



Fogarty, Anne & Morales-Ladrón, Marisol (editors). *Deirdre Madden. New Critical Perspectives*. Manchester University Press, June 2022, pp.280. £80.00.- Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-5261-1892-9

Deirdre Madden's *oeuvre* is reputed by scholars as outstanding, original, and "magnificent" as Frank McGuinness states in his Preface to *Deirdre Madden. New Critical Perspectives*, Manchester University Press, June 2022. McGuinness praises the author as well as her novels, from her beginnings back in the 1980s to the present, shows his admiration for her work and presents Deirdre Madden as someone who "knows her stuff," selecting, crafting, and giving the right and original shape and content to the stories she chooses to tell as the artisan she indeed is. A writer in control of her art all throughout her career. Revisiting some of her well-known novels –*Hidden Symptoms*, *Nothing is Black* and *Authenticity*– McGuinness anticipates some of the key issues about her work that will be developed in detail in the following articles by highly reputed scholars from Ireland, Europe, the U.S.A. and Canada. Her concern for issues of place and time, the relevance of memory, the fragility of humanity.

However true the preceding statements are, in the Introduction to *Deirdre Madden. New Critical Perspectives*, the editors of this impressive volume on Madden's career seek to establish that her excellence in writing has not received the full attention it deserved by critics and reviewers, especially in Ireland, even though her novels have been translated into many different languages and are regularly taught in universities around the world. To compensate this lack of balance they commissioned a comprehensive set of essays which account for almost forty years of "writing Ireland, especially Northern Ireland, Belfast, Donegal, The Troubles, and in doing so also writing about social change and upheaval in the South." Madden's critical eye and the way in which she weaves her narratives is a recurrent motif in almost all essays. Madden's novels- the only genre she has devoted herself to- as this book strongly proposes, are novels of being but mostly of becoming, pointing at the multiple possibilities of the self in relation to time and place. Secrets, lies, loneliness but above all Madden's understanding of human failure make her novels unique; they depict survivors, overcoming-or at least attempting to do so- traumas of different kinds, real traumas experienced by real people.

Madden's writing style and versatility is suggested in several of the essays written in this collection together with the echoes that her novels bring of eighteenth and nineteenth century novelists and their concerns and topical choices, such as Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, and George Eliot but also of twentieth century modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield and even of postmodernist ones as may be the case of Jean Rhys. Despite the fact that Madden has gradually achieved more attention from critics and thus more visibility, the fact that her writing is difficult to fit a given category has played against her acquiring greater prominence.

The first Part of the book "Memory, trauma, and the Troubles" collects essays by Stefanie Lehner, Elizabeth Chase, Catriona Clutterbuck and Brian Cliff who, through a careful reading and analysis of Madden's novels *Hidden Symptoms*, *One by One in the Darkness*, and *Time Present and Time Past*, approach the complexities of forgetting and remembering the past, especially when the past involves traumatic experiences such as The Troubles in Ireland, but not limited to them. Other mechanisms related to memory and its way of coping with difficult times or hardships are also examined.

Part II, "Art and objects" in Madden's works comprises five articles written by Sylvie Mikowski Heather Ingman, Hedwig Schwall, Teresa Casal and Julie Anne Stevens which explore Madden's preference for art, artists and their productions but also the relation between art, identity and the psychology of human beings.

In the last Part of this comprehensive volume, "Home and place" Jerry White, Elke D'hoker, Anne Fogarty, and Derek Hand explore *Nothing is Black*, *Hidden Symptoms*, *The Birds of the Innocent Wood*, *Authenticity*, *One by One in the Darkness*, *Time Present and Time Past*, and *Remembering Light and Stone*, from the perspective of the concepts of home and place. The section ends with an illuminating interview with Deirdre Madden by Marisol Morales-Ladrón which, while recovering past interviews given by the novelist also demystifies several assumptions that critics or readers alike might have made and taken for granted about her writing, sources of inspiration, preferred topics and the relationship between the artist's personal life and the lives of her characters.

Madden has also proved an amazing writer of novels for children and young adults, and in relation to this there is one aspect I would like to mention not as a weakness but as something this reviewer would have liked to see expanded. Given the importance of literature as a vehicle to transmit values to the younger generations, other essays beyond the one included in this volume could have asserted Madden's deconstructive way of presenting a more egalitarian, less violent world. Her children's novels might well be analyzed from both a sociological and pedagogical perspective and considered as suitable readings to form

part of a given educational curriculum due to the fact that they entertain and amuse while at the same time teach deep lessons of conviviality.

Last but not least, selecting “Autumnal Fruits” (1968) by Anne Yeats for the cover is deemed a perfect choice since it announces that fruits are not only collected in summer but all along the seasons of our lives and especially when they are not perhaps even expected.

Deirdre Madden. New Critical Perspectives is a must not only for those scholars, followers of this exceptional writer’s works and impressive career, but for literary critics, lecturers on Irish contemporary literature, and Irish literature graduate and post-graduate students. Also for Irish Studies cohorts that seek to “understand” Ireland, its contemporary history and culture and who will, through Madden’s incredibly well-crafted works, find answers to the many questions, this volume asks and attempts successfully to answer.

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