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How to Cite: Davies, E 2018 Domestic Space and Memory: Remembering Deirdre Madden's *One by One in the Darkness* and the Belfast Agreement. *Open Library of Humanities*, 4(2): 34, pp.1–27. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.359>

Published: 06 November 2018

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *Open Library of Humanities*, which is a journal published by the Open Library of Humanities.

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Domestic Space and Memory: Remembering Deirdre Madden's *One by One in the Darkness* and the Belfast Agreement

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This article posits the home as a key site in the Northern Irish conflict and examines the possibilities opened up by the home in Deirdre Madden's 1996 novel *One by One in the Darkness* for dealing with the past, developing subjectivity and building solidarity, resilience and resistance. In dealing with these themes, this article will examine how Madden's text, set in the run-up to the first IRA ceasefire in 1994 and published in 1996 at the tail-end of the conflict, anticipates some of the rhetoric of the Belfast Agreement and the discourse around it, but also how it fills in some of the gaps left by the Agreement and even challenges aspects of it. In thinking about Madden's intense focus on the home, I draw on the work of Adam Hanna, Daniel Miller, Sara McDowell and Catherine Switzer and Rhona Richman-Kenneally. Madden's novel is explicitly concerned with memory and representation and I will examine these preoccupations with reference to the theories of memory-studies theorists Guy Beiner, Graham Dawson and Rebecca Graff-McRae. In my final section I will make use of theories of memory, narrative, power and agency put forward by various social and discursive psychologists, drawing particularly on the work of Cristian Tileagă, to examine how the characters use their past experiences to deal with a situation of political and personal turmoil. I argue that Madden offers us a different, more radical and dynamic form of remembering than more conventional, static forms of remembrance in Northern Ireland and suggests the spaces on which we should be turning our attention.

Introduction

The Belfast Agreement's main functions were to end sectarian conflict and to set up a system of devolved government that would be agreeable to both nationalist and unionist communities; as a result, it is infused by the language of duality. The 'two traditions' approach to conflict resolution in Northern Ireland takes both nationalism and unionism to be equally valid expressions of a cultural identity. While this approach is in large part driven by motives of inclusivity, there are ways in which it has entrenched unhelpful narratives about the situation in the North. Graham Dawson has argued, for example, that this tendency has proven to be more about 'efforts to *manage* conflict and its resolution' and is informed by an ideological stance to the Northern Irish conflict which holds that at its root it is 'fuelled by atavistic religious passions and enmities' (2007: 45–46, italics in original). This tendency is much in evidence in the Agreement and has informed the way the conflict and its aftermath have been framed. The continued emphasis on the two communities, as well as obscuring the role of the British state, excludes identities that do not fit neatly into Catholic/Protestant or nationalist/unionist dualities. This can impose a rigid framework on experiences of the Troubles and make a fetish of certain militaristic, male-dominated and conservative traditions and ideologies. It also fails to address the complex positions women may occupy within these dualities, as Rebecca Graff-McRae argues in her examination of the ways in which these narratives of the past 'work to obscure the political significance of gender' (2016: 2). The resulting commemorative culture in Northern Ireland is often centred on public space, physically inscribing stories and identities into the landscape through murals, memorials and parades (McDowell, 2008). Historical events – the Battle of the Boyne (1690), the 1798 rebellion, the 1981 Hunger Strikes – are celebrated and used by particular communities to tell stories about who they are, and about resistance and victory. Traumatic incidents from the past such as Bloody Sunday are claimed and commemorated as part of ongoing campaigns for justice and truth.

Debates about the past, about who and what is remembered and how they are remembered, are highly charged partly because so many of these stories are contested by 'the other' community. But there are also tensions within communities

about the stories and how they are told. Private, individual memories of conflict – of pain, loss, trauma or physical or emotional struggle – may fit uneasily into the landscape of public memory, especially if they took place within the home, ‘behind closed doors’ and contradict or threaten the story a particular group tells about itself. In an exploration of the everyday commemorative landscapes in Derry’s Bogside, Sara McDowell and Catherine Switzer explore the control that memorials can exert over streets and neighbourhoods. They quote Brian Graham and Yvonne Whelan: ‘the landscape of commemoration represents an orchestrated process in which paramilitary organisations and their political parties are consciously creating these sites and their memorial practices as one means of perpetuating identity politics and territorial control’ (2011: 98).

While there is no doubt that these practices are used by groups to exert their power, it is important also to emphasise that the public nature of these memorials is used by communities – including women – as focal points for solidarity, often in the face of historic injustices. There will always be tension between individual and group narratives in such public displays, but the gaps left by such commemorative practices deserve to be highlighted and explored. In my research, I argue that the novel is a form that can do this. Chris Andrews and Matt McGuire assert literature’s importance in developing our understanding of societies in conflict, arguing that its ‘slowing down of time, the imaginative access it grants to what cannot readily be seen ... gives it a unique purchase on these issues’ (2016: 3). Gaps, spaces, disagreements and contradictions can be made plain. It is not that literature offers us an account of how things really were; rather it enables us to think about certain periods, events and experiences differently and develop a kind of reflexivity when thinking about the past and how it is represented.

