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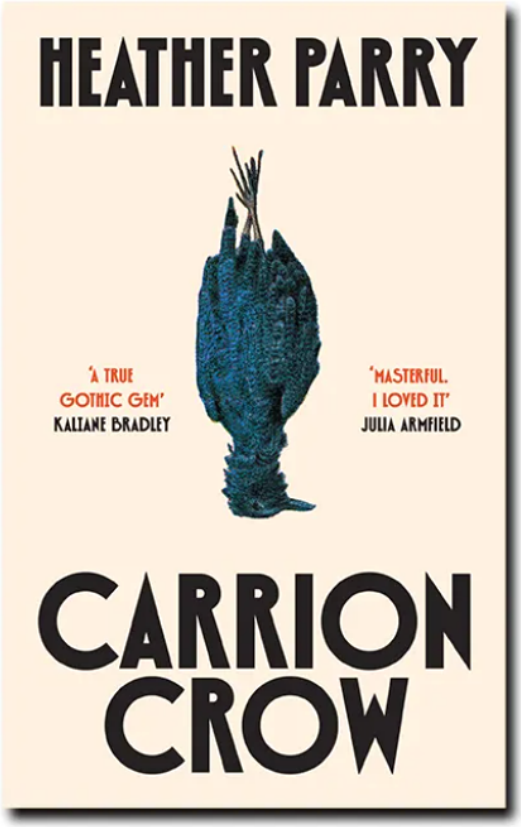

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Domestic ideology

A novel about the condition of being a daughter

By Isabella Greenwood

Heather Parry's *Carrion Crow* is a brutal, unflinching meditation on the phenomenology of womanhood: the inheritance of constraint, the conditioning of self-effacement, the body as both burden and contested territory. Parry's novel, gothic in temperament, is attuned to the banal intricacies of domestic life, charting the slow deterioration of Marguerite, a young woman locked in an attic by her mother until she is deemed fit for marriage.

Accompanied by a nesting carrion crow, a sewing machine and the sparse provisions rationed to her, Marguerite finds that her imprisonment is not merely physical, but existential. The Victorian house in which she is confined mirrors the slow dissolution of her body; once made to feel by her now absent lover, Alouette, like "a space in which to pray, to shout out the name of God", it is now a site of decay. *Carrion Crow*'s lineage is unmistakable: Parry nods to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* and, more obliquely, to the mythic grotesquerie of Angela Carter's early fiction.

The writing is psychologically acute, attuned to the learned compulsions of female diminishment. Marguerite internalizes this demand: "there was not enough room inside [her] for all the things she was expected to contain". This uneasy dialectic – between the imperative to shrink and the

impossibility of containment – drives the novel's feverish intensity, perhaps best captured by one of its most disturbing motifs: the spectre of Marguerite sewing a doll into the flesh of her own stomach. Drawing on Donald Winnicott's notion of the transitional object, Parry renders this gesture as a conduit between fusion and individuation: a desperate, intimate bid for psychic autonomy.

The novel is punctuated by excerpts from *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*, reminding readers how domestic ideology, under the guise of practicality, inscribes itself across generations. (In her acknowledgements, Parry refers to her mother, who had a copy of the book.) "There are some facts about the world that only your mother could teach you", Marguerite notes in the opening chapter. Yet, as *Carrion Crow* suggests, these "facts" are often myths.

Parry grants Marguerite's mother, Cécile, a narrative of her own, exposing maternal cruelty as a learned structure rather than a deviation. Despite her violence, Cécile is as pitiable as she is fearsome—her failures structural rather than purely malicious. The novel's most unsettling proposition is that all mothers inevitably fail, not by flaw but by an intractable inheritance.

At its heart, *Carrion Crow* is a novel of maternal reckoning. "When did you last look at yourself, mother? When did you last think about who you are?

About what you have made me?". Marguerite's imprisonment is not merely spatial but spectral, extending beyond the attic into the flesh, the mind, and the unconscious repetitions of behaviour. In the end, it is not the attic she is kept in that haunts her, but the condition of being a daughter in a world shaped by other daughters—for, as *Carrion Crow* reminds its reader, all mothers were once daughters too. Parry's novel is not a lament but an excavation of the spectral weight of inheritance, and the difficulty of extricating oneself from its grasp.