

'Around the sky': The Memory of Trauma in Deirdre Madden's *One by One in the Darkness*

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One by One in the Darkness is a meditation on the phenomenon of memory and trauma, chronicling a week in the lives of three sisters shortly before the beginning of the IRA ceasefire in 1994. The contemporary narrative is interspersed by flashbacks of the sisters' childhood and by examining these memory flashbacks, this paper explores the dialectic between the memory of trauma and the construction of identity, both in a personal and national context. In examining the relationship between the narrative of a family and the history of a society, this paper uses the experience of trauma as a lens through which to illuminate the nature of personal and societal memory and to explore the possibility of healing through memorialization.

Memory becomes traumatic when the act of remembering itself facilitates an obsessive return to a traumatic moment. Robert F. Garratt posits that on a national level, traumatic experience can distort and disrupt historical recollection and reflection. The Irish nation is haunted by its own violent memories. Trauma then, becomes an appealing-or even compelling-lens through which Irish authors can engage with national and social narratives. If we are concerned with 'how the national story is told', we must necessarily be concerned with the trauma that underlies that story.¹ Communities experience a sense of identity through shared memories, and as such, the memory of trauma troubles both individuals and communities. The sense of traumatic repetition that defines the experience of trauma victims lies in the belief that history repeats itself. Because trauma occurs outside of time, it creates its own time within the psyche of the victim who has survived it- memory time.

One by One in the Darkness is a meditation on the phenomenon of memory and trauma, chronicling a week in the lives of three sisters shortly before the beginning of the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) ceasefire in 1994. The contemporary narrative is interspersed with flashbacks of the sisters' childhood. In examining these memory flashbacks, this article seeks to explore the dialectic between the memory of trauma and the construction of identity, both in a personal and national context. Furthermore, in examining the relationship between the narrative of a family and the history of a society, this article uses the experience of trauma as a lens through which to illuminate the nature of personal and societal memory, and to explore the possibility of healing through memorialisation.

¹ R. Garratt, *Trauma and History in the Irish Novel: The Return of the Dead*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 1.

One by One in the Darkness is thus, by Garratt's definition, a 'trauma novel', in that the reconstruction of the events of the sisters' childhood through memories and reflections is as crucial to the development of the narrative as the events themselves are.² For Garratt, the paradox at the centre of the trauma novel is the fact that a character or characters cannot remember the event that haunts them. For the sisters, the traumatic event which haunts them is one that they did not witness. They cannot remember the event because they were not present for it.

The relationship between the experience and the remembrance of trauma pervades texts which deal with the social and political issues of Northern Ireland. Memories that cannot be retrieved, traumatic moments that cannot be concluded, and secrets that cannot be articulated are all features of a traumatic national past which resonates throughout the lives of individuals and communities. Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*³ chronicles the coming of age of a young Catholic boy from Derry and centres on his gradual uncovering of a devastating secret that haunts his family and his childhood. Siobhan Dowd's *Boy Child*⁴ features a teenage boy haunted by images of a murdered girl whose body he discovers in a bog. The narrative unfolds through dream and flashback sequences, and highlights the instability that lies at the heart of the recollection process. Sean O'Reilly's *Love and Sleep*⁵ is an account of a young man's attempt to engage with his fractured past and re-establish a connection with his estranged family in a damaged post-Troubles community seeking reconciliation. In each of these representative texts, the process of narration and the act of remembrance are inexorably linked by the experience of trauma and the uncovering of secrets which have previously remained hidden. In contemporary Northern Irish fiction, individual and communal identities are both defined and damaged by the historical and personal experience of trauma.

In their own individual and intimately personal ways, each of the central characters in Deirdre Madden's *One by One in the Darkness* experiences a crisis of identity and of self-representation. Focusing on the way in which the past—both private and historical—constructs the present, the novel juxtaposes the peace and security of the sisters' early childhood experiences with the violence of a Northern Irish society traumatised by the effects of conflict. As the integrity of these childhood experiences is broken down by the pressure of the sisters' memories of their father's violent death, they—and their widowed mother—begin to question the stability of their identities and the way in which they perceive themselves in relation to each other and to the wider world of which they are a part.

Their responses to these crises are as distinct and separate as their personalities. In order to examine those responses, we must first explore the concept of identity in the text. As sisters, Helen, Cate and Sally share a mutual past and a communal childhood. Identity in the narrative is intimately connected with the idea, memory and experience of that past. In this context, narrating and remembering the past becomes a way to reclaim it and to reconstitute their identities. But even this aspect of their responses to their identity crises is problematic as the past cannot be

² Garratt, *Trauma and History in the Irish Novel*, p. 5.

³ S. Deane, *Reading in the Dark*, New York, Vintage International, 1998.

⁴ S. Dowd, *Boy Child*, London, David Fickling, 2010.