Historically, the novel has been vital in giving voice to women’s experiences and attaching value to individual private, domestic stories. Nancy Armstrong, in her political history of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel, argues that this form attached private, psychological motives to what had hitherto been understood in purely public, ‘political’ terms and in doing so conferred a new kind of power and significance onto private space and the figure of the domestic woman (1989: 4). Jane

Tompkins, in her discussion of the nineteenth-century American sentimental novel, similarly posits the domestic sphere as a site of political struggle in these works. According to Tompkins, such novels represent 'a monumental effort to reorganize culture from the woman's point of view' (1985: 124). In this article I argue that Deirdre Madden's 1996 novel *One by One in the Darkness* can be seen as part of these literary traditions which posit the home as a site of political significance and struggle. I will draw attention to the ways in which domestic spaces were crucial to the Northern Irish conflict and examine the possibilities opened up by the home in Madden's text for dealing with the past, developing subjectivity and building solidarity, resilience and resistance.

In thinking about Madden's intense focus on the home, I discuss the work of literary scholars Adam Hanna and Rhona Richman Kenneally on the significance of domestic space in the Irish literary tradition. The anthropologist Daniel Miller has written extensively on the meaning of objects in people's homes and lives and I use some of his ideas alongside Hanna and Kenneally to broaden my arguments around the function of domestic objects in Madden's text. In the field of human geography, McDowell and Switzer have written on the ways in which public commemorative landscapes interact with people's everyday lives in post-conflict Northern Ireland, particularly in residential areas; their arguments inform some of my thinking with regard to landscape, memory and human experience in *One by One in the Darkness* and in post-Agreement Northern Ireland more generally. Madden's novel is explicitly concerned with memory and representation and I will examine these preoccupations with reference to the theories of memory-studies scholars Guy Beiner, Graham Dawson and Rebecca Graff-McRae. In my final section I also make use of theories of memory, narrative, power and agency put forward by various social and discursive psychologists, drawing particularly on the work of Cristian Tileagă, to examine how the characters in Madden's novel use their past experiences to deal with a situation of political and personal turmoil. The domestic is central to all of this in *One by One in the Darkness*, as a space in which stories are told, conflict is made sense of, solidarities are strengthened and the emotional work of grieving and dealing with the past takes place.

The novel is concerned with the disturbance, violence and pain associated with the war in Northern Ireland, but the terrain on which we see this all played out is, in the main, the home and the family. In fiction produced during the Troubles, the home and relationships associated with it often function as an escape from the conflict. In such books, family and romantic relationships are represented as spaces separate from politics, and the war itself a bloody, irrational and intractable conflict. (See, for example, *Cal* by Bernard MacLaverty or *Eureka Street* by Robert McLiam Wilson.) Madden's novel, written towards the end of the Northern Irish conflict, unsettles these public/private boundaries and shows the complex workings of the home and its interactions with the political context.

In dealing with these themes, this article will examine how Madden's text, set in the run-up to the first IRA ceasefire in 1994 and published at the tail-end of the conflict, anticipates some of the rhetoric of the Belfast Agreement and the discourse around it, what Liam Harte and Michael Parker term the 'readiness of writers to anticipate and respond to the possibilities of peace' (2000: 232). I will also explore the ways in which the novel fills some of the gaps created by the Agreement and in some cases exposes some of its limitations. Through all of this, I suggest that *One by One in the Darkness* offers us a more radical and dynamic form of remembering the atrocities of conflict than more conventional, static forms of remembrance in Northern Ireland.

The past, the home and 'moving on'

The Belfast Agreement is, by its nature, a document heavy with the past, the need to deal with it, acknowledge it and somehow 'move on' from it. This is summed up in this oft-quoted clause in the Declaration of Support:

The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all (Belfast Agreement, 1998).

'Suffering', 'fresh start', 'reconciliation' and 'mutual trust' are words and phrases which may be interpreted differently by different people, and beyond the short, three-clause section 'Reconciliation and Victims of Violence', the Agreement itself does not deal very much with what any of them mean or look like in practice. As would be expected, a great deal of attention is given to the institutional and governmental arrangements in post-conflict Northern Irish society but much is left to the imagination about the work that constructing a post-conflict settlement involves and the contested nature of so many issues relating to the past, traditions and memory. The work of grieving, of processing the past, of negotiating feelings of sadness, worry or anger and dealing with disagreement and ambivalence are all essential parts of living through conflict and its aftermath. A report produced by Belfast-based NGO Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) in 2007 entitled 'Talking about the Troubles and Planning for the Future' drew attention to these processes and highlighted the absence of women's voices in Northern Ireland's post-conflict society. Through interviews and testimonies, it asserted the importance of 'women's distinctive experiences of the conflict, associated with their predominance in organising and sustaining family life, and the roles they take within local communities' (WRDA, 2007: 2). Madden, in her book published two years before the Belfast Agreement was signed, shows us these processes in action, demonstrating also how much emotional work and 'dealing with the past' takes place within the home.

One by One in the Darkness begins with the character Cate Quinn arriving back in Northern Ireland from London, where she now lives. (We learn quite near the beginning that since moving there she has begun to spell her name with a C to become less Irish-identified.) She has come back to her childhood home to tell her family that she is pregnant; she is unmarried and there is subsequently an air of stigma and unease around this fact in her family, particularly her mother. The novel is ostensibly an account of the following week in the lives of Cate, her sisters Helen and Sally and their mother Emily. This all takes place in 1994, just before the first IRA ceasefire, but the 'present day' narrative is heavy with the past and large parts of the book are devoted to descriptions of the characters' childhoods. It is through these

sections that we discover their family history through the 1960s, 70s and 80s and its relationship with the political developments in Northern Ireland at these times. We also learn of the murder of their father/husband Charlie by loyalist paramilitaries in his brother Brian's home, a few years before Cate's visit.

