

## Sense of self, Sense of Place: The Landscape of Urban Violence in *Love/Hate*

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# Sense of self, Sense of Place: The Landscape of Urban Violence in Love/Hate



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## Introduction



The Irish TV series *Love/Hate* (RTE one, 2010-present)<sup>1</sup> is set in Dublin, and its violent “gangland” plotline inspired *Guardian* reviewer Marc Lawson to call it the “Irish *The Wire*”<sup>2</sup>, placing it firmly within an American tradition of television production. Like *The Wire* (HBO, 2002–2008), *Love/Hate* raises issues of place, space, and identity in a post-industrialised, globalised city.<sup>3</sup> The series is rooted in the specific place of Dublin and part of a broader tradition concerned with urban narratives in the late capitalist era. *Love/Hate* focuses on a small group of characters and differs in that regard from its American counterpart: *The Wire* is an explicit portrait of Baltimore in which the proliferating characters constitute the social, economic and political landscape of the city.<sup>4</sup> *Love/Hate* writer Stuart Carolan, on the other hand, cites his fascination with “gangland”, rather than an interest in the city, as his inspiration.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the series offers a striking portrait of Dublin, urban space and nature woven into its story of gang violence. *Love/Hate* is therefore specifically

1. All images in this paper are taken from *Love/Hate Series One*, writ. Stuart Carolan, dir. David Caffrey, RTE 2010, DVD.
2. Marc Lawson, “Is *Love/Hate* Ireland’s Answer to *The Wire*?”, *The Guardian*, July 24 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2013/jul/24/love-hate-ireland-the-wire?> (last accessed 14/04/2015).
3. Frank Moulaertt, Arantxa Rodriguez & Erik Swyngedouw (eds.), *The Globalized City: Economic Restructuring and Social Polarization in European Cities*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2003.
4. “The Wire is not about Jimmy McNulty. Or Avon Barksdale. Or crime. Or punishment (...). It is about the City”. David Simon, “Introduction”, in Raphael Alvarez (ed.), *The Wire: Truth Be Told*, New York, Pocket, 2004, p. 4.
5. Interview with Stuart Carolan, *Irish Film and Television Network*, 30 September 2010, <http://www.iftn.ie/news/?act1=record&aid=73&rid=4283399&tpl=archnews> (last accessed 14/04/2015).

Irish in its social, geographical, and narrative setting, but it is also profoundly shaped by American references, thus reflecting the intense and long-lasting cultural exchanges between America and Ireland. In the context of televisual production, this close cultural bond is also one aspect of the global influence of American popular culture on the rest of the world.

From the first episode, Dublin is both recognisable and lacking in the specificities that made Baltimore a unique feature of *The Wire*. *Love/Hate* depicts Dublin as a generic post-modern city and shows how globalised urban society affects our sense of place and identity. The story is set in 2010, in the midst of the Irish financial crisis and in the wake of the 2009 global recession. Darren Treacy comes home to Dublin after spending a year in Spain to evade a gun-possession charge. On the day of his return, his younger brother Robbie comes out of jail, only to be killed in a drive-by shooting. This initial murder draws Darren back into the Dublin criminal underworld. Issues of violence and family are closely related in the narrative and the notions of “safe place” and “home” are challenged from the start. Such notions are in fact considered problematic in contemporary geography, and we first need to examine a few basic definitions before we can analyse the series itself.

My theoretical starting point is the question of place; if ecocriticism is about “the relationship between literature and the physical environment,”<sup>6</sup> then an ecocritical examination of *Love/Hate* must look into the series’ representation of its own space and place(s): the city, suburbia, the rural outskirts of Dublin. As its title suggests, *Love/Hate* is about relationships. This also includes the characters’ interactions with their environment: Dublin, home, nature, the post-industrial city, all these elements deeply affect the characters’ sense of self and influence their reaction to, and use of, violence in the story. What are “space” and “place”? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “space” as “nowhere”, merely a physical location made of abstract coordinates; it is, ultimately, “an empty area between things”. Place, on the other hand, is “somewhere”: it has identity and significance. Humanist geographer Yi Fu Tuan opposes space and place as the abstract and inauthentic versus the authentic and the grounded: place is “humanised space”.<sup>7</sup> Our understanding of place involves relational thinking and comparative notions: us versus them, inside versus outside, safe versus threatening, familiar versus strange. Most importantly, as geographer John Agnew has shown, the notion is intricately linked to our *sense of place*, i.e. to our feeling of identity in relation to a place.<sup>8</sup> *Love/Hate* starts with a theme of ambiguous homecoming: Darren comes home to a

