# Political Violence in Northern Ireland: The Violent Loss of Male Figures in Deirdre Madden's *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness*

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## Abstract

In this work I intend to examine Deirdre Madden's *Hidden Symptoms* (1986) and *One by One in the Darkness* (1996) taking into consideration the historical, material and ideological contexts in which these novels were produced. I will specifically focus upon the male characters, paying particular attention to the way in which their deaths are naturalized through a feminization process. Likewise, I will scrutinize their relation with concepts such as hegemonic, alternative/subaltern masculinities and patriarchal order, seminal to this article. These two works have been widely analyzed by criticism and the conclusions reached range from considering them as deeply conservative novels to regarding them as typically female products or clearly postmodern texts. My approach comes closer to the earlier analysis although adding meaningful nuances.

**Keywords:** Deirdre Madden, Northern Irish Fiction, Hegemonic and Subaltern Masculinities, Victimhood, Feminization of Men.

# Violencia política en Irlanda del Norte: La pérdida violenta de las figuras masculinas en *Hidden Symptoms* y *One by One in the Darkness* de Deirdre Madden

## Resumen

La pretensión de este artículo no es otra que la de examinar las novelas de Deirdre Madden *Hidden Symptoms* (1986) y *One by One in the Darkness* (1996)

teniendo en consideración el contexto histórico, material e ideológico en el que fueron producidas. El análisis se centrará de manera especial en los personajes masculinos y en la forma en que sus muertes son naturalizadas a través de un proceso de feminización. Asimismo, se tratará su relación con los conceptos de hegemonía, masculinidades subalternas/alternativas y orden patriarcal, todos claves para este artículo. Estas dos novelas han sido ampliamente analizadas por la crítica y las conclusiones alcanzadas abarcan desde una consideración de las mismas como obras profundamente conservadoras, pasando por valorarlas como productos típicamente femeninos o bien como textos claramente posmodernos. Nuestro enfoque es cercano al anterior análisis, aunque con la inclusión de significativos matices.

**Palabras clave:** Deirdre Madden, ficción norirlandesa, masculinidades hegemónicas y subalternas, victimismo, feminización de los hombres.

Literature, like any other superstructural production or cultural artifact, takes part in the ideological, material and social context to which it belongs. Not only does it passively reflect that milieu, but also contributes to its shaping.[1] Thus, the literary text becomes what Frederic Jameson has called a "socially symbolic act" which literary criticism must use to disclose the "political unconscious" behind its production (Jameson, 20-21).[2] It is not surprising, then, that, since the end of the 1960s, a great number of literary works, those socially symbolic acts, published in Ireland, have dealt with an extremely relevant political issue, the conflict in the North. However, those creations have not always succeeded in making the texts become symbolic solutions to real but unconsciously felt social and cultural problems. According to Michael Storey (10), there have been more than five hundred works of fiction published between the end of the 1960s and 2004 which deal with the so-called 'Troubles,' along with a significant number between that year up until now, and there are scholars who have pointed out that a significant number of those works do not reach, from a political perspective, their potential as

subversive literary products.[3] This seemingly depoliticized literary trend, which commonly highlights the private sphere of individuals and tends to present the conflict as an unnatural event that breaks up an ordered world, conceals a strong political stand. Either consciously or unconsciously, these works and their authors contribute to uphold the hegemonic neoliberal order which draws on any strategy to prevail over alternative, subaltern or subversive modes that struggle to unveil and transform the political unconscious which the Establishment strives to hide in its own interest.[4]