Memory and the past are embedded in both the structure of *One by One in the Darkness* and in its themes. The past is crucial to characters' sense of identity, which Madden builds with detailed descriptions of the rural landscape and the houses in which her characters live and spend their time. The narrative shifts between past and present, with some chapters wholly devoted to complete episodes from the past and others set in the present day, broken up by characters' reflections or reminiscences about events. These times are filtered through each character slightly differently, with Cate, Helen, Sally and Emily all having varying relationships to their childhood home, Northern Ireland and the events of the Troubles. Cate is the character who has broken most obviously from her childhood: she moves to England, changes the spelling of her name and builds a new life for herself in London. This distance, however, means that home in part becomes a refuge, a place of safety and comfort that she feels she can return to. Helen, the eldest sister, stays in Northern Ireland but moves away from their rural family home to Belfast; she has an uneasy relationship to this new place, cannot quite settle or commit to her flat and returns to the family home every weekend. She is also the character who has made the most explicit political commitment to Northern Ireland – she works as a lawyer for a small firm in the city, defending republican paramilitaries – having decided as a teenager that she wants to stay there to study law and to 'make a difference' (Madden, 1996: 158) The youngest sister, Sally, has the most unbroken relationship to their childhood: she continues to live with their mother in the house they all grew up in and teaches at the primary school they all attended. Their mother, Emily, as part of a different generation, is a direct line to life in Northern Ireland before the conflict began and as such represents a kind of intermediate between these two eras. The accounts of her youth show her trying to move away from the socially constricting Catholic family of her upbringing and towards building a different kind of family with Charlie.

The past is a source of both comfort and pain. Sometimes past events are used by Madden to establish a sense of solidity in the characters' lives, a sense that they are deeply rooted in family, community and home. But the fact of Charlie's death, introduced early in the narrative, means something very different; here, the past equals loss, violence and trauma, which undermines any sense that it is something linear, straightforward or easily interpreted. As Harte and Parker point out, the book is 'profoundly conscious of its own textuality and time' (2000: 232). Images and narratives of various types proliferate in the text – on television, in newspapers, in people's homes and in daily conversations – conveying the different ways in which the history and experience of violence in Northern Ireland is understood. There is always a 'before' lurking in the story and there are frequent flashbacks and references to the past through text, objects and conversations. This does, as Jayne Steel argues, create 'a more contingent past, a past that is constructed through memory', one which is at times untidy and painful and which does not conform to the linearity of 'historical meta-narratives' (2004, 57).

Madden mixes these experimental features with a narrative voice that is very much rooted in the tradition of Irish social realism. The setting of the home is integral to this voice and descriptions of domestic objects are everywhere in the text. In a discussion of domestic space in the poetry of Seamus Heaney, Adam Hanna adopts the phrase 'memory-weight' from Heaney's poem 'Squarings' as a term for understanding how objects tie us to the past (2017: 187). This idea of the 'memory-weight' is useful when thinking through the function of objects in *One by One in the Darkness*. Items that create and shape memory are present in almost every scene in the book; they are parts of life to be encountered, dealt with and negotiated. Sometimes the characters come across them by chance in their everyday lives, as when Helen comes across memorial cards stuffed in a book she picks up: 'old dark ones, dense with print, and more modern ones which were brightly coloured' (Madden, 1996: 27). At other times they are experienced as something to be sorted through and thought about, as when Emily discovers 'a cache of memorabilia she hadn't known existed' in Charlie's wardrobe after his death, objects which she wants to throw away, but which her daughters insist on keeping (Madden, 1996: 107).

It is partly through these details that Madden's text engages with the theme of remembering. Astrid Erll points out in her study of cultural memory that we cannot observe memory itself and it is only 'through concrete acts of remembering situated in specific socio-cultural contexts' that we can theorise its workings (2011: 8). Interactions with domestic objects are one of many such acts of remembering performed by the Quinns in the text and form a crucial part of how the characters express themselves. Daniel Miller, in his influential anthropological study *The Comfort of Things*, argues that the objects people keep in their homes should be 'listened' to and demonstrates the ways in which people arrange space and the items within it tell crucial stories about who they are: 'Some things may be gifts or objects retained from the past but [people] have decided to live with them, to place them in lines or higgledy-piggledy ... These things are not a random collection' (2008: 2). In this light, it is the very existence of these objects in the characters' lives in *One by One in the Darkness* that turns them into memory-weights; the retention of cards, letters, clothes and books is an external act of remembrance, demonstrating conversations that have been had and decisions that have been made.

Home, then, is a crucial site of memory for the Quinn family. In the following passage, it is so deeply felt that it is beyond language for the characters and is instead something reflected in their surroundings and their interactions with them:

The scope of their lives was tiny but it was profound, and to them, it was immense. The physical bounds of their world were confined to little more than a few fields and houses, but they knew these places with the deep unconscious knowledge that a bird or fox might have for its habitat. The idea of home was something they lived so completely that they would have been at a loss to define it. But they would have known to be inadequate such phrases as: 'It's where you're from,' 'It's the place you live,' 'It's where your family are' (Madden, 1996: 21).