6. Cheryll Glotfelty, *The Ecocritical Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Athens (GA), Georgia U.P., 1996, p. xix.
7. Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis, Minnesota U.P., 1977, p. 54.
8. Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004, p. 7.

place that is in fact hostile to him and his family. By questioning place as a positive and constructive part of its characters' identity, *Love/Hate* raises the question of the global city as a generic *non-place*, following anthropologist Marc Augé's analysis of hypermodernity.<sup>9</sup> Like Augé, geographer Edward Relph relates the global flows of postmodern society to the notion of placelessness, denouncing our increasingly inauthentic relation to place in a consumerist society.<sup>10</sup> All these issues will be relevant to *Love/Hate*'s representation of the post-modern city.

How does violence come into the series' representation of place and space? It is indeed a focal point of the narrative: starting with a murder in the first five minutes of the pilot episode, the story unfolds in a world of murders, arson, racketeering, beatings, and even rape (season 3 episode 1). Focusing on the first season, I will examine how the series addresses the geography of gang violence in the city, and how, conversely, its visual representation of space affects its characters' sense of self. I will first analyse the pilot's opening sequence and its defining themes: local and foreign, peace and violence, recognition and identity, nature and the city. I will then examine the series' representation of the city as oppressive space, and the place of nature in the post-modern urban landscape.

### Opening Sequence: Urban Violence and Global Society



The series opens with striking contrasts, setting the image of a quiet, wealthy Irish suburb against that of violence, global communication and consumerism. The opening shot gives us a view of a leafy suburban area with fall colors and chirping birds, a stereotype of desirable suburban culture. The panning shot then zooms to reveal a large house, big car and surveillance camera, introducing the themes of money, consumption, and paranoia, and already unsettling the idyllic tone of the street's warm colors and bristling leaves. This ambiguous sense of security is further disrupted by a voice-over telling us, in an American accent, how "to field-strip a Glock."

9. Marc Augé, *Non-Lieux*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1992.

10. Edward C. Relph, "Reflections on *Place and Placelessness*", *Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology*, 7 (3), 1996, <https://newprairiepress.org/eap/vol7/iss3/1> (last accessed 8/11/2020), p. 14-15.



Fig. 1 – *Love/Hate*, S01E01. Opening scene, wealthy suburb

The next shot reveals that the voice comes from a YouTube video playing in the house. From an ecocritical perspective, “Field-strip” is an ironically evocative compound: there is no rural field in *Love/Hate* but hills stripped bare for gangsters to breed killer dogs (season 2). In a compound verb that does not refer to nature but to violence and war, this subtle echo further underlines the problematic place of nature in the gangland narrative. The arresting injunction to field-strip a Glock also constitutes a comment on our global society of violence and consumerism. Glocks are manufactured by an Austrian company and sold worldwide, but mostly symbolise American gun culture;<sup>11</sup> these plastic pistols can be easily assembled and taken apart, do not require special training and are, most importantly, disposable objects of consumption. In this scene, gang-member Nigel, who has just acquired one such weapon, is practicing with the help of a step-by-step video tutorial, in his family house, while his wife and child are playing next door. The video first takes up the whole frame of the shot, before the camera zooms out to reveal Nidge’s computer screen. This provides a meta-narrative comment on screens and spectatorship, while symbolising the irruption of global consumption and violence within the privacy of a quiet, Irish family house.

The camera then cuts to the opening credits: a hectic stream of very brief shots layering the many places and narrative strands of the episode – the airport, the prison, a private bedroom, then back to the airport, and so on. Significantly, this sequence starts with several jump-cut views of Nidge’s surveillance camera and monitor, to the pulsating beat of an American rap song.

11. Paul M. Barrett, *Glock: The Rise of America’s Gun*, New York, Crown, 2012.



Fig. 2 – *Love/Hate*, S01E01. Surveillance camera

Such a picture raises the question of inside versus outside: Nidge’s camera is meant to help keep intruders out, but it also psychologically locks him in. The rap song – “Just a Memory” from the posthumous album by rapper Notorious B.I.G. – finds a visual echo in the prominently displayed Tupac Shakur poster on Nidge’s bedroom wall. Both rappers were killed within a few months of each other, and were involved in the notorious East Coast-West Coast rivalry of the 1990s, which again reminds us of the close connection between place, identity and violence. B.I.G.’s song ominously warns us that “You’re nobody till somebody kills you.” In Nidge’s cozy house, the song, poster, video, and handgun contribute – not without a hint of humor – to making Irish suburbia a generic space of global violence. Thus global consumption, violence and the spectacle are the grounding themes of *Love/Hate*’s opening sequence.