Feminism has become a subversive tool in literature since a gendered perspective implies the questioning, and perhaps the transformation, of the hegemonic patriarchal order.[5] Within these parameters, subversion may take place in every woman's refusal to accept any imposed truths on her. The feminist motto "the personal is political" also lies behind these postulates, since the interrelation of the private and public spheres makes individual acts, literary works in this case, not only instruments of self-awareness but also agents of political change while, at the same time, politics deeply affect and condition individuals on a daily basis. However, and as far as feminist writing is concerned in the overwhelmingly conservative North of Ireland, subversive models that may shatter the Northern Irish political unconscious are still hard to find in literary productions due, among other factors, to the prevalence of violent masculinities as social role models. However, we can perceive a certain evolution in some of these works in the last two decades, as we witness how Northern Irish literature is slowly making the transition from a prevailing violent hegemonic masculinity to a more sophisticated, money-centered mode that has seemingly displaced the ideal of manliness in the North.[6]

With all the aforementioned ideas in mind, this article will concentrate on the implications that, as a result of political violence in Ulster, the absence of male figures has on the two Deirdre Madden's novels that explicitly deal with the Troubles: *Hidden Symptoms* (1986) and *One by One in the Darkness* (1996). *Hidden Symptoms* tells the story of Theresa and her attempts to cope with her life after the murder of her twin brother, Francis, during a random attack by loyalist paramilitaries. Her grief becomes almost insurmountable, affecting

her relationships with both her mother and friends. Her religious beliefs also stagger as she undergoes an internal and moral conflict. *One by One in the Darkness* recounts the efforts of the three Quinn sisters and their mother to overcome the death of their father and husband Charlie at the hands of a loyalist commando. Together with this story-line, the novel also focuses on the particular implications that Kate's pregnancy has, not only for the whole family but also for Northern Ireland, as a symbol of hope in the future.

Before going any further, it is convenient to briefly allude to recent critical evaluations of both novels. Some scholars have criticized Madden's lack of commitment to make her novels become subversive weapons that disclose the Northern Irish political unconscious. For that reason, critics like Gerry Smyth deem Madden's *Hidden Symptoms* "a deeply conservative and reactionary novel" since "individual insight is won at the expense of any larger political vision" making these individuals engage with the 'Troubles' only from apolitical and ahistorical perspectives (Smyth 119). Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (238-58) follows Smyth's view when arguing that Madden's interest is not directed at political violence, but at its consequences on individuals, thus stripping her fictional characters' experiences of any historical or political content. Furthermore, and from a feminist perspective, neither does Sylvie Mikowski appreciate any sign of subversion in Madden's works since she does not observe any kind of alternative to the traditional roles imposed on females by the Northern Irish patriarchal society.

On the other hand, other scholars have clearly emphasized that the political reading of Madden's novel is not as important as her insight on individuals' grief and their attempts to survive after the violent loss of a male beloved one. Graham Dawson underscores the personal implications of violence, but not the political ones. He believes that Madden's writing works

> as a means to explore the inner worlds of her grieving fictional victims as they negotiate a social world permeated by cultural representations of victims, interpersonal relationships structured by attitudes towards victimhood, and mores which determine what can and

> cannot be told and heard about their experiences of violent bereavement. (145)[7]

Contrary to the opinion of critics like Smyth, Kennedy-Andrews or Mikowski, Marisol Morales Ladrón ponders over the elements of subversion in both Madden's works because of their challenge to "meanings and received assumptions that go beyond the wrongs of a segregated society" (79). Thus, according to Morales Ladrón, Madden deconstructs traditional identitarian binaries that have subjugated Northern Irish society for ages. Maeve Eileen Davey adds a very valuable remark concerning another subversive element in Madden, that is to say, the male body becoming a victim so that the stereotyped image of white male virility and strength becomes an "outmoded, colonial façade", which, at the same time, harks back to Caroline Magennis's description of the evolution of hegemonic masculinities in Northern Ireland. In a similar vein, Michael Parker supports the subversive element in Madden's novels. He believes that Deirdre Madden uses the background of the Troubles to question traditional and assumed truths through strategies of disruption in her narrations. The fact that both novels deal with the sudden death of a beloved one, as the aftermath of the political turmoil, is not reason enough to focus on the sociopolitical context that provoked those deaths, but to delve into the consequences those casualties have on individuals. According to Kennedy-Andrews, the outlook of all these scholars has something in common: they are framed within postmodern criticism where individuals' inner experiences count above any other type of happenings, where the interest, in the Northern Irish case, "is not in the act of violence but in the psychological effects of violence" on individuals (Kennedy-Andrews, 153).