This completeness will later be ruptured by the murder of Charlie. This passage above also points to the significance of landscape in this profound and all-consuming

conception of home, and the fields, lanes, loughs of the countryside are there as the backdrop to many of the significant events in the book. One way that the characters process the violence and loss of Charlie's death is through thinking about their changed relationship to these features beyond their home.

Home as site of war

As a result of the conflict and violence that has taken place there, the Northern Irish landscape is a highly charged entity, a palimpsest 'read in different ways' (Kennedy-Andrews, 2008: 2) by the people who live within it. The landscape of *One by One in the Darkness* demonstrates this frequently, as Madden shows us a place overwritten with memory and signs of history. This deepens the characters' connections both to place and one another. We see this in an account of a family outing to the ancient stone cross at Ardboe and the excitement and delight both Helen and her father feel at this physical sense of history: 'to think of it having stood there for all those hundreds of years amazed her almost as much as it amazed and delighted her father' (Madden, 1996: 63). The palimpsestic nature of the landscape is similarly embodied on Cate and Helen's drive home from the airport, as Cate's reflections as she looks out the window are layered with different pasts: the historical estate around Shane's Castle, memories of her own curiosity about the castle as a child and the motorway cutting through the estate that was built in the 1970s, as well as the Union Jacks, Ulster flags and red, white and blue kerb stones that dot the streets in the present.

The above extract also points to the ways in which commemorative culture is physically inscribed into the landscape. McDowell and Switzer, in their exploration of the 'intensively memorialised' landscape in Derry's Bogside, describe the stories, struggles and power dynamics embodied by commemoration and the control it exerts over everyday spaces (2011: 87). In such public displays there exists a tension between 'the private remembering of loss, and either the public neglect of that loss or the public exploitation of that loss for political ends' (Reid, 2007: 946). This tension is neatly expressed in the vernacular landscape described by McDowell and Switzer. Houses, streets and blocks of flats are sites of private lives, places 'where everyday life was located before, and continued after' the violence and atrocity that occurred there

(Dawson, cited in Switzer and McDowell, 2011: 89). At the same time, these dwellings have also become memorials, as murals are painted on the gable ends of houses and blocks of flats; in addition to being places where people simply live, these homes have become commemorative objects. The domestic, emotional and physical labour that takes place inside is concealed by the bigger stories of collective suffering and struggle told on the outside.

Nancy Armstrong asserts that the power of the novel has historically partly derived from its ability to valorise private psychological struggles amidst bigger 'political' narratives and that argument is useful here. In post-Agreement Northern Ireland the novel form has a role in asserting these types of experiences into broader narratives about conflict, providing insight into what went on inside people's houses as well as outside of them and underscoring the importance of these stories and memories. In *One by One in the Darkness* Madden demonstrates this power through her treatment of grief and its effects on the everyday lives of her characters. Violence frequently intruded on domestic spaces during the Northern Irish conflict through army raids and paramilitary violence, and Madden dramatises the psychological impact this has on a family's experience of home and the surrounding landscape of Northern Ireland more generally. The book opens with the line 'Home was a huge sky' (Madden, 1996: 3) and the idea of home – what it means, what it looks like, where it is and what happens to it during a time of violence and political upheaval – is a central concern of the book. In focusing her attention on these spaces Madden shows us how people's lives were shaped by war and asserts the importance of considering these everyday lived experiences.

The novel's domestic context allows a focus on individual characters and their subjectivity. The recognition of these qualities is a crucial aspect of post-conflict dialogue and a process which, according to Richard Rankin Russell, novels such as *One by One in the Darkness* can aid us in. In his essay, Russell argues that literary texts such as Madden's add to 'reciprocal recognition' by highlighting the experiences of individuals during conflict and offering us 'a salient dialogue with these fully realised characters, whose "distinctness and personhood" we recognise and sympathise with'. (2016: 57). The text's engagement with this 'distinctness and personhood' is shown

in the following passage, in which Emily reflects upon the conflict, the loss of her husband and the ways in which such lives get quickly forgotten in media narratives: 'There'd been well over three thousand people killed since the start of the Troubles, and every single one of them had parents or husbands and wives and children whose lives had been wrecked. It would be written about in the paper for two days, but as soon as the funeral was over it was as if that was the end, when it was really only the beginning' (Madden, 1996: 127). Passages such as this bear the traces of the specific moment that Madden is writing from. The sadness and trauma of the Troubles are ongoing but there appears to be a perspective emerging in her text, perhaps enabled by a sense that the end of the conflict is near, about the need to come to terms with the scale of the suffering, to consider its human consequences, not just in the sense of her immediate characters, but more broadly across Northern Irish society. Madden offers up a space to engage with the pain of the conflict; there is no conclusion offered by Emily's reflections here and the text does, as Harte and Parker remind us, 'retain its stress on the hurt of the living' (2000: 24). The scene provides us with the 'imaginative access' referred to by Andrews and McGuire, without the pressures of neat solutions or fixed narratives demanded by stories that have more rigidly defined functions in the public political sphere.

