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Counting the dead as “one” and “one again” in the fiction of twentieth-century Irish
women novelists

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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By Elizabeth A. Chase

In the aftermath of twentieth-century civil strife, Ireland’s dead have been used in myriad ways. “Counting the dead as ‘one’ and ‘one again’ in the fiction of twentieth-century Irish women novelists” contends that for Elizabeth Bowen, Jennifer Johnston, and Deirdre Madden, each of the ways in which the dead have been understood, represented, and memorialized falls short. Historically, commemoration is a masculine field: it is traditionally soldiers’ memories that shape collective memory; furthermore, the masculine narrative of war often corroborates and reifies the nationalist narrative of the state. The nature of traditional remembrance is problematic for female Irish novelists who recognize that understanding Ireland’s dead through the lens of the state will only beget further violence. I contend that their novels are therefore interventions in the historical record, offering new, feminine forms of remembrance that reinsert the experiences of women, and an ethically charged focus on the lived lives of victims, into Ireland’s commemorative practice.

As these novelists show, the violence of the Troubles happened on the scale of the domestic, and therefore requires memorials that exist on a similar scale. These writers probe the geography of commemoration when consensus as to cause for which the dead fought and died is not easily forthcoming. This study fosters an understanding of how Irish women writers alter and expand the human scope of our relationships to history, memory, and commemoration. Their work has shaped the stories Irish fiction tells about twentieth-century conflicts, and their novels seek to transform the way communities in Ireland and Northern Ireland view the past and the ethics of public commemoration. Examining their novels—*The Last September*, *Shadows on Our Skin*, *The Old Jest*, *The Railway Station Man*, *Fool’s Sanctuary*, *Hidden Symptoms*, *One by One in the Darkness*, and *Molly Fox’s Birthday*—yields a more nuanced understanding of women’s engagement with historical violence and reveals a long-standing history of female-authored writing about commemoration that challenges and redefines our map of Irish fiction.

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Introduction

“Everywhere and nowhere”

Commemorations are acts by the living, for the living, in service to the dead. The act of remembrance is at once deeply personal and, often, highly public; ideally, such acts require that those who witness them engage with the memory of the dead in ways that shape our understanding of the present as well as the past. As Brian Conway writes, “at a basic level . . . commemoration is work” (5). It is the work of remembering the past in a way that will carry forward a vision for the present. As such, commemorative acts can be ethically charged attempts to recognize past failings in order to prevent their reoccurrence, or, conversely, they may be acts that subsume individual losses under a grand narrative to which the dead may or may not have ascribed. This is particularly true in Ireland, where history and memory have been highly contested and repeatedly employed to foster particular narratives. In the aftermath of the violence of the Troubles throughout the twentieth century, Ireland’s dead have been used in myriad ways. For the female writers studied in this project, each of the ways in which Ireland’s dead have been understood, represented, and memorialized—in stone and in literature—falls short. Historically, commemoration is a masculine field: it is traditionally soldiers’ memories, soldiers’ names, that shape our collective understanding of the theater of war, and so “in . . . [conflicts] largely orchestrated by men against men, the experiences of women and their varied interpretations have often been elided” (McDowell 335). Furthermore, the masculine narrative of war often corroborates and reifies the nationalist narrative of the state. This, too, is problematic for female Irish novelists who recognize that

understanding Ireland's dead only through the lens of the state and the nationalist or loyalist history it seeks to chart will only beget further violence. Their novels are therefore interventions in the historical record. I argue that Elizabeth Bowen, Jennifer Johnston, and Deidre Madden seek to offer new, feminine forms of remembrance that reinsert the experiences of women, and a focus on the lived lives of the victims, into Ireland's commemorative practice. Thus, these writers craft stories that lay bare the simple truth that in twentieth-century Ireland, unlike in Europe or the United States after the First World War, there is not one unified narrative that can encompass or explain those killed in the Troubles.¹

