

## Chasing the Intangible: a Conversation on Theatre, Language, and Artistic Migrations with Irish Playwright Marina Carr

*Valentina Rapetti*

Università degli Studi Roma Tre (<[valentina.rapetti@gmail.com](mailto:valentina.rapetti@gmail.com)>)

*Abstract:*

Offally born Marina Carr is amongst the most prolific, influential and internationally renowned Irish playwrights of our times. Since her debut on the avant-garde side of the Dublin theatre scene in the late Eighties, she has had seventeen plays professionally produced, both in and outside Ireland. Her earlier work is influenced by Samuel Beckett's Absurdist drama, while in her most mature and recent plays she draws on both classical and Irish mythology, Greek tragedies and Shakespeare's poetics. In the interview, Marina Carr recalls and discusses some pivotal moments of her upbringing and career; she also speaks about language, landscape, dreams and the unconscious in relation to her playwriting and aesthetics.

*Keywords:* Contemporary Irish Drama, Irish Theatre, Irish Women in Theatre, Marina Carr, Midlands

Spanning twenty-five years of uninterrupted audience acclaim coupled with critical and academic recognition, the career of playwright Marina Carr (Dublin, 1964) is amongst the most enduring, prolific and influential in the history of Irish theatre. Four years ago<sup>1</sup>, she was awarded with an honorary degree of Doctor of Literature in University College Dublin. In her citation, Cathy Leeny said:

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. The philosophical, emotional and poetic scale of her work shows audiences a world where life is intense, tragic, and hilarious; where the conversation between life and death spans the oily currents of the Styx: this is a bigger life. Her work is loved and admired by audiences and by theatre people. Her importance to students of theatre worldwide would be hard to underestimate.<sup>2</sup>

Since her professional debut in 1989 with the absurdist, Beckett inspired *Low in the Dark*<sup>3</sup>, Carr's eclectic work has never ceased to attract both theatre-goers and scholars alike, granting her a prominent role in the male-dominated literary canon<sup>4</sup> of her native country. Her achievements as a writer who challenges stereotypical and prescriptive notions of womanhood, motherhood, family and national identity, have helped a whole generation of committed scholars to rediscover and acknowledge the work of many twentieth and early twenty-first century women playwrights who have been unjustifiably marginalized from mainstream theatre and intellectual discourses, such as, just to name a few, Teresa Deevy, Eva Gore-Booth, Dorothy Macardle, Mary Manning, Marie Jones, Anne Devlin, Christina Reid, Patricia Burke Brogan, Hilary Fannin, Ioanna Anderson, Anne Le Marquand Hartigan, Mary Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy, Deirdre Hines, Paula Meehan and Morna Regan.

Besides stimulating new stylistic experimentation and injecting unusual perspectives and female characters of unprecedented force in domestic drama, Carr's plays have expanded beyond national frontiers to reach international audiences. Since the Irish production of *Portia Coughlan* directed by Garry Hynes hit the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1996, Carr's dramatic creations have travelled extensively outside Ireland, in either stage or book form, firstly in England, and shortly after in a number of different European countries, in the United States, Russia, South-America and Asia<sup>5</sup>.

Amongst Carr's vast and varied body of work, the most renowned and internationally acclaimed titles include *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996), *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998) and *On Raftery's Hill* (2000); this cycle is usually referred to by critics and scholars as the 'Midlands Plays', given the extensive use of Hiberno-English and the distinctive rural, boggy setting where the dramatic actions take place. Even though embedded in quintessentially Irish atmospheres and set in contemporary times, the unsettling narratives of these widely produced, worldwide translated and praised plays, teem with mythological resonances and are modelled around ancient Greek tragedies, thus their universality. The *Mai*, protagonist of the play by the same name, bears traits of Dido and Penelope as well as Portia Coughlan recalls Antigone and Electra; tinker Hester Swane in *By the Bog of Cats...* is an original, compelling version of *Medea*, while *On Raftery's Hill* stands out as a dark and uncompromising exploration of tragic fate, miasmal crime and doom looming over different generations of the same family. The following play, *Ariel* (2002), is a retelling of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, but also a parting, both temporary and long-lasting, from Classic mythology, tropes and characters, which Carr further scrutinized in her most recent play to date, *Phaedra Backwards*, presented on October 2011 at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton.

