

VIOLENCE AND HOPE IN *ARIEL*, BY MARINA CARR

Zoraide Rodrigues Carrasco de Mesquita

Associação Brasileira de Estudos Irlandeses

Abstract:

This article deals with two forms of intertextuality: rewriting and allusion. On the one hand, by confronting Marina Carr's *Ariel* (2002) and the three Greek tragedies employed as the starting point for her play, we examine how our contemporary world is depicted by the Irish playwright through the shifts introduced in the texts used as sources. On the other hand, allusion, especially the one present on the title, is also analysed, since we understand that it offers new dimensions for the interpretation of the play.

Keywords: intertextuality, rewriting, allusion, violence, hope.

The Irish playwright Marina Carr (b. 1964) began her career in 1989 and since then has published ten plays. Considering her theatre production from 1994 to 2002, it can be said that the five plays belonging to this period present common traits regarding characters, themes and form.

All the main characters, for instance, are bound to spaces that exert a powerful attraction because they enclose stories and legends that match the dreams, anxieties, traumas, or desire for domination, strongly experienced by the characters. As family is central in these plays, another relevant aspect to Marina Carr's five plays written within the

Ilha do Desterro	Florianópolis	nº 58	p. 289-308	jan/jun. 2010
------------------	---------------	-------	------------	---------------

period mentioned is that in each play the inner impulse that leads Carr's characters to their tragic destinies or unhappy lives comes from their parents, a heritage that must be overcome, or even erased, in order for them to reach a satisfactory life of their own. It is a very hard task and most of them fail. Millie, the narrator and one of the central characters in *The Mai* (1994), and Ded, a minor character in *On Raftery's Hill* (2000), are two examples of characters who fail to free themselves from their parents' legacy.

Millie remembers her mother and her great-grandmother with affection, but The Mai's suicide left a permanent mark on her, as if she had inherited from her mother the obligation to stay by that ominous Owl Lake, although she is conscious that it represents an obstacle to a more meaningful life. Similarly, Ded, an "artist" with a sensitive and gifted soul, is impaired by his father's behavior. In *Ariel* (2002), however, there is a character who manages to get free. This is Stephen, the youngest child in the Fitzgerald family, whose decision of leaving home, whether good or bad, reveals at least that he was aware of the menace to freedom that his heritage represented. In his last dialogue with his mother, Stephen declares that he will not run his family's business and asks his mother to stop living through him:

STEPHEN. . . . You had your chance, ma, now ud's mine, and I won't be buried under a ton a cement on your whim. I tould ya I'd help ouh till the trial's over. And I will. Buh then I'm gone.

.....
FRANCES. So that's the way ud is. I thought ya were on my side.

STEPHEN. Ya though wrong. Ud's time ya stopped pulling ouh a me, livin through me.

(*Ariel*, 67)

Stephen's role is secondary; nevertheless, he is the only character who manages to escape the turbulent world shown in the play, in which Ariel, his sister, is sacrificed by their father.

The sacrifice of a daughter is central to *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and this play, written by Euripides in 405 BC, is the starting point for *Ariel*. In fact, the intertextual procedure is largely used by Marina Carr, especially in the form of allusion, found in all five plays, and rewriting, restricted to *By the Bog of Cats* (based on Euripides' *Medea*) and *Ariel*. Since the classics have often been used as inspirational sources, Carr's rewritings are part of a wider tradition, apart from aligning her with her contemporaries, given the number of adaptations and rewritings of Greek tragedies in Ireland in the last two decades. According to Marianne McDonald, from 1984 to 2000, more than fifteen Irish playwrights have adapted tragedies written by Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides (16). Analysing these modern adaptations in Ireland, McDonald observes that, although the classics "have often been used to further the cause of imperialism", they "can also provide a literature of protest". Referring to the Irish plays based on Sophocles' *Antigone* and Euripides' *Medea* and *Trojan Women*, she infers that they "focus on human rights more than on fate and identity", and the result "is not simply a political tract protesting abuse, but a passionate expression of hopes and fears". The essayist goes on stating that:

The literary classics provide a heightened mode of communication. In the same way that the classic can be used to filter personal terror, such as fear of death, and allow the audience to confront this fear, so can it explicate social and political atrocity so that the audience can finally see what in many cases it would prefer to ignore. (16)

