

Introduction

Recently, contemporary Irish and Black theatres alike have reflected an identity crisis coupled with a new interest in reconsidering myth and history. The cultural heritage of Black and Irish myth and history is held responsible for communicating false ideas and misconceptions and creating, as a result, forged identities. Speculating upon the process of identity formation, Natalie Dawn Harrower refers to myth and history as two essential elements that participate in it. If myths inspire the process of identity formation with endless stereotypes, history, which is supposed to give an honest account of past events, authorizes it. According to Harrower, identity is formed by “a process of accretion, where events, ideas, facts, myths, and performances build upon one another to create an ever shifting image of the self. Identity is shaped and reshaped by repetition: it borrows from popular and personal memory, it draws sustenance from the power of myth, and it looks to history for legitimacy” (1). However, myth and history alike are subjected to a deliberate distortion and alteration to help privileged groups like the Whites, males and colonizers to score over minority ones like the Blacks, females and colonized nations. Altering the past and the present of nations and peoples through the creation of false mythical and historical discourses has become colonizers’ ‘celebrated method of distorting the real identity of colonized peoples and of justifying colonization as well.

In his *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said points out the role played by culture to subjugate colonized peoples by portraying them as uncivilized brutal nations and thereby developing deceiving stereotypes and misconceptions about them. For example, to justify their case, imperialist nations depict the peoples they dominate as ill-mannered, vulgar, and barbaric. Therefore, they need to be helped out of darkness to civilization. According to Gregory Castle, there are certain attributes such as brutality, drunkenness and laziness which colonizers use to classify a nation as barbaric and primitive. This classification is based on physiological differences like skin color and social behavior (MCGraw 2). The present study comes to call such misconceptions “cultural myths”. Creating such myths has

become a defense mechanism used by race supremacists to marginalize ethnic and minority groups. In the process, these myths trouble and burden the spirits of those who try to live their lives by them and as a result they cultivate liminal personalities. In this manner, the Blacks as well as the Irish have been portrayed in a stereotypical manner by their colonizers who create a deformed image of them both on the physical and the social levels. Critics argue that the created stereotypes communicate misinformation about the Blacks and the Irish and, therefore, black and Irish identities have been distorted. Therefore, biological truths no longer dictate our roles as men and women; they are rather dictated by deceptive cultural myths.

The first and foremost myths that disturb Irish and Black identity alike are gender myths that underlie male and female portraiture in Irish and Black society and consequently decide gender roles. In this way, men and women, throughout history, are helplessly placed into fixed cultural forms. The Blacks are surrounded by myths about black man that describe him as the tom, the coon, the sambo, and the brutal, black buck. On the other hand, myths underlying black woman identity are the super woman, the mammy, the matriarch, the jezebel and the welfare queen. Such myths manage only to create an image of black female as masculine, dishonored, sexless and corrupted. Likewise, Irish female has been stereotyped through a number of myths that depict her as a symbol of land, passive, submissive, unsociable or desexualized maternal figures. Some of the myths underlying these fake Irish female stereotypes are those of Mother Ireland and the desexualized Madonna who renounce sexual desire. The creation of such myths is meant to empower a male-dominated Irish society. Therefore, society limited men and women by placing them into fixed gender molds that have been greatly influenced by many deceiving gender myths and stereotypes. Margaret W. Matlin defines gender stereotypes as “structured beliefs about the characteristics of women and men” (258). Such images and beliefs are hugely important in changing ideas about gender.

Though cultural myths are responsible for the creation of misconceptions and false ideas, they survive because we do not analyze or question them. Despite their falsehood, they continue to move from one generation to another. Some of these ideas come to be

taken for granted. People stop wondering if they are true or not, and they come to gain an almost mythical quality. They help only to misrepresent gender concepts in society. However, to escape the destructive impact of these myths and ideas of gender on identity, they need to be critically rethought together with their outcome of gender stereotypes that are equally deceptive and misleading. In "Needed: A New Image", Ann Barbara Teer calls for the importance of putting an end to the Black's double consciousness and the deceased black identity and proposing a new clear black personality. She writes, "The time has come to break down and destroy these antiquated stereotypes and concepts. The black youth of America needs a new image and it should be the responsibility of the black artist to provide it for them"(223). Consequently, Feminist thought becomes dominated with a strong tradition, developed by women writers, of rethinking and rewriting stories derived from myths and history. This trend that has recently dominated feminist writings finds expression in the drama of Carr and Parks.

