedding. She is interrupted by the appearance of the ghost of Joseph Swane. Her connection to the spirit world allows her to hear his ghost and he pleads with her to lead him to Hester.

Meanwhile Caroline is just beginning to realise how connected Carthage and Hester will always be. With the party assembled, Mr. Cassidy makes his father of the bride speech. This is followed swiftly by an unplanned 'mother of the groom' speech in which Mrs. Kilbride describes the gifts Carthage has given her. It draws attention to her narcissism as well as her jealousy of her son's attention to Caroline.

Father Willow's speech follows but makes little sense and trails off as his mind wanders.

Hester appears in her own wedding dress. She has reached a peak of desperation and determination. Once more she begs Carthage to return to her. When he refuses she asks to be allowed, at least, to stay on the bog. Other members of the group weigh in with taunts and support, with Monica revealing that Mrs. Kilbride is closer to 'tinker blood' than she would like to admit.

Carthage is unmoved and tells Hester to leave. Her wrath is solidified. She leaves with the promise to wage 'a vicious war' against them.



Des Nealon (*Father Willow*) and Brid Ní Neachtain (*Catwoman*) in *By the Bog of Cats* by Marina Carr, directed by Selina Cartmell.

ACT THREE

It is dusk. Hester, in her charred and muddied wedding dress, stands alone save for the ghost of her eighteen year old brother, Joseph Swane. Behind her the house and shed are in flames, the cattle inside are burning. He approaches her singing one of their mother's songs. He means her no harm and Hester is relieved that he has not come looking for revenge. They talk about big Josie Swane and about the night Hester slit Joseph's throat as he rowed her and Carthage to shore. This is her terrible secret that has weighed on her since that night. They find a sort of resolution with each other.

Hester makes her peace with the Ghost Fancier and readies herself for death. She is interrupted by Josie returning. The young girl is abuzz from the party and they dance together. Xavier appears, enraged that his property is burning. He advances on her as if he might rape her but she holds her ground. Carthage reappears, furious, and promises her that she will never see Josie again.

Caroline is able to see just how broken Hester is where Carthage can only see his own losses. She promises to look out for Josie and to work to change Carthage's mind.

Josie reappears and Hester tries to say goodbye, convinced that there is now no escape. Josie refuses to let her mother leave, adamant that if she does she will spend her whole life waiting for Hester to return. Hester cannot bear the thought of her own pain repeated in Josie's life and, in one savage moment, she cuts her throat. In the same instance the Ghost Fancier steps forward. He and Hester have their final dance of death as she dies.



THEMES



THE OUTSIDER

Caoimhe Cassidy (*Waiter*), Barry John O'Connor (*Carthage Kilbride*), Peter Gowen (*Xavier Cassidy*) and Rachel O'Byrne (*Caroline Cassidy*) in *By the Bog of Cats* by Marina Carr, directed by Selina Cartmell.

Travellers sometimes became ashamed of their identity. That shame came about because for years we were told to give up our traditions and ways. We were expected to assimilate. What helps us not to assimilate are the two most important parts of our culture as I see them, our Nomadism and our family.

Travellers as an Ethnic Group

It is often the case in society that anyone seen as 'different' is met with fear and suspicion. We try to contain them, to control them, unsettled by the strangeness of their ideas and unpredictability. If they resist, we force them out. Travellers are an indigenous ethnic group who have been a part of Irish society for centuries and, because of people's prejudice and fear, are forced to the edges of our society. They are proud of their heritage and maintain a set of traditions, the heart of which is a nomadic lifestyle. Traveller families can often be led by strong matriarchal figures like the character of Big Josie Swane or Hester Swane. In *By the Bog of Cats* Hester is an outsider because of her traveller blood. She lives on the bog and, even when Carthage builds her a house, stays close to the land and often sleeps in her caravan. This casts her as an 'outsider' and she often has to defend herself and her heritage.

HESTER: *And as for me tinker blood, I'm proud of it. It gives me an edge over all of yeas around here, allows me to see yeas for the inbred, underbred, bog-brained shower yeas are.*

Understanding what makes Hester different to the rest of the town helps us to understand her position in the play. She is the outsider and her values and traditions reflect that. Nothing is more important than her connection to her mother, her daughter and to the Bog itself. Her love for her family and a wilful need to be living where she needs to be are two strong traveller traditions.

Selina Cartmell: How do the community deal with what they have witnessed and how does that information get passed down to the next generation and the generation after that? How is Hester looked upon? What is the memory of her? And I think that's what's buried in the bog as well. It sits right below the surface and it takes something to release it.

