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WOMEN'S VOICES IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH THEATRE: POSTFEMINIST AND ETHICAL ISSUES IN MARINA CARR'S *MARBLE* AND NANCY HARRIS'S *NO ROMANCE*

Abstract

The issue of re-establishing the contemporary Irish women playwrights to prominence has gained great attention. Women playwrights feel the need to combat systemic prejudice in the theatre industry, meaning that postfeminists in Ireland are very much present. Although often regarded as a synonym for third-wave feminism, postfeminism has its separate characteristics. One of them is that postfeminism defines equality differently than has been done previously. Equality should not look like androgyny, nor should it be strictly divided based on gender since such a division ignores the human elements of thought, intellect, emotion, and expression. Furthermore, ethical issues in literature have been identified and discussed worldwide for years, not excepting the contemporary Irish theatre.

The aim of this paper is to show a notable step towards an increased emphasis on the issue of gender responsibility and solidarity, or lack thereof. The paper also deals with ethical implications and consequences of the ways in which these issues under-

pin social interactions as well as family and gender relations that Marina Carr and Nancy Harris dramatize in their plays.

Keywords: postfeminism, equality, gender, ethical issues, contemporary Irish theatre, Marina Carr, *Marble,* Nancy Harris, *No Romance*

Introduction

Although sporadic and fragmented until the 1980s, there has been a female tradition in Irish playwriting alongside the much earlier identified male-authored one, extending from William Butler Yeats to Brian Friel, and beyond. Women dramatists "were free to build their own tradition, a tradition crafted through the experiences of women" (Kearney 24). The evidence of exclusion of women's voices by lack of direct access to the main stages of Ireland's theatres can now be traced and verified. Early plays written by Irish women playwrights were considered "highly experimental" in the 1980s where the dominant form of theatre in Ireland was the traditional, "male-authored 'literary' play text" (Leeney 1). An Irish actress and writer Eileen Kearney remembers when in 1988 her colleague was looking for plays by women in a leading Dublin bookstore and "was promptly directed to the section on Lady Gregory" (225). Then she was sent "to another leading store, whose employees could not think of any women dramatists" (Kearney 225). As Sarahjane Scaife explains: "There were few prominent female playwrights in Ireland at the time. Theatre was run by men for the most part. Plays were directed by men and written by men" (6).

Throughout the twentieth century plays by women have often been negatively reviewed by men because they did not follow the dominant criteria of either subject matter or form which contributed to their removal. In relation to this, Cathy Leeney indicates: "Audiences for the premieres of new plays sport a variety of blinkers […] where critics reflected back conservative values associated with the maintenance of existing power structures in society and culture" (585). Indeed, it is "profoundly misleading to judge old plays by old reviews [and] it is certainly impossible to judge plays written by women through old reviews; nor should we deem such plays unworthy of production if they were deemed unworthy in the past" (Leeney 585). And Elizabeth Grosz remarks that the overpowering phallocentricity of historically privileged discourses is an act of "strategic amnesia [which] serves to ensure the patriarchal foundation of knowledge" (40).

According to the lack of gender diversity at Ireland's contemporary national theatre, women dramatists felt the need to combat systematic prejudice in the theatre industry and to give a voice to those silenced by this oppression. This means that feminists, that is, postfeminists of Ireland, are very much awake. The term postfeminism[1] is often regarded as a synonym for third-wave feminism, and most critics assert that postfeminism has its roots within a neoliberal society and consumer culture. Fien Adriaens confirms this by saying that "postfeminist discourse can [...] be considered as a form of a non-hegemonic resistance against neoliberalism and its values ... mainly expressed by means of humour, irony and through the practice of overemphasising." Not only literary but cultural manifestations of postfeminism as well are evidently shaped by the material and cultural conditions of the society and its media world from which they branch out. A period of hyper-inflated super-growth in Ireland known as the Celtic Tiger or economic boom (ca. 1995-2008) was ultimately proved hollow and economically devastating (O'Riain 4). It was dominated by neoliberal views and consumerism—the very context for postfeminism to be fostered by and thrive in.