The opening credits also importantly introduce the issue of recognition and identity in relation to place. While Nidge is busy field-stripping his newly-bought Glock, Darren Treacy lands at Dublin airport and goes through customs, holding his passport between his teeth. Darren is in an ambivalent position: he must be identified in order to reenter the country – he is, in fact, coming home – but he must not be recognised since he is still on the run from a gun possession charge. The passport shot reminds us of the problematic tensions at stake between identity, place, and legitimacy. By holding his passport between his teeth (picture below), Darren displays a careless attitude towards the symbol and enabler of his belonging, while at the same time aggressively asserting his legitimacy and desire to be back inside the country.



Fig. 3 – *Love/Hate*, S01E01. Passport scene

While Darren comes home to an oppressive city that will eventually claim his life, his brother Robbie is let out of jail, following a similar assessment of his identity: matching his face with his ID picture on a computer screen. Robbie is then allowed to come out of jail, and prepares to go back to “gangland.” These brief opening credits reveal the characters’ ambivalent attitudes towards place (their home and their city), and their already constrained freedom of movement in the open space. This leads us to two crucial themes in the early episodes of the series: oppressive space and the place of Nature in the city.

### The City as Oppressive Space



*Love/Hate*’s visual portrait of the city is an integral part of its narrative of urban violence. Dublin is visually and aesthetically represented not as a place but as an enclosed, oppressive space. Here I am going back to my initial definition of space as the “empty area between things”. In the series, all the characters are burdened with a lack of free movement that translates in the visual set up of their surroundings, the prison cell being the most literal representative of their confinement. This general sense of oppressiveness is primarily conveyed through the repeated use of low-angle shots.

The two pictures below frame the pilot episode: they feature Robbie as he comes out of prison in the opening credits, and Tommy looking down at his friends in the final scene. Both suggest the impossible freedom and tragic fate faced by all the characters. In the first picture, Robbie stands outside, his back to the prison door and to the camera. The low angle follows Robbie’s upward gaze to the open sky and its promise of freedom and new beginnings. However, Robbie’s perspective at ground level is nonexistent since he stands between a tall fence and the prison wall. In front of him, a solitary tree fails to tower above the surveillance camera, mirroring Robbie’s powerlessness and helplessness – they are the only live beings in

the picture. Robbie's first experience of free space is an enclosed parking lot, and this visual restriction of the landscape prefigures his death a few minutes later.



Fig. 4-5 – *Love/Hate*, S01E01 : Oppressiveness and low-angle shots

In the second picture, Tommy stands above his friends Nidge and Darren, as he ponders whether to follow them deeper in the woods. All three characters are coping with the consequences of Robbie's death and with their feelings of guilt and thirst for revenge. This is the final scene of the episode, and in this case, the low angle reveals another kind of helplessness: Darren, Tommy and Nidge find themselves in an ominously enclosed space, with the trees blocking the outside world from view. Tommy, looking down, betrays his fear of being killed and buried there in a hole in the ground (he thinks his friends blame him for Robbie's death); his friends' upward gaze is no more hopeful and only suggests the grim reality of their lives. Low-angle shots usually give greater screen space to the sky, as in the first picture, but the suggestion of open space is deceptive in the series: it is systematically undermined by visions of fences, grids and barriers. Bodies are always fenced-in, voluntarily or involuntarily. While planes cut through the sky and cars speed through the woods outside Dublin, the city itself is made of innumerable fences, effectively trapping the characters, literally and symbolically, so that they become more desperate as they search for a way out.

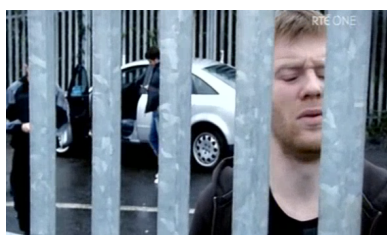


Fig. 6-7 – *Love/Hate*, S01E04 : Grids and cages

Oppressiveness also pervades *Love/Hate* through the recurring theme of surveillance and paranoia introduced in the opening sequence. This brings us back to the question of inside and outside and to the definition of home. In the first and second seasons, gang leader John Boy becomes gradually more paranoid as his illegal schemes catch up with him. His high security, bunker-like modern apartment is complete with



concrete walls, iron doors and surveillance cameras. John Boy is holed up rather than “dwelling”, to quote Heidegger’s definition of Being-in-the-world: for Heidegger, “Being” means being at home in the world, which implies having a sense of place.<sup>12</sup> John Boy’s experience is the opposite of being-at-home: he works outside legality and trades in violent trafficking, and as a result, he cannot feel at home anywhere. He is constantly threatened by other gangs and by the police who search and empty his apartment in the first episode of season 2. John Boy’s home is just another prison, and his growing paranoia suggests that his fate is also hopeless; he is murdered by his own people at the end of the second season.

