
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN MARINA CARR'S *THE MAI*

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Abstract: Marina Carr, a contemporary Irish playwright, wrote *The Mai* (1994) that seems to be a drama of Empowering Irish Women and a matrilineal drama to give voice to the historically neglected feminine cultural persona. It stands as a commentary on the empowerment of women and their ability to make choices both culturally and politically. Carr changes the overall disempowerment of women in mainstream channels of artistic expression. In her *The Mai*, the molds and usual frameworks have been shattered. Most important to note is the vast differences between the women and the generations they represent. The methodology of this research is qualitative library based. For this case, the drama is studied through Women's Studies to specify women's role in the play. Contrary to the role that women traditionally play in Irish stories, women destroy one another in Carr's drama. Matriarchal relationships and female points of perspective are Carr's visible emphasis all through her work. Carr presents no positive motivation for patriarchy; whereas, she culminates her characters' destiny in absurdity. The ability of Carr's women to be bold and even grotesque is a triumph that brings the long-repressed women's point of view out from the darkened Irish theatre. It is into this dark realm that Carr delves a realm of the self, of passionate obsession, violence, and despair, and ultimately, results in a state of abjection for the women. Marina Carr's *The Mai* can be observed as a way of quantifying and excavating the fragments of past, present, public and private. Carr revealed her fascination in *The Mai* to present women's role in the contemporary Irish society, and to construct an identity, still, absurdity is dominant.

Keywords: Absurdity, Irish drama, Matriarchy, Women Empowerment.

Introduction: Marina Carr (b. 1964), an Irish playwright, grew up in a household filled with literature. Her award-winning plays—largely poetic tragedies of rural Irish domestic life—have been produced around the world. Marina Carr's plays are not a good advertisement for motherhood. *The Mai*, is named after an Irish folklore character who slaughters her children. McMullan (2002) wrote that Carr sets the plays beside the region's lakes, rivers, and bogs—demonstrates Irish pride. Irish history plays a significant role in the formation of Marina Carr's ideas and thoughts. Marina Carr's writing tends to be in keeping the notion of a continuance or discontinuance of family prevailing over death. Allen Randolph (2010) mentioned that the notion of family in association with death is a compelling interest in Carr's written works. Wallace (2001) noted that female playwrights have not existed or do not exist in relatively great numbers, but few have succeeded in attaining the renown or success of some of their male counterparts. Ireland, it would seem, is no great exception to this tendency.

Marina Carr wrote *The Mai* (1994) that seems to be a matrilineal drama to give voice to the historically neglected feminine cultural persona. Carr's plays are quite untraditional in terms of their expression of traditional gender roles; in her *The Mai*, the molds and usual frameworks have been shattered. Most important to note is the vast differences between the women and the generations they represent. Kristeva (1982) complemented that the abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are

based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being.

This research is intended to study Marina Carr's *The Mai* as a reference to Irish women society to answer the following questions:

1. What are the roles of women in Marina Carr's *The Mai*?
2. What is the meaning of empowerment for women in Marina Carr's *The Mai*?

Marina Carr's *The Mai* can be observed as a way of quantifying and excavating the fragments of past, present, public and private. Carr revealed her fascination in *The Mai* to present women's role in the contemporary Irish society, and to construct an identity, still, absurdity is dominant. The women presented in *The Mai* are similar in their struggles because none of their relationships have been successful. The ability of Carr's women to be bold and even grotesque is a triumph that brings the long-repressed women's point of view out from the darkened Irish theatre. It is into this dark realm that Carr delves a realm of the self, of passionate obsession, violence, and despair, and ultimately, results in a state of abjection for the women.

The methodology of this research is qualitative library based. For this case, the drama, Marina Carr's *The Mai* (1994), is studied through Women's Studies to specify women's role in the play. Contrary to the role that women traditionally play in Irish stories, women destroy one another in Carr's drama. Matriarchal relationships and female points of perspective are Carr's visible emphasis all through her work. Carr presents no positive motivation for

patriarchy; whereas, she culminates her characters' destiny in absurdity. Population of this research is the whole 16 drama written by Marina Carr up to now. The sample size is Marina Carr's *The Mai* (1994). Hancock (2003) explored Irish contemporary playwright Marina Carr's work and her place among the great writers of that country and in so doing, establishes her writing as sharp counterpoint to the dominant patriarchal view of Irish history. Johnson (2007) wrote that Carr takes women's topics that have no public voice in the patriarchy (e.g. pregnancy out of wedlock) and projects these scenarios onto her male characters. While Carr has not revisited absurdism to this level in her other work, she continues to weave a sense of nihilism into her female characters.

The basic story line is about the Mai, a forty year-old woman abandoned by her husband, Robert, who, five years before, "got into his car with his cello and drove away" (p. 10). Trotter (2001) remarked that men are important to the women for physical and emotional love and for the purposes of begetting children, not to uphold a moral code or to fulfil an economic need. The Mai was left with the burden of figuring things out for herself and her children. In the opening scene, Robert has returned to his wife after a long, unexplained absence and is playing his cello as the Mai enters. A crucial theme in this play is the repetition of history and what is passed from one generation to the next. Millie, The Mai's daughter, is the fourth generation who leaves Ireland for New York and has an illegitimate son. As seen in the play, women cannot often choose to remain with their men because the men abandon the woman, the child and any responsibility. Compared to the other characters, Grandma Fraochlán is a radical example for the Irish female. The consciousness of the four generations of women who gather at Owl Lake are not haunted by guilt based in dogma, but guilt based on the decisions made in their past. Funahashi (2000) wrote that Millie plays the crucial parts in this play. She acts as a sixteen-year-old daughter of The Mai and Robert, but she "remains onstage throughout the play" (p. 11), and occasionally tells her stories to the audience as narrator. The repeated motifs deal with the roles and restrictions of women. Every piece reflects the other and makes up a whole design: a family history. Grandma Fraochlán is the spirit of festival glee and deviation from the usual routine of everyday life. She considers herself as "a useless mother", and repeatedly tells stories about her beloved dead husband. Funahashi (2000) mentioned that this format gives an entertainment quality to this play, so that audience can relax and enjoy their talk, but also it gives an opportunity for them to consider the issues discussed on stage as their own concerns. The past and present are at odds in all the