Wanda Balzano and Moynagh Sullivan begin their editorial to an issue of *The Irish Review* on Irish Feminisms with a consideration of postfeminism in contemporary Ireland as a term "used liberally in the media" giving young women and men "the vague impression that we all live in an equal world—because, in the world of consumer choice, all seem to have equal opportunities" (1). What contradicts this reveals itself in many consumers, women's as well as men's irresistible desire "to be at all costs modern, and postmodern, in other words progressive and trendy" (Balzano and Sullivan 1). In Ireland, the contradictions of postfeminism are perhaps more conspicuous than elsewhere, due to the uniquely inflected trajectory of feminism(s) in the Irish society. However, it became postmodern and global too quickly after prolonged span of the post-colonial years. Postfeminism in Ireland can also be defined as an intensely ambiguous discourse which, paradoxically, gives rise to forms and practices of both conscious feminism and its opposite—*anti-feminism*.

Arguing products of contemporary Irish culture, Claire Bracken asserts that the term postfeminism reveals conflicting problematics of "subjectivity and ob-

[1] The diversity of interpreting postfeminism is paralleled by the lack of consistency in the spelling of the term. By some authors, it is spelt as two words while others use it as a compound word or a hyphenated one. In this text, the term will be used as a compound word.

jectivity, of negotiating the very fine lines between sexualisation and an articulation of sexual identity, of owning desire and being an object of desire" (6).

After 2008, with the collapse of economic prosperity, postfeminism became transformed by the social costs of the recession. Writing about the gendered aspects and consequences of the post-boom situation, Diane Negra asserts that "the placement of intense economic austerity as an overriding imperative [...] nullifies the interest of gender equity" (24). She implies that, in fact, it is men who are considered in need of more attention. On the other hand, Cormac O'Brien uses the tellingly coined phrase "post-feminist patriarchy" (200) in reference to the hidden refashioning of gender hierarchies and their destructive influence on day-to-day life in the present.

There is a burgeoning cultural production in contemporary Ireland within which theatres offer nuanced representations of the abovementioned paradoxes and complexities. Drama by women authors displays a high degree of sensitivity to the contradictions and problems related to the *regendering* of earlier achievements in women's emancipation. It also shows the courage to address these issues through innovative strategies of characterization and dramaturgy.

Pinpointing significant changes in young women playwrights' attitudes, Melissa Sihra argues:

> Unlike many women during the 1980s and 1990s, the younger generation of women in theatre now largely self-identify as feminists, due in part to the integration of feminist discourse in education, the visibility and vocalization of LGBTQ groups, the dismantling of its misogynist, bra-burning, 'man-hating' associations, and the move towards equality for all. There is a sense of self-worth and entitlement in this generation of women which was not inherent in the previous generation. (557)

Furthermore, the editor of *The Routledge Companion of Feminism and Postfeminism*, Sarah Gamble, sums up the postfeminist debate as one that "tends to crystallise around issues of victimization, autonomy and responsibility" (36), which also have strong ethical implications and ramifications.

Ethical issues in literature have been identified and discussed for some years worldwide. Werner Huber claims that in recent Irish literature "the signs of 'ethical issues' begin to appear. Questions are being asked [...] concerning 'respon-

sibilities' and the problem of being in accordance with moral /ethical standard of any kind" (9). If compared with the ethical analyzed in other genres, ethical issues have been recognized in the world of theatre studies too. Namely, ethical issues are an indispensable part of plays written by women. To explore ethics, among other things, means to consider "interrelated practices of sensitivity" (Bannon 3) that can be seen through the ties that people share with those with whom they are close, whether in terms of their work, community, neighborhood, familial associations or other personal relations.