⁵ S. O'Reilly, *Love and Sleep*, New York, Carroll & Graf, 2003.

fully articulated or even understood, especially as the sisters now view it through the lens of their father's violent death. Key moments in the formation of their characters are alluded to but never fully remembered or recapitulated. Because these moments are never reclaimed, they cannot be completely understood. Their childhood is unavoidably revised by the death of their father; Charlie's murder is in many ways the catalyst for the identity crises the girls experience, with the trauma affecting each in a different way. The sisters' essential selves are interrogated by that trauma and reduced to their component parts until the idea of their lives ceases to make sense. This is a theme throughout the novel insofar as community is situated in the links between these constituent parts: when these links break down, when trauma isolates the members of this community, meaning is lost. In order to deal with the crises of identity they each experience, the sisters must translate the past they all share to form new identities that encompass the trauma they have experienced: the loss of their father, the void that his absence creates and the violence of his death. But access to that past becomes problematic within a text where memory is always subjective and influenced by recent events.

As such, memory and its inherent subjectivity fundamentally inform the twin ideas of home and community in the text. These concepts are formed within a fundamental structure of exclusion; paradoxically, communities in the novel are formed through isolation and separation. Even as children, Helen, Cate and Sally recognise this. Home for them is more than a place; it is a separation from aspects of the wider community of Northern Ireland and of their own village. Their childhood and the homes in which it is centred, come to literally house their own concepts of themselves and their identities. These highly significant sites become repositories of memory, and as such, when their sanctity is compromised by Charlie's death, the sisters' ideas of themselves, both as individuals and as a family, are also compromised. Both homes become memorials to the childhood and pasts that can no longer be accessed. These sites preserve memories but can no longer evoke them. Charlie's violent death ruptures the past these characters have shared and creates a space in the unstable present in which they must interrogate their identities or lose them completely. The sisters articulate these interrogations primarily through language and memory. These two concepts become the means through which they can attempt to access both the past and the future. They are also ways in which the sisters attempt to reclaim and revision the past, stabilise the present and contemplate the future in all its uncertainty. Identity in the text and for the sisters is both constituted through and complicated by these concepts.

This is illuminated in their struggles to retrieve their childhood from the traumatic void their father's death has created. Gaston Bachelard talks about a permanent childhood—a state created and maintained by the interaction of imagination and memory that exists outside of time and history, and which is real only in the sense that it is both imagined and remembered.⁶ Charlie's murder has made it impossible for the sisters to recall their childhood without re-experiencing the trauma that has come to define it. The horrific event of his murder represents the moment their identities and their perceptions of the world around them had begun to break down. Now their childhood, inextricably associated with a moment like

⁶ G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, trans. D. Russell, New York, Orion Press, 1969, p. 20.

this, has become fundamentally compromised. The sisters cannot truly allow themselves to remember what has happened to their father because they have yet to absolutely acknowledge that in remembering his death, they cannot change it. The line between remembering and imaging has been blurred; memory no longer brings them back 'into the domain of the actual and the already lapsed' but rather into a liminal space between what has happened and what might have been.⁷ If memory itself can be defined as 'an experience preserved in time', then precisely because of its preserved nature, it can never truly be reclaimed or re-experienced. It becomes a self-contained moment in time, in a place which is ultimately inviolable and preserved by virtue of the fact that it has happened and it cannot happen again-it cannot be changed or altered. The primacy of the 'lived relation between identity, place and memory' is compromised and the sisters are cast adrift in a reality where nothing-not even the past-is stable.⁸

If children construct their own perception of their childhoods even as they are living through those childhoods, and if selfhood is constructed even partly through memory, then, as Peter Hollindale suggests, our identity depends 'on our sense of personal continuity in time'-and on our ability to structure our lives through linear narratives.⁹ We access that continuity and express that identity through stories and memories. Through the narrative of past experiences, we story our lives. Story becomes a language that carries memory, meaning and identity. But the three sisters have become locked into a silence that disrupts the interaction between experience and memory. Ironically, it is only through communication that the sisters can hope to reconstitute their childhood memories by 'pulling together the distributed strands of experience'.¹⁰ But Cate, Sally and Helen are each locked into their own individual realities by the silences they observe-silences they cannot break.

Language and communication are inadequate purveyors of meaning and emotion within the narrative. Cate endures the emotional distress of breaking the news of her pregnancy to her family only because she believes she will find consolation in the fact that by the end of her visit, 'everything would be known'.¹¹ She desires complete disclosure but we know that this is not possible. We know she will never tell her family everything, and that the inadequacy of language will prevent her from doing so. Indeed, her mother Emily only talks to the young parish priest following her husband's death because she believes he will not be able to understand what she is saying. She seeks refuge in the inadequacy of language so she will not have to attempt to articulate her feelings. Language itself becomes a carrier of memory. Yet, because language ultimately fails the sisters, so too does memory. They cannot truly remember because they will not or cannot allow themselves to communicate effectively.

⁷ J. Wylie, *Landscape*, London, Routledge, 2007, p. xvi.

⁸ D. Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*, Ohio, Ohio State University Press, 2012, p. xxv.

⁹ P. Hollindale, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*, London, Thimble Press, 1997, p. 68.

¹⁰ R. Fivush and P.J. Bower, 'The Emergence of Recollection: How We Learn to Recall Ourselves in the Past', in J. Hall (ed.), *The Act of Remembering: Towards an Understanding of How We Recall the Past*, London, Blackwell, 2011, pp. 259-283.

