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In *Deirdre Madden, New Critical Perspectives*, professors Anne Fogarty and Marisol Morales-Ladrón have joined efforts to produce the first collection of essays devoted to Irish novelist and short story writer Deirdre Madden. This carefully edited book, published by Manchester University Press, explores the multi-faceted legacy of Madden with the aim to “allow a comprehensive engagement with her work overall” (2022: 9). This is a much-needed contribution to the Irish literary scholarship because Madden’s work has gone largely unnoticed despite her uninterrupted career as a novelist, and the various awards that she has won.

Deirdre Madden was born into a Northern Irish Catholic family, studied English at Trinity College Dublin and then a Masters in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. Married to poet Harry Clifton, she spent extended periods of time in France and Italy before returning to Ireland in 1994. Her first novel, *Hidden Symptoms*, published in 1986, was soon followed by *The Birds of the Innocent Wood* (1988). Since then, a sustained career has given birth to *Remembering Light and Stone* (1992), *Nothing is Black* (1994), *One by One in the Darkness* (1996) *Authenticity* (2002), *Molly Fox’s Birthday* (2008), and *Time Present and Time Past* (2013). Added to these novels, she has also written three books for

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children: *Snakes' Elbows* (2005), *Thanks for Telling Me, Emily* (2007), and *Jasper and the Green Marvel* (2011).

The quality of her writing is undisputable, and has deserved important awards, such as the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature for *Hidden Symptoms* and the Somerset Maugham Prize for *Remembering Light and Stone*. Added to that, *One by One* and *Molly Fox's Birthday* were both shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction (previously the Orange Prize for Fiction) in 1997 and 2009, respectively.

Undoubtedly, one element that defines Madden's lifelong trajectory as a writer is the long-time span of her production, between 1986 and 2013. Although her visibility has increased in recent years, Fogarty and Morales-Ladrón note her international reputation outside Ireland and her general neglect among Irish criticism. This oversight, they argue, is due to a number of reasons, such as the general under-representation of female writers in the Irish literary canon, the longevity of her career, and the difficult categorisation of her work. Hence, the editors devote significant effort in the introduction to contextualise the author and her oeuvre, a necessary step before delving into the intricacies of her topics and style.

An outstanding feature of this volume is the editors' knowledge of the existing critical scholarship on Madden's work. This indisputably meticulous task is evident in the thorough review of the scholarly attention given to Madden's work and it must be read as a valuable act of condensation to situate and set the ground for further study.

Regarding topics, the editors are cautious to label Madden as a Northern Irish writer as they underline that her early novels fall outside the parameters of Northern Irish Troubles fiction. Admitting that this may have been the reason why they have received scant attention, they nevertheless affirm that Madden's novels concentrate on the emotional responses to the Northern conflict of her characters, both individually and collectively. In like vein, Corder had insisted on Madden's focus on "the philosophical rather than the socio-political arena" (2014: 175). Added to that, her work is interspersed with other topics too, among which the interrogation of identity and gender politics, dislocation, and the transcending function of art, may be included. As a result, Patterson describes Madden "as a novelist, of her time and yet timeless" (2013), and Fogarty and Morales-Ladrón conclude that the breadth and depth of subject matter covered by her work demonstrates the "controlled introspection of her plots" (2022: 5). This complex and rich introduction to Madden's work is followed by a multi-focus approach and the volume is divided into three main parts, each devoted to distinctive issues. Part I concentrates on Madden's treatment of memory, trauma and the Troubles, and the ways her characters struggle with dreadful events. Stefanie Lehner inaugurates this section with a detailed approach to *Hidden Symptoms*, *One by One in the Darkness* and *Time Present and Time Past*, to explore Maddens's ability to revisit traumatic past events through visual strategies. Frequently, these take the shape of images, photographs and family pictures in what Lehner has called "prose pictures" (2022: 19). It is their emotional power what allows

confrontation and reconciliation with the past, and a somewhat symbolic openness to the future, Lehner argues. *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness* are also Elizabeth Chase's object of study and her contribution concentrates on the relation between memory and identity, and the ethical implications of a true encounter with the Other. In her analysis, Chase demonstrates how Madden's novels steer towards the individual as an entity worth remembering, and demand an "individualised idea of commemoration" (2022: 43). Through Madden's deep and sensitive approach to trauma, the reader's attitude towards the Troubles is challenged, and "the ethical ties between individuals" (2022: 48) are brought to the fore, Chase concludes. Accordingly, Catriona Clutterbuck concentrates on *Hidden Symptoms*, Madden's first novel, and reviews thoroughly her protagonist's struggle with existence after the death of her sibling, Francis, to come to terms with herself and the others ultimately. Hence, this chapter delves minutely into Teresa's anger and isolation, and unveils the liberating role of loss and suffering that leads the protagonist to transcendence and healing. Clutterbuck's insightful contribution concludes that this novel inaugurates Madden's use of grief as a transformative tool, a device frequently found in her novels, and often associated with orphanhood. Finally, this section is completed with Brian Cliff's examination of *One by One in the Darkness*. As in the previous contributions, Cliff's study reveals Madden's use of traumatic events, such as Charlie's murder by mistake, to revolve around grief and survival, because Madden's interest lies in "the process of living out those events" (2022: 67), he affirms. His analysis notes the nonlinear direction of the narrative, a device that exposes Emily's troubled acceptance of her father's murder, and challenges the official accounts of the Troubles at the same time. With deep insight, Cliff approaches the text critically and demonstrates Madden's engagement with class issues and political activism in order to destabilise fixed notions of identity.