In the intervening time, Carr wrote a trio of small cast *pièces*: *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006), *The Cordelia Dream* (2008) and *Marble* (2009); all three are

haunted, to a greater or lesser extent, by Shakespeare's poetics and deal with recurrent themes of Carr's imaginary world: ageing, death, the supernatural and the oneiric, liminal spaces, shifting identities, derelict marriages, betrayals, the role of art and the disruptive power of creativity. She also wrote a large cast play on Anton Chekhov entitled *Sixteen Possible Glimpses*, the result of a decade of unrelenting research into the life of the nineteenth century Russian playwright. The play opened at the Peacock Theatre as part of the 2011 Ulster Bank Dublin Theatre Festival and provided the audience with a prismatic overview on the most intimate affairs of Chekhov's family and love relationships, as well as offering an account of his professional and ethical struggles, both as a doctor and as a writer. Even though Carr started from a biographical standpoint and drew on reliable sources, she did not dismiss her distinctive metaphysical approach to stagecraft. The supernatural figure of the black monk, a symbol of death as well as eternity (that is, death's oxymoron or its hyperbolic counterpart), appears on stage as soon as the play opens and speaks witty, lapidary words to the anything but appalled protagonist. Both hints and explicit references to the after-life, heightened by the insistence on themes such as the immortality of the artist and the everlasting permanence of the artistic creation, punctuate the dialogue and the dramatic action, thus reasserting Carr's poetics as "a metaphor for the crossroads between the worlds"<sup>6</sup> (Carr 1996, 297).

Mixing as they do a range of stylistic approaches, playing remorselessly with shifting notions of time and space, and deliberately failing to point at a fixed, universal truth, the plays of the Irish writer could indeed stand as effective dramaturgic equivalents of 'the Empty Space' Peter Brook envisaged in his 1968 book. In fact, her work seems to encapsulate the four major characteristics of the word theatre laid down by the renowned English director: deadliness, holiness, roughness and immediacy. Carr's theatre is deadly as "every art form that once born is mortal and must thus be reconceived" (Brook 1977, 16); it is holy as it deals with universal and supernatural themes such as destiny, genealogy, doom and death using the framework of Greek tragedy and plunging into the oneiric world. It displays elements of roughness and popular culture influences by using an extremely harsh, explosive language, grotesquery and black humour. It is also immediate as it works as "an acid, a magnifying glass, a searchlight or a place of confrontation" (Brook 1977, 137), for audiences, scholars and practitioners alike, posing questions on national and gender identity, mortality and eternity.

To date, Carr has written fifteen full-length plays<sup>7</sup>, two plays for children and the tale *Grow a Mermaid*<sup>8</sup>. She has won many prizes and awards, including the Dublin Theatre Festival Best New Play Award with *The Mai* (1994), the Edward Morgan Forster Award for Literary Achievement from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2001), the American Ireland Fund Annual Literary Award (2003), the Macaulay Fellowship, and the Susan

Smith-Blackburn Prize. Carr is a member of Aosdána and has been writer in residence at the Abbey Theatre, Trinity College, University College Dublin, Dublin City University and Princeton University.

She recently travelled to Rome to attend the conference *Performing Gender and Violence in National and Transnational Contexts*<sup>9</sup>, starring women playwrights from Italy and the English speaking world, whose work has been analyzed and discussed by Italian and international scholars<sup>10</sup>. Fellow playwrights participating in the conference included Raquel Almazan and Carolyn Gage (USA), Van Badham (Australia), Erin Shields (Canada), Tamara Bartolini, Betta Cianchini, Lucilla Lupaioli and Fausta Squatriti (Italy).

Carr had already visited Rome in February 2011 to attend the Italian *première* of her play *Marble*, but it was not until her last journey to the Eternal City that the idea of the present interview occasioned.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The official ceremony was held on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2011 at the Department of English, Drama and Film (University College Dublin).

<sup>2</sup> Cathy Leeney is lecturer in Drama Studies at the Department of English, Drama and Film at University College Dublin. Her citation is quoted from the Department's official website and can be found at the following link: <<http://www.ucd.ie/englishanddrama/news/sedfnewstitle,55902,en.html>> (06/2014).

<sup>3</sup> *Low in the Dark* premiered at the Project Arts Centre (Dublin) on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1989 in a Crooked Sixpence Theatre Company's production directed by Philip Hardy, starring Bríd Mhic Fhearai (Curtains), Joan Brosnan Walsh (Bender), Sarahjane Scaife (Binder), Peter Holmes (Baxter) and Dermot Moore (Bone).