According to certain number of theorists, drama and ethics have always been connected, even intertwined. For instance, Alan Read emphasizes that "theatre has nothing to do with the political in any instrumental sense, but everything to do with ethics, contributes to an ever-changing ontology of morals" (69). As a key source in the field, Nicholas Ridout's *Theatre and Ethics* departs from the hypothesis that theatre dramatizes ethical situations and the characters' ability to enter into "ethical relationships with others [which] depends on a suspension of self-interest" (22). He also claims that "for theatre and performance studies the appeal of Levinas' ethics seems to derive, at least in part, from the centrality of the encounter with the 'face.' For Levinas, the 'face' is never any particular face but rather the otherness of the other as it appears to us in the encounter" (53).

In the world of theatre, ethics certainly involves orientation towards others. It may be traced and analyzed in the characters' promptings to act, and relational patterns thus invoked between performances and their transformative effects on audience.

Postfeminist and ethical issues are represented through innovative strategies of characterization in two contemporary Irish plays by women—Marina Carr's *Marble* (2009) and Nancy Harris' *No Romance* (2011). In these two plays, ethical issues emerge through the characters' close relationships with spouses, partners, parents and children or old friends while the plot focuses on both genders. There are moral problems, disputes and embrace of violent acts that the characters embody. Also, there is the strategic use of grotesque humour.

As a tender and funny tale about our secret selves, *No Romance* by Nancy Harris[2] deploys a special kind of humour as the most effective dramaturgical means

[2] Nancy Harris is an Irish playwright and screenwriter who was born and raised in Dublin and lives in London. She was educated at Trinity College Dublin, earning a B.A. in Drama Studies and Classical

of its aesthetics. Arguing that women authors expose shortcomings and failures within the society and make jokes, Meidhbh McHugh explores the presence and working of humour in the most recent plays by female authors that premiered in the Abbey between 2010 and 2014, including *No Romance*: "The inanity of sexism and misogyny, the absurdity of gender inequality, and the oppressive effect of patriarchy on both women *and* men, is now a cause for laughter, and by looking and laughing we might shake the foundations on which its culture stands" (145-46).

Though her play focuses on marital relationships and their breakdown Marina Carr[3] indicates the folk-origins of *Marble*: "I got the story from Fiona Shaw one hot summer's night in London over a mackerel dinner. Fiona Shaw got the story from Ted Hughes, who got it from an Icelandic poet, who probably got it from an Eskimo, who got it from a seal, who got it from a wandering meteorite…" (Carr, *Plays* x). Apart from that, there certainly is the feeling of solitude, beauty and mystery in *Marble* which Robert Hughes refers to in "De Chirico's *pittura metafisica*" as modes of "alienation, dreaming and loss" (161).

Postfeminism and (*un*)*ethical romance* in *No Romance*

When it is about the structure of Nancy Harris's *No Romance*, the dramatization of fragments appears in her play by way of fragmenting the plot itself.

Civilization, and the University of Birmingham, where she completed an M.Phil. in Playwriting Studies („Nancy Harris" [*Nancy Hern Books*]; "Nancy Harris" [*People Pill*]). Harris was given the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature in 2012. She was awarded The Stuart Parker Award 2012 for her first original full length play *No Romanc*e. The play was also nominated for an Irish Times Theatre Award, a Zebbie Award and was a finalist for The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize in 2012. Her play *Our New Girl* premiered at The Bush Theatre London and was long listed for an Evening Standard "Most Promising Playwright Award" in 2013. Her plays include: *Two Ladies* (Bridge Theatre, 2019); *The Beacon* (Druid, 2019); *The Red Shoes* (Gate Theatre, 2017); *Our New Girl* (Bush Theatre, 2012); and *No Romance* (Abbey Theatre, 2011).