McDonald's essay was published before the production of *Ariel*, but the ideas proposed are of great value for the interpretation of Marina Carr's play. My focus is to examine how Marina Carr depicts our

contemporary world, highlights some aspects of our problematic and to some extent chaotic society by confronting it with another kind of society, and suggests that there is still hope for a better future. However, one question remains: will young generations maintain the same set of values and beliefs that have guided the older generations or will they take a turn for the better? As an attempt to answer this question, firstly I will examine the similarities and the differences between *Ariel* and the Greek plays employed by Carr as "pretexts"¹ (*Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Agamemnon* and *Choëphoroe*), aiming at discussing the aspects of contemporary society that are put in evidence through this confrontation; secondly, I will draw my attention to the title chosen by the dramatist for her play, supporting the discussion with José Enrique Rodó's ideas about Ariel, the Shakespearean character.

Marina Carr openly refers to the source of inspiration for *Ariel* in an interview with Melissa Sihra. Carr states that everything that happens in *Iphigenia in Aulis* is present in *Ariel*, but it is not a "version" of the Greek play, since it is only "loosely based" on it (qtd. in Sihra 55). This statement clearly shows the intertextual procedure: the author declares she is making use of another text, and we are expected to apprehend this intentional and intertextual connection, by examining in which ways she approaches the "pretext" text or distances herself from it. It is also worth mentioning that Heiner Müller, the German playwright, regards the dramatic texts as the result of a crisis: it would be the testimony of a transitional phase and would sketch the new times from the experiences of past ages. For Müller, reading and re-reading authors' belonging to the past is a "dialogue with the dead", by which he means that every text is related to other texts previously written; the new text, however, changes the focus of the "pretext" (Röhl 27-8).² This idea is not unfamiliar to Marina Carr, who stated in "Dealing with the dead":

My talk today is less a lecture and more a ramble around a subject close to my heart—dead writers, more specifically great

dead writers. I know I'm not alone in my affection for this subject. The whole world and all its civilisations have been shaped by this great panoply of the dead, whose voices we hear all around us [...]. These warriors of the desk, these songstitchers, these myth finders, while scaring you with their formidable gifts, do also bolster the heart, especially in this anti-heroic age where the all consuming intellectual pursuit seems to be that of demystification. (190-1)

Among these "warriors of the desk", to whom it is a good piece of advice to return in this "anti-heroic age", William Shakespeare must be cited, since he is one of Marina Carr's favourite "dead-writers"; moreover, the title of the play in discussion here may be regarded as an allusion to one of the English dramatist's characters, a topic to be examined in this essay.

The dominant persona in *Ariel* is Fermoy Fitzgerald, the father, responsible for the interfamilial conflicts. He is married to Frances, and they have three children: Ariel, Elaine and Stephen. The family includes the Catholic monk Boniface, Fermoy's elder brother, and their aunt Sarah. Sarah got married to the widower of her sister, Fermoy and Boniface's mother. Fermoy owns a cement factory, and, at the start of the play, his ambition is to begin a political career. He is a mad character who has unbelievable dreams such as dining with Alexander the Great, Caesar, and Napoleon Bonaparte. The latter is his idol. Fermoy quotes Napoleon when he says he loves power the same way an artist loves it, but the words sound as his own, as if Fermoy, taking possession of Napoleon's ideas, could transform himself and establish a perfect communion, blending his identity with his idol's: Fermoy is Napoleon and Napoleon is Fermoy. He also invents a God that demands a bloody sacrifice in order for him to win the election. He believes that mortal sins are back in fashion, kills his daughter to achieve power and success, throwing Ariel in Cuura Lake, the same place where his mother lies. He is following in his father's footsteps: his father killed his own wife

and threw her in Cuura Lake, Fermoy repeats the action with his own daughter. Incredibly, he gets everything he wants. It is true, however, that besides fulfilling the condition imposed by his God, he also took some practical measures to defeat his opponent Hannafin, by the expedient of publicly revealing some secret facts of Hannafin's past life, which led to his suicide. Anyway, he succeeds. Ten years after Ariel's sacrifice, there he is, a successful politician who boasts of having yielded his country excellent results as Minister of Finance:

FERMOY. Look, I spent five-and-a half year in Finance. I brough ud kickin and screamin into twinty-first century. I brough money into the country from places yees didn't know existed and in ways ye'd never dreamt of. I done my service in Finance. Ih was time to move on.
(*Ariel*, 40)

Fermoy held three ministries in succession: the first was Arts and Culture, an area he knew very little about, then he became Minister of Finance and, after that, Minister of Education. His next step was to reach the highest position, as the future Taoiseach. He did not go so far, though. His wife murders him, when she finds out that he had killed their daughter. This pattern of vengeance is repeated once more at the end of the play, when Elaine, who adored her father, kills her mother.