This leads me to the notion of “home” as a quintessential embodiment of place. In humanist geography, the concept of home largely derives from Heidegger’s philosophy of dwelling and from Gaston Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space*. For Bachelard, the home is “a primal space that acts as a first world or first universe that then frames our understandings of all the spaces outside.”<sup>13</sup> This classic idea of home as the primordial place of safety, identity and nurture is turned on its head in the series, thus echoing the feminist critics’ contention that the idealised notion of home and the domestic does not correspond to the reality of experience for many women.<sup>14</sup> In *Love/Hate*, home is indeed a specifically gendered place: while most of the trafficking takes place outside and is run by men, the gangsters’ wives and sisters struggle to maintain a sense of normalcy and peace at home. From the start, home appears as the site of particularly transgressive violence in the series. In episode 2, private homes are under attack and vulnerable to racketeering and physical destruction. In episode 3, a pregnant Rosie is beaten up at home by her jealous boyfriend who claims that “it’s my house, not yours” to assert his physical and symbolic domination over her. Rosie loses her baby, and later leaves the country altogether to find a new life in London. In the same episode, former gang member Jimmy is killed in his home in front of his wife and child. The brutal irruption of masked killers in the private house is reminiscent of sectarian violence and the Irish Troubles; together with the threatening of “civilians” outside their homes and the gangsters’ own fear of invasion, such scenes forcefully demonstrate that the breakdown of place is directly related to urban violence.

This has crucial consequences on the characters’ sense of self. Significantly, the main characters of season 1 seem to have no parents: they have siblings, wives and children, but are cut off from the older generation. Darren and his sister Mary (a single mother with two children) are

12. Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, Berkeley, California U.P., 1997, p. 245-246.
13. T. Cresswell, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
14. Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, Minneapolis, Minnesota U.P., 1993.

orphans, and they lose their brother Robbie in the first episode. The breakdown of place comes with a parallel loss of genealogical history and depth, in keeping with the characters' mindless consumerism, and despite their otherwise aggressive loyalty to "family" and "blood". Although the series is explicitly set in a specific place (Dublin) at a specific time (now), its overall narrative is one of placelessness and uprootedness. The unique Dublin landscape thus becomes a near-anonymous backdrop to *Love/Hate*'s generic tale of the post-modern, post-industrial city of the Western World.

From the pilot episode and throughout seasons 1 and 2, *Love/Hate* displays generic sites of the post-industrial world: the airport, the multi-lane motorway, the suburban shopping-centre with its multinational chain stores and endless escalators, the unfinished building site of post-property bubble Ireland, and finally, the "rejuvenated" industrial areas and their post-modern architecture of glass and steel. These elements are prominently featured in the first season and contribute to a generic representation of Dublin, whose older architecture and historical landmarks are relegated to a blurry background. This generic landscape reflects on the notion of "non-places" defined by anthropologist Marc Augé and geographer Edward Relph in their analysis of hypermodernity and global transience. Such "non-places" are equated with consumerism, violence and the time-space compression of global trade.<sup>15</sup> As *The Wire* has shown, drug trafficking is a typical illustration of the neo-liberal ideology of global, late capitalism, and the fast lanes and airports are also a functional part of the gangsters' trade in *Love/Hate*.