Such reflections are firmly rooted in the home – in this case Emily is in her conservatory, surrounded by her treasured plants and flowers – and Madden establishes the centrality of this space throughout the book with her attention to the minutiae of interiors. Scenes set in a home include detailed references to the layout of parlours, living rooms, sculleries and kitchens and the food and drink that people are eating or preparing. Such descriptions are often used to demonstrate some kind of wider drama or tension, as when the girls visit their Granny Kelly, whose aloof and judgmental nature is illustrated through her relationship with domestic space and the rules she enforces about what food is allowed, the mugs and cups in which she serves tea and the glass cabinets, ornaments and vases that fill her 'dim parlour' (Madden, 1996: 39). Home is inextricably bound up with childhood and the past in these accounts, and even when the events are more obviously political – the mourning of the victims of an IRA bomb or the family's angry response to the arrest

of the girls' uncles Brian and Peter – Madden brings our attention back to the small details: 'the tiles of the floor stone cold' under Helen's 'slipperless feet' (Madden, 1996: 153) or the 'clatter of crockery' (Madden, 1996: 101) in the kitchen when Brian and Peter are finally let out of police custody.

A recently published collection of memoirs and critical essays entitled *The Vibrant House* explores the life of houses and domestic spaces and objects within the history of Irish writing. In its introduction Rhona Richman Kenneally draws on Bruno Latour's writing on the 'spatial turn' to emphasise the weight and symbolism that everyday domestic objects can carry: 'In the discourse of the spatial turn ... even something as seemingly humble as a spring-loaded door-closer has been deemed ... a "highly social actor that deserves careful consideration"' (2017: 17). The collection as a whole takes seriously the 'agency' of the house in Irish writing 'owing to its material and spatial properties – its design, materials, contents, geometry and distribution, capacity to *hold or propel atmospheric conditions* such as warmth or light, and contextual relationships with landscape or resources' (Kenneally, 2017: 15, italics added). In this framework the house is a dynamic actor within stories, shaping human behaviours and responses as well as reflecting them.

Madden's attention to detail in her descriptions gestures towards this agency, as well as showing the home as a site of work and activity. Every object is there because somebody has decided to put it there; it may have been polished or washed or placed somewhere with extreme care, as in Granny Kelly's parlour. They become a part of the story that domestic objects tell about individuals and their lives. The kitchen and scullery are particularly central in Madden's text. This is where meals are cooked and then cleaned up after; there are several scenes, for example, in which characters are washing dishes as a backdrop to some other more dramatic occurrence or to a particular emotional association, as when Helen thinks fondly of her Uncle Peter after he dies: 'She'd remembered going into the back scullery at Brian's house and seeing Peter standing by a sink full of soapy water, whistling to himself as he stacked the clean, thick plates in the rack on the draining board' (Madden, 1996: 161). While such acts are rarely a central concern of a scene, they remind us of the constant backdrop of labour that maintaining a home requires and help to build up this sense

of a house as somewhere invested with sensation and atmosphere, even in its most mundane and prosaic forms. The work that goes into creating a home, through objects chosen and placed, is represented by Madden through Helen's reflections on the sterile, unhomely nature of her flat in Belfast: 'She knew she needed more pictures, more rugs, more *things*, it was just a question of wanting to have them, and of taking the time and trouble to go out and get them' (Madden, 1996: 45, italics in original). This recalls Miller's studies of the power of household objects. The relative emptiness of Helen's flat reveals something of her desire for blankness and has an agency in itself; as Miller says there is a violence and 'a loss of shape' when a flat is so devoid of contents (2008: 8). In Helen's case this reflects her emotional state and the ways that violence has ruptured her relationship with both the idea and the reality of home.

This rupture is embodied most obviously by Brian and Lucy's house, where Charlie is murdered. This place is initially presented in the book as a place of childhood visits and fun and happy times, associations which the murder violently disturbs. This murder affects the characters and haunts the narrative as the house becomes heavy with associations of violence, invasion and loss. It carries echoes of the disturbance that has occurred inside it, holding those 'atmospheric conditions' and, in a way, becoming a character in its own right, with Brian remarking that he can no longer 'sit at peace' there (Madden, 1996: 29). After the murder Brian and Lucy have the kitchen redecorated, adding another layer of alteration to this place, which changes not only characters' relationships with the space itself, but also with the past events that have occurred within it. Cate reflects on the house after its redecoration and its relationship to her memories of childhood Halloweens: 'The changes meant that Cate didn't imagine her father lying murdered on the floor, as she had feared, but it also meant that she couldn't imagine the nut-cracking either. She had always thought of her childhood not principally in terms of time, but as a place to which she could always return' (Madden, 1996: 142). For Helen in her new flat this sense of home is a force she is trying to escape 'having moved in as soon as the builders moved out she was confident that it was, psychologically, a blank' (Madden, 1996: 44).

In the context of the Troubles, this experience of home is not untypical. During the conflict the home in Northern Ireland was politicised in very specific ways. Hanna reminds us of the census-driven calculations on which the creation of the majority Protestant state were based, pointing out that this 'made each house a unit that either underwrote or called into question the existence of the polity' (2015: 2). The Northern Irish civil rights movement of the late 1960s was of course formed partly in response to the gerrymandering and anti-Catholic housing discrimination of the Northern Irish state. And as the state and its security forces responded with violence – and some political struggles became more militarised – houses, streets and neighbourhoods became physically implicated in the conflict, as Bryony Reid outlines:

Because of the intimate nature of the Troubles, houses have been on the frontline of violent struggle used as boltholes and weapon stores by paramilitaries, the carriers of political symbols of assertion of resistance such as flags; as the objects of invasion and search by the army and police, often the site of their inhabitants' murders, and in many places vulnerable to destruction as a result of their inhabitants' politics or religion, private family homes in Northern Ireland have been made full participants in the public world in ways specific to the province's history and politics (2007: 943).