It is not difficult to realize that there are many similarities between Marina Carr's play and Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Fermoy and Frances Fitzgerald have three children just like Agamemnon and Clytemnestra: Ariel stands for Iphigenia, Elaine for Electra, and Stephen for Orestes. The title-characters are both sixteen years old and both are sacrificed by their fathers, in order for Fermoy and Agamemnon to achieve a certain objective. Also Frances and Clytemnestra have similar stories. Both had been married before – Frances to Charlie, Clytemnestra to Tantalus – and their husbands at present are accused by them of having caused the deaths not only of their first husbands but also of their sons.

Marina Carr, however, proceeds with some changes at this point of the story, which leads us to examine the differences between *Ariel* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. While Agamemnon murdered Tantalus and smashed Clytemnestra's son against the ground, Fermoy is not the author of a crime. Nevertheless, he is accused of being responsible for the death of Charlie, who loved his wife Frances and could not bear to hear that she was having an affair with Fermoy. Similarly, by not allowing Frances to take her son with them on their honeymoon, Fermoy is accused of being indirectly responsible for James's accidental death, although he was miles away from the place where the child's death occurred. So far, if we compare Fermoy to Agamemnon, the first seems to be the victim of an injustice, but in the development of the play, Fermoy reveals himself as capable of committing even the worst crime. Besides these differences between the two plays, there are other variations introduced by Marina Carr in *Ariel*, especially regarding the characters, which are important elements for the interpretation of the play.

In Euripides' play, Kalchas is the one who communicates the necessity of Iphigenia's sacrifice to the goddess Artemis. In *Ariel* it is Fermoy's particular God, with whom he talks in his dreams, who demands Ariel's sacrifice. As a result, the goddess Artemis and Kalchas, the soothsayer, each one a separate entity, are merged into one God that exists only in Fermoy's mind. In other words, these two concrete and objective personae are reduced to an abstract and subjective God.

Concerning the sacrifice, Agamemnon, unlike Fermoy, hesitates and makes an attempt to save his daughter: he says he had lost control and was out of his mind, referring to the moment he sent for Iphigenia to come to Aulis to be put to death. However, being a king and chief of the Greek army, Agamemnon was not free to heed his fatherly feelings, since the possibility of victory for the Greeks against the Trojans depended on his acceptance and fulfilment of the goddess Artemis' design. The objective of such a victory would be the preservation of honour for a whole nation. Moreover, Agamemnon's revolt would be

useless, because it was certain that his refusal to sacrifice his daughter did not mean she would be safe; neither would he be safe, since the Greeks would be against him, and would not be merciful. Agamemnon submits and decides for the sacrifice, but it was a very hard decision that made him struggle with his personal feelings and his social duties: "the debate between the *koinos* and *idios* - the community and the self" (Teevan, xviii). On the other hand, Iphigenia, knowing the meaning of the sacrifice, willingly offered herself. Completely different is Ariel's condition: her death was not for the benefit of a nation, but it served as nourishment for her father's ambition to win the election and begin his political career. This shift introduced by Marina Carr stresses Fermoy's extreme individualism and egotism. He did not shed a single tear for his crime, convinced that it was the price to be paid to achieve the glories of power. In contrast, Agamemnon laments that power led him to make his painful decision.

Besides these deviations, Marina Carr expands Euripides' play, going beyond it. *Ariel* lasts ten years, the same length of time as the Trojan war. Frances murders her husband after finding out he had killed Ariel. Clytemnestra performs a similar action, but not in *Iphigenia in Aulis*. A parallel between the two women can only be found in *Oresteia*, by Aeschylus, where Clytemnestra is depicted as a mother, and not as an adulteress who, on Agamemnon's return from the war, murders him so that her lover Aegisthus might become king of Mycenae. As a mother she commits a crime because she would never forgive Agamemnon for sacrificing their daughter. It is worth noting the contrast between Clytemnestra's patient preparation to revenge for long ten years and the instant reaction of Frances, who kills Fermoy as soon as she knows the truth. In *Ariel*, the length of time between the sacrifice and the revenge is the same, but Frances did not know that her daughter was dead and hoped she would come back some day. The transition from recognition to action is too fast. Frances suspects her husband, makes him confess the crime and kills him in a very quick sequence. The accelerated and dynamic rhythm, as well as an extreme

individualism, that shape our present society, strongly contrasts with the Greek world.