With spatial genericity comes disposability and consumption. In the pilot episode, Robbie is killed in a drive-by shooting while his friend Nidge buys himself a shirt at the shopping mall. In episode 3, Nidge flies out to Prague with his friends for a weekend of nightclubbing with prostitutes and a day at the shooting-range; he takes holiday-style "selfies" against this new yet undifferentiated background of global entertainment. Yet despite its recurring theme of international travel, the series' ultimate representative of placelessness and conspicuous consumption is the car rather than the plane. Gang members parade their SUVs through town to flaunt their wealth and assert their domination over the urban space, deriving a sense of immunity from their bubble of steel. At the end of episode 1, Nidge's black SUV zooms out of town and across the countryside; passengers Tommy and Darren barely look at the outside view, a landscape made blurry and unreal by the speeding car. The omnipresence of big cars in the small Dublin streets and outside the city is also another comment – often

15. For a definition of time-space compression, see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990.

made in contemporary Irish literature<sup>16</sup> – on the new, Americanised Irish landscape in which cars have replaced the bicycle as a national symbol of the Irish way of life. In *Love/Hate*, Dublin has become an oppressive bubble of glass and steel, strikingly illustrated in the pilot episode (Fig. 8). In this context, the natural world functions as an anecdotic footnote to the characters' disintegrating sense of place, thus completing the series' chilling portrait of Western urban society as a whole.



Fig. 8 – *Love/Hate*, S01E01. Bubble of glass landscape

## Nature's Place in the Global City

Visually, the series' dominant color is not green, as might be expected for a city that is one of the greenest in Europe in terms of park space. There is no sight of the Phoenix Park in seasons 1 and 2 of the series. Cold, metallic hues dominate: the white, grey and dark steel tones of the post-modern estates eclipse the picturesque, multicolored vision of Dublin's city center. Some landmarks make the city recognizable, such as the Richmond courthouse whose red bricks cut through the urban grey of the first season. Instead of Dublin's numerous parks and trees, our vision of nature in *Love/Hate* is that of a commodified, consumable object fragmented into decorative items flaunting the gangsters' triumphant consumerism. In the first episode, a fish tank in Tommy's apartment illustrates the place of the natural world within the confines of the city, while providing a mirror image of the characters' own lack of freedom in their oppressive urban environment. At Robbie's funeral, and later at Nidge's wedding party, wreaths and flower centerpieces fail to bring humanity to a harsh environment of constant violence and conspicuous wealth. In episode 2, John Boy's modern apartment comes complete with exotic potted plants: as Nidge tells his wife Trish in the first season, it takes a lot of (dirty) money to maintain a nice, decorated house. Like their furniture, the gangsters' plants and pets

16. See for instance Gerard Donovan's short story collection *Country of the Grand*, London, Faber & Faber, 2008.

are signifiers of wealth and, most importantly, they are cut off from their natural habitat. Like the solitary tree on the prison parking lot at the start of episode 1, cut flowers and potted plants represent the irreversible break of urban life from the natural world.

The dehumanising fracture between urban and rural landscape, man-made architecture and the natural environment is in keeping with the characters' claustrophobic loneliness and their seeming lack of family history. Nidge and Trish's wedding in the final episode of season 1 dramatically underlines this spatial and temporal disruption, which locks the characters in an inauthentic bubble of consumerist mimicry. The wedding takes place in Carton House, an 18<sup>th</sup> century mansion famous for its Georgian parkland and located in Maynooth (it is indeed a luxury hotel and wedding venue in real life). What we see of the park is a blurred background as we follow expensive cars gliding along the driveway. The interior is another (golden) blur as the guests, bride and groom dance towards the altar to a hectic techno beat. Again, exotic flowers complement the golden hue of the house in a bid to impress the guests. The use of historical monuments as wedding venues has become a common tradition in Western societies, and reflects our obsession with "places of memory". This, according to Yi Fu Tuan, betrays our intrinsically inauthentic sense of place: "a truly rooted community may have shrines and monuments, but it is unlikely to have museums and societies for the preservation of the past."<sup>17</sup> In *Love/Hate*, heritage revival and commodified memory only underline the existential void in which the characters are mired. Turning historical sites into objects of consumption completes the divorce between postmodern transience and the urban landscapes of the modern age, still rooted in their wider environment. Instead of a harmonious cohabitation, the series displays the artificiality and lifelessness of commodified nature, as the ephemeral funeral wreaths remind us in episode 1. In the same episode, Mary's traditional semi-detached house, a symbol of stability and familial love, is covered in wood-paneling the colour of Robbie's coffin.

In season 1, nature is shown as lifeless and cut off from its ontological significance. Season 2 opens with an even darker vision, in which nature has become an instrumental backdrop to the dehumanising savagery of gangsters. In the first episode of season 2, newcomer Fran, a mid-level trafficker and loan shark, trains killer dogs outside Dublin. The bare hills surrounding his house are dotted with dead goats, as it is made clear that Fran regularly unleashes his dogs against the hapless herds that graze the fields. Later in the same episode, a dog-fighting scene is shown together with a boxing match in a cross cutting montage, thus dramatically demonstrating how the betting business thrives on dehumanised

17. Y. F. Tuan, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

violence in a consumer's society of the spectacle. In this instance, *Love/Hate*'s representation of nature is one of savagery rather than wilderness: dogs are trained to kill, fields are stripped bare to be used as vacant breeding grounds, and the woods have become a hiding place for dead bodies.