According to Caroline Magennis (8), masculinity can be defined as "a series of practices that are regarded as the ideal for men [and characteristic] in a given socio-cultural context". Following Magennis and also Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony' as the active struggle for dominance (245-46), I will define hegemonic masculinity as that mode of masculinity (behaviour, attitude, social standing) that prevails over other expressions of this same notion which may be considered as subaltern. It also acts as a means to secure the gender order with respect to female subordination. Connell and

Messerschmidt (829-59) lie behind Magennis's formulation, though further reflections proposed by these scholars must also be taken into consideration. For both researchers the ideal mode of behaviour that hegemonic masculinities stand for is simply a set of patterns to be followed, as no man entirely fulfills the model. They also highlight the constant evolution of the hegemonic model of masculinity as the need to accommodate to challenges coming from both alternative/subaltern masculinities and women's resistance to patriarchy.

The hegemonic Northern Irish masculinity at the time both novels were written has been labeled as "traditional" (Connell, 10): men are presented as providers for their families, participants in the public sphere and, if necessary, administrators of their dominance through violence. Within the context of the Northern Irish conflict, most literary discourses portraying alternative or subaltern masculinities found themselves subsumed by the hegemonic one. However, as time went on, mainly from the 90s and, above all, since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, this hegemonic masculinity referred above started to be seriously challenged and led the way to new definitions of what being a man meant. Magennis wisely summarizes this shift, which has obviously been reflected in literature:

> Northern Irish fiction has represented the transition in hegemonic Northern Irish masculinity from a mode defined by sectarian violence to one that favours material status with its own tactics of resistance and subversion of the dominant mode of masculinity. (145)

It must be said that, although I generally agree with Magennis's tenets about hegemonic masculinity, there are other nuances to be brought in. The evolution from a violent and sectarian to a more money-centered mode of masculinity has not been as radical as one would think. This new hegemonic model of the corporate world, according to Connell (9), goes hand in hand with the new socio-political context that not only Northern Ireland, but the whole world, has experienced. Since the end of last century, and within a global neoliberal context, hegemonic masculinity has been redefined,

though keeping its core values. This new masculinity is not as explicitly violent as its former expression, though violence is still exerted in more subtle ways. In terms of women's status, neither do contemporary hegemonic masculinities help accomplish gender equality. In fact, women's progress very often implies the fragmentation of their identity and their partial alienation through masculinization (Ergas 603). Ultimately, what we are witnessing are the attempts of patriarchal capitalism to keep its hegemony through a strategy of disguise, through a series of apparent changes that make it seem modern and updated.

Within the context of the novels under analysis, sectarian hegemonic masculinity prevails and contributes, as mentioned above, to secure a traditional gender order at all levels, both among men and between men and women. In *Hidden Symptoms*, conventional gender roles are strictly distributed in Robert's family, accordingly contributing to the preservation of long-established gender structures. Robert's sister, Rosie, is portrayed as an archetypically devout housewife serving men and taking care of children. Meanwhile, her husband, Tom, who has Rosie at his entire disposal, is shown as an openly sectarian individual involved in the IRA. The prevalence of hegemonic masculinity associated with sectarian violence is also uncovered when Theresa relates a group of men drinking at a pub with the death of her brother: "any one of them might have done it" (Madden 2014: 44). *One by One in the Darkness* exemplifies this idea, too. This is what the owner of a shop, who refuses to serve British soldiers under the threat of the IRA, tells Charlie: "'there's men in this country and if they thought I was serving soldiers they wouldn't leave me with one stone on top of the other of either house or shop'" (Madden 2013: 99).