To understand the lack of consensus that surrounds the commemoration of those killed in Ireland's civil strife, it is necessary to understand the traditions that dominated the memorial landscape in the twentieth-century. During the First World War, British and American soldiers had a clearly identified outside enemy.² The cause for the violence was external and moral; thus, the listings of names on the memorials to the fallen had a certain gravitas in keeping with the type of war the public believed its soldiers had fought. When it came time to create memorials to the dead, most commemorative structures turned to nineteenth-century models. In "Memory and Naming in the Great War," Thomas W. Laqueur notes that "in January 1915—one can date this remarkable change with a precision not usual in cultural history—a new era of remembrance began: the era of the common soldier's name" (Gillis 152). In each of the graveyards of France, a "stone of Remembrance" was raised, inscribed "Their *NAME* liveth forevermore" (153).³ Enormous emphasis was placed on remembering the names of individual soldiers, in a way that also emphasized their tie to the nation, in order to create a "social body"

once again “whole and manifest” (158). In *A Century of Remembrance*, Derek Boorman examines one hundred memorials in the United Kingdom, beginning with the Boer War memorial unveiled on November 5, 1904, and ending with the Animals in War memorial unveiled on November 24, 2005. Of the 100 memorials Boorman discusses, 62 depict male soldiers in uniform; when men are depicted out of uniform, the male body is overwhelmingly represented in its heroic, Christ-like embodiment of the sacrificial martyr. When present, women are largely represented as allegorical figures of the nation. In such structures, Boorman notes a sustained emphasis on man’s heroism, rather than his humanity. However, I argue that the tradition established by the First World War fails to encompass the complexities of Ireland’s involvement in the War, the fact of the Easter Rising, and the debate over Home Rule, all of which compete for narrative significance in works of Irish history.

In Ireland, as World War I gave way to the Troubles of the 1920s, and then to the Troubles of the 1960s and forward, traditional memorials—with their listings of names or their steles and obelisks often accompanied by the figure of the universal male soldier—could not comfortably encapsulate the intimacy and personal nature of the violence. While World War I happened largely elsewhere and on a scale that was incomprehensible, the violence of the Troubles happened on the scale of the domestic, the “neighborly murder” that brought violence often quite literally into one’s own home. As a result, the act of commemorating Ireland’s dead is fraught with both historical and ethical questions that the novels included in this study attempt to answer. Creating memorials and commemorative practices to honor *all* Ireland’s dead entails complex negotiations. Communities, politicians, and historians struggle with the challenge that is,

as Barry Sloan writes, “at one level practical”: “What form might ... a commemorative project take to achieve both inclusiveness and acceptability to all sections of the community? Where might it be located, or how would it be accessible to people?” (50). Yet the problem is, he argues, “also moral and ethical: what should be the purpose of any such project? What responsibility does it bear towards those whose lives are commemorated both as individuals and in terms of all those who died?” (50). Here, we find the crux of the issue that contemporary memorials face: “reconcil[ing] generality and singularity in the time which follows atrocity” (Watkins qtd. in Sloan 53). For William Watkins, who examines what he calls “deathart” in modern literature, this notion of reconciliation between the individual and the masses is “the main ethical concern of commemoration” (53). It is also the main concern for the novelists studied in this project. Bowen, Johnston, and Madden each display in their work a recognition of the fact that traditional monuments have failed to ethically encompass the lives of individuals. In fact, they challenge the very scale of memorials and the idea that traditional structures can be successful and moral in Ireland and in the wake of sectarian violence.

In their works, these novelists give readers examples of female characters who strive to commemorate the individual dead, through practices of remembrance that focus not on molding individual deaths into a clean, linear narrative of History, but that focus instead on a person as he or she lived. Thus, one primary question frames my project: How do writers negotiate the relationship between past and present, memory and history? In “The Rights of History and the Rights of Imagination,” Cynthia Ozick writes that

when a novel comes to us with the claim that it is directed consciously towards history ... [that] the divide between history and the imagination is

being purposefully bridged, that the bridging is the very point, and that the design of the novel is to put human flesh on historical notation, then the argument for fictional autonomy collapses, and the rights of history can begin to urge their own force. (16)

While history does exert its own force on the novels I discuss, the reverse is also true: novelists place pressure upon history, at times coaxing and at times demanding that the past give way to imagination. Declan Kiberd describes the pressure writers place upon history in *Inventing Ireland*, noting that authors must “bring elements of the past into contact with the present in a dynamic constellation” (629). To do so requires that writers perform “their own acts of translation and retranslation ... by writing their own history and then rewriting it. This would be a literal re-membering – not a making whole of what was never whole to begin with, but a gluing together of fragments in a dynamic recasting” (629).

I argue that the political history and collective memory of Ireland suggests that the “dynamic recasting” called for by Kiberd entails not just a dual process of memory but also an even more complex interrelation of memory and ethics. The process of bearing witness to history imbricates us in ethical networks that require the revision of not only commemorative structures but also of the very process of remembrance itself. The works of Irish writers disrupt elements of the collective memories of historical conflicts and in doing so seek to dethrone long-standing historical narratives, replacing outmoded relationships between Ireland’s past and present with new understandings. Thus, characters such as Theresa or the Quinn sisters in Deirdre Madden’s *Hidden Symptoms* (1986) and *One by One in the Darkness* (1996), for instance, struggle to find

new ways for expressing and understanding the past that will allow them to escape from a pattern in which “they imagine the past and remember the future” (Namier qtd. in Foster 33). Madden’s characters envision multiple futures in which new commemorative structures and systems allow for the past to be mutable and multivocal.