In Part II, the volume pays special attention to Madden's use of art and objects in her work as aesthetic means to approach the transience of life. They, too, play an instrumental role to remember past traumatic events. Sylvie Mikowski's study of objects in Madden's artist novels discloses the author's critical approach to materialism and her preoccupation with consumerism and accumulation, especially detectable in the *Künstlerromane Nothing is Black* and *Authenticity*. At the same time, it scrutinizes the pivotal role played by objects to (un)define characters' identities, as exemplified in *Molly Fox's Birthday*. In her study, Mikowski brings to light Madden's ability to link objects with the creative process to reach "the most intimate and inaccessible memory" (2022: 101), which is, ultimately, the author's way to search for authenticity. Then, the relation between identity and age is the object of study of Heather Ingman, who selects *Authenticity* to explore Madden's preoccupation with remaining faithful to the artistic vocation in contemporary Western societies. Her examination of ageing in the novel unveils the key role of culture in the shaping of this

concept, and the diversity of experiences ageing artists face when materialist values come into play. *Authenticity* is also selected by Hedwig Schwall, whose study complements Ingman's contribution from a very different perspective. Drawing on Bolla's theory of object relations, Schwall scrutinizes Madden's characters' psyche and delves thoroughly into the author's interest in the relationship between inner and outer life. Again, it is through trauma revisitation that Madden explores its healing properties, and brings to the fore the thin line that separates consciousness from the unknown. In this novel, Schwall concludes, Madden succeeds in articulating objects as vehicles of self-exploration. The human wish to transcend subjectivity is Teresa Casal's object of interest in three selected novels: *Hidden Symptoms*, *One by One in the Darkness*, and *Molly Fox's Birthday*. Casal turns her attention to Madden's use of ethics and aesthetics for the sake of peacebuilding through empathy and recognition of the Other and the self. This quest, also explored somewhat differently in Chase's contribution, is made evident by Casal in her exhaustive and convincing study of Madden's call for engagement. On a different note, Julie Anne Stevens turns to Madden's interest in childhood, which can be found not only in her children's books, but also in several adult novels, among which *Remembering Light and Stone* outstands. To illuminate Madden's critical approach to constructed notions of childhood, Stevens concentrates on her use of language, especially irony and parody, and how the animals and objects present in her works serve as portable property subject to trade. Stevens' study is illuminating in highlighting the interconnections between Madden's adult fiction and her children's books.

The last part of this volume takes home and place as the central subjects of research, and begins with Jerry White's look back into *Nothing is Black*, Madden's 1994 novel, to uncover its prophetic approach to contemporary Ireland. In the novel, class, religion, rurality and Europe are intimately linked with history and identity, and Madden's treatment of the emerging transformations in the country "evoke large-scale problems through a focus on tiny details" (2022: 168), White affirms. To enlarge the understanding of Madden's use of home, Elke D'hoker addresses its spatial imaginaries and situates her study within contemporary critical approaches to the concept, considering it both a physical and a social place. Her review of Madden's production under this lens contributes significantly to fathom the contradictory and shifting relation between her characters' sense of belonging and the physical and emotional space they inhabit. Madden's uneasy relation with place is thoroughly studied in Anne Fogarty's approach to *The Birds of the Innocent Wood* and *Remembering Light and Stone*, where she analyses how Gothic themes and motifs shape the architectural spaces represented therein, and relate with the protagonists' tormented interiority. Furthermore, Fogarty's informed study demonstrates Madden's ability to deconstruct and reconstruct the Gothic and situate her female characters trapped in inescapable and disturbing spaces. Finally, this section is closed by Derek Hand's appraisal of Madden's recent novels *Authenticity*, *Molly Fox's Birthday* and *Time Present and Time Past* as challenging responses

to the Celtic Tiger era. Hand suggests that they should be read as a series where Madden engages with contemporary Ireland from the personal, the domestic and the ordinary. As he shows, her work singles out from her contemporaries' in its introspective nature, hence allowing her characters escape the anxieties of contemporary rapidity. Here, too, art and life hold each other to find existential meaning.

The volume closes with an interview with Deirdre Madden. Here, Morales-Ladrón guides the conversation wisely towards key issues in this author's universe, such as time, transience and memory, as well as the formal intricacies of her narrative. Undoubtedly, this engaging piece is of value to scholars interested in Madden's work.

In sum, Fogarty and Morales-Ladrón's volume offers a comprehensive and well-informed collection of essays about Madden's "quiet and subtle brilliance" (O'Riordan, 2013) as a writer, and the intricacies of her oeuvre. It is a long-needed piece that may be of interest not only to specialists in the field of Irish studies, but also to those interested in the broader exploration of memory, trauma and place.

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