But the patriarchal order also affects women's imposed submission in other aspects of life such as their access to, or exclusion from, the labour market. The narrator in *One by One in the Darkness* recalls how Emily, Charlie's wife, found herself, like most women in Northern Ireland in the 1950s and 60s, socially forced to quit her job to get married despite the timid hints of subversion shown by certain women refusing to go home after their wedding day. These first defiant movements provoked an immediate reaction from patriarchy

that started to threaten the status quo. The newspaper letter that Emily's mother sends her after she learns Emily is engaged clearly shows this reaction:

> One notes with sorrow the growing number of girls who, on marrying, selfishly retain their jobs in our Catholic schools, thereby denying employment to unmarried girls who need teaching posts, and, more importantly, to men, many of whom may have wives and children on their own to support. To see such a lack of understanding of their own Christian vocation as wives and mothers makes one wonder if closer attention needs to be paid to the type of girl who is selected to be trained as teachers. (Madden 122)

In the conservative Northern Irish society that Madden portrays, men customarily populate the public sphere and women the private one. Therefore, it is not surprising that men are more exposed to common and naturalized behaviours within the public realm, such as violence. Charlie Quinn's death in *One by One in the Darkness* goes in line with that naturalization of men as victims, although his demise has to do, too, with the process of feminization of his masculine persona developed by Madden throughout the novel. Charlie's murder invokes certain sympathy for this character, which would not have arisen had the victim been his brother, Brian, an exemplary archetype of hegemonic masculinity and real target for the paramilitaries. This is so precisely because Charlie provides elements of subversion to hegemonic masculinity that break the traditional understanding of manliness in Northern Ireland. Charlie is depicted as a man who does not properly belong to the public sphere, someone who has never publicly expressed his support for the Republicans, but whose opinions are more private, more reserved, just like women have traditionally complied. Besides, other circumstances contribute to this character's feminization, as Bill Rolston points out: "As mothers, women come to empathize with all children. Everyone is someone's child, so the concern with protecting goes far beyond the bounds of family" (3). In fact, when a group of British soldiers comes to the Quinns' home (Madden 96-98), it is Charlie who sympathizes with them, and is then rebuked by his wife, Emily. Charlie's response is revealing:

> 'He was no more than a child; I'm sure his ma isn't getting a wink of sleep with him over here. I'm glad I was civil to them,' he went on, digging into his pocket for his cigarettes and matches. 'There's no harm in being civil.' (Madden 98)

Not only does Charlie's wife censure his behaviour, but so does his brother Brian: "'You should have told them hell roast all,' Brian insisted. 'You're too bloody soft, Charlie, that's your trouble.'" (98) As a culminating step in Charlie Quinn's process of feminization, it is revealing to remark that his death takes place within the most traditionally private and sacred place for a woman, the kitchen, an improper place for a man to be according to hegemonic standards of masculinity.

In *Hidden Symptoms*, Theresa's brother, Francis, is also feminized since he is presented as a spiritual and sensitive man, more prone to dealing with feelings and religious issues than to identifying with hegemonic masculinity. In order to support this statement, Francis' reflections on art and religion while looking at the Pietà in Rome may be revealing:

> 'Were I to break that, I would only be breaking stone. People do not look for God, they only look for bits of metal and stone and glass. They come for art's sake; they don't believe.'
>
> 'And without belief', she said, 'it's just a piece of white stone.' (Madden 55)

At another point in the novel, he also reveals himself as a representative of a subaltern masculinity. This happens when he voices his reasons to quit university and start working at a supermarket: "'I like boring work,' he said. 'It leaves my mind freer for higher things'" (Madden 63). Francis' closeness to his twin sister also makes him more feminine in cultural terms (Davey 17).