Roy Foster argues that historians, cultural critics, and, one might add, novelists, “are all for alternative histories now” (xiii), but it is not merely that we are “all revisionists now” or that these writers simply substitute a new history, displacing an older one. Rather, literary narratives of the twentieth century, and in particular those crafted by Ireland’s female novelists, offer new understandings and new stories that stand alongside existing ones, subverting the idea of one overarching, all-encompassing understanding of Ireland’s conflicts and the significance of those who died in them. I argue that the writers studied here show, through their novels, an awareness of the stories being told about Ireland’s history and a desire to renegotiate those stories to make room for an ethical engagement with the past that resists the continuation of violence. Many of the strains and tensions of this process, most notably in the poetry of figures such as Seamus Heaney, have been well documented, but the role of fiction by women, and particularly fiction by women that takes on the twin themes of conflict and commemoration, deserves further exploration.

Writers such as Bowen, Johnston, and Madden recognize that “as identity grows more problematic, so memory becomes more important,” and the more important memory becomes, the more likely it is for individual identities to be lost in the struggle to maintain a view of the past that supports a particular vision for the present (Megill quoted in Keren 29):

In the aftermath of traumatic political conflict, the lingering memories of violence intersect with the desire to shape a new and different society.

Memorialization of conflict therefore comes into direct contact with questions of cultural identity: that is, how the society is to be perceived, both internally and externally. (Graff-McRae 41).

In response, these novelists are invested in a rethinking and revision of commemorative techniques expressed via works focused on their characters' modes of bearing witness to their personal and national histories. In writing of conflicts throughout the century, these female novelists explore what it means to witness history, to create narratives of that history, and to participate in the creation of an Irish story transmitted via collective remembrance. Such narratives are often invested in an ethically charged representation of the past; in other words, the works produced by the novelists discussed below attempt to give voice to and honor those who have been neglected by or dispossessed of their own Irish story. Furthermore, through fictive representations of Irish violence, Bowen, Johnston, and Madden carefully examine both those moments when remembrance fails to engage ethically with the individual dead and those moments that can serve as models for literal commemorative practice. Their novels serve as pedagogical tools intended to foster dialogue, rather than to titillate or cause fear. By separating themselves from the sub-genre of the Troubles thriller and by resisting the urge to slip into voyeurism, these novelists strive not just to "give a permanent materiality to someone or something that has been lost," but also to create a third path: an individually, domestically centered mode of commemoration that is neither republican nor loyalist (Watkins 9).

The domestic nature of many of the scenes of violence and memory—individual and collective—in works by these novelists distinguishes them from the work of many of their male counterparts; their work is not simply by women, it is also a feminist engagement with the questions of history and memory that have dominated the twentieth century. An extended study of Irish women’s literary production remains a vital and necessary endeavor because, as Nancy Miller notes, “the signature of a woman writer who is also a feminist writer is a mark of a resistance to dominant ideologies; for the feminist critic, the signature is the site of a possible political disruption” (17).⁴ Reading fiction by women as gendered production forces critics to look for these potential sites of disruption, to identify moments in which writers participate in a “literature of dissent” that is linked to the reinterpretation of the past (5).

Such a reading also points to the gendering of memory and memory studies as a male-dominated field of inquiry. Because the theoretical understandings of memory and commemoration have been largely written by men, for the men who fight, women’s understandings of remembrance remain inadequately explored. The same is true of the memorial spaces that result: they are often gendered in ways that further limit who has access to the memories they preserve and the acts they motivate. Northern-Irish Troubles memorials, for instance, represent “the claiming of space through memorialisation, [which] not only constitutes almost a ‘war by other means’ but serves to reproduce the wartime gender order/regime. It is the paramilitary men who decide who, what, where and when to commemorate” (McDowell 340). For the women who visit such spaces, there is the sense that they have lost “‘ownership’ over their private grief to paramilitary organizations” (345). In response, I argue that both the geography and the theory of

commemoration can be better understood by examining female novelists' interventions in the field of memory studies; thus, I document the ways in which their novels reclaim the territory of remembrance and offer new forms of commemorative practice. The novelists discussed in subsequent chapters probe the geography of commemoration when consensus as to the meaning and cause for which the dead fought and died is not easily forthcoming; in turn, I examine what role literature by women can and does play in providing fictive models that seek to influence our understanding of remembrance and commemoration.