The home, while central, then, is contested and unsettled in Northern Ireland and in *One by One in the Darkness* this is demonstrated most dramatically through Charlie's murder. There are army and police raids in their homes prior to this event in the novel, however, and during one such incident Madden uses the arrangement of and movement around domestic objects to dramatise the sense of unease this presence provokes:

The room into which they all now went was dark, formal and seldom used. Emily and the children perched stiffly on the armchairs and sofa, Charlie

stood with his back to the cold hearth, and the younger of the two soldiers, who was carrying a long gun, moved over towards the china cabinet (Madden, 1996: 96).

Certain details here emphasise the strangeness and uneasiness of the experience: the rarely used nature of the room, its darkness, the cold hearth, the soldier and his gun poised next to the china cabinet and its suggested breakability. Again we see the house functioning as a character in itself, with the characters' behaviour towards it an integral part of the scene's action and mood. Madden shows how conflict and violence reach far into the intimate, everyday spaces and relationships of people's lives: 'Everybody was afraid now ... A parked, empty car, even on a deserted country road, was now a thing to be feared. Sammy who drove the travelling shop, and the man who sold hardware out of a van, had both long since stopped calling at their house' (Madden, 1996: 131). The family friend Wesley, a protestant painter and decorator from Castledawson, stops calling at the Quinns' house, as the heightened sectarian violence bestows a new meaning for him onto this place. As Charlie wonders if he should call him, Emily comments that 'He's probably too frightened to come to a Catholic house now, and you'll only embarrass him if you force the point' (Madden, 1996: 132).

The details of Charlie's murder are revealed gradually throughout the book and it is not until the final chapter, through Helen's imaginings, that we learn the specifics of how it actually happened. She thinks about her father 'drinking tea out of a blue mug' and talking to Lucy 'who was working out in the back scullery' doing the dishes. Two men burst in and there is 'the scrape of a chair' (Madden, 1996: 181) as Charlie moves and realises what's about to happen to him. Not actually being present at the scene, there is no way for Helen to know these details. Their presence in her own retelling of the story, however, underscores the role that these components parts of the home play when characters understand and process events; once again, objects become embodiments of remembrance. With this account and its specificity and focus on the small, Madden is contrasting her individual characters' memories with the crude and simplified media narratives of Charlie's death. Helen's imaginings

create, as Jayne Steel argues 'a more detailed, more poignant and, arguably, more "real" narrative of the murder than the so-called facts reported in the male-dominated media' (2004: 58).

The potential of domestic space

This conflict and invasion meant that domestic spaces in Northern Ireland also became sites of resistance. There are several iconic examples of this: the case of Free Derry when community activists constructed barricades around the Catholic areas of the Bogside and Creggan in Derry to prevent security forces from gaining entry to their streets and houses, and the women in Catholic neighbourhoods who banged dustbin lids to warn that the army were approaching. These are examples, in a way, of bringing the home outside into the street, making the private public and visible. However, the radical potential offered by Madden is of a subtler, less visible kind. The home in this novel is a place in which things are discussed, worked out, alliances, stories told and solidarities forged. In this section I discuss the role of the home as somewhere the past is dealt with, memories are used and narratives are built. Possibilities are opened up in Madden's text for a type of memory which 'is not a mass, commemorative process but rather something difficult and complex, which does not always rise to the "right" stimuli and provide a uniform response' (Magennis, 2016: 47). I argue that this more complex memory is enabled by its taking place in domestic space, removed from monolithic public group narratives and from the landscapes which 'reveal both a past and present shaped and defined overwhelmingly by men' (McDowell, 2008: 336).

Dawson and other memory-studies scholars have theorised the dynamic relationship between collective and individual memories and have worked to break down some of the rigid distinctions between myth and reality in relation to Irish history. As Dawson writes, such thinking 'suggests that memories are not simply *myths* to be dispelled or transformed by the reasoning of historians', rather they are something to be taken seriously and from which we can learn. He challenges the idea of the past and memory as simple 'uncovering'. Rather, there are 'multiple and contradictory truths' and historical narratives and people's relationships with them

can shift and change (Dawson, 2007: 18, italics in original). Guy Beiner suggests the term 'mythistory' to replace the 'binary opposition between history and myth characteristic of Irish revisionism' (2016: 16). In an important and influential 1982 paper entitled 'Popular memory: politics, theory, method', the Popular Memory Group, of which Dawson was a member, argued that 'Private memories cannot ... be readily unscrambled from the effects of dominant historical discourses. It is often these that supply the very terms by which a private history is thought through' (Popular Memory Group, 1982: 206). Personal memory, history and public narratives, then, all have a dynamic relationship with one other.