Another aspect to be considered is that in Euripides's play the action concentrates on Iphigenia, and it ends with her sacrifice, while in Marina Carr's, Ariel is almost completely absent. We do not know for sure if Iphigenia really died, but Ariel's skeleton was found ten years later and returned to be mourned by her family in a grotesque scene, at the beginning of Act III. This act reminds us of *Choëphoroe*, the second part of Aescylus' *Oresteia*, but presents a deviation from the Greek tragedy, concerning the murder of Clytemnestra by Orestes: here, it is Elaine who kills her mother. Doing so, Elaine repeats the same pattern of transgression and revenge observed in Aeschylus' play, with a difference: while Orestes had the support of Electra, the protection of Apollo, and finally of Athena, who would defend him at the judgment, Elaine's decision is immediate and individual. Elaine is alone when she makes her decision of murdering her mother. Another example of a more positive individualism is shown by Stephen, who escapes from this series of murders. His turning away from his family is also an individual action in a society that fails to solve the conflicts in order to promote harmony among their members.

Unlike Orestes, who is the central character in the second part of Aescylus' trilogy, Stephen has a small role in Marina Carr's play and he is not at all involved with his father's triumph as a politician or with his father's murder. He maintains himself apart from the increasing feelings of hate in his family. He is an artist and through his art he can understand that he is being robbed of his self, as he clearly perceives that he has been nothing but a substitute for someone else in his mother's heart. Frances's motherly love for Stephen was just her way of expressing her feelings for James, her adored son who had died prematurely. The film Stephen produced, even if it was not a great success, was of the greatest value for him, for through it Stephen could objectively see the trap that menaced him, and he finally understands the reason for some aberrations regarding the relationship he had with

his mother, who always saw him as James, to the point of breast-feeding Stephen till the age of ten. He recognizes that he had played the game because he loved his mother, but now he learns the most important thing: that one cannot give up freedom and identity even in the name of love.

Confronting Marina Carr's play and the "pretexts" she employed, we have a picture of our contemporary world where honour, the sense of community, and patience are replaced by the pursuit of power, individualism and urgency. It can be observed that some details carefully selected by the playwright to emphasise intertextuality also function as indications of the Fitzgeralds' tastes and social status. This procedure includes the description of their house with its "Grake columns and the fountains goin full blast and the lions roarin on the gates" (*Ariel*, 32). In fact, Marina Carr constructs an up-to-date plot with hints of the way of life of well-off people, such as the Fitzgeralds, who belong to a society that has reached a period of economical progress. Fermoy can afford a new car to give as a gift to his sixteen-year-old daughter, a fact that suggests how Celtic Tiger Ireland's citizens are far from those years of poverty the country faced a relatively short time ago. As Fergus Finlay remarks, Irish people are now rich beyond their "wildest dreams", "to the point where poverty is beginning to be defined as the absence of a second car" (qtd. in Merriman, 150). Not everything has been solved, though, and the play includes social issues mirroring the problems that society faces at the beginning of the twenty-first century, through the promises made by politicians to convince people to vote for them: "aqual wages, crèches in the workplace, no ceillin on the women, the pace process, a leg up for the poor, the handicapped, the refugees, the tinkers, the tachers, the candlestick makers" (*Ariel*, 17-18). Fermoy Fitzgerald mocks these promises; he does not regard them seriously, but as part of a game to achieve power.

Apart from basing *Ariel* on *Iphigenia in Aulis* and also on *Agamemnon* and *Choëphoroe*, the first two plays in the Orestian trilogy, the very title Marina Carr chose offers another dimension to the play.

Destiny was the title the playwright first thought of. Her change to *Ariel* suggests additional resonances.