¹¹ D. Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, Great Britain, Faber and Faber, 1996, p. 9.

Claire Hackett and Bill Rolston have written extensively about the 'burden of memory' and the consequences of narration; of storytelling as a way to understand trauma.¹² The narration of memory is charged with potentiality—both positive and negative. Hackett and Rolston posit the notion that storytelling is never a simple, contained act. In attempting to regain control of their own identity, a victim engaging in the storytelling process runs the risk of isolating themselves from their audience. The agency gained through storytelling—through remembering—is fragile. Hackett and Rolston's concept of transition space is especially relevant to Madden's text. On the eve of a ceasefire, the sisters and their wider community find themselves reflecting on what has passed—and what is perpetually passing. As they struggle to find the words to narrate their memories, they struggle even more to become the 'subjects of their own stories'.¹³ In remembering, they find themselves questioning both who they were and who they have become. Trauma disrupts the linear flow of time and compromises the ability of the individual to view their life as a coherent narrative. As 'failed experience', trauma overwhelms the present with a reality that the victim cannot assimilate.¹⁴ As Hackett and Rolston write, it 'prevents the present being real'.¹⁵ Trauma, then, prevents the victim from engaging with the everyday reality of their own lives. Lawrence Langer talks of the difficulty of narrating the trauma of the past out of the normality of the present.¹⁶ But for the sisters, the present they inhabit is framed and influenced by the trauma they have experienced. There is no 'context of normality' in their present.¹⁷

In this context, language forms the centre of a conceit of miscommunication that runs through the novel: as children, the sisters 'couldn't understand all of what was being said'.¹⁸ They are denied access to the meaning of some of the conversations they overhear and are addressed in registers that do not facilitate the transfer of that meaning. Some of the larger social ideas that inform their childhood are placed almost out of their reach because they do not understand the language that is being used to articulate them. It is implied in the text when Charlie, Peter and Brian are fighting about the Northern Irish Troubles that Brian is speaking in what is fundamentally a different language from his brothers, a language laden with associations and ideologies. Supposedly, it is only when the sisters grow up that they can re-narrate their past with the appropriate language, and so reconstitute not only their identities but the idea of their childhood. Yet for Helen at least, the loss of her father exposes the inadequacy of the language she must use to articulate herself: a discrepancy arises 'between self and place, sign and reality, past and present'.¹⁹

¹² C. Hackett & B. Rolston, 'The Burden of Memory: Victims, storytelling and resistance in Northern Ireland', *Memory Studies*, vol. 2, 2009, p. 355.

¹³ Hackett & Rolston, 'The Burden of Memory', p. 369.

¹⁴ E. Van Alphen, 'Caught by Images: On the Role of Visual Imprints in Holocaust Testimonies', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2002, pp. 210-211.

¹⁵ Hackett & Rolston, 'The Burden of Memory', p. 359.

¹⁶ L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruin of Memory*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1991, p. 22.

¹⁷ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, p. 22.

¹⁸ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, pp. 71-72.

¹⁹ L. Harte & M. Parker (eds.), *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories*, Great Britain, Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000, p. 239.

Following their father's death, the constitution and character of the Quinn family change. This traumatic event is arguably the point at which the interrogation of the sisters' identities begins. Cate is intimately aware of the change. In childhood, it was love that bound them together as a family. But the family that emerges after Charlie's death, struggling to restructure itself and to create a structure within which to function in the face of such trauma, is defined precisely by his death. His murder and his subsequent absence from the family unit bind this new version of the family together. Home and family are now founded on a loss, on absence; the murder is what now binds them together. They have been 'frightened' by this trauma and Cate's musings imply that that fear never dissipates.²⁰ It is 'like a wire which connect[s] them with each other and isolate[s] them from everyone else'.²¹ Fear and loss create a new community and force the sisters to renegotiate the terms of their identities and the nature of their relationships with each other. This new family structure which emerges following Charlie's death is a powerful image of the unstable present within the text.

Characters in the novel try to cope with this unstable present by imagining themselves to be other people or by trying to contextualise and visualise the pasts of other characters. This process, no matter how many times it is engaged in, fails to provide insight, closure or fulfilment. As Cate drives through a countryside she does not understand or possess the language to describe, she daydreams about standing at a 'high distant window' and imagines herself 'looking out from another life'.²² This daydream occurs as she is driving through villages whose names have become signifiers for the violent events which have happened there. The tension that surrounds the idea of naming and its arbitrary nature within the text, both in terms of the landscape and in terms of Cate herself, is especially tangible here. The details of this other life from which she imagines herself looking out are never specified, just as the events, which she associates with the villages she passes through, are never articulated or narrated.

Helen also experiences moments of this failed imagining. While visiting her mother's old friend in the city, she fails to imagine what life would be like in this place of slate rooftops and chimneys. The idea of her own home and the huge sky which encompasses it prevents her from stepping outside of it, even in her imagination. When she tries to picture her mother 'as someone who wasn't her mother', she draws a 'blank'.²³ More than that, the idea disturbs her and she retreats from it, having shaken the foundations of her own identity. She cannot access her mother's past; it is only the memory of that past that remains. The same failure of imagination occurs when she tries to see her grandparents as younger people and 'looking as they did in the framed photograph in the parlour'.²⁴ The photograph is the only access to their past that she has and it is not enough. In memorialising that moment, the photograph has also confined it to a kind of stasis.