One by One in the Darkness shows this collision of memory narratives in action. All the characters display an interest in and awareness of the exchange between public and private stories, the places that they intersect and those where they diverge, the gaps between how things are represented and how they are experienced on a day-to-day level. Media representations of conflict are frequently compared with characters' own experiences of events. In early memories there is a distance between what they see on TV – the images of gritty, urban violence – and their own lives in rural northern Ireland, described here by Madden in lyrical, pastoral terms: 'They watched the black-and-white pictures while their parents fretted, and then they stepped out of the house again ... where the swallows swooped and dipped in jagged flight around the back yard; where cattle ambled through the long grass; and where the honeysuckle bloomed by the green gate' (Madden, 1996: 96). This gap becomes more menacing after Charlie's death and there are several moments when characters recall the media's treatment of his murder, in which there are insinuations that he 'had only got what was coming to him' (Madden, 1996: 47). Throughout the novel such texts 'fail to do justice' (Harte and Parker, 2000: 238) and in the first meeting between Helen and her journalist friend David it becomes clear that this failure is a motivation for them both in their respective careers, as they try to somehow 'right' the wrongs that are done by these false narratives.

Madden focuses on these more personal moments and expresses the grief and pain of individual experiences. An incident in which the Quinns' teenage neighbour Tony Larkin is killed while planting an IRA bomb under an electricity pylon

demonstrates the interplay between individual death, personal grief and public commemoration, of the type described by Reid and McDowell and Switzer. The Quinns watch at Tony's funeral as his coffin is draped with an Irish tricolour and men and women 'with black berets and dark glasses' fire a volley of shots over his open grave (Madden, 1996: 104). Alongside this overt display of republican aggression, Madden describes the less conspicuous, more personal responses to Tony's death: the grief of Tony's mother as she cries for her son by his grave and, later on, Charlie's quiet, sad fury as he talks to his daughters: 'Never forget what you saw today; and never let anybody try to tell you that it was anything other than a life wasted, and lives destroyed' (Madden, 1996: 105). This episode recalls a real life incident cited by McDowell in her feminist critique of Northern Irish commemorative politics, in which the mother of a 17 year old boy killed in a bomb blast objects to the ways his memory is used by Sinn Fein and the IRA:

She recalled thinking that he had been a civilian victim until paramilitaries turned up at the funeral and tried to impose Republican burial rites on the ceremony. She refused and her son was subsequently buried without military honours in a family, rather than Republican, plot. Her grief, however, was reignited when an IRA memorial commemorating him and other volunteers was erected some 15 years later in a public space not far from her home: 'A man just came to the house and said that they were putting his name on a monument and that was that. I had no choice. It brought it all back' (2007: 345).

Both Madden's fictional account and McDowell's case study display the tension between individuals' responses to death and the responses of bigger political movements who strive to publicly project a bigger story about their plight. Again, we see the imaginative space created by Madden's fictional text for exploring this tension and the human stories that exist within it.

In the field of social psychology there have been various studies investigating the relationship between group identity and individual memory, demonstrating the ways in which group narratives influence how people remember events (see, for example,

Sahdra & Ross, 2007). This exchange can also work the other way, although the power dynamic is different: individual experiences and accounts of the past may be absorbed into broader group narratives, as in the cases of the murals in the Bogside, Madden's fictional funeral or McDowell's case study cited above. These individual instances may then be used or exploited in the service of a particular agenda. The discursive psychologist Cristian Tileagă undertook several investigations into this process and examined the social nature of memory in transitional post-Communist societies through archive, confessional accounts and memoirs. In his studies Tileagă treats collective memories of conflict as constructed 'texts of history' and in doing so highlights the processes which create these memories. He argues that we must examine how 'nation states turn themselves into "socially organized biographical objects"' when confronting the past (Ken Plummer quoted in Tileagă, 2013: 1).

Tileagă's analysis can also provide an insight into the processes at work in post-conflict Northern Ireland and the gaps and unanswered questions left by the language of the Belfast Agreement. Tileagă interrogates what 'coming to the terms with the past' means in post-Communist Romania and highlights the ways in which various calls by the Romanian president to 'condemn', 'heal' and 'lift' burdens have had a totalising effect on memory and have overlooked the complexities of individual experience in the name of political expediency: 'These are all actions that take for granted "togetherness" and the timely nature of reckoning' (2013: 25). In the Northern Irish context, there are traces of such rhetoric in the Agreement's Declaration of Support quoted above, with its references to a 'fresh start' and 'mutual trust' without any real attempt to imagine what these things will look like. Perhaps, given its original technocratic purpose, the Belfast Agreement is the wrong place to look for such imaginings, although it does seem clear, from the various political crises that have beset the Northern Irish Assembly over the years, that there is an urgent need to find different ways of talking about both the experiences of the past and visions for the future.

Madden's text problematises the language of togetherness and fresh starts by demonstrating the emotional work undertaken by individuals and families in the

aftermath of violence and loss. In the following account of how Sally helped Emily cope with her bereavement the use of domestic activity is striking:

Sally had known instinctively what she needed then, she'd known the times when Emily was truly helpless with grief, and then she'd cooked for her and looked after her. But she'd also known the times when Emily needed firmness, needed to be pushed. Then Sally would ask her mother to make scones or to let down the hem on a skirt for her, or insist on some other domestic chore that was exactly the distraction Emily needed (Madden, 1996: 111).

As when Emily sits in her conservatory and reflects on the past, this is a process that is largely hidden from the public eye; it is not performative or easily incorporated into public commemorative events and takes place in private space.

