

Biofiction and Female Agency in Maggie O'Farrell's *Hamnet*

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Both the so-called “historical turn” and “ethical turn” have proved fundamental critical trends in the development in recent decades of the historical novel and the biographical novel in English. Historical revisionism of major and minor characters and events have opened new approaches to the discourses of history and biography, providing alternate views of the past, raising ideologically motivated themes and personages that had been hidden or ignored by traditional historiography. One of those new forms of discourse has been influenced by the powerful emergence of female agency, since women’s voices, values, actions, feelings and roles in shaping history have passed unnoticed so far. This paper is an attempt to tackle some of the features of biographical fiction or biofiction, as discussed, among others, by critics such as James Fitzmaurice, Naomi J. Miller and Sara Jayne Steen for the Early Modern period, or, in more general terms, by Michael Lackey, an author who considers that the Irish have crucially contributed to the emergence and evolution of this kind of discourse. Works that can be termed biofictions aspire to expand the notions of truth, fact and history, by fictionalising historical characters and events. One of the most distinguished authors in this respect is the Northern-Irish writer Maggie O’Farrell, whose recent and acclaimed novel, *Hamnet* (2020), depicts and brings to the fore the unheard voice of a 16th-century forgotten and neglected woman, Agnes or Anne Hathaway, Shakespeare’s wife.