The present study proposes to examine the way the two Irish and Afro-American playwrights Marina Carr (1964-) and Suzan Lori-Parks (1963-) establish a psychoanalytic model of identity building that is based upon a rewriting of myth and history. The study throws light on Carr and Parks as two women playwrights who seek to re-imagine myth and history from a psychoanalytic perspective. They concentrate heavily upon myth and history as that part of cultural heritage that help greatly in shaping Irish and Afro-American identities. Carr and Parks highlight the fakeness of myths and historical narratives and the possibility of altering them; they try to excavate history and myth to restore the lost identity and to recreate a new one. Hence, they suggest a going back to history and antiquities to lay bare the tensions and contradictions of myth and history and the portrayal of the feminine in mythology. As feminist playwrights, they believe that women live within a patriarchal society in which they are inferior. To gain equality for women, they must change myth and history; it is mythical and historical constraints that make women unequal. Rewriting myth and history will change the patriarchal ideology that exists and the common ideas of gender roles assigned to man and woman by them. However, beside gender issues, Carr and Parks are also concerned with historical and national myths that are

responsible for the creation of the identities of nations. Like gender myths, historical and national myths have to be rethought together with historical traumas to be remembered in a different manner.

Hence, part of the argument of the present study is intended to deal with this specific issue of destroying old myths and stereotypes and creating new ones. The study's main objective is to examine the two playwrights' selected plays to offer a much-needed opportunity to revisit some of the ideas that people have come to take for granted. Their plays offered a scheme of change that is based on a rewriting of myths through many kinds of subversion. Therefore, rewriting ancient myths, Carr and Parks subvert roles, male and female activities, customs, and gender. Their plays suggest that dealing with stereotypes and mythology, one must view them with three questions in mind. First, why were selected stereotypes and myths created? Second, in what ways do stereotypes and myth influence modern American and Irish cultures and identities? And third, how could myth and stereotypes be rewritten?

Both Carr and Parks are posing the same question once asked by Jung to himself, "What is the myth that you are living?" (qtd .in Shelburne 55). They suggest that myths shouldn't be passed to following generations; everyone should build his own personal myth. To rewrite gender myths, Carr and Parks call for a return back to the old myths of earlier matriarchal tradition and of powerful women, such as Electra, Antigone and Medea to create new ones in theatre that can express the real image of woman. Their plays depict the way motherhood has been culturally defined and how women discuss those definitions, as well as how societies do or do not assist the practice of mothering. They portray the way the concept of motherhood is reflected in myth and how myth helped in the formation of a mother concept, whether right or wrong, something that would be shown later on as the study progresses. The true purpose of theatre according to them is therefore, to create myths and to destroy a system of beliefs that keeps woman, races and nations in a state of inferiority and weakness. In this way, both playwrights suggest a going back to old myths to rewrite them. This is meant to be a starting point to look to the future and to the new

myths we may need. Thus, the destruction and reconstruction of myths as part of Carr and Parks's model of identity building is intended to be the first argument of the thesis.

The second argument of the thesis is concerned with rewriting history in light of Carr and Parks's suggested psychoanalytic paradigm of resolving past traumas which represent the second step in their identity building model . On a psychoanalytic level, the thesis is intended to identify the most common traumas recurrent in Carr and Parks 's plays , to highlight their psychoanalytic model of trauma resolving and to give a brief account of Irish and Afro-American traumatic past. According to Carr and Parks, traumas threaten the identity of the individual and create traumatized nations and individuals as well. They regard the stage as a space where representations of traumatic moments in history are acted out before the audiences to respond to and to resolve traumatic events.

Trauma may be physical, psychological, national and cultural. The two major types of trauma that affect both collective memory as well as collective identity are national trauma and cultural trauma. *National trauma*, is defined by Arthur Neal as experiences that are difficult to be overlooked or ignored and that will be repeated several times in individual conscious mind until they become part of collective memory (Eyerman, *Cultural trauma* 2). On the other hand, according to Ron Eyerman, cultural trauma happens to members of a one group who have been subjected to a terrible experience that greatly influences the group consciousness, being integrated in their memories for ever, and change their prospective identity in basic and permanent ways ("The Past in the Present" 160). *Cultural trauma*, therefore, influences a group of people who have something in common and who have achieved a sort of unity .It doesn't beget emotional effects, like psychological or physical trauma, it rather creates feeling of emptiness and identity crisis. It is a trauma that haunts a group even if it is not experienced by all its members (Eyerman, "The Past in the Present"160). Eyerman argues that "cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all" (*Cultural Trauma* 2).Moreover, like any type of trauma that needs to be reflected and represented in different manners and forms,