Salomé, Paul. *Marina Carr and Greek Tragedy: Feminist Myths of Monstrosity*. **New York and London: Routledge, 2024**

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On October 1, 2025, Marina Carr's most recent play, *The Boy*, premiered on the Irish national stage. Marking the playwright's sixtieth birthday, it is also her sixth adaptation[1] of a Greek tragedy – or rather tragedies, as Carr usually melds more than one source text to craft her version. *The Boy* is primarily a reworking of Sophocles' Theban Cycle, which was the last of the more famous Classical tragedies (trilogy, in this case) not yet rewritten by Carr. If not before, the question whether Marina Carr is revising the entire Greek tragic canon certainly arises now. And it indeed seems to be the case.

Carr draws on Classical texts in most of her work, but only some of her plays have been regarded as adaptations of Greek tragedies. Earliest among these are set in rural Celtic-Tigre Midlands: *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998)strongly echoes Euripides' *Medea*, while *Ariel*(2002)is a revision of Aeschylus' trilogy *The Oresteia*(with other significant influences).Following these, Carr left the Midlands behind but remained focused on Euripides: *Phaedra Backwards* (2011) is a reworking of his *Hippolytus,* and *Hecuba* is (2015) a new version of an eponymous play by the same author. More recently, Carr returned to *The Oresteia* in her *Girl on an Altar* (2022).

Carr's work has received profound scholarly attention, including the monographs *Bloody Living: The Loss of Selfhood in the Plays of Marina Carr*(2010) by Rhona Trench, *Marina Carr: Pastures of the Unknown* (2018) by Melissa Sihra, a section of Shonagh Hill's *Women and Embodied Mythmaking in Irish Theatre* (2019), and Dagmara Gizło's *The Art of Experience: The Theatre of Marina Carr* (2021). Her adaptations of Classical tragedies specifically have been treated in a number of articles and book chapters, including those published by Michael Walton and Marianne McDonald's *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy* (2002) or in S. E. Wilmer and John Dillon's *Rebel Women: Staging Ancient Greek Drama Today* (2005). Salomé Paul's *Marina Carr and Greek Tragedy: Feminist Myths of Monstrosity* (2024) may be seen as a bridge between Carr and Classical scholarship, as it focuses only on the inspiration the playwright has drawn from Attic tragedies.

While Paul positions Carr as following in the footsteps of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, she illustrates the ways in which this Irishwoman playwright breaks

1 My usage of the term relies on the theory offered by Linda Hutcheon, rather than by Julie Sanders, who distinguishes between adaptation and appropriation.

with tradition through a "transformation not only of the narrative but also of the form of Greek tragedy" (i).The monograph is structured into four chapters that outline Carr's revision of the concepts of female monstrosity and sacrifice, her(re)creation of myths, her gender-focused writing process, and her operating within the genre of "epic tragedy". The influence of Greek tragedy is analysed across Carr's theatre, including plays that are not adaptations as such but that may have been inspired by the Classical canon. This strategy translates into the terminology used, as Paul has opted for the word "transposition" to serve as an ultimate umbrella term for all instances of intertextuality. The most recent works discussed are *Girl on an Altar* and, intriguingly, the 2021 monologue play *iGirl* (*The Boy* was not yet accessible at the time of writing). *iGirl* is neither an adaptation, nor a tragedy; drawing partly on Sophocles' Theban Cycle, it is described by Paul as "a postmodern tragic epic", (115) a concept that is theorised in the last chapter.

Chapter One examines Carr's refusal to write women characters that serve as a cautionary tale justifying patriarchy. As Paul argues, "[t]here are [...] no women in classical theatre, only embodiments of 'woman'" (43), either good or bad, staged as "sacrificial" or "monstrous" (44), respectively. The first half of the chapter is devoted to Hecuba, Phaedra, Medea, and Clytemnestra, female characters posited as monstrous in Classical drama –representing a threat to both patriarchy and patrilineality – and to their reformulation by Carr as victims of violence and male oppression. To contrast these, Paul next turns to the characters of Polyxena and Iphigenia, embodiments of "the sacrificial woman" in Greek tragedy and "the polar opposite" of the monstrous, "vindictive woman" (60) previously discussed. She illustrates that "Carr does not change the characterization of sacrificial womanhood as it still leans on the lack of women's agency, but she overturns its reception" (61) by altering some details, such as erasing Polyxena's virginity or by depicting her sacrifice as a barbaric ritual gone wrong, "gory and graphic" (62).Paul finally adds one more Classical character to the list of sacrificial women, Antigone, identifying "some similarities with [her and] the protagonist [Portia]'s dramatic arc in Carr's *Portia Coughlan* [(1996)]"(66).

Chapter Two focuses on Carr's use of myths. Drawing on Julie Sanders' theorizing of the terms "adaptation" (where a connection to the hypotext is made obvious) and "appropriation" (where intertextuality is less overt), Paul delineates two phases in Carr's work: her early transpositions set in the Midlands are defined as appropriations (mainly due to the altered setting), while Carr's adaptations date from the 2010sonwards.Paul argues that whereas Carr's use of myths in the appropriations is "a reply to the metanarrative about gender fostered in Ireland" (93), her "adaptations [...] intend to defuse the patriarchal metanarratives that have endorsed the sexist oppression of women in Western civilisations throughout history" (77) in a broader context. Discussing the latter phase first, Paul illustrates Carr's reconstruction of some of the founding myths of Western societies. The Trojan War is reformulated as a genocide caused by the Greeks, while by disposing of divine influence in the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus, the responsibility for what transpires is solely with the humans. Here, Paul comments on Carr's recasting of blame from Phaedra, attributed to the character in some modern versions of the play, to her husband Theseus.