²⁰ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 9.

²¹ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 9.

²² Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 83.

²³ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 75.

²⁴ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 73.

It is through the faculty of Helen's imagination that Charlie's death is eventually articulated and, to some extent, narrated. Here again, though her imagination does not fail, the process is ultimately painful and unfulfilling for her. Instead of reconciling herself to her father's death and constructing a new sense of identity from that acceptance, Helen dooms herself to repeat this process of almost-remembering, almost-imagining, over and over again. This moment in which she envisages the scene of his death mirrors another episode in the text when she discovers her father crying in the dark. He himself could not articulate the fear he felt. In hindsight and perhaps in the moment itself, Helen understands what he had been thinking. It is as if, in that moment of Charlie imagining his own death or the death of one of his family members, Helen has 'already lost him'.²⁵ Charlie's 'loved body' exists, in that moment, in both that present and the future which contains his death.²⁶ The violent destruction of his body becomes, in a way, the consequence of that fear. His death is foreshadowed in this moment as he stands at the back door of his own home and contemplates the unstable present he finds himself in.

Home, death and memory are thus intimately linked in the text. Home itself is described in the opening section of the novel as 'a huge sky...birds in flight...a solid stone house where the silence was uncanny'.²⁷ This description has a kind of memorial quality to it; the images it is based on offer moments of insight into the idea of home within the text. These images could also be said to function as memories, or at the very least, as the landscape against which the memories of the central characters are placed. Thus at the very outset, home is linked to the idea of memory, and so, to the concept of time. As the text progresses we realise that the idea of home is located in and associated very specifically with the sisters' childhood: as they grow older and move further away from that childhood, the home from which they have ventured out into the world becomes more exposed to the effects of time. The sisters believe that their childhood is situated in a kind of timeless space, a space they will always be able to access through memory. This belief is ultimately revealed to be fallacious as the sisters' memories prove more and more subjective and unreliable. The idea of geographical place and intimate space within the text functions on both a real and an imaginary level: the landscape is imbued with memory and experience.

Their father's murder blocks the access the sisters have to that intimate childhood space by colouring their memories of that time. Home becomes the stone house filled with an uncanny silence. The process of remembering is gradually distorted and is linked with the idea of repression and trauma. This is, in part, what fuels the identity crises the sisters experience. Their childhood, the site upon which their identities were constructed, must be reinterpreted in light of the events of the recent past. According to Bachelard, a house 'constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability'.²⁸ While the sisters' kitchen is the only part of the house that does not change, its counterpart in their uncle's house is changed beyond all recognition in a renovation project; that is to say, while memories are

²⁵ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 130.

²⁶ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 130.

²⁷ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 1.

²⁸ G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1994, p. 17.

preserved in the former, they are dislocated in the latter. As the physical space of the home changes, so too does its ability to hold memories and to provide access to a past time. For Casey, the 'specificity of place' is fundamental both to memory itself and to the act of remembering.²⁹ Denying that specificity compromises access to memory through place and disrupts the memorial potential of place itself. The renovation process is thus a denial of the specificity and importance of this meaningful place within the narrative and within the life of the family.

Brian's house is a space within the text where almost anything can happen. For the children, it is a kind of fantasy house. As a child Cate used to think that it was impossible to imagine 'a nicer house than Uncle Brian's'.³⁰ We are told that the front door was almost never opened and the back door was seldom locked. This raises the idea of trust and intimacy both within the family and the wider community. After her husband's death, Emily hesitates to open her front door unless she is certain of who is waiting on the other side of it. Doors, front and back, within the text at first signify a kind of openness and familiarity. However, following Charlie's murder, they become a symbol of silence, isolation, and estrangement. The back door that was seldom locked speaks to a kind of continuity that existed in the sisters' childhood: a knowledge that this was a space in which they were constantly welcome and with which they were intimately familiar. The front door their mother becomes anxious about opening speaks to the breaking of that continuity and of their connection to the past. The idea of an 'enclosed, knowable community', previously viewed in a positive light throughout the text, here becomes painfully ironic as the wider community becomes isolated within its trauma.³¹ At night, it seems as if one is driving towards 'some huge city, because of all the lights' but during the day, one can see that it is 'all just a scattering of small towns, villages and isolated farms'.³² The illusion of an 'organic community' still exists but even the landscape seems at times to collude in perpetuating a kind of physical as well as emotional isolation.³³ As the violence persists, the idea of community in the novel is inexorably broken down into individual experiences of trauma which are necessarily isolating in their emotional nature.

Just as the idea of home within the text is necessarily predicated on a kind of exclusion of the world outside that home, in order to truly see and know their home, the sisters must view it from different perspectives. When Peter takes them out to an island on a local lake, Helen and Kate³⁴ see their uncle Brian's house from 'an unfamiliar angle' and the familiar, natural act of looking at a place they know so well is suddenly rendered strange and disorientating.³⁵ The house itself has not changed but their position in relation to it has. They are suddenly separated from it

²⁹ J. Wasserman, 'To Trace the Shifting Sands: Community, Ritual, and the Memorial Landscape', *Landscape Journal*, vol. 17, 1998, pp. 42-61.