According to Dawson, for common memories which circulate within relatively private spheres to become more public they need to 'create agencies' (2007: 53) that can speak beyond such spaces. So how to create such agencies when memories do not fit in with a broader political campaign? One of Tileagă's suggestions may prove useful here and Madden's novel offers a vision of how it may work. Tileagă argues that, in contrast to the 'archontic power' of state archives and narratives which impose a false or misleading coherence to the past, personal archives provide a more creative and flexible practice of remembering and storytelling. These memory devices may be built up through everyday practices, through 'personal notes, various documents, photographs, diaries (sometimes, audio or video recordings)' (Tileagă, 2011: 9). This personal archive may be the beginning of a process of agency-building and in *One by One in the Darkness*, we see the Quinn family creating their own personal archives throughout the book. It is built up through past experiences and memories which they play back internally or share with each other in their conversation, all of which appears to give them a kind of resilience when dealing with the horrors of the Northern Irish conflict.

When Cate arrives back from London at the beginning of the novel we get a sense that there is, for her, some kind of authenticity to being in this space with her

sisters and her mother, with its objects and their associations, all of which comes from its deep connection to the past:

Cate always loved the first meal with her family when she came home and they would talk and laugh and tell each other the bits of news they had neglected in their many phone calls and letters. It reminded her of the visceral, uncomprehending emotional closeness that had bound them together over dinners of baked beans and fish fingers eaten at that same table when they were small children (Madden, 1996: 8).

The past is there in this scene, pulling on the present day through the kitchen table and the memories associated with it. This fusion of time and space in the family house is explicitly dealt with by Madden in the book, when Cate is described as thinking of her childhood as 'as a place to which she could always return' (Madden, 1996: 142). Several scenes in the novel describe a similar sense of solace and intimacy to that 'first meal', with the four women talking, laughing, and sharing memories and observations. In the midst of violence and political upheaval, the home is a place that the characters can return to, draw strength from and reflect within. Even while their home exists within the divided, war-torn Northern Ireland and the heightened sectarian hostility of marching season, this completeness, as Harte and Parker argue, sustained the family (2000: 234).

These times and spaces are not sealed off from the Northern Irish war; the home is invaded by the conflict, but it is also where the characters willingly engage with it, together or alone. There are political discussions and arguments about civil rights marches, bombings, deaths; characters reflect individually about their thoughts and feelings about the war. It is also the site of political awakenings, as we see with a flashback to Emily's youth:

She remembered sitting in the garden of her aunt's house in Ballymena on a warm summer evening, listening to the sound of a flute band practising in the distant streets for the Twelfth celebrations ... she realised that those

people hated her, *hated* her, and would give her family no quarter (Madden, 1996: 115, italics in original).

Even when dealing with the intense trauma of their father's death, all characters seem to work through their grief in different but very considered ways, sometimes thinking about it in relation to the wider political situation, or to the Northern Irish landscape, or to their family. They learn how to use the past for their own purposes from a young age, constructing their own 'personal archives'. An account from Cate's childhood demonstrates this, as it describes how she deals with her anxieties during one of her Uncle Peter's mental health episode: 'She would make herself think of the day he'd taken them out to the island and showed them the gulls' nest and she'd tried not to be frightened anymore' (Madden, 1996: 37). In this way, the characters create their own narratives and are portrayed as in control of their own stories. There is a kind of reflexivity on show here – and which the other characters demonstrate – about what forms and shapes the past and how it can be used for different purposes.

Conclusion

The tension that Bryony Reid highlights, between public and private forms of remembrance in Northern Ireland, is dramatised by Madden in the book, through this picture of the daily emotional life of a family and the ways in which they process violence, loss and grief. This process is managed in part due to the rich possibilities of private space, as somewhere that subjectivities and agencies can be worked out, and where responses to loss, questions of national identity and history can be thought about and worked through together. All of this is possible partly because the home is a space removed from the force of coercive group narratives. Erll poses an important question about what counts as memory, asking 'Can we really take individual mental processes, myths, memorials, debates about the past, autobiographies and families looking at snapshots and bring them all together under the umbrella of "memory"?' (2011: 6). Madden's text in some ways embodies both this question and its answer – here is a family participating in all these forms of remembering and making them a part of their stories, as individuals, as a family and as citizens of Northern Ireland. In

Northern Ireland twenty years after the Belfast Agreement, this novel provides a vision of remembrance, grieving and dealing with the past as emotional work. Cate's idea for a memorial is in some ways the ideal physical embodiment of the links between memory and place in the novel and also bears the traces of some kind of home space:

She imagined a room, a perfectly square room. Three of its walls, unbroken by windows, would be covered by neat rows of names, over three thousand of them; and the fourth wall would be nothing but window. The whole structure would be built where the horizon was low, and the sky huge (Madden, 1996: 149).

This passage explicitly links us back to the huge sky of the book's opening sentence, pulling together the themes of loss but also possibility represented by the home in the novel.

All of the women in this novel are or have been publicly engaged in the politics of the conflict: they have been on marches, been members of political parties, and worked out in the community. The process at work in Madden's text offers readers a kind of bridge between this public sphere and the private sphere of home. Rather than characters' domestic experience being privately fenced off, it is something the women bring out into the public world with them and vice versa. Madden's book anticipates some aspects of the Belfast Agreement's rhetoric with regards to acknowledging personal suffering and loss, but as a piece of literature it has the space to go further, filling in some of the absences it leaves and suggesting the spaces on which, twenty years on, we should be turning our attention.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Davies, E 2018 Domestic Space and Memory: Remembering Deirdre Madden’s *One by One in the Darkness* and the Belfast Agreement. *Open Library of Humanities*, 4(2): 34, pp. 1–27. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.359>

Published: 06 November 2018

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