Memory work

To understand fully the significant work of female Irish novelists, it is necessary to delineate the history to which their work responds. What, then, has been our purpose in commemorating the dead? This question is at the center of debates over how and why we remember. Maurice Halbwachs's *On Collective Memory* is partly responsible for the central position of memory in twentieth-century discourse, while the First and Second World Wars—and subsequently the need to understand memory after the Holocaust—have deeply altered the way memory is theorized and experienced in contemporary culture.⁵ Jay Winter has suggested that the commemorative forms of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries “are the remnants of a scaffolding of belief erected by the bereaved as they sought to come to terms with the horrendous losses of” the First World War (Keren 27). Such memorials center on a “martial mythology” that “justifies its maker and denigrates its opponent, promoting the idea of the ‘right cause’” (Melling 255). Yet for many of the conflicts of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries,

including Ireland's Troubles, it is the very idea of a "right cause" that is used to justify the continuation of violence at the expense of the individual. In these cases, earlier commemorative forms fail and new ones must be found to take their place. Thus, female novelists' commemorations of the Troubles in their novels explicitly reject the idea of memorializing a cause and instead focus on remembering the individual. When the cause stems from and continues internal civil violence, it can no longer form the basis for ethical modes of remembrance.⁶

My argument throughout this project is that memory—both personal and collective—unlike history, is a source of empowerment because it lacks the reified nature of traditional "History."⁷ Thus, the readings undertaken in this project reinforce the understanding that writers are not working from a position outside contemporary events and concerns but are instead constantly grounded in historical struggles that require them to engage with the meaning and significance of the memory of past events.⁸ In a 1999 *PMLA* special issue on ethics and literature, Derek Attridge writes: "The creative act, however internal it might seem, works with materials absorbed from what we can broadly call a culture or a *mélange* of cultures, and it is on cultures that it has its inventive effects"; in other words, "although the individual's memories of his or her own past have a unique reference point in the self as a 'locative system', these memories are always forged *vis-à-vis* available social and cultural frameworks" (Caldicott 12).⁹ The embedded nature of memory means that, while culture acts upon memory, memory also acts upon culture. By focusing their work on characters who bear witness to history and participate in the work of remembrance, Irish women writers also work to re-envision and revise Ireland's commemoration of its twentieth century conflicts. Their novels, while they look

ahead to and seek to influence future practice, are simultaneously imbricated in historical networks.

Thus, in part, the new understanding of commemoration and remembrance we find in these novels stems from a growing belief that, as the twentieth century came to a close, memorials centered on alphabetical or date-ordered listings of names were no longer sufficient. Instead, new twenty-first century memorials employ technologies that attempt to account for victims' lived lives, bringing their individual, domestic selves into memorial culture. I argue that a literary tradition of these domestically and individually centered memorials already exists in the fiction of Ireland's female novelists; these feminized forms of remembrance enable an ethics of mourning described by William Watkin: "If you can count the dead as one, and then count them as one again, then you have resisted adding them to a larger tally of victims and begun a process of truly ethical mourning which, to be continued, demands you count the dead as one again, and again, and again" (Watkins qtd. in Sloan 53). For Watkins, "the problem with death ... is that it is everywhere and nowhere ... [While] we all die ... we have removed death from our day-to-day lives," becoming "spectators of atrocity" (1). This spectator-status differs from the idea of witnessing presented by the trauma theory that arose in the aftermath of the Holocaust. To witness is to bear responsibility for the story one hears, to take an active role as agent in hearing and comprehending someone's narrative. To be a spectator is to be passive, an "atrocity expert" for whom death is a remote abstraction (1). As the novelists discussed in this project make clear, allowing death to be figured in the abstract is supremely dangerous.¹⁰ It enables the dead to be subsumed into a political narrative that urges the continuation of violence; in its place, these writers argue, we need an

ethically centered practice of remembrance that privileges the individual and resists simple categorizations.¹¹

Writing against “the immutable graven image”