³⁰ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 1.

³¹ G. Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation*, London, Pluto, 1997, p. 61.

³² Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 42.

³³ E. Kennedy-Andrews, *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969: (de-)constructing the North*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2003, p. 156.

³⁴ The alternate spellings of 'Cate' and 'Kate' are explained on pages 11-12.

³⁵ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 18.

in a way they have never considered or conceived of before. This calls into question the idea of Sally's perspective within the text: even as children, her sisters see the landscape of their home from a strange position, from outside the sphere of their normal lives, but she does not because she does not go to the island with them. Crucially, she remains at home with their mother, and so, she is inside the house as they look at it from a different angle. Equally significant is the fact that Cate does not want to look at their house from the water. She is an uneasy participant in the dialectic between distance and perspective raised by the incident. Though Cate is the sister who moves farthest away from their childhood home, she remains intimately connected to it; so much so that as a child, she recognises the possible danger in situating herself outside of it. Even out on the liminal space of the water, placed as she is outside the context of home, Cate still connects herself to it, anchoring herself in the house where her father stands watching. It is Helen who tells her that their own house can be seen from the water as well. The implication here is that Helen actively looks back at the land they have left behind, and in doing so, instigates a process of distancing that will intensify as she grows older and engages more and more deeply with this strange perspective.

This distancing process fundamentally influences the lives of the sisters and the way in which they perceive themselves and their relationships to each other. The individual crises of identity the sisters and their mothers experience compel them, out of an emotional necessity, to 'renegotiate the terms of their originary relationships with family, community' and, to a certain degree, with the idea and experience of belonging to a nation.³⁶ The centre of these originary relationships, which are simultaneously communal and individual, resonates from the idea of the home within the text. The idea and the sanctity of the home are problematised within the text by Charlie's death, as are the foundations of these relationships. Emily, as the matriarch of the family, necessarily stands at the centre of these relationships: after the trauma of her husband's death, the balance at that centre is disrupted.

Emily spends much time trying to regain that balance and trying to re-stabilise the present moment she finds herself living through. In her memorial to her husband-the garden she creates and nurtures-Emily instigates her own concept and cycle of time. In projecting the emotional power of her grief into the garden, she accepts the sense of depersonalisation she feels, extricating herself from the structures and rejecting the realities of past, present and future simply because they cannot contain the scope and depth of her grief. The structure of conventional, linear time becomes unstable within the never-ending cycle of her grief. She embraces the art of 'thinking without feeling' and distances herself from the moment when her life and the life of her family had changed forever.³⁷ Flowers are the only things that make any sense to her in the aftermath of Charlie's death. The self-contained and knowable world they and their cycle of life, death and regrowth represent provide her with a structure within which to contain her grief and to channel it.

³⁶ Harte & Parker (eds.), *Contemporary Irish Fiction*, p. 233.

³⁷ D. Simeon & J. Abugel, *Feeling Unreal: Depersonalization Disorder and the Loss of the Self*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 3.

She does not know how to pray for her husband so 'the cultivated roses on the earth that sheltered his body' take the place of the prayers she cannot compose. That is to say, the garden memorial she creates functions in the place of the language of grief that fails her.³⁸ By growing and cultivating the roses in her garden and placing them on her husband's grave, she connects him, even in death, to the home that they had created together. This action in itself reconnects Emily to the idea of natural time in the text, placing her back 'into the circle of the seasons'. She 'wordlessly' comprehends this reconnection in an act of natural intuition.³⁹ The natural cycles she integrates herself into allow her to process her grief without words and face the crisis of identity her widowhood presents her with beyond the inadequate system of language. We are told that her garden allows her to 'bear time' again, implying that time must be structured in some way in order for it to be endured or tolerated or even understood.⁴⁰ Charlie's death implodes the structures and measurements of time upon which she has based her life and the life of her family, and his absence creates a space that is infinite because his death has rendered her life meaningless. That lack of meaning translates into a kind of timelessness that Emily and her family must somehow structure in order to endure it. While the structures of past, present and future offer her no comfort, the flowers in her garden become natural symbols and signs of a timeline that she can subscribe to. Within her natural memorial, Emily can begin the process of reclaiming and re-visioning her experience. Yet conversely, the very fact that such a memorial exists at all is a reminder not of the past and of her husband but of her loss of him. In many ways, the memorial, no matter how natural, is a sign and an indicator of the fact that the past cannot be retrieved but only imperfectly remembered.

The family home itself begins to function as a similar type of memorial. The concept of the home in the text is a centralising image and each of the characters, in their own individual ways, use this image to concentrate and focus their feelings of belonging and community, as well as family unity. The house becomes the foundation for their collective and individual identities. The security of being able to return to the family home and find it virtually unchanged is a major concern within these identities; when the validity of that return is compromised, so too are the identities it sustains. Charlie's death, among other things, translates into a loss of that centralising force, that concentrating image.