[3] Marina Carr is a prolific Irish playwright who was born in Dublin and raised in County Offaly. She graduated from University College Dublin with a degree in English and Philosophy in 1987. Her plays are *Ullaloo* (the Abbey Theatre's Peacock space, 1991); *Low in the Dark* (Project Arts Centre, 1990); *The Mai* (Peacock Theatre, 1994); *Portia Coughlan* (Peacock and Royal Court, 1996); *By the Bog of Cats* (Wyndhams Theatre, 2004); *On Raffery's Hill* (Druid Theatre Company, 2000); *Ariel* (Abbey, 2002); *Woman and Scarecrow* (Royal Court, 2006); *The Cordelia Dream* (Wilton's Music Hall, 2008); *Marble* (Abbey Theatre, 2009); *16 Possible Glimpses* (Abbey Theatre, 2011); *Hecuba* (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2015). Prizes include Windham-Campbell PRIZE 2017 for her body of work, The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, The American/Ireland Fund Award, The E. M Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, The Macauley Fellowship and The Puterbaugh Fellowship. Marina Carr is a member of Aosdána. She has taught at Trinity College Dublin, Villanova University and Princeton University. Currently she lectures in the English department at Dublin City Press. See also Middeke and Schnierer; „Marina Carr," *Irish National Opera*.

Through its discontinuous form, the play reflects the atomization of Irish society during the post-Celtic Tiger economic recession. The form can be seen as having similarities with "postdramatic theatre" which is according to Hans-Thies Lehmann, "distinguished by experimenting with, among other things, the renunciation of a consistent plot" (27). In her play, Nancy Harris blends features of the postmodern discontinuity and fragmentation with the familiar technique of staging characters' action and dialogue. There are also the intertwined social and moral issues that support the ambivalence of Harris's characters and call for the questionable strategies they use to counteract their loss of certainties regarding gender equity and personal agency. Pointing out to new-old phenomena in Ireland Diane Negra says that "men's falling status and positionality in the recession is recuperated by their symbolic mastery of women. This is part of a broad pattern in which recession-beset masculinity is stabilized through invocation of its social inferior" (26). The play shows that the communication of those who are closest to each other is fraught with misunderstandings and lies. The main reason for this is that all parties strive to pursue their own agenda.

No Romance puts in the foreground the resurfacing of traditionalist views on gender and family relationships that were dominant in Ireland earlier but re-occur in both men's and women's attitudes and behavior in the present. The communication of characters in *No Romance* is *spiced* with lies, pretense, and lack of solidarity. The circumstances of severity and the associated changes in public discourse are pressing all of them to follow their own plans, having no energy or wish to consider the interests of others – their partners, spouses, parents, or children. Along with family and generational relations gender is a key theme in all three parts of the play. The first and second parts of the play focus on homo- and heterosexual failing relationships and dysfunctional marriage.

No Romance can also be addressed in the context of a "neoliberal, postfeminist culture" (O'Brien 177), focusing on Harris's concern with gender. In scene one, Gail, a photographer and Laura, her new client, are in dialogue. Gail's ten-year-long lesbian relationship with her partner, Sarah, has just broken up but she cannot afford to rent another place and move out. Namely, Gail is cast in the artist's feminine role whereas Sarah holds the traditionally male job of a doctor. Consequently, Gail remains dependent on Sarah, subjected to the inferior position and *trapped* in Sarah's apartment. For O'Brien, in this scene of *No Romance*, "the presence-through-absence of patriarchy becomes palpable on several levels" (200). In her play, Nancy Harris allocates distinctive male/female

roles to the lesbian couple which imitate "heteronormative relationality" (201), thus prone to undermine equality.

At the time of the play's action Ireland had not yet introduced same-sex marriage.[4] According to that, abandoned partners such as Gail had no access to any kind of legal agreement to help them start afresh. But what is even worse than that is the fact that Gail has to cope with the presence of Sarah's new girlfriend in the apartment. The unethical aspect of the situation shows itself in the fact that Sarah seems to have no empathy for Gail. She doesn't even notice that the other woman, her former partner, might feel hurt. On the other hand, Sarah's attitude is matched by Gail's reaction as the cheated and jealous woman: "I can't stand the thought of their love-making. Do you [Laura] think it means more to her than ours did?" (37)

Similarly, Gail's client, Laura, is emotionally dependent on her fiancé Simon who wants her to give up her job once they are married. So, Laura seems to be controlled by Simon even before their marriage. Although having a cancerous lump in her breast, she obeys him and wears a corset which shapes her body to fulfil her fiancé's ideal of the female figure:

> Simon bought me this corset. Picked it out himself and everything, bless him. If you knew Simon, he's really not the Ann Summers type. Probably took him a week to recover. It's kind of a pain with all the laces and stuff but – if I could pull it off, he'd be in his element, I recon. He loves the whole chorus-girl can-can thing. I could put on some stockings too – for the whole shebang. (21)

To please her fiancé, Laura has come to Gail to be photographed in exotic costumes and these photos are intended to be a unique present to for Simon's fortieth birthday. This is, actually, an attempt to have her body eternalized in erotic poses before she receives surgical therapy for breast cancer, meaning that Laura "willingly objectifies herself and embraces the patriarchal gaze economy of both her fiancé and society" but also internalizes "post-feminist body politics" (O'Brien 201).

The second scene of the play involves a married couple, Joe and Carmel, who are in a funeral parlor watching the corpse of the husband's mother. Joe is

[4] Same-sex marriage in Ireland has been legal since May 2015.

unemployed, while Carmel has a good job which makes her the family breadwinner. The fact that he depends on his wife has had a devastating effect on Joe's *ethical* self, urging him to set the *right* gender balance by whatever means. He tries to find compensation for his feminized state by acting the authoritative *judge* of women in the family, remembering his dead mother as "an old dragon" (Harris 69) and naming his own daughter "an internet trollop" (45) because of uploaded pictures of her wearing only a wet T-shirt. Nonetheless, Harris's couple are having a bitter feud, leading to both verbal and physical violence. He blames Carmel for violation of his privacy as she opened a package addressed to him and she calls Joe a hypocrite and "*kicks him in the shin*" (62). He feels his manhood endangered and attempts to recover it by retreating to worn out patriarchal attitudes and the affirmation of his male rights. As Diane Negra asserts, Joe is "the best, recession-impacted man, whose anxieties are done away via his transformation into the re-masculinised man" (31). But what is interesting is that one minute he falls on his knees like a medieval knight in front of his lady to beg for forgiveness but the following minute he wants to take revenge on Carmel, remembering his mother as a strong individual who "was funny about most women" (Harris 70). After he tells Carmel about his mother's remark concerning the fatness of her (Carmel's) legs, she strikes back by telling him about her sexual adventure with a Nigerian taxi driver. Then, Joe revises old conventional beliefs about marriage according to which openness and sincerity had better be limited between men and women:

> I'm not glad I know that my daughter is entering wet T-shirt competitions on the other side of the world or that you're being felt up by taxi drivers and enjoying it. I am not sure that all that knowledge will help me sleep easy at night. What happened to privacy? What happened to discretion? What happened to keeping it to yourself? Maybe there are some things we are better off not knowing. Maybe we can love each other despite. (75)

Carmel's unethical reaction to his remarks is that she, in return, "stuffs the stockings inside the corpse's jacket" (76) which mocks Joe's secret dependence on internet pornography and its links with patriarchal resonances of postfeminist culture. At the same time, Carmel desecrates the dead body of her mother-in-law for her previous criticism of her daughter-in-law.

The third scene of Nancy Harris's *No Romance* presents middle-aged Michael and his teenage son, Johnny, for whom he is now a *weekend father* after his di-

vorce. When taken into account that he has no authority and agency, Michael considers himself a victim as his ex-wife wants Johnny home despite the fact it is her ex-husband's weekend with their twelve-year-old son who is wedged between his divorced parents. So, Michael is convinced that: "Like all women she always gets what she wants in the end" (89). Similar to Joe in the second part of the play, Michael decides to recompense for the situation he finds himself in by exercising authority over the *weaker* family member—his eighty-year-old mother, Peg. He is determined to move her out of the country cottage where she lives and place her in a nursing home in Dublin. Concerned about his own defeats, he is not aware of the fact that this country house symbolizes freedom for his mother who believes "it was a place I could be myself" (102).