<sup>4</sup> It is worth remembering that Seamus Deane, general editor of the 1991 *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, obliterated the names and the work of many Irish women writers, as well as crucial texts and events of Irish women history. One of the most anticipated events in the history of Ireland's contemporary literary criticism, the anthology aroused a huge controversy among Irish women intellectuals, critics, scholars, novelists, poets and playwrights because of its blatant omissions. In September 2002, the protest campaign launched in 1991 by journalist and writer Nuala O'Faolain on the RTÉ television programme *Booklines* and on the columns of *The Irish Times*, resulted in the publication of two new volumes of the anthology (Volume IV and V), devoted to writing by and about women.

<sup>5</sup> In 2001, Carr's 1994 play *The Mai* was presented in Czech translation with the title *Maja* at the F.X. Salda Theatre in Liberec, Czech Republic. On the same year, the Pittsburgh Irish and Classical Theatre Company production of *Portia Coughlan* premiered at Chatham's Eddy Theatre (USA) and *By the Bog of Cats...* was presented by Irish Repertory in Chicago and by San Jose Repertory Theatre in California. In 2002, Rotterdam based company RO Theater staged both *Portia Coughlan* and *By the Bog of Cats...* (Dutch title: *Kattenmoeras*) in the Netherlands, in Dutch translation. In 2006, *Woman and Scarecrow* was presented at the Royal Court Theatre, starring Fiona Shaw in the role of Woman, while in 2008 the Royal Shakespeare Company presented *The Cordelia Dream* at the Wilton's Music Hall in London. More recently, Paolo Zuccari directed Carr's 2009 play *Marble*, a co-production of Officine Puricelli and Associazione Culturale Tournesol. The play opened, in Italian translation, on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2011 at Teatro Vascello, Rome. After its world *première* on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2011 at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, *Phaedra Backwards* was presented in German translation at the Staats theater in Darmstadt, Germany. For reasons of space, the present list of selected

productions of Marina Carr's plays outside Ireland is far from being exhaustive. It is worth pointing out that by 2010, *By the Bog of Cats*... had been translated and published in Chinese.

<sup>6</sup> Carr chose these words to describe the liminal quality of the Midlands landscape in her "Afterword" to *Portia Coughlan*, published in *The Dazzling Dark*, general edited by Frank McGuinness (see works cited). The writer portrays the Irish Midlands as a metaphorical, osmotic place haunted by supernatural forces and creatures, where mortals can communicate with the dead and linger between past and present, myth and reality, the sacred and the secular. For a thorough discussion on the unorthodox treatment of the categories of time and space in Carr's theatre, see *Theatre on Eleven Dimensions: A Conversation with Marina Carr*. The interview was carried out by American scholar Nancy Finn, lecturer in dramatic literature and Irish studies in the English Department at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and is fully accessible on the World Literature Today website at the following link: <<http://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2012/july/theater-eleven-dimensions-conversation-marina-carr-nancy-finn#.U5a-ZSjI8is>> (06/2014).

<sup>7</sup> Only eleven out of fifteen amongst Carr's full-length plays have been published. Carr's works are published by The Gallery Press in Ireland, Faber and Faber in the United Kingdom and Dramatists Play Service in the USA.

<sup>8</sup> The tale *Grow a Mermaid* won the Hennessy Prize in 1994.

<sup>9</sup> The conference was held at the Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Cultures of Università degli Studi Roma Tre on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Scholars included: Kate Burke, Alessandro Clericuzio, Masolino D'Amico, Carla De Petris, Cristina Giorcelli, Cathy Leeney, Valentina Rapetti, Caterina Ricciardi, Marinella Rocca Longo, Melissa Sihra, Maria Anita Stefanelli, Sabrina Vellucci.

### *Works Cited*

Brook Peter (1977 [1968]), *The Empty Space*, London, Granada Publishing.  
Carr Marina (1996), *Afterword*, in Frank McGuinness (ed.), *The Dazzling Dark*, London, Faber & Faber.