History for Emily is 'no more than the effect of one day following another', a relentless progression that encompasses all experience without necessarily articulating or processing it.⁴¹ Time is 'like an ocean', a fluid concept which cannot be contained by the ideas of past, present and future in which everything is 'linked in an extraordinarily simple way'.⁴² History, time and memory work together to create identity, just as one day follows another. This is how she loses the image of her own father: day by day, until it is replaced by a myth, by the figure of a man she

³⁸ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 106.

³⁹ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 106.

⁴⁰ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 106.

⁴¹ N.A. Miller, *Modernism, Ireland and the Erotics of Memory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 34.

⁴² Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 112.

does not quite remember and 'all her memories [become] like dreams'.⁴³ It is the process of recovering the past that is problematised for Emily. Having experienced the trauma of her father's death, she finds it almost impossible to believe that 'nothing separated her from the past but that simple chain of one day following another'.⁴⁴ Her father's absence figures as such a rupture between her previous life and the life she must live following his death that the continuity between the past and the present is completely disrupted for her. A similar rupture and disruption occurs when her husband is brutally murdered. These two events, so similar and yet utterly different, problematise the trajectory of her life and render the process of reclaiming and re-visioning the past, stabilising the present, and confronting the future an almost impossible task. For Emily, memory cannot reconstitute the past, yet it still has the healing potential to allow her to know and understand the present in which she finds herself living and the future that threatens to overwhelm her.

This healing potential that memory promises figures greatly in Cate's return from London. We are told in the novel's opening section, in unequivocal terms, that 'Cate was going home'.⁴⁵ For Cate, the journey back, the return home, functions on a variety of emotional levels: it is a homecoming but it also symbolises the crisis of identity she is experiencing. As the concept of home within the text becomes more and more problematic and as the process of homecoming itself becomes suspect, Cate's crisis of self-representation becomes more acute. Through her return home she invokes the idea and memory of the communal past she shares with her family. Given the instability of the present in which she finds herself, this past is particularly evocative and compelling, and the temptation to reinterpret it in light of recent events, such as her as yet secret pregnancy and her father's brutal murder, prove irresistible. Her unborn child infuses the unstable present with the prescience of the future. The very fact that at the novel's opening her pregnancy is a secret known only to Cate signifies the fragility of this future and its pervasive influence throughout the text.

The idea of Cate going home is also significant given the problematic nature of that concept within the narrative. As the sisters' recollections progress, home ceases to function as an image or memory of security and centredness. In fact, the home from the sisters' past, the home of their childhood and the image of it which they have carried with them is inverted by the death of their father and the retroactive and disruptive effect it has had on the structure of their lives. Because the essence of home is now lost, a homecoming cannot truly be achieved. Cate is returning not to a place but to a memory of that place and even that memory has lost meaning. Now, homecoming itself can only exist as a memory or a desire on the part of the sisters, that is, desire for a childhood that has already been lost. Cate's attempt to come home both reflects and perpetuates her crisis of identity and self-representation. As a place within which the uneasy past, the unstable present and the unknowable future are pulled inexorably towards one another—notably through the character of Cate herself—home becomes a larger image of the process of re-visioning and reclaiming: both of the structure of time within which they operate

⁴³ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, pp. 112-113.

⁴⁴ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 113.

⁴⁵ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 116.

and the identities they have fashioned for themselves that the sisters must engage with.

Cate's existence up until this point seems to have been defined by her ability to translate herself, both literally and metaphorically, and to live materially and emotionally in a manner quite different to the one in which she grew up. Her move to London sets up a dialectic tension between the idea of that home and a life outside the community of the family. The material aspects of her life in London, such as her clothing and her jewellery, estrange her (even though she does not seem to be aware of it) from her mother and to a certain extent, from Helen. The latter tends to quantify Cate's life in terms of its surface appearance. This is ironic considering just how deep-seated Cate's anxieties relating to 'identity, naming and belonging' really are.⁴⁶ When she changes the way she spells her name, it never occurs to her that her family might perceive it as an effort on her part to distance herself from them. The fact that Kate is also her grandmother's name speaks perhaps to a subconscious desire to alter history and to change the way she represents it to herself and interacts with it. That a certain distance is initially created by her actions is doubly ironic as those actions are fuelled by a desire to belong to a community outside of her family circle. This perceived rejection of certain aspects of her life and her past can perhaps be viewed as the initial onset of the identity crisis she experiences. By consciously choosing to alter the way she spells her name she creates a distinction between the child Kate and the adult Cate.

At the airport, Cate stares at herself in the mirror as though trying to recapture the essence of the identity that her bereavement has forced her to renegotiate completely. Usually, a glance at her own reflection is enough to calm and centre her. But as her crisis of identity and self-representation deepens-especially as she faces the ordeal of revealing her secret to her family-we realise that Cate has become estranged from her own image of herself. Here, in the liminal, transitory space of the airport, she experiences a moment of intense depersonalisation. She is aware of herself only in the context of not knowing who she has become. Disassociated from the known reality of her past, now, the only way to restore a sense of that reality is to touch the 'tiny invisible scar at her hairline'.⁴⁷ The scar itself, received in an accident with a hay baler when she was six, functions as an 'originary emblem' for Cate, signifying a pivotal moment and memory from her childhood.⁴⁸ Yet, this crucial moment is never revisited within the text. The event itself is never narrated and is never fully remembered within the narrative. We are told that Emily warns her daughters frequently to stay away from three dangerous things: 'the lough, the hay baler and the shotgun'.⁴⁹ As the narrative unfolds, incidents in the sisters' past involving both the shotgun and the lough are revealed, but Kate's accident with the hay baler is never recalled. It is as though it had happened outside the idea of the past that the family shares. The scar becomes the only evidence of that story and it is only the invisible scar that allows us to extrapolate the meaning from

⁴⁶ P. de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983, p. 92.