THE BOG

The setting for *By the Bog of Cats* is very important. Raised bogs – like those found in Offaly – are areas of peat built up over thousands of years with an average depth of eight meters. It is a landscape that has appealed to many Irish artists, but what makes them such a compelling image? Bogland is formed very slowly as layer upon layer of moss and vegetation break down. Each layer reflects the moment it was formed. Like the complex history of Hester Swane, the bog is detailed and holds clues to what has come before. She is deeply connected to the difficult landscape and can't fathom existing anywhere else. It connects her to the past in a surreal way, conjuring a link to an ancient time in Ireland and resisting the fast pace change brought about by mechanisation and technology. We understand the power of her pagan beliefs and “dark” ability more because of the complex history of the bog. Like Hester, the bog also holds violent secrets; the remains of many murder victims (such as the Croghan Man) have been preserved by the bog for thousands of years. The ghost of Joseph Swane comes to find Hester on the bog, the door between the dead and the living weaker in this strange, mythical place where past and present exist side by side.

Selina Cartmell: The starting place for me – knowing the play for 10 years and going back to it again and again – is the idea of the bog. The idea of memory and stories in the bog that have been submerged because the bog can hold thousands and thousands of year old matter. Objects and bodies, the bog bodies are all fascinating. Compressed memory, compressed worlds, shifting worlds, all stored in the bog. It's universal, it's timeless and it effects us all.



Jane Brennan (Monica Murray)
in *By the Bog of Cats* by Marina
Carr, directed by Selina Cartmell.

MEDEA

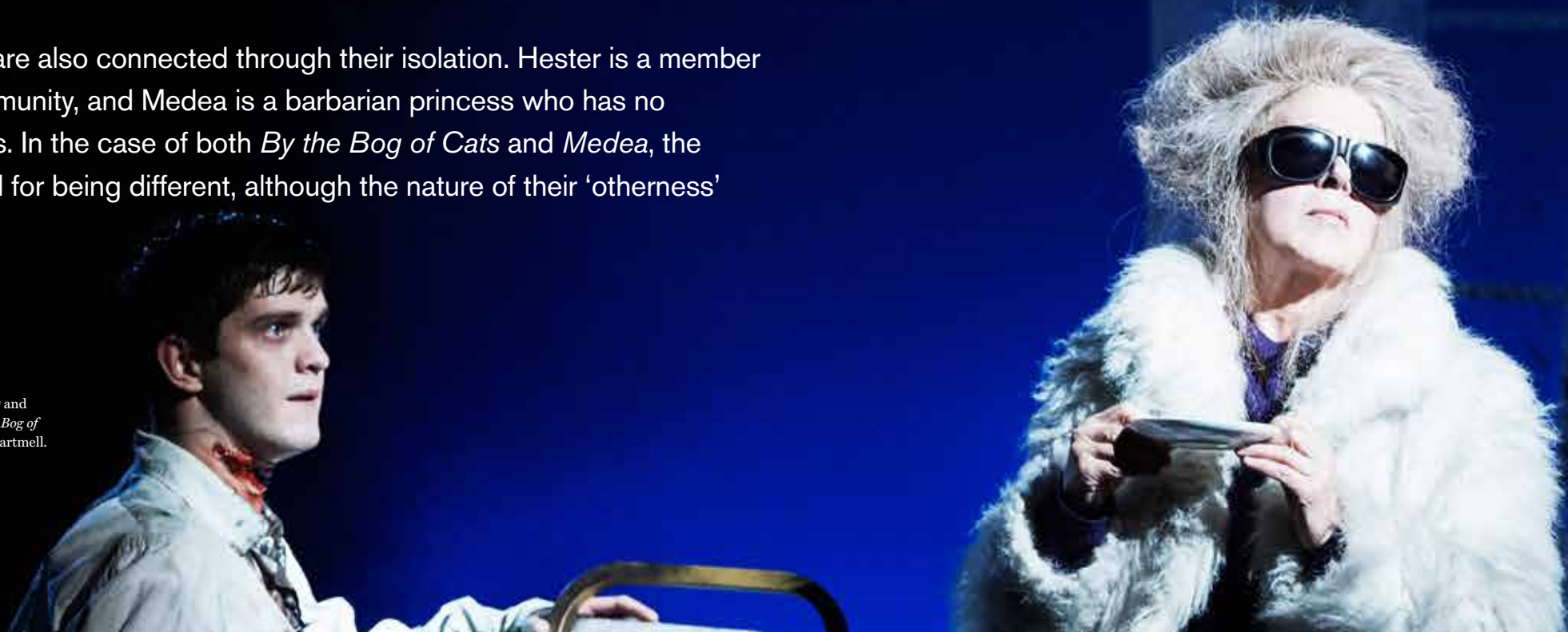
Euripides' *Medea* was first produced in ancient Greece 431BC. It is among the most famous Greek tragedies ever written and has been reimagined, and used as inspiration for new work, for centuries. Marina Carr creates a modern Irish tragedy from ideas and images found in *Medea*. Adopting this ancient story as a structural foundation also allows her to tap into stylistic and thematic tropes such as the mythical or magical, ideas of fate and destiny or the rough justice of nature. There are a number of parallels between the two plays; both respond to the social and cultural upheaval happening at the time, articulate the difficulty faced by women seeking independence in a male-dominated society, and explore the damaging effects of ostracism as experienced by the 'outsider'. *By the Bog of Cats* was written during a period of great upheaval in Ireland. It was commissioned and produced in the same period that saw the introduction of the euro, the legalization of divorce after a lengthy referendum campaign, and increasing paramilitary activity as the Good Friday Agreement approached. *By the Bog of Cats* is a dark play for a generation who were confronted with fear and insecurity amidst immense social change.