Peg's case shows that growing materialism and the related cultural fragmentation within the post-boom society are likely to alienate from each other not only couples but generations as well. As an old and lonely woman, Peg likes to chat about her life. Through memories of her difficult married life, the common subjects of gender inequity and domestic violence come to the surface. She had a dissatisfied, unkind husband who broke her nose out of frustration. His true love was a male friend, so he had to repress his homosexual propensity in the stuffy socio-cultural context of the time. Therefore, his wife and children suffered from the violence he vented on them:

> He had me starching the towels and bleaching the sheets so often I once got a rash on my arms and had to go the hospital for a cream. They thought I'd been in a fire. [...] He used to inspect the cupboards too, [...] And the drawers. And the pantry in the evenings to make sure the jars were all in order and the tins were lined up straight. And if there was so much as a fork that wasn't gleaming or a napkin not folded just so, well… you don't want to know what was in store for us. (90)

Now the past *visits* Peg again in a new-old appearance: she is treated like an object to be displaced at will by her son. But she decides to rebel by turning to violence which increases the grotesque effects of the scene. In order to fight against the restitution of male control she thrashes her son with the sweeping-brush, a symbol of domestic duties assigned to women, children and other inferiors in the patriarchal system.

What is evident from all these examples taken from the play is that *No Romance* offers a rather negative picture of the characters' morals in the context of

postfeminist and ethical issues. A vividly conspicuous incongruity that nurtures grotesque effects is the wide gap between the characters' regression to conservative views, practices and patterns of behavior in gender and generational relations. The play attests, even the closest relationships of married couples, partners and family members have no romance in them; rather, the opposite is the case.

Marble as a (post)feminist (fairy) tale

Marble is constructed as a series of duologues across two acts in which all four characters never meet. It is the first of Carr's plays to be set in a city. Although the setting is different there is the emotional environment of unsatisfied desire, intimacy and isolation.

The play explores what lies beneath the social façade of middle-class marriages and family life as outward appearances conceal inner truths. The characters are two couples in their forties who live in prosperity: the men, Art and Ben, hold well-paid jobs, and the women, Anne and Catherine are housewives who look after the home and rear the children. They have lived fantasy lives with big houses, beautiful children, good looks, and plenty of money, but beneath the surface lies a palpable hollowness which they fill with alcohol, work and the acquisition of material goods "to disguise the journey" (Carr 51). There is no explicit mention of Ireland as the setting, yet some inferential references to the country appear in the text, for instance in Anne's rather cynical reaction to Art's mention of newspaper article he has just read: "Don't tell me, something about what a happy little nation we are, a woman in a bikini telling us to invest so we'll be happier" (62).

Belonging to the newly rich class, the characters can afford to buy anything they want or have a fancy for. At the same time their lives and marriages seem to be hollow at the core: the husbands, who are close friends, chat about superficial topics like fishing while the wives feel bored and keep themselves alive by drinking wine and reading novels with plots set far away from their everyday experience. All four characters are deeply immersed in and have their share of what Carmen Kuhling and Kieran Keohane call "a liberal, affluent culture, but one that is shallow and vulgar; a new emancipated subjectivity, but one that is aimless and listless; a promiscuous and indiscriminate *openness* to the new, a frailty and readiness to embrace the fashion, whatever it may turn out to be" (127).

They also argue that, paradoxically, while many successful Irish people embrace what is new, they also "feel nostalgia for the past" (Kuhling and Keohane 128).

Ben's and Anne's possessiveness to keep their spouse as theirs by law has its roots in the renewal of patriarchal norms as well as the most conservative beliefs about marriage. Even though Anne admits that love between her and Ben is over, she insists on maintaining her conventional marriage of convenience. On the other hand, Ben regards women as appealing or detestable objects or instruments when measured against his own well-being, and his wife seems not to take exception, which is something postfeminism points out as humiliating and undesirable. There is nothing ethical in his remark: "Women aren't allowed to get old. I mean of course you're allowed but it's not mannerly. It's somehow not appropriate. Old women interfere with my sense of myself" (Carr 19-20).