⁴⁷ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 1

⁴⁸ Kennedy-Andrews, *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles*, p. 157.

⁴⁹ Harte & Parker (eds.), *Contemporary Irish Fiction*, p. 239.

Emily's loaded verbal warning. The idea that this formative event in Kate's childhood is held outside of memory and outside the perceived structure of time that exists within the text is a potent one. It is not only an originary emblem for a central character, but also, it is a symbol of the complex and shifting relationship between the past, present and future that exists within the text.

Cate admits to herself, even though she does not like to make the connection, that since her father's death, everything has been different. It is a moment in the life of the family that affects both the past and the future simultaneously. It is a moment outside of time, simply because its consequences cannot be controlled by time. The spell of her life is broken by his death. It is the point in time through which the rest of the world enters their lives and the moment in which the sealed community of their family is ripped open. She wonders what 'future love' can match the warmth and emotion which had filled her childhood; she wonders whether the concept of home and family can exist in the future without the binding figure of her father to give them meaning.⁵⁰ Her unborn child becomes the symbol of that future love, and it is significant that at first, her mother cannot accept or even assimilate the idea, primarily because it involves processing the fact that her family continues to exist despite and around the absence of her husband. In fact, Emily can only process the news in a space that her husband was once a part of, while the space which is dedicated to his memory-the garden she creates and maintains-must be kept separate from the continuing life of the family.

In the school where Sally works-one of the many sites of their childhood-home and memory are connected again: 'the sky itself' provides the greatest access to memory, to her past and childhood'.⁵¹ Cate tells Sally that her ideal memorial should be built 'around the sky' and that the sky itself should be part of the design.⁵² Three unbroken walls will be covered by rows of names while the fourth wall will be 'nothing but window'.⁵³ The idea of naming and identity becomes significant within the context of the memorial. The writing of the victims' names on the wall in some way confirms their history and their place in the communities their deaths removed them from. The shrine would be a place 'which afforded dignity to memory'⁵⁴ and it would become a place which legitimises memory in a narrative that constantly questions-through the identity crises its protagonists experience-whether memory is 'ever a reliable container of the past'.⁵⁵ Cate envisages the shrine-located where 'the sky is huge', where the landscape is at its most timeless-not only as a place to bring grief and anger, but also as a structure to contain memory, to legitimize and at the same time transcend the idea of past, present and future, reclaiming and re-visioning them in a space where all responses to violence and loss can be validated.⁵⁶ The idea of the shrine is also a rethinking of the relationship between the past and the present, and between the act of

⁵⁰ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 5.

⁵¹ M. Parker, *Northern Irish Literature: 1975-2006*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 176.

⁵² Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 33.

⁵³ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 148.

⁵⁴ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 149.

⁵⁵ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 149.

⁵⁶ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 149.

remembering and the process of forgetting. Memory and time become intimately connected.

But while access to the past is 'necessarily dynamic' because the faculty of memory is constantly changing, expanding and contracting, memorials risk creating a static image of that past and limiting the result of any access gained to that one image alone.⁵⁷ Paradoxically, a memorial can never indicate the past it stands as a testament to, but rather only its absence and irretrievability. Memorials, in a way, discourage the act of remembrance: the event itself is memorialised but the 'memory of the event' becomes subsumed by the static nature of the structure erected to preserve it.⁵⁸ Because of the open nature of Cate's memorial, its subtle, almost subconscious connection to the idea of home and the implication that the concepts of memory, time and history are subject to change within it, the memorial transcends its own structure and becomes a site where the memorialisation that occurs concerns lives as opposed to events and where that memorialisation occurs through emotion as well as memory.

Memorialisation is not a healing process for Helen because home for her becomes the site of a rupture: to go home is 'to push against [the] crack with her fingers and feel it yield'.⁵⁹ Home questions and probes her self-containment and, far from encouraging acts of repression, seems to threaten a violent expulsion of memories which Helen cannot deal with emotionally. She is like her mother, in that nostalgia for them both is a kind of indulgence and one that comes at an emotional price. Like Cate, Helen seems to conceive of her childhood in spatial terms. Their timeless kitchen where nothing has changed is the perfect location in which to engage in the act of remembering. She imagines that if she were to visit her uncle Brian's house, 'she would find it, as it was in the past', and that she would find within it the space and the people who created her childhood.⁶⁰ Crucially, she imagines listening at the door to children speaking, one of whom is herself. She cannot imagine herself back into her childhood despite having actually experienced it. She can only create an image of the child she once was, an image that remains completely separate from her adult self and cannot be maintained for long. In losing access to her past, she has lost the idea of the child she used to be, precipitating a crisis of identity in the unstable present.