Ariel is, in the first instance, an angel who reminds us of the prophetic vision of Isaiah, "foreseeing the destruction of a city", as Fintan O'Toole remarks (89), but Ariel is also a character in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, representing the genius of air, the noble and winged part of the soul. About this character, the Uruguayan essayist José Enrique Rodó wrote in 1900:

Ariel is the empire of reason and feeling over irrational stimulus: he is generous enthusiasm, the high and disinterested stimulus in action, the spirituality of culture, the vivacity and charm of intelligence, the ideal aim to which human selection ascends, correcting, in the superior man, with the perseverant chisel of life, the strong vestiges of Caliban, symbol of sensuality and perversion. (23-4)³

José Enrique Rodó, who was born in 1871 in Montevideo, the capital city of Uruguay, wrote his essay *Ariel* two years after Spain had lost Cuba in consequence of the USA intervention. The essay has a political perspective since the author's concern was the preservation of his own country's sovereignty, fearing that North America could do the same thing there as they did in Cuba. Rodó's *Ariel*, however, cannot be reduced to a discussion of USA imperialism; in fact, this subject fills only about a quarter of the book, which presents other topics of interest such as the symbolism of Shakespeare's character that inspired the essayist, the concept of youth and considerations about materialism as opposed to the harmonious development of a democratic life.

On the first pages of Rodó's essay, we are introduced to an old teacher known as Prospero, the name he was given due to his love for books. Prospero delivers a lecture to his young pupils who come to visit him at home. He has a magnificent statue of Ariel in the room where he talks to his students. Prospero honestly believes in the energy,

intelligence and capacity of young people to fight for ideas; he also believes in their perseverance to pursue the noblest ideals. Shakespeare's character is, for this aged teacher, the symbol of the important instinct of perfection; therefore, it fits his purpose to suggest sublime thoughts to his students, for the triumph of Ariel means "idealism and order in life", "noble inspiration of thoughts", "good taste in arts", "heroism in action" (119).⁴

We do not come to know much about Marina Carr's character Ariel, but at least one of her aspects is emphasised: her youth. Her sacrifice is the symbolic sacrifice of youth. Moreover, if we think about Fermoy's characteristics, it can be said that this ambitious man is destroying not only youth, but also other qualities attributed to Shakespeare's Ariel by Rodó. By murdering his daughter Ariel, Fermoy is also giving up feelings and reason and is intensifying his obsession for power, whatever the means employed to reach his aim. He goes down in the human scale and retains only Caliban's malignity and sensuality, for Ariel's death corresponds to Caliban's triumph.

Another idea by Rodó that can be applied to interpret Carr's play is the link he establishes between youth and ancient Greece. According to him, there was a time when the attributes of human youth became the attributes of a whole civilisation: glorious Greece. This same idea had been previously stated by Hegel, as explained by Luis Diez Del Corral: "Greek life is a true accomplishment of youth: Achilles, the young man created by poetry, opens that age. Alexander the Great, the royal young man, closes it" (49).⁵ According to Rodó, Greece represents the young soul and its heroic deeds and magnificent culture were made possible because the nation could count on the enthusiasm of youth. This could be the connection between the title Marina Carr chose for her play and the "pretexts" she employed as sources: a synthesis of the winged spirit of Ariel and the youth of Greece.

When youth is suffocated, what remains is a society of old, sclerotic people, represented in Marina Carr's play by the elder Catholic priests whom Boniface, Fermoy's brother, takes care of and about whom he

tells ridiculous stories. None of the religious men seem to be sane: Caugh Celestius trying to hit Aquinus's head with a hammer; Aquinus pretending he has a horse that follows him everywhere; Bonaventura, whose only concern is Billie Holiday and the desire to be young again, saying in his critical moments that he is not a Catholic any longer. Boniface, a monk and former alcoholic, feels old himself – an image of the decadent Church, which has no power either to oppose the arbitrariness practiced by the State, or to give advice and save the family. Boniface feels regret and blames himself because he did not leave the seminary to look after his younger brother when their mother was killed by their father. The tragedy had happened thirty-five years before, when Boniface was only seventeen. The monk is sure that his brother Fermoy, a little boy at the time, was deeply affected by the crime he witnessed, but Boniface does not know to what extent this trauma continues to affect his brother in his adult life. Boniface is too weak to stop the meteoric political rise of Fermoy, who has singular ideas about religion to the point of being blasphemous. Fermoy, representative of the State, defends the idea that Christ did not die to save mankind but was instead put to death by us, thus provoking God's wrath and His desire to vengeance against us, a God not at all inclined to pardon. Aged and weakened, the Church is unable to oppose to these outrageous arguments which are immediately and smartly refuted by the State, as shown in the following dialogue between Fermoy and Verona, a character who is conducting an interview with him:

VERONA. The Church has spoken out against you on several occasions, and I quote a recent statement from the Archbishop's office. 'What the Minister proposes is the antithesis of the nature of God. What he proposes is ancient, barbaric, and will take us back to the caves'.