All this implies that alternative, or subaltern, readings of male gender, mainly represented in these works by Francis and Charlie, will

be defeated by physical and sectarian violence. Both men are shown assuming some of the roles that convention and tradition have ascribed to women, namely, sensitivity, passivity, or the domestic realm as the natural place, and both will be punished for that in a world where these features are scorned by the hegemonic discourse. In other words, Madden's feminization of these characters, which might seem a progressive stance and make these novels look groundbreaking, unconventional and transgressive, ends up in nothing since their subversion is defeated by hegemonic masculinity. Judith Butler states that gender is not innate, but something we learn to perform:

> … gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts* (…) [T]he conception of gender (…) requires a conception of a constituted *social temporality*. (…) What is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo." (Butler 519-20)

Thus, by feminizing these men, Madden is unconsciously reinforcing the patriarchal discourse because neither do they fit in hegemonic definitions of masculinity nor become strong enough to overcome them. As a consequence, the process of feminization that both Francis and Charlie undergo makes them appear as more vulnerable individuals and, therefore, easier targets for paramilitaries, preventing them from becoming effective tools that would subvert the already established order.

Deirdre Madden's narrative seems to require an examination of the actual emergence of new meanings, values and practices in Northern Irish culture. Whether these entail new phases of the dominant cultures or, instead, some alternatives to them, as Raymond Williams famously expressed in *Marxism and Literature* (1977: 121-27), I am persuaded that in her novels Madden narrates new modes which seem to break away with the Northern Irish dominant culture, that is, new models of men that confront the traditional, accepted and leading roles. Neither Charlie nor Francis fit into the stereotypical male models and represent new and alternative masculinities, defined above

as feminized masculinities. However, this redefinition of what being a man means, this conflict with the most traditional meaning of patriarchy is resolved with the defeat of these emergent and alternative masculine models. Yet with both Francis's and Charlie's murders, social order is reestablished and the message the political unconscious grasps is that social and material reality cannot be altered, thus turning the approach of the narration towards a defeatist and conservative stand. This assessment does not necessarily imply that Madden has to be labeled as a conservative narrator, as scholars like Gerry Smyth assume when commenting on *Hidden Symptoms* (1997: 119). She is more likely to be rated as an insightful observer, as an author who accurately describes a particular socioeconomic context and its consequences at a time when the strength and prevalence of certain dominant masculinity in the North of Ireland prevented its overcoming or, at least, its accommodation to alternative modes of masculinity.

All of the foregoing is also deeply related to Raymond Williams' notion of "structures of feeling" (Williams 132). As a matter of fact, in this narrative we witness the evolution of certain forms of masculinity (embodied by Francis and Charlie), which seems to reproduce a process that started in the mid-1980s. These structures will recur in later novels, from the mid-nineties on, and there will be a shift in hegemonic masculinity models, with all due cautions mentioned above when referring to Maguinnes's proposals. This change will go hand in hand with the political, material and social changes that have taken place from the beginning of the peace process. But as far as Madden is concerned, though these new structures are present in both *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness*, they do not succeed because they are outstripped by the traditional and sectarian hegemonic masculinity.

If we want to understand the whole scope of victimhood in the Troubles, it is necessary to reflect on how the killing of male characters, a straightforward consequence of the conflict, turns women into collateral victims of that same strife. Their multidimensional status as victims is usually highlighted in Troubles fiction with respect to the aftermath of the assassinations. These sequels are ultimately reflected both in their material world, that is, their families, and in relation to their inner or spiritual world. Thus,

women will undertake material responsibilities such as keeping their household united, sustaining their children, or assuming the traditional role of fathers as guardians of order (Rolston 44-46). But they will also face internal conflicts which may shatter their systems of values and beliefs, although these same conflicts may become, at the same time, an opportunity for them to subvert their traditional social stance (Morales Ladrón 76).