In *Love/Hate*, the savagery of urban violence spills out into nature and makes it another hostile space threatening the characters' mental and physical integrity. One image, however, breaks with the series' grimly realistic aesthetics, in the first episode of season 1.



Fig. 9 – *Love/Hate*, S01E01. Gothic Landscape

This gothic, romantic view appears for a few seconds, right before the funeral scene, although Robbie's funeral actually takes place in an urban cemetery. It is in fact a recurring shot, also displayed before John Boy's funeral in the final episode of season 2. This brief, haunting vision is a heterotopia, defined by Michel Foucault as a "place of otherness" that lie outside of the normal pace of daily human life. Prison is one such place – a heterotopia of "deviation".<sup>18</sup> *Love/Hate* is a story of social and moral deviation; it is therefore no surprise that prison and the prison cell should be significant elements in the narrative. Foucault also examines cemeteries as peculiar places of otherness; he notes that "during the nineteenth century, the shift of cemeteries toward the suburbs was initiated. The cemeteries then came to constitute, no longer the sacred and immortal heart of the city, but the other city, where each family possesses its dark resting place".<sup>19</sup>

18. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias", *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, 5, 1984, <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf> (last accessed 8/11/2020), p. 46-49.

19. M. Foucault, art. cit.



Fig. 10 – *Love/Hate*, S01E01. At the cemetery

The romantic churchyard then stands in stark contrast with the site of Robbie’s burial. It provides a gothic respite in the frenzied narrative of the series, and reminds us of the older, literary and aesthetic tradition of the picturesque, romantic landscape – the very opposite of *Love/Hate*’s mostly realistic aesthetics. It is ultimately a meta-fictional comment on traditional representations of the Irish landscape and their disconnectness from contemporary urban reality. Robbie’s burial takes place in a suburban cemetery where the industrial background and traffic noise block out all sense of meditative contemplation. His untimely death and standardised burial finally denounce post-industrialised society as a whole and its essential destructiveness of natural and human life.

## Conclusion



*Love/Hate* is a story of violence. Its portrayal of Dublin frames its narrative of oppression and destructiveness, and reveals its underlying representation of postmodern urban landscapes on a global scale. To conclude my analysis, let me briefly go back to *The Wire* and to the first of many echoes to that series in *Love/Hate*: the “gangland” newspaper headline in the pilot episode.



Fig. 11 – *Love/Hate*, S01E01. Gangland headline

For keen watchers of *The Wire*, this picture is a clear nod to Baltimore's "Murdaland" graffiti in the series' opening credits. *Love/Hate* was first broadcast in 2010, and is clearly inspired by its predecessor, to which it pays tribute on numerous occasions, not least in casting Aidan Gillen, an alumnus of *The Wire*, as gang leader John Boy in seasons 1 and 2. *Love/Hate* is not *The Wire*, of course, since David Simon's creation is explicitly and primarily a portrait of Baltimore. *Love/Hate* is a character narrative first of all, but it shares *The Wire*'s realistic aesthetics, and most importantly, its pessimistic representation of the city as both the cause and symptom of a self-destructive society: a place in which nature is at best a disposable object of consumption, at worst, the backyard of urban violence. *Love/Hate* raises issues common to *The Wire*'s post-industrialised Baltimore, but rooted "in the trends and tensions of contemporary Irish culture."<sup>20</sup> It can be considered as the second major work in a tradition of realistic urban narratives and social criticism initiated by *The Wire*; the increasing popularity of such a genre is far from belying its intrinsic literary qualities, but rather suggests our growing awareness and concern for social and spatial justice. Like *The Wire*, then, *Love/Hate* is finally about "untethered capitalism run amok, about how power and money actually route themselves in a postmodern [global] city, and ultimately, about why we as an urban people are no longer able to solve our problems or heal our wounds."<sup>21</sup>

20. M. Lawson, art. cit.

21. Nick Hornby, "David Simon Interview", *The Believer*, 46, 2007, [http://www.believermag.com/issues/200708/?read=interview\\_simon](http://www.believermag.com/issues/200708/?read=interview_simon) (last accessed 14/04/2015).