Hester and Medea are also connected through their isolation. Hester is a member of the Traveller community, and Medea is a barbarian princess who has no citizenship in Athens. In the case of both *By the Bog of Cats* and *Medea*, the women are shunned for being different, although the nature of their 'otherness'

is not something within their control. Hester faces off against Xavier who seems intent on driving her out as he did her mother. This confrontation reveals two opposing truths simultaneously; she is strong but she is also vulnerable. Hester and Medea eventually come to accept their outsider status, deriving power from it. Yet their isolation is what limits their possibility of an alternative ending. As she is threatened with being cast out from her homeland and torn from her daughter, Hester must confront her own feelings of abandonment that date back to her mother leaving her as a child. She must also choose to lead her daughter towards or away from similar heartbreak.

Selina Cartmell: That's why Marina's writing stands the test of time; like the Greeks, and like Shakespeare, it is a story – obviously influenced by Medea – it is a story that transcends time. With By the Bog of Cats there is an alchemy there. It comes from imagination, somehow Marina has bridged the two elements so it feels utterly contemporary, and yet it's so rooted in the mythic and the Greek version. They work seamlessly together.

Niall Wright (*The Ghost of Joseph Swane*) and
Brid Ní Neachtain (*Catwoman*) in *By the Bog of
Cats* by Marina Carr, directed by Selina Cartmell.



INTER- VIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH SELINA CARTMELL

She's extraordinary. It feels like I've known her a lifetime. Her outlook as a human being and as an artist is so bold. There's no one like her. She has a fearless and distinctive voice. Marina's work is like a complex emotional weave that is finely stitched together. As a woman and as an artist I find her absolutely inspiring.

Selina Cartmell on Marina Carr

I first heard about Marina Carr when I was living in London and I was thinking about moving to Ireland. I was at a dinner party and I was describing the kind of work I wanted to do as a very naïve – just starting out – director, trying to figure out why I wanted to direct, and the stories I wanted to tell, what I wanted to say. And someone said, if you go to Ireland you have to check out this great writer Marina Carr and you definitely have to read *By the Bog of Cats*. So the next day I bought the play and I sat down to read it and completely fell in love with her writing and the world and now, sitting here now, about to start rehearsal for *By the Bog of Cats* it does

make you think, how extraordinary this world is. This is a play I've wanted to do for ten years.

This is my fifth time working with her and the relationship has evolved. It feels like a very personal evolvment as well as a professional evolvment. I've certainly grown and it feels like a very strong, creative relationship. I think her ideas and her work, what she's trying to say, how she straddles the mythic and the contemporary, how she brings the dead and the living together, how her great lyrical words and her writing really challenge me. I always feel challenged by Marina's work because you have to rise to her. The work has extraordinary beauty, great humour, great darkness, and yet it's always filled with great truth. I feel in many ways her work has shaped the work I want to make. I keep returning to her work, I keep re-reading it. She's fearless in what she's trying to say and how she achieves it is extraordinary.



Selina Cartmell.

I really feel honoured to be given the opportunity to direct this play by the Abbey Theatre, and to be working with Marina again on this modern classic. It's terrifying and at the same time exciting that a whole new generation of people is going to see this piece. She wrote it just on the cusp of the Celtic Tiger, just as the country was changing from the punt to the Euro. A really big question, looking back at that time, is what have we learned? Have we learned anything? Her writing looks back through the generations of travellers – through Hester and her mother and through the Catwoman and the generations of the tinker blood – to a time that was a lot more rooted to the mythic, rooted to the land, a lot more respectful of nature. The idea of modernization and the past, those two different energies sit side by side.