One of the characters in *One by One in the Darkness*, Helen's closest friend David, lets her know that his mother turned into an unintended subversive individual when she had to assume all those allegedly male roles after her husband's assassination: "She told me she'd been terrified at the prospect of bringing up five children on her own, having to provide for us and get us educated and keep us out of trouble" (Madden 49). Emily, Charlie's wife, also takes on that responsibility. The "solid stone house" (Madden 1, 181) built by Charlie helps Emily fulfill her duty since it holds its familiar meaning even after her husband's death, thus becoming the place of reference for the three sisters around the figure of their mother. Going home at weekends is a "safety valve" (Madden 6) for Helen. Home turns into the only place where they have the chance of staying together, of tightening their knots and overcoming their loss (Madden 8-9).

Madden acutely focuses on the most private side of female victimhood in *Hidden Symptoms*. Theresa goes through a terrible spiritual struggle with her religious beliefs, the only tools at hand for her to cope with loss. She questions her brother's death as God's will and the fact that she, as a Catholic, has to accept his fate. Her inability to understand and assimilate that plan leads her to a process of self-annihilation that almost exceeds her mental and physical limits:

> 'I have to go on living without him, and I have to go on believing in God, a good God, a God who loves and cares for me. Do you think that's easy? I have to believe that my brother's death was a victory. I have to forgive the people who killed my brother; I have to try to love them as I loved him (…) You tell me what's easy about belief. You tell me where the comfort is.' (Madden 138)

Theresa's behaviour transcends traditional female stereotypes of submission and passivity, but, at the same time, the element of subversion her conduct may imply is not that unconventional, since it goes in line with other long-established female manners which suggest women's tendency towards emotions. Despite the potential subversion in her internal strife and the danger of self-annihilation it implies for her, Theresa finally accommodates to one of the traditional roles Bill Rolston observes in Northern Irish fiction, that of women as peace-loving individuals in an extension of their domestic role:

> The division between men and women in relation to violence is not only biological, but almost metaphysical. Men come to represent violence and women peace with all the force of a Greek myth. The only proper, acceptable, natural role for a woman is that of mother – both in the domestic sense of caring, and in the more global or mythical sense of peace-loving. Because they care for children, women care about peace. (Rolston 44)

This view is also endorsed by Carly J. Dunn in her reflections about the political dimension of Madden's novel. According to this scholar, Theresa's "struggle to forgive the men who murdered Francis, and her knowledge that horrific acts of violence occur on both sides of the conflict … lead her to desire not revenge or Catholic victory, but peace and equality" (122).

Gerry Smyth insists on the need to deal with political violence as an opportunity to wheel out the stereotypes of the Troubles. He believes that Irish writers have the moral obligation to engage with politics and history, "to challenge the received forms of 'Troubles' narrative, and to develop new languages and new perspectives as a contribution to the imagination of change" (Smyth 116). Unfortunately, he argues, novelists like Deirdre Madden evade historical explanation and focus on "individual intervention and psychological motivation" (Smyth 114), thereby introducing a distance in the novelistic vision which reinforces traditional positions. Thus, Madden's writing explores the (im)possibilities of moving forward

from pain, suffering, and loss, but not communally. Like Smyth, Sylvie Mikowski does not observe any progress in Madden's novels either as regards subverting patriarchy.

Nonetheless, Smyth and Mikowski's readings have been challenged by other scholars like Morales Ladrón, Davey or Parker who have underscored Madden's skills in depicting the anomalous environment which her characters inhabit and their individual responses to the socio-political context that entangles them, sometimes even providing elements of subversion against long-term observed traditions such as capitalist patriarchy. This perspective goes in line with the prevailing postmodernist trend in literary criticism, which focuses more intensely on individuals and less on collective responses to moments of crisis. The prevalence of postmodernism is not surprising at all in Western societies, as it easily accommodates the hegemonic neoliberal ideology where individuals lie in the center and become responsible for every single action they carry out, whereas any collective, supportive or communal positioning is despised.