FERMOY. What does he mane take us back to the caves? Does he think we've left em?

(Ariel, 43)

Rodó thinks that the Christian idea is “an essentially juvenile inspiration”, “the youth of soul”, “a living dream”, a “merry enjoyment”; Christianity has triumphed because it opposes the “loveliness of its inner youth” to the “stoics’ strictness and the “mundanes’ decrepitude” (30).⁶ Fermoy Fitzgerald distances himself from the traditional conception of God and professes a faith in a personal god who can provide material success. In this sense, he is exclusively materialistic.

T. S. Eliot, expressing his ideas about liberalism in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, states that “The more highly industrialized the country, the more easily a materialistic philosophy will flourish in it, and the more deadly that philosophy will be”. Moreover, “the tendency of unlimited industrialism is to create bodies of men and women – of all classes – detached from tradition, alienated from religion, and susceptible to mass suggestion . . . ” (21). This idea is similar to the one proposed by Rodó. Commenting on the spectacular economic development obtained by the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century, Rodó believes that the pursuit of material progress cannot be the permanent condition of humanity; instead it should be a step to achieve a high spiritual life. In a development of Positivism, the author remarks that Auguste Comte called attention to the danger that menaces super-developed civilisations: a state of social improvement facilitates the existence of narrow and deformed minds. Although this is not a new idea, it fits three characters in Marina Carr’s play, since they show just the kind of minds mentioned by Comte: Fermoy, a corrupted politician, his daughter Elaine, and Verona, the interviewer. The three of them take part in a combined game to move and convince people. The political game and the manipulation of truth make the interview part of this materialistic world, in which the only concern is to keep the privilege of occupying high positions in society.

Fermoy does not hesitate to answer questions about his private life, including the ones about the disappearance of his daughter Ariel. Of course he is not sincere, since this matter is just part of a carefully prepared scheme. Fermoy’s behaviour exemplifies what happens in our “dramatized society”, as Raymond Williams calls a society in which

not only actors play their role. Also, "Specific men are magnified to temporary universality, and so active and complex is this process that we are often invited to see them rehearsing their roles, or discussing their scenarios" (Williams 17). When the interview is over, Fermoy, Elaine and Verona discuss what they will keep and what they will cut off from the interview in a cold, professional way, without any feeling of compassion for a missing member of the family:

FERMOY. Elaine, what do ya think?

ELAINE. Three things. Ya can't admih ya love power. Thah has to go. God. Pape's fierce touchy about God. We may pare thah back. And three, Ariel. Ariel's your trump card. Play ud. Ya nade to go wud the emotion of ud more. Thah's whah pape wants, details of your personal life. Don't be afraid to give ud to em. Don't be afraid to give em Ariel.

VERONA. No, no, the Ariel section was fine. If you want people to feel for you, you hold back a bit yourself. Your instincts are spot-on there, Minister.

(*Ariel*, 45)

Elaine, particularly, at the age of twenty-two, is not a young spirit any longer, but a loyal follower of her father, whom she loves passionately. They have narrow minds, just the opposite of Shakespeare's Ariel, who represents the possibility of freedom and flights of the spirit.

At the time of *Ariel's* first production at the Abbey Theatre, Fintan O'Toole published a review on the play in *The Irish Times*, reproduced later in Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan's volume about Marina Carr's work. The critic says that from "the very first minutes of Marina Carr's new play *Ariel*, we know we are in a crumbling world", and that "the three pillars of the old Ireland – Church, State and Family – are in an advanced state of decay" (89). A crumbling and decadent world indeed, pervaded with resentments, blood and death, a picture that

reminds us of William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming", particularly the first four lines: "The bloody-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere / The ceremony of innocence is drowned; / The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity" (203). The poem refers to Christ's prediction of his second coming, but the poet blends it with the description of the beast of Apocalypse. Commenting on these lines by Yeats, Joseph Campbell says that they imply we are coming to the end of the last of Christian cycles and that both at the end of a cycle and at the beginning of another, suffering and turbulence are inevitable. Yeats's poem seems to match the reality shown in *Ariel*: turbulence still in process, the period of crisis between the end and the beginning of a new era. This period of crisis is, in Carr's play, represented by materialism, by calculated actions to achieve power, by the mockery on social problems, by extreme individualism and the incapacity of calmly pondering on the best solution for a difficult situation. Fermoy Fitzgerald, Elaine, Frances and Verona are representative of this world in crisis. On the other hand, Stephen may represent this new era.