## *Q&A with Marina Carr*

*VR: You were born in Dublin, the most anglicized and, in more recent years, the most globalized city of the Republic of Ireland, but you spent your childhood and adolescence in County Offaly, right in the heart of the Midlands Region. To be more precise, you lived in Gortnamona, between Tullamore and Birr, for the first ten years of your life and then you moved with your family to Pallas Lake, a small village set on the shore of the homonymous lake. What are your memories of those early years spent in a rural setting that most foreign people would regard as the idyllic, iconized epitome of Irishness and associate with the illusory and nostalgic ideal of an authentic, though bucolic and mythic, Ireland?*

MC: My memory is not good on the early years. I remember trying to climb a stairs. I remember being stung by a bee as I climbed a tree. I remember swimming across Pallas Lake in the middle of the night, but I'm not sure I didn't dream that. I remember playing till all hours the long summer evenings. I remember praying in front of the sacred heart picture, putting on plays in the shed with my siblings, a huge oak being felled because it threatened a neighbour's house, a midnight picnic when we were caught and sent back to bed in disgrace. I remember my playmates and the passion of the games and the easy camaraderie that would erupt into a full-scale row with skin and hair flying only to calm down again. The freedom and space is what I remember most and the colours, the earth and sky, the leaves and the sound they made, the dragonflies on the water on scorching summer days.

*VR: How did the peculiar landscape of the Midlands and the experiences of those early years in the countryside influence your subsequent writing in terms of setting, characterization, and thematic content?*

MC: It is difficult to say how much the Midlands have influenced me. It all started there for me. It was my first stage, where I opened my eyes first and took in what was around me. In short, an immense influence I would imagine but so a part of me that I can't really discern or pinpoint what it is exactly.

*VR: You attended secondary school at the Sacred Heart Convent in Tullamore, and then you went to Presentation College at Mountmellick. Did Catholicism and religious upbringing play a major role in those educational institutions? If yes, to what extent was Catholicism linked to the notion of Irishness and to that of a (national) identity?*

MC: I went to my mother's school first. She was the principal of a small country school only a stone's throw from the house. Then, when I was twelve, I went to the convent in town and then at fifteen to another convent as a boarder. I hated school. The stupidity of it, the awful timetable and stifling rules, the uniforms that itched and made you sweat. That people could and did tell you what to do all day, every day. I thought I would never get out of there. I was an indifferent student. I liked music and reading and that was pretty much it. The ethos of the schools was catholic, very rigid and strict with very little imagination at work in the curriculum or from the teachers. There were exceptions. There always are but not enough to alter the overall depression of the atmosphere. We had to go to mass three mornings a week. We spent an awful lot of time praying, before each meal. After each meal, evening prayers before bed and so on. I enjoyed slipping into the chapel for a bit of peace.

*VR: Besides being constitutionally recognized as the national, first official language of the Republic of Ireland, the Irish language was, and still is, a required*

*subject of study in all schools within the Republic. How long did you study it for? Was there any subject specifically taught in Irish rather than in English? Did you perceive or regard the Irish language as a paramount aspect of your cultural upbringing and (linguistic) identity? Has your perception, or your opinion, changed over the years?*

MC: Irish children study the Irish language from the age of four until the age of seventeen, eighteen, that is until their leaving certificate. It used to be a requirement for entry into university, the catholic ones anyway. So every child has a relationship to the language whether good or bad. It was hugely important in my education. I spent many summers in the west of Ireland at Irish college as did my siblings. I even spent a winter there and had at one time excellent Irish but it is almost forgotten now as I don't practice it. I think it has to be spoken to you from the cradle or it doesn't sink in enough.

*VR: Historically and culturally speaking, English is the imposed language of the colonizer/oppressor, both dominant and domineering, while Irish is the aboriginal, ancestral language of the colonized/oppressed which stands out as an identity bulwark and a symbol of resistance, rebellion and independence. In Ireland, the two languages have been coexisting, however conflictingly and controversially, for centuries. To what extent and in which ways has the coexistence of the two official languages, Irish and English, shaped your identity and influenced you as a writer?*

MC: English is my language. I can live with that. If I was passionate enough about my native tongue I would have pursued it. I don't think there is enough time. What we speak in Ireland is Hiberno-English, an English that is informed by and sometimes carries the rhythms of Irish in it, a ghostly imprint.

*VR: At the age of seventeen, you left your family home in the country, moved to the city and enrolled at University College Dublin, where you studied Economy for one year before switching to English and Philosophy. Dealing with the city must have been an exciting and enriching change for you at that time. Was it also demanding and anxiety provoking? How did the urban setting, the academic environment and the language of the city, with all its different sounds and accents, impact on you? Was it like the seductive song of the Sirens in the Odyssey or rather an overwhelming, disorientating, babelish cacophony?*

MC: Moving to the city to go to University was wonderful. I couldn't wait to get out of Offaly and be independent. Yes, there was an adjustment period but I had been used to fending for myself for quite some time or so it seemed to me.