Turning to appropriations next, Paul identifies another transposition of Antigone's narrative arc in *Portia Coughlan*, this time in the tale of a "witch" killed by the locals. Looming over the landscape, "the tale re-enacts one of the main functions of classical myths in Greek tragedy", as it "echoes Portia's [own] characterisation" (92) of a woman braeching gender norms. She illustrates a similar use of a local legend in another Midlands Play, *The Mai* (1994), as well as drawing a parallel between the tomb in which Sophocles' Antigone is buried alive and the Irish heroines' marriages. Outlining the marginalized position of the Traveller minority in Ireland, Paul then discusses Carr's *By the Bog of Cats...*, in which Medea's barbarian origin is transposed toa Traveller heritage.

In Chapter Three, the author analyses Carr's writing process, which she grounds in the playwright's "gendered experience" (111) as an Irish woman. Foregrounding Hélène Cixous's concept of "*ecriture feminine*", Paul outlines Carr's place in the Irish and Western canon as a disruptor of patriarchal tradition. The chapter first examines the plays that feature a female narrator, before turning to those "not involving [such a] narrator-like character, [where] Carr brings the hidden (hi)stories of women onstage through the dramatisation of shared experiences of patriarchal oppression manifested by the female characters" (113). Identified as a version of Electra (but mourning her dead mother rather than father), the character of Millie from *The Mai* is discussed as the most obvious female authorial voice (one that crafts a story rather than being its object). Paul also observes that Jocasta, famously overlooked in the Theban Cycle, "is among the subjects from the classical culture to speak in *iGirl*", her account of personal trauma "not challenged by another character" (116). Similarly unmitigated is the voice of Cassandra, who utters the final lines in Carr's *Hecuba*, thus asserting her version of events. At the same time, Paul illustrates a strategy in this play of allowing all characters to voice their perspectives "in order to not reproduce the process of narrating the events [from a single perspective] used by the Greeks". Paul further observes that Carr's "women storytellers do not use their narrator and narrator-like position to tell only their own stories but also the stories of their female relatives who have been silenced by the patriarchal tradition." (126) This latter group includes the absent Pasiphae in *Phaedra Backwards* or the absent Grandma Fraochlán in *The Mai*, as well as the partly present character of The Mai herself.

In the final chapter devoted to the (re)coinage[2] of the genre of "epic tragedy", grounded in Bertold Brecht's concept of epic theatre, Paul first discusses Carr's "appropriations" (the Midlands Plays). These chronologically precede the later "adaptations", which are, in contrast, marked by a "lack of a realistic setting [that] enables Carr to push further her experimentations on the inclusion of epic theatre in dramatic theatre" (153). The author illustrates how in *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan*, Carr disrupts the rules of temporality set by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, as well as highlighting Carr's use of comic elements in *By the Bog of Cats...*.Regarding this last play, the author also demonstrates Carr's breaching of Classical norms by situating the heroine in a low social stratum or by blurring the line between life and death (the latter being applicable to all the Midlands Plays). Moving on to discuss

2 Paul credits Fiona Macintosh with the original coinage (143, 169).

the "adaptations", Paul introduces "a new genre deemed theoretically impossible by Aristotle" (153), "epic tragedy", a tragedy that uses Brechtian techniques to critique reality. While in *Phaedra Backwards* the inclusion of screening onstage allows Carr to criticize patriarchal hegemony, in *Hecuba* and *Girl on an Altar* she uses a blend of dialogue and inner monologue to achieve a similar goal. However, Paul does not limit the meaning of "epic" to Brecht's epic theatre; turning once more to *The Poetics*, she argues that Carr also crosses the boundary established between the genres of epic and tragedy in Classical antiquity. Finally, the author turns to *iGirl,* which, while defined as an adaptation, Paul argues to be a reversed blend: a "tragic epic".

In her conclusion, the author examines the concepts of justice, freedom, and happiness in tragedy. Situating Carr's theatre within an ever-evolving history of the genre, Paul emphasizes the playwright's breaking with the Classical convention of representing an unchangeable reality to staging one that not only is changeable, but "should be altered". (176) Illustrating her argument on a chain of female suicides that Carr's theatre is (in)famous for, Paul also observes that this has been broken in *Girl on an Altar* (where Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon).

A few minor proofreading issues aside, *Marina Carr and Greek Tragedy* is a timely addition to drama as well as Classical scholarship, including adaptation and Carr studies. Incorporating quotes in Ancient Greek, among others, the monograph demonstrates a sweeping knowledge of the scene. Carr's transpositions are contextualized within the history of Western drama, including modern plays, and Paul builds on a number of influential theories from the fields of drama and gender studies, as well as philosophy. Her book presents more established readings of Carr's theatre alongside bolder and less obvious ones (such as observations regarding Antigone's dramatic arc) to provide a concise commentary on Carr's transposition of Greek tragedy to date. Unable to comment on *The Boy*, Paul nevertheless shares her expectations. At the same time, by framing *Hecuba* and *Girl on an Altar* as a diptych, she implies a sort of climax in Carr's theatre, as the latter play's heroine no longer dies due to patriarchal oppression but instead murders its embodied representative on stage.

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