Hester is a great female character and Marina Carr is a great female playwright and all those other incredible female parts like Mrs. Kilbride and Catwoman, and we've got an all-female creative team, it's the way it's worked out.

The play attracts certain creative interpretations and I've worked with Marina, Monica, and Sinead before. What better arena to work with than on a character like Hester Swane. When I met with Susan Lynch the first thing she said to me was *"how come I never knew about this play? I cannot believe no one ever told me about this play"*.

And the strength is Marina's work taps into something. Hester Swane is one of the greatest female roles ever written, particularly for that age. She's a forty year old woman, she's complex, dangerous, sexy, completely in touch with who she is, uncompromising. She is everything you respect in

someone who stands her ground and won't give in – and quite rightly so – in the world Marina has set it. She asks really difficult questions of us all about who we are, why we do what we do. And it makes these characters really believable. Marina shines a light into the darkest places, particularly with Hester, but with all the characters to some extent. And she asks you to look at that dark energy. It's a very liminal space. This story for Hester is a cycle that's been told for generations. In the same way that her mother was the song stitcher, in the same way that she relates to her daughter. It's a play about abandonment between mother and daughters. It's the bloodline. It will go on.

Sometimes audiences like to be promised an answer but I think she just asks serious questions, she leaves it open and that's as good as it gets. Whenever you revive a classic like this, you try to find a way of working on the text that releases it in some way for an audience today. Ireland is a very different place but through the Celtic Tiger and through everything that's happened we hold a mirror back up. It doesn't feel old. It feels fresh-minted in many ways. It's of a particular time as well, Ireland was on the cusp of something when she wrote it, and we are again now. We're at a point where we need to ask serious questions.

INTERVIEW WITH MARINA CARR

I suppose, the older I get, it's people that interest me. It's always people that interest me. But what really gets me isn't what they're saying but what they're not saying, a couple of layers down. And I think Selina has always operated somewhere between the surface and those layers and that's what makes her a good director.

Marina Carr on Selina Cartmell

This was the first play I had on the Abbey stage so that was a big thing for me. I'd just given birth to my first child, and that was more important in a way. I delivered the final draft, went in to the hospital and had William the following morning. Patrick Mason was ever so impressed that I delivered the final draft of the play en route to the hospital to have a baby. But I just knew that if I didn't get it in I never would, so I had to get it in. But it's just living. You do what you have to do. It's almost so long ago it's as if the play has nothing to do with me. I know some aspect of me wrote it. But the woman I was seventeen years ago was very different to the woman I am today. If I was to sit down and write that today it'd be completely different. I'm very proud to have written it, but I'm not precious. It's a writer's instinct; you want to get on to the next thing. I haven't seen a production in Ireland since it was done here at the Abbey. I'm mad about Selina. I'm very excited by the way she talks about the play. She's a fantastic imagist. She has that epic quality to her work. She sees underneath. She always sees below the surface, and this is a world of surface, taking people as they are.

I can't imagine a play of mine without music. I love music. It's another character. I'd always be thinking about it – and great if it works – I hear it as a part of it. Music affects you differently, it's a language itself. With the music in *By the Bog of Cats*, the fact that her mother was the song stitcher is important. Her mother's accent is what's haunted her life and in a sense there'll be no completion until she finds her again. And she never does, so there can't be. There is a completion of sorts in her death and in her meeting the Ghost Fancier, but that primal bond has been destroyed so in a sense nothing is ever going to. It's the site of the first wound. So I suppose the music is an expression of that rupture. And very practically it is the sound of the mother, and it's the story and idea of a woman who has had everything taken from her, even her song. I don't think it's an accident that the Greeks sang everything. And Thespis, to hell with him, stood up and started talking one day and we're stuck with that. Why did we have to stop singing? I was telling this to my husband, that Thespis stood up and spoke and we've been stuck talking prose ever since. And he said maybe there came a point where it couldn't be sung anymore and it had to be spoken. Maybe we need our age of prose.