The two novels by Madden under scrutiny here, *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness*, convey the beginning of the transition of hegemonic masculinity in Northern Ireland, as well as the shift in the material and sociopolitical conditions that determine it. The author presents emerging elements of subversion, Williams' "structures of feelings," which turn out to be defeated by the still hegemonic and traditional masculinity. These alternative masculinities will force capitalist patriarchy to show its plasticity in order to adapt itself to the changing times. However, this transformation does not take place in Madden's works. She only depicts the emergence of alternative masculinities, the tension between hegemonic and subaltern, but the sociopolitical context shows itself incapable of assuming these new challenges.

The violent loss of a beloved one is, without a doubt, a traumatic experience. In the Troubles literature, it is quite common to find men, usually fathers, among the victims of sectarian violence, with all the implications this has for the female family members. What this article has tried to show is twofold. On the one hand, it contends that, from the point of view of patriarchy, the feminization of male victims helps to accept and better understand their violent deaths, apart from

showing the defeat of alternative masculinities in the Northern Irish context. On the other hand, this work exposes that women, whether wives or sisters, become the other collateral victims in the conflict and their traditionally assigned roles make their status as victims seem natural. Besides, these female victims will find themselves compelled to undertake certain public roles that, in principle, patriarchal society had not envisaged for them. Thus, they will often end up with the obligation to become heads of their families, providers for their children, or keepers of familial order. In other words, they will have to masculinize their roles in order to cope with tragedy. The physical violence exerted on these men as well as the (in)ability of many women to overcome their loss come to demonstrate, in both novels, the prevalence of conservative and sectarian patriarchy not only in Northern Irish society but also in its literature.

## NOTES

[1] As is well known, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels already claimed this much (Storey). Louis Althusser (242) also reformulates this idea when he claims that "it is impossible to think the work of art, in its specifically aesthetic existence, without taking into account the privileged relation between it and ideology, i.e. *its direct and inevitable effect*," and Terry Eagleton further explains it by saying that "to understand literature, then, means understanding the total social process to which it is part" (Eagleton 5-6).

[2] In other words, there are "certain kinds of knowledge about society [that] are encoded in literary texts and in their forms" (Jameson 157).

[3] Among these scholars it is worth mentioning Gerry Smyth and Elmer Kennedy-Andrews. The former split the authors of these works into two differentiated groups: on the one hand, those who merely used the conflict as a background where stories about individual desire and conflict took place, and, on the other hand, those who examined "the ways in which cultural representations impact on the received realities of life in Northern Ireland," thus challenging, or attempting to challenge, assumed, naturalized and stereotyped representations and roles (Smyth 116-117). In a similar line of criticism, Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (238-258) claims that there is a very

important amount of 'Troubles' literature which disregards the socio-political context and observes violence under Tom Nairn's (211-213) "myth of atavism," that is, as a mere expression of irrationality rather than as the result of social and political conditions.

[4] The strife between hegemonic and subaltern modes brings to mind Raymond Williams' argument in *Marxism and Literature* (121-127) claiming that cultures undergo the emergence of new elements (meanings, values, practices,…). Yet the heart of the matter resides in discovering if these only imply a new phase of the dominant culture or, on the contrary, are alternative or opposite to it. These new elements, which Williams called "structures of feeling," can be found in social life and "exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience" (132).

[5] Christine St. Peter develops these ideas in her seminal work *Changing Ireland. Strategies in Contemporary Irish Fiction* (151-153).

[6] In order to deepen on this issue, Caroline Magennis's *Sons of Ulster: Masculinities in the Contemporary Northern Irish Novel* (2011) proves to be invaluable.

[7] This is also the case of Geraldine Higgins, Tamara Benito de la Iglesia or Carly J. Dunn. These scholars tend to highlight Madden's awareness on the implications of violence on individuals, leaving political concerns of the conflict, at best, in the background.

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