While caring for their own dreams, on the one hand, and affirming their marital rights on the other, the characters are incapable of considering the otherness of the other, let alone forgetting about their self-interest and any sense of responsibility for anyone apart from themselves. Furthermore, the symbolism of marble in the play is given interesting consideration by Ondřej Pilný:

> The intertextual underpinning of the characters' story by Greek tragedy combined with the gradual shift in the meaning of the trope of marble thus suggests that when Art and Catherine leave in pursuit of their transgressive dream in the end and destroy both of their families, it means a move towards certain death rather than liberation. (Pilný, *Debates* 179)

In Carr's *Marble* the idea of a *living-death* summarizes the reality of being alive but not fully present. Catherine has had a revelation in her dream:

> A dream was given to me, inside me from birth, a dream of marble, a woman in a marble room with her lover. And all the waking world can do is thwart it and deny it, and say, no, it cannot be, [...] impossible, you must walk the grey paths with the rest of us, go down into the wet muck at the close. [...] That's what you have to look forward to. [...] I refuse this grey nightmare with its ridiculous rules and its lack of primary colours. (60)

She reflects upon the representative power of the image of marble: "Why are we given such images, such sublime yearnings for things that are never there?" (60). Catherine's dreams transcend the quotidian as she explains to her husband: "It's as if my real life is happening when I go to sleep and you and I are a

dream, a fragment, difficult to remember on waking. Being awake is no longer important" (32).

Marble is also an outstanding trope because it reduces the fusion of beauty, material richness and emotional coldness towards fellow humans. In Marina Carr's play all of the characters are searching for a sense of purpose. The men go through the city with mobiles, laptops and take-away coffees running after the next big deal and such a male-dominated city is represented as generic and uninspiring.

At the end of the play, tensions rise between Art and Anne in a conversation about a new sofa. Anne announces that she has bought a red sofa: "It's something to do. Order it. Pay for it. It won't arrive for six months by which time we'll forgotten about it. I'd like to put it in the hall instead of that table" (62). The pointless object becomes a signifier of the emptiness in their lives. When Art says: "I wish something good would happen to us – to me," she replies: "That's why I want that sofa" (63).

Before he leaves the home for good, Art tells a parable of their lives:

> Once there was a man, happily married, big house, good-looking wife, healthy children. He made enough not to have to worry. [...] His wife bought five sofas every day. There wasn't room to move with all the sofas. Then one night it struck the man that all these sofas were a trap, a banal trap. His wife sat opposite him on her new sofa. He sat opposite her on his new sofa. We're death sitting opposite one another on designer sofas, the man said. [...] Now what's left, the man wandered, as he sank into the sofa [...]. There is nothing left, he said to himself... (65)

Art's realization is clear: "This is our love in a nutshell. This is what it comes down to at the toss of a coin. The great happy marriage" (66). However, Car also implies that not fulfilling women's true potential is the greatest betrayal of all. Depictions of women leaving their homes, husbands and children (at the end of the play, Catherine leaves Ben and their children) have traditionally caused sensation and protest in theatres from the early performances. According to that, it can be said that *Marble* is a study in female disaffection and process of empowerment such as Catherine's journey towards self-actualization. She tells Art: "There can be no change without change" (44). Her remark, "Nothing happens just like that. It swells and swells inside until one day you make a decision, probably the wrong

one, but just to decide something. Hopefully it will lead on to – somewhere else" (58), underlies Catherine's quest for the unknown hoping to find herself and fulfil her potential in another, different (yet unknown) environment. Moreover, *Marble* equates law-making with patriarchal control as Ben informs his wife: "There are codes and rules and contracts we must live by, Catherine" (40). Although he has been married for many years, Ben is still unable to regard his wife as a human being: "She's just a woman like any other. I can't see the individual in her, the space that defines her, that makes her who she is" (34), which is not just a typically patriarchal but also an unethical standpoint. This is one of the examples from the play which shows division that ignores the human elements of thought, intellect, and emotion as indicated by a postfeminist standpoint.