Chapter one positions this project within existing scholarly discussions of memory, commemoration, and remembrance. In conjunction with the “memory boom” of the late twentieth century, there is an ongoing critical debate surrounding the terminology of memory. Jay Winter advocates for a shift from “memory” to “remembrance,” and has also been careful to note the distinction between memory and collective memory (Keren 26). Because these terms have proliferated in contemporary discourse, Winter warns against the assumption that there is “a scholarly consensus about what these terms mean and how they may be used effectively” (Winter and Sivan 1). Therefore, the first chapter examines existing discourse and defines my own understanding and uses of the terms collective memory, remembrance, and commemoration as they apply to the fiction produced by Bowen, Johnston, and Madden. In order to understand the active role played by female novelists in the creation of new, feminine forms of commemoration, following on Winter, I delineate the importance of agency that is part of a focus on remembrance rather than memory. In Ireland, where the national story and national memory have been dominated by masculine discourse and have focused on the intersections of military and paramilitary perspectives, a shift to remembrance opens interpretive ground that enables critics to productively engage with Irish fiction by women in new ways.

In order to understand fully the historical and commemorative landscape in which these novels exist and which they challenge, chapter one next links the ongoing critical

debates surrounding memory to Ireland's history of commemorative practice. In "Martyrdom, history and memory in early modern Ireland," Alan Ford illuminates the creation of "an apostolic succession of heroic suffering" in Ireland leading from early Christian martyrs to "Wolfe Tone to Bobby Sands" (Ford 43). Ford's work underscores the long-standing tradition in Ireland of understanding the dead through the lens of political and religious definitions of the nation. Each novel studied in subsequent chapters of this project challenges the rhetoric of martyrdom and the notion of the heroic sacrifice; understanding the concept of apostolic succession outlined by Ford, therefore, is vital to in turn understanding the rewriting and revisioning of Irish remembrance Bowen, Johnston, and Madden undertake. From Ford I continue with an examination of how the belief in an unbroken tradition of Irish martyrdom has influenced commemorative practice and the physical monuments constructed in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Ireland. The idea of an apostolic succession moves individual deaths from the singular to the collective, inscribing those deaths within a totalizing narrative. The urge to universalize is a denial of the ethics of remembrance; in contrast, I delineate the concept of an ethically charged understanding of commemoration, drawing on the work of William Watkin; I advocate a link between Watkin's work and the seminal work on witnessing undertaken by Shoshanna Felmann and Dori Laub. To bear witness is to recognize one's ethical obligation to another individual and to the remembrance of his or her life. Recognizing the individual, then, has a profound impact on the forms commemorations must take, as this chapter shows.

Finally, to better understand the consequences of Ireland's tendency to subsume individual deaths in the national narrative, this chapter concludes with a literary example

that views death in the aggregate and that interrogates, but is ultimately complicit in, a voyeuristic relationship to Ireland's dead. An analysis of Bernard MacLaverty's *Cal* serves as a counterpoint to the fiction of Ireland's female novelists. Although MacLaverty recognizes the ethical dilemma posed by the Troubles dead, his novel *Cal* does little to offer readers new modes for understanding or commemorating their lives. In contrast, this chapter establishes the networks of remembrance and commemoration through which novelists such as Bowen, Johnston, and Madden interrogate existing understandings of the Troubles dead, and sets the foundation for subsequent chapters that challenge critical understandings of these writers' status within the Irish canon.

The three chapters that follow serve, then, as case studies for the ways in which Irish women novelists seek to account for the particularity of each death and to examine their characters' movement through various ethically engaged relationships to the past. Chapter two focuses on Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*. Bowen's novel is often read as a paean to the Ascendancy, a work that mourns the loss of the Big House, written in the midst of its decline. However, I argue that Bowen was deeply conscious of the historical moment in which she was writing, and that she examines Ascendancy culture in its final days with a highly critical eye. Bowen's nonfiction writing, her notes for teaching lectures, and an unpublished monologue, all held in the Elizabeth Bowen collection at the Harry Ransom Center, reveal an author who was in fact deeply aware of her historical moment and concerned with Ireland's understanding of its recent past. Bowen notes that it is "the idea of the past" that captures human imagination, and her writings show her awareness that such imagination can have significant consequences for the present.

Understanding Bowen's interest in the historical positioning of her work requires that critics reevaluate their summation of her Irish settings as Big House novels concerned only with the world inside the demesne walls. Therefore, my chapter situates *The Last September* within the historical events taking place in Cork during September 1920, examining the interplay between Bowen's fictional world of Danielstown and the real historical events taking place on the demesne's borders. Historians' accounts of the summer of 1920, along with contemporary testimony from British and Irish soldiers, reveal that *The Last September* contains a very accurate depiction of Cork and the events taking place there. I argue that Bowen's attention to detail infuses the novel with a sense of danger, making it impossible to read