play, but the difference in *The Mai* centres on the way that the past haunts the characters like ghosts. Grandma Fraochlán's accusations are confirmed when Robert's affair with a local woman is exposed. The Mai answers her devastation at this news by drowning herself in Owl Lake, the locale that epitomized Robert's return to her. Some critics including Johnson (2007) believed that the Mai's death was not a tragedy but a senseless and selfish act. Hancock (2003) described the power of myth in Carr's plays and does not veer from the pain and sadness evoked by the Mai's story. These portrayals of Irish female identity challenge the norms and therefore bring into play the very questions that need to be asked to incite change. Therefore, the multi-generational storyline presents an important evolutionary stage of the Irish woman. A century old, smoking opium and cursing away, Grandma Fraochlán provides some of the most profound insights into the historically silenced female.

Carr presents no positive motivation for Robert's return to Owl Lake. He is not returning to seek forgiveness for leaving, nor has he found that his love for the Mai is too strong to stay away. Robert is a musician first and a wanderer second and the father of Millie last. This research has been a discovery of and tribute to the talented dramatists – past and present. Maccionnaith, Eric-Michael (2008) wrote that Marina Carr mentioned that if women are already exiles in their own land, how does alienation characterize their work; how might their work be a literature of alienation? The boundaries around Irish women's realities define containment as a form of exile: exile from self-expression, from self-determination. Almost all the researchers note that Marina Carr does not consider herself to be a feminist playwright. The reality of her admission seems obvious, for while feminist analysis illuminates much of the mystery of Carr's plays, the analysis does not seem to be able to delve deep enough into the often bizarre images and characters that we see in her work.

The main plot of *The Mai* is about an ordinary woman who comes to realize that she cannot keep her husband at her home. In order to make the dimensions and depth of pain hidden in such an ordinary life understood, Marina Carr adopts the narrative of legend in the storytelling tradition. Marina Carr (1964 -) was one of the most successful playwrights in Irish theatre in the 1990s. Her career started with a comedy in the tradition of Beckettian theatre of the absurd, and her continued work in this genre is evident in her second play, *Low in the Dark* (1989). With her fifth play, *The Mai*, she adopted a more naturalistic style. Carr takes women's topics that have no public voice in the patriarchy (e.g. pregnancy out of wedlock) and projects these

scenarios onto her male characters. The name, the Mai, is taken from an Irish myth of a woman who destroyed her young; this is no accident, as the basis of the tragedy of this play is that women destroy their children by being more interested in the men that give them heartbreak over the love and happiness of the offspring. Hancock (2003) denoted that for female writers in Ireland, the tradition of portraying Ireland as a woman has meant that: the very act of writing challenges patriarchal practices of the state precisely by representing national identity...as other than male. Billig (1996) noted that a common by product of identity construction around society's cultural elements is national stereotypes and these stereotypes can fuel nationalistic efforts granted that they "glorify the in group and posit out groups as despised enemies". The Republic of Ireland relied heavily on these stereotypes to unify its people and achieve independence in the early 20th century. However, Harrington (2009) stated that over time those stereotype began to chafe many of the Republic's citizens as certain characteristics, once exaggerated, came to be considered more backward than authentic. Irish writers are able to represent the Irish consciousness with an authenticity that is difficult to replicate in other psychological studies and experiments on national identity. As a result, Harrington (2009) cleared that Irish society and Irish drama act the same. Based on this, the Irish identity for women can be achieved all through Carr's work. Campos (2008) emphasized on the Marina Carr's female protagonists and their relevance to contemporary Irish women. Like their fictional counterparts, Irish women are frequently faced with either a liminal position outside of society or traditional women's roles within an addictive society. Although Carr's protagonists do not appear to offer any solutions to these problems, her plays do

meaningfully illuminate and name these problems that Irish women face. O'Gorman (2003) mentioned that Carr's play goes further than the work of her contemporaries; she uses her characterisation of 'difference' to demonstrate the deconstructive idea of femininity as a performance, both in the play text itself and in the opportunities it provides for the stage. Harrower (2009) wrote that Marina Carr refigure the way identity is tied to notions of emigration and exile. Rapetti (2014) remarked that the career of playwright Marina Carr is amongst the most enduring, prolific and influential in the history of Irish theatre. She added that Marina Carr is a playwright of genius, distinguished, accomplished, and fearless. A woman warrior, the power of her creativity has made theatre that is huge in its achievement, stunningly theatrical, and internationally recognized as remarkable. Carr's plays have expanded beyond national frontiers to reach international audiences.

Conclusion : On the whole, Marina Carr has given voice to the historically neglected women of Irish society. So, the role of women is conspicuous and it is the major role done by women rather than men. Only one man, Robert, exists all through the play. Carr followed Samuel Becket the years before writing *The Mai*, and she followed absurd theatre. Carr's female characters are empowered by being given a voice, and never mind, the dominancy of absurdity. Carr's characters are considered both a sample of Irish women and many other women from all over the globe. Carr employed Irish culture and mythology with an approach to Feminism. Absurdity is a general theme for her drama. Psychological aspect of study is a complement aspect to every study about Marina Carr's drama.

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