Helen encapsulates the idea of time and place being intimately, even inexorably linked within the narrative. For her, the trauma of her father's death is 'compounded by it having taken place in Brian's house'.⁶¹ The monstrous and unknowable nature of the event is psychologically heightened by the incongruity of it happening in such a familiar setting. She remembers dreaming that the house was burning down, that she was losing it forever; and her father's death is just as destructive as that imaginary fire because now, even though the house still stands, it

⁵⁷ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 149.

⁵⁸ P. Ramadanovic, *Forgetting Futures: On Memory, Trauma and Identity*, USA, Lexington Books, 2001, p. 14.

⁵⁹ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 149.

⁶⁰ J.E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993, p. 344.

⁶¹ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 48.

and all that occurred within it 'is lost to her'.⁶² The present for Helen is doubly unstable because she refuses to anchor it in any physical place. She appreciates the psychic 'blankness' of her apartment in Belfast, its lack of human history; if she does not physically contextualise and situate the life she is living in a particular, specific location, it cannot be penetrated to the same violent degree as her childhood.⁶³

Sally says of herself that, 'I hardly ever think about the past. Maybe that's something I missed out on by not going away'.⁶⁴ It could be argued that she has not gained the perspective her sisters have by moving away, by breaching the zone of exclusion their family and their community has set up around themselves. Sally cannot look at the landscape of home, either political or personal, from a detached point of view because she cannot physically escape it. Her ties to home are so strong that when she is on holiday and hears that a bomb has exploded, she wishes she were at home because being there would allow her to process the experience in a more complete manner. She tells Cate about what she feared would happen to her if she moved away. She feared that she would make 'strong links in some other place, but not strong enough, so that [she would] feel disconnected, wherever [she] was'.⁶⁵ Home is such an intrinsic part of Sally's identity that she basically envisages a crisis of that identity for herself if she should ever move away. The ironic thing is that her father's death undermines the concept of home within the text and within the family itself, and remaining in Northern Ireland has not shielded her from the feeling of disconnectedness she fears.

Sally's past is mediated to us through her sisters' memories. Her past is not narrated to the same extent that her sisters' are. In a way, she is even more invested in the present than Helen or Cate because the past does not have the same memorial resonance for her. She is the link between the past and the present: her 'childlike appearance' is a physical reminder of the children the three sisters used to be and how the relationships they shared in their childhood have shaped the women they have become.⁶⁶ But even her appearance speaks to the instability of time and knowledge and the concepts of past, present and future within the narrative. There is something in her face that Cate observes in the highly significant and charged location of their primary school when they revisit it: something about her brow and 'the set of her mouth that [makes] her look like a child who [has] seen more than she ought to have done, a child who knew too much'.⁶⁷ We realise that her identity in the text is predicated and maintained through a balance of innocence and knowledge. As an adult, Sally resembles a knowing child, a child who has more knowledge than is appropriate to its age and understanding: past and present are conflated in this image of her. The very fact that Cate can conceive of her in this manner speaks to the fragility of distinctions when it comes to aspects of time within the text. Because of the rupture their father's death has caused in the structure of their lives, past, present and future have begun to seep into one other. From this point on and from

⁶² Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 21.

⁶³ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, pp. 21-22.

⁶⁴ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 44.

⁶⁵ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 44.

⁶⁶ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 44.

⁶⁷ Madden, *One by One in the Darkness*, p. 136.

the depths of their identity crises, the sisters begin to see how the uneasy past is influencing an unstable present, and how the concept of the future shapes their perception of both. As the figure of the knowing child, Sally comes to stand for the conflation of time within the narrative and for the idea that the sisters cannot leave the past behind them because their very identities are invested in it. As they stand in the school, a place where the past is still being enacted in the present, even if it is only through the presence of children who look so much like their parents, we realise that memory and language cannot provide access to or articulate the past, the present or the future within the text, and the sisters' crises of identity remain unsolved.

One by One in the Darkness is, in many ways, a text about the complex role narratives play in the construction of identity. Following the death of their father, the sisters must reconstruct the narratives upon which they have built their lives and their identities. By translating the past, they hope to reconfigure the selves which have begun to break down. The stories they create now must be the stories of their survival: they must respond to the trauma they have experienced. In order to translate the past, they must reconstruct and re-narrate it in light of Charlie's murder. The novel thus 'allows history to unfold through recollection' as the central characters seek to recreate a sense of the past they have been alienated from through memory.⁶⁸ However, in their quest to reconstitute their identities, the text reveals that 'memory cannot be equated with the past' and that memory itself—in this context at least—comes to function as a kind of memorial⁶⁹ isolating and preserving past experience rather than facilitating a healing and grieving process. The movement towards reconstruction paradoxically serves to reinforce the instability the sisters endure in the present, exposing them to the subjectivity of their own memories and the ultimate impossibility of retrieving their past experiences out of the memorial they have created.

⁶⁸ E. Kennedy-Andrews (ed.), *Irish Fiction Since the 1960s*, Great Britain, Colin Smyth Ltd., 2006, p. 74.

⁶⁹ Ramadanovic, *Forgetting Futures*, p. 26.