Stephen Fitzgerald is the only character in the play who tries to escape from that turbulence and from the doomed heritage prefigured by Hannafin, Fermoy's political opponent:

HANNAFIN. The pipe drames of the self-med. You were forged in a bloodbah, Fitzgerald, and the son allas carries the father somewhere inside of him. I know that much, he carries the Da inside of him sure as he carries hees kidneys, the family jewels, the heart. And ud's time the pable beyond this parish knew the gruesome blacksmith hommered you to earth and the symmetry can be predicted from there. (*Ariel*, 33)

Stephen's role in the plot is secondary, an indication of his little involvement with the conflicts within the Fitzgerald family. Minor characters, however, can provide an insight for the apprehension of something that really counts. This is what Marina Carr thinks about them:

If people are coming to see the plays and if they get something out of it, even if it is a very minor character – and very often it is – *that* is what speaks, not necessarily the hero or the heroine. I find that, with plays that I like, very often it is the minor characters. It can be a line just thrown away – that's the thing that really destroys you. (qtd. in Shira, 58-9)

In Act I of *Ariel*, Stephen is just a little boy and has just four lines, in which he expresses his feelings of love for his mother and fear of his father. In fact, Stephen is passive, since he depends on Frances to agree with his desire to be breast-fed or to be permitted to “lie up against” her. Since he is asleep most of the time, he does not take part in the family's affairs around him. He is sleeping or – as his sister Elaine believes – is pretending to be sleeping, while she reveals her love for their father and her hate for their mother, and Fermoy quarrels with Frances, accusing her of not fulfilling her role as a wife; he does not even react when his mother tries to see a resemblance between James, his half-brother, and him.

In Act II, which begins with a scene that shows Fermoy as a successful politician, and ends with his death, Stephen, now twenty-years old, has an even smaller role. He does not complain about the little attention he receives from his father, who is always busy. He has learnt that his father's attempts at making their relationship better are vain promises.

In Act III, Stephen's role is more extensive. He appears as a conscious young man who tries to understand the circumstances. He speaks to Elaine, listens to her and answers her questions. He believes that all people have something good deep inside, and that they must have reasons to act the way they do. It is difficult for him to equate his father with a murderer; he does not hate his mother as Elaine does; he assumed the family's business for a while just to help Frances, who is waiting for trial. Unlike Elaine, who tries to find a difference between the two murders, the one committed by their father, “a crime of eternihy”, and the one committed by their mother, “a low, blood-

spahhered, knife-frenzied revenge" (*Ariel*, 64), Stephen is not disturbed by all those disputes. Fermoy and Frances are his parents and deserve respect, one can forgive their mistakes and the little attention they gave to their children. However, he is not going to stay by his family, he has his own ideas and feels free to make decisions for his own life.

Ariel points to the necessity of renewal. The many problems we are faced with in our contemporary world demand a persistent evaluation of the dominant values which rule our lives. Material progress is not to be condemned, but spirituality and ideality must prevail. The door is opened with Stephen's gesture: he leaves his father, his mother, his sister Elaine, and the family's business behind. Instead of dedicating his life to the cement factory, a symbol of immobility, Stephen, twenty-years old, chooses freedom, by turning his back on that crumbled world shown in Marina Carr's play. His decision means that he has achieved independence from his parents' legacy, and, without denying his heritage, he can follow his dreams. Stephen takes the place of Ariel, his sister, and we can say that with him there is hope, since youth is not entirely suffocated.

The collective youth of Greece cannot be revived, but it is possible to dream, at least, as Prospero says in Rodó's essay, with the appearance of a generation able to bring back youthful idealism and enthusiasm for life. Surely, all the violence and materialism shown in Marina Carr's play create the desire for a better world, ruled by superior feelings and commanded by the winged spirit of Ariel.