By the Bog of Cats is about the heart. It concerns the heart, how people feel. I'm less interested in what people think. What people feel, what they do because of that. That's something from the play that has followed me. That way of approaching life, what do you feel here and how is that going to play out? It's very difficult to be honest about how we feel. You have to put your mask on just to survive. Hester is a woman who feels. From feeling to articulation it doesn't seem to go through a process. She's been pared away, pared to the bone, and the mask has slipped a huge deal. At times I think the mask is off. So what you have is this walking amalgam of feeling and powerful volition because of what she feels, and that carries to the nth degree. There's no time for messing or games or pretence. In the first production Tom Hickey was playing Xavier Cassidy. And he's a wonderful actor, I remember him getting frustrated one day in rehearsal saying "the thing about that one is she has an answer for everything!" He just couldn't best her. And she does, she has an answer for everything and everyone. She lets nobody near her. I love that about her. Susan Lynch has that about her, she has that power, she has that look, she has that stillness as well, and danger. Because Hester is danger, or can be dangerous.

Monica's set is beautiful, she just has it. The original was playing with horizontal lines, this one has a different geometric idea at the heart of it. She gets it, and she delivers the simple ideas perfectly. It has every detail in its own way but it's not obtrusive, it's enhancing the thing, it's not interfering with it.

COMPARATIVE ESSAY

COMPARATIVE ESSAY

BY LISA HARRIS

Insurgent versus *By the Bog of Cats*

It's an odd one alright, to think of comparing Marina Carr's play *By the Bog of Cats* with the big budget Hollywood adaption of Veronica Roth's *Divergent* sequel *Insurgent*. In *By the Bog of Cats* Hester Swane is an older single mother in rural Ireland of the 70s; whereas Tris Prior, the central protagonist in *Insurgent* is a teenager in a dystopian America. What on Earth could they have in common? What could we possibly learn from comparing the two? Well, while their time and settings may differ, both of these texts provide a perfect insight into the public perception at large towards strong women who reject social norms and choose to forge their own destinies.

Both female leads live under oppressive circumstances. Hester Swane lives as a social outcast in a small rural community where gossip is rife and social conformity is king. Hester has been marked her by her peers as a target for small minded discrimination. Many factors cause the villagers to react as such: Hester's roots as a traveller, her mother's terrible reputation and the suspicion of witch-like behaviour. Tris Prior lives in a military world where people are segregated into 'factions' based on their personality traits. Tris fits into none of these factions and is therefore considered "divergent" and a threat to the peace of the nation.

The fear and greed displayed by the key authority figures in both texts is what also spurs along the discrimination. In *Insurgent*, Jeanine, during her quest for absolute power over all factions, uses the public's fear of divergents to turn them against Tris for her own political agenda.

Hester is ultimately spurned by her love for Carthage because his avarice has determined that he would rather be in a loveless marriage – but heir to substantial land and a farm. Carthage is encouraged by his soon to be father-in-law Mr. Cassidy, who holds a personal grudge against the Swanes. Mr. Cassidy uses the villagers fear and mistrust of the outsider Hester to try to achieve his backhanded deeds.

It is the cruel treatment of both Hester and Tris by the corrupted hierarchy around them that forces these women into action. Both are driven to bloody extremes to 'survive.'

In order to clear the name/reputation of all divergents – as well as execute her own vendetta – Tris is left with no choice but to try and over-throw Jeanine and her regime, killing her if necessary. Hester would rather commit suicide and slaughter her daughter than have the new wife of Carthage, Caroline Cassidy, live in her house and raise her young Josie.

As similar as Hester and Tris are in their social independence, courage and determination, Tris has something that Hester doesn't, requited love. What sets Hester in motion throughout the play is that Carthage has rejected Hester and he doesn't want her back. Tris, however, has the emotional support of Four throughout the series. Having Four by her side is definitely an advantage for Tris, but ultimately the relationship between them is a sub-plot and we are given the impression that even if Four abandoned Tris, she, unlike Hester, will still continue on her crusade against Jeanine. Hester Swane is not so emotionally independent. She can't bear the thought of Carthage living a life without her or her without him. Hester's only desperate ambition for the entire play is to win Carthage back, with tragic results.

By comparing these two texts we see that whether it's the past or the future there will always be negative attitudes and reactions towards those in opposition to the norm, particularly female opposition. We also see that self-reliant and assertive females will *always* strive towards the life *they* want to live by any means, and won't acquiesce to the overwhelming peer pressure forced upon them.



By the Bog of Cats
Resource Pack 2015

*This resource pack was made possible
with assistance from the Arts Council*



Written & Compiled by
Maeve Stone

Photography by
Trevor Hart
Ros Kavanagh

Designed by
Maeve Keane

Artwork by
Mariane Picard

*For more information on this resource
pack and the Abbey Theatre's educational
work please contact —*

Phil Kingston

Community and Education Manager
phil.kingston@abbeytheatre.ie

or visit —

www.abbeytheatre.ie/community-education