Conclusion

According to the selected plays by Marina Carr and Nancy Harris, early twenty-first century Ireland where "the past, repressed, returns and intrudes into the present, informing the future" (Kuhling and Keohane 120) is obviously controlled by a prior stage in the nation's life. It is evident that *Marble* and *No Romance* offer a rather negative picture of the characters' morals in order to demonstrate that there is a distinct concern with the ethical (and the lack of it) in contemporary women's drama inspired by the phenomena of postfeminism. They also refer to the alarming post-boom (post-Celtic Tiger) problems that are largely responsible for the chaotic moral state of present-day Irish society as represented in the plays. These selected works also contribute to the landscape of ethics, politics and *social justice* in contemporary drama where, as Pilný writes, "[…] the use of the grotesque [can be] a device of social and political critique" (Pilný, *The Grotesque* 13).

Marble and *No Romance* experiment with dramaturgical devices to highlight ethical concerns in the context of postfeminism and the warning signs preceding the economic collapse as well as the recession itself. Dealing with patriarchal structures of place, gender and identity Marina Carr's play suggests new ways to process the past and change the future for women in Irish theatre. *Marble* uses marble as a symbol to suggest wealth but also coldness and death, while the multiplying images of a sofa in the play suggest inertia and comfortable passivity as an escape from making efforts to understand the human world surrounding the self and the concomitant reactions of others. And, *No Romance* foregrounds newly emerging problems linked to the economic recession, most

notably the reappearing of traditionalist views on gender and relationships in the postmodern and postfeminist world. The play also highlights the ways in which this process can undermine and distort close relationships and family ties as well as make the characters feel isolated, hurt or even powerless to various degrees. By its discontinuous structure it reflects an alienated social fragmentation, as well as the search for connection in a *fractured* world.

The fact is that both plays display a high degree of sensitivity to the context of postfeminist and ethical issues. They also show the *courage* to address these issues through innovative strategies of characterization and in dramatizing self-reflexivity in a specific way. These two plays abound in characters' memories of their married lives, conflicts and divorces and the protagonists are also the audience of each other's memories on stage. This certainly points to the nature of theatre where playing and viewing are not only juxtaposed but also interact. The potential outcome is that all participants achieve an *ethical turn* towards each other and themselves as a workable foundation of *equality for all*.

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ŽENSKI GLASOVI U SUVREMENOM IRSKOM KAZALIŠTU: POSTFEMINISTIČKA I ETIČKA PITANJA U DRAMAMA *MARBLE* MARINE CARR I *NO ROMANCE* NANCY HARRIS

Sažetak

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Pitanje reafirmacije suvremenih irskih dramatičarki privlači veliku pozornost. Dramatičarke osjećaju potrebu za borbom protiv sistemskih predrasuda u kazališnoj industriji, što znači da su postfeministice u Irskoj itekako prisutne. Iako se često smatra sinonimom za treći val feminizma, postfeminizam ima svoje posebne karakteristike. Jedna od njih jest ta da postfeminizam definira jednakost na drugačiji način nego prije. Jednakost ne treba poistovjećivati s androginijom niti je treba strogo dijeliti prema rodu jer takva podjela zanemaruje ljudske elemente mišljenja, intelekta, emocija i izražavanja. Štoviše, etička pitanja u književnosti prisutna su i temom razmatranja već neko vrijeme širom svijeta, uključujući irsko kazalište.

Cilj ovoga rada jest pokazati vidljivi pomak ka isticanju pitanja rodne odgovornosti i solidarnosti ili pak njihova nedostatka, kao i sagledati etičke implikacije i posljedice načina na koji prethodno spomenuta pitanja podupiru društvene interakcije, porodične i rodne odnose, a koje Marina Carr i Nancy Harris dramatiziraju u svojim djelima.

Ključne riječi: postfeminizam, jednakost, rod, etička pitanja, suvremeno irsko kazalište, Marina Carr, *Marble,* Nancy Harris, *No Romance*