Notes

1. "Pretext", meaning the text upon which the intertext is based, is the word used by Manfred Pfister in his essay "How Postmodern is Intertextuality?" (In Plett, Heinrich F. *Intertextuality*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991, 207-224).
2. "[...] conviver com textos do passado é 'um diálogo com os mortos' [...]: todo texto se relaciona com textos de outros autores e muda o enfoque em relação a eles [...] ele caracteriza o texto dramático como um produto tardio, fruto de uma crise. Enquanto testemunho de uma fase de transição, o texto dramático esboçaria os

novos tempos com base na experiência dos tempos passados [...]” (Röhl 27-28). All quotations taken from the books in Portuguese and Spanish (e.g. Röhl's, Corral's, Rodó's) were translated into English by the author of this paper.

3. “*Ariel es el imperio de la razón y el sentimiento sobre los bajos estímulos de la irracionalidad; es el entusiasmo generoso, el móvil alto y desinteresado en la acción, la espiritualidad de la cultura, la vivacidad y la gracia de la inteligencia, el término ideal a que asciende la selección humana, rectificando en el hombre superior los tenaces vestigios de Calibán, símbolo de sensualidad y de torpeza, con el cincel perseverante de la vida*” (Rodó 23-4).
4. “*Ariel triunfante significa idealidad y orden en la vida, noble inspiración en el pensamiento, [...] buen gusto en arte, heroísmo en la acción [...]*” (Rodó 119).]
5. “*La vida griega – añadiría Hegel – es una verdadera hazaña de juventud. Aquiles, el joven creado por la poesía, la inaugura. Alejandro Magno, el joven real, le pone término*” (Corral 49).
6. [*El cristianismo naciente es ... un quadro de...]* *juventud del alma [...]* *de un vivo sueño [...]* [*derrama en el espíritu ...su ...ingenua]* *alegría de vivir [...]* *porque ellos triunfaron oponiendo el encanto de su juventud interior [...] a la severidad de los estoicos y a la decrepitud de los mundanos.*” (Rodó 30).

References

- Campbell, Joseph. *O Poder do Mito*. Trans. Carlos Felipe Moisés. São Paulo: Associação Palas Athena, 1990.
- Carr, Marina. *Ariel*. Ireland: The Gallery Press, 2002.
- _____. “Dealing with the dead”. *Irish University Review* 28.1 (1998), 190-191.
- _____. *On Raftery's Hill*. London: Faber and Faber, 2000.
- _____. *Plays 1: Low in the Dark, The Mai, Portia Coughlan, By the Bog of Cats*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999.
- Corral, Luis Diez Del. *La Función del Mito Clasico en la Literatura Contemporanea*. Madrid: Gredos, 1957.

Eliot, T. Stearn. *The Idea of a Christian Society*. London: Faber and Faber, 1954.

Ésquilo. *Oréstia: Agamênon, Coéforas, Eumênides*. Trans. Mário da Gama Kury. 6.ed. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2003.

Eurípides. *Ifigênia em Áulis*. Trans. Mário da Gama Kury. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 1993.

McDonald, Marianne. "Classics as Celtic Firebrands: Greek Tragedy, Irish Playwrights and Colonialism". *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*. Ed. Eamonn Jordan. Dublin: Carysfort, 2000, 16-26.

Merriman, Victor. "Poetry Shite". *The Theatre of Marina Carr: 'Before Rules Was Made'*. Eds. Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan. Dublin: Carysfort, 2003, 145-159.

O'Toole, Fintan. "Review of *Ariel*". *The Theatre of Marina Carr: 'Before Rules Was Made'*. Eds. Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan. Dublin: Carysfort, 2003, 89-91.

Rodó, José Enrique. *Ariel*. Madrid: Mestas, 2002.

Röhl, Ruth. *O Teatro de Heiner Müller: Modernidade e Pós-Modernidade*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1997.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1994.

Sihra, Melissa. "Marina Carr in Conversation with Melissa Sihra". *Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners*. Ed. Lilian Chambers et al. Dublin: Carysfort, 2001, 55-63.

Teevan, Colin. "Introduction to *Iph*". *Iph: After Euripides' Iphigeneia in Aulis*. London: Nick Hern Books, 1999.

Williams, Raymond. *Writing in Society*. London/New York: Verso, 1991.

Yeats, William Butler. "The Second Coming". *Selected Poems and Three Plays of William Butler Yeats*. 3rd. ed. New York: McMillan, 1962, 89-90.