*VR: After having obtained your degree from UCD, you moved to New York where you taught girls English in a convent school. It was your first time in the*

*United States and your first working and teaching experience, moreover on the other side of the Atlantic. Did you envisage your future transatlantic artistic journeys at that time?*

MC: Yes, I taught in a Catholic school in Brooklyn after I graduated for one year. I had already written my first play by the time I graduated, but no, I don't think I envisaged future transatlantic journeys regarding the work. I was a fledgling playwright but quite lost. Who isn't at twenty-one?

VR: *Once back in Dublin, you started a collaboration with the Project Arts Center that resulted in the first professional production of your work. The play was Low in the Dark and the year was 1989. The last time we met in Rome you told me how different the Project Arts Center was at that time, what a vibrant and creative environment it provided for you, for all the artists and practitioners who gravitated around it and, in general, for the Dublin, thus the Irish, theatre scene. Could you tell us something more about it?*

MC: Yes, I started out at The Project Arts Centre. At that time it was a hive of activity. There were a lot of people around with a real passion for theatre. There was no money in the country so we made plays out of nothing.

VR: *Soon after what the critics usually refer to as your "Beckettian phase", you left Dublin to go into a voluntary, so to speak "inland" exile in Inishnee, Connemara. How much time did you spend there? What were you fleeing from and what were you looking for at that time?*

MC: I wasn't fleeing from anything when I went to Inishnee. I'd had four plays on in a very short space of time. I had been rushing things and wanted time to think, read, write. I had also just met the man I would marry. We decided to rent a house on the island. You had to walk through fields to get to it. I wrote *The Mai* there and then we moved back to Dublin and shortly after I wrote *Portia Coughlan, On Raftery's Hill* and *By The Bog Of Cats*. These three plays are written in Midland dialect. Much has been made of this. For me it was very simple. It was just how I heard them.

VR: *The New Millennium marked the beginning of a long-lasting theatrical dialogue and fruitful cultural exchange with the United States. In 2000, the Irish production of On Raftery's Hill directed by Garry Hynes toured to Washington. Despite the shocked response, the following year you received the Edward Morgan Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Portia Coughlan was staged in Pittsburgh and By the Bog of Cats had two American productions, one in Chicago and the other in California, starring Oscar winner actress Holly Hunter in the leading role of Hester Swane. In 2002 you were Heimbod Chair*



*in Irish Studies at the University of Villanova; in 2003 you received the American Fund Annual Literary Award. Five years later you were appointed Writer in Residence at Princeton University, where your latest play Phaedra Backwards was produced in 2011. In the same year, Woman and Scarecrow was produced in Philadelphia and one year after you were appointed Puterbaugh Fellow at the University of Oklahoma. What do these fifteen years of constant collaboration and recognition mean to you as a playwright? How did they impact on your writing and on your life?*

MC: What I feel about constant collaboration, and any appreciation there is for the work, is eternal gratitude both for those I work with and for those who come to see or read the work.

*VR: Who are the European and the American playwrights you feel most indebted to, or you appreciate the most?*

MC: The playwrights I feel most indebted to are Tennessee Williams and August Strindberg. Henrik Ibsen, too and Anton Chekhov. It goes without saying that Shakespeare is the one.

*VR: Your 2006 play Woman and Scarecrow seems to have marked a watershed in your perpetual experimentation with theatrical forms. You switched from Hiberno to standard English, reduced the number of characters and distanced yourself from the pattern of Greek tragedies to focus more closely on individual dilemmas and one-to-one visceral disputes. Was this transition partially or significantly motivated by the looming economic crisis and the subsequent necessity to contain production's costs?*

MC: Yes, with *Woman and Scarecrow* I went back to standard English. I just got fed up writing in the Midland dialect. It wasn't about economic necessity. I never seem to have a plan, always chasing characters down by the tail and hanging on until they reveal themselves. I'm wary of plans, [mettere un punto?] I think they often are at odds with the writer's instinct which at its best is to explore and discover and allow the unexpected to happen.

*VR: The Cordelia Dream (2008) was the outcome of your first collaboration with the Royal Shakespeare Company. What did it mean for you, both as a Shakespeare's erudite admirer and as a professional Irish playwright, to write for such a prestigious English theatrical institution? Do you have other projects with RSC?*

MC: *The Cordelia Dream* was written for the Royal Shakespeare Company. Yes, it was thrilling to work with them then as it is now. I am currently working on two plays for them, one finished and the other in progress as they say.

VR: The Cordelia Dream, as the title itself reveals, is your transformation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*; it explores a conflicting father-daughter relationship envenomed by the old man's jealousy of the woman's talent. Why did you decide to focus on one of the daughters only (Cordelia), leaving aside her two sisters (Goneril and Regan) and the other fascinating characters of the Shakespearean tragedy?

MC: I focused on Cordelia because I think the heartbeat of *King Lear* is that relationship. In a way, she carries aspects of Regan and Goneril within her or so it seems to me.

VR: The dream you refer to in the 2008 play's title (*The Cordelia Dream*) becomes a crucial theme in *Marble* (2009). In both plays, dreams act as forebodings of an "impeding catastrophe" and as a propulsive force that provokes dramatic changes in the character's lives, pushing them towards the pursuit of their wildest desires or, alternatively, towards death. You seem to share Freud's ideas about dreams, Eros and Thanatos and Tennessee Williams's belief that "desire is the opposite of death". Do you believe in the language of dreams and their power to reveal our innermost desires and fears? Did you consciously and craftily use dream as a device to trigger off the dramatic action?

MC: Yes, *Marble* is powered by the dream. The dream as portent and the dream as beauty and the unattainable. That and the fact that we carry so much mystery in us, mystery that we mainly deny until it forces itself on us and makes us pay attention or, at least, acknowledge its presence.

VR: In October 2011, *16 Possible Glimpses* premiered at the Peacock Theatre in Dublin and the American production of *Phaedra Backwards* opened at McCarter Theatre in Princeton. Both are large cast plays, but very different in terms of dramatic form and content. The first one is an attempt to glimpse at the life of Russian writer Anton Chekhov through fourteen scenes. I was just wondering why the possible glimpses of the title are 16 and not 14...

MC: I called it *16 Possible Glimpses* because I liked the title and thought it might give an impression of what I was trying to do. I know there are fourteen scenes. I just don't like the sound of fourteen. It's not a romantic number for a man. Sixteen is. This I think makes no sense to anyone except me.

VR: *Phaedra Backwards* is your original retelling of the *Phaedra* myth and a dramatic statement of your ongoing fascination with Greek tragedy. Nevertheless, it is very different from earlier plays inspired by classic tragedies like *By the Bog of Cats*... or *Ariel*. To start with, the action of *Phaedra Backwards* does not take place in Ireland and the characters do not speak in dialect. Setting and language apart, the time as described in the stage directions is "Now and then. Then and now. Always". Did Sallust's words "These things never happened, but are always"

(Sallust, *Of Gods and The World*), quoted by Roberto Calasso in the epigraph of *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* guide you somehow? Did you want to be as universal as possible given that the play was meant to be produced in Princeton?

MC: I wanted a timeless quality to *Phaedra Backwards*. It seemed to me that nothing was to be gained by nailing it down timewise or geographically. The myth has a timelessness about it and I was trying to respond to that in the truest way I knew. Yes, “These things never happened, but are always” – Sallust puts it where I imagine it to be.

VR: *In the course of your career, you have also written children plays: Meat and Salt (2003), and The Giant Blue Hand (2009). You have four children aged between seven and fifteen. Did they inspire you? How was the experience of delving into a theatrical language imagined and shaped so as to attract and entertain children? I was lucky enough to attend a performance of The Giant Blue Hand in 2009, and I remember you did not spare your young audiences a certain amount of violence and suffering. Despite the happy ending, the play certainly had some dark, appalling elements in it. Did you mean, or maybe wish, to bring back to life the atmosphere of the plays you wrote as a child, the ones you performed with your siblings in the little theatre in the shed?*

MC: I have written three children plays so far: *Meat and Salt*, *The Giant Blue Hand* and have just finished a new play for The Ark called *Beetlefang*. I enjoy writing for children. It’s a different energy, more free in some aspects. They aren’t as conservative as us adults and have no problem with the incongruous and the potential for magic and swift plot changes and contradictions. It is amazing. Maybe it goes back to the plays in the shed I wrote as a child, which were dark and horrific and always had a happy ending.

VR: *Your plays have been translated into a number of different languages, among which Bulgarian, Chinese, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish. Do you usually play a role or get involved in the translation process? Do you like talking to the translator, guide him/her in the difficult task of re-creating your wor(l)ds? Do you attempt to read the translation once it is over?*

MC: A lot of the plays have been translated into other languages. Usually I am not consulted in these matters but I am always happy to talk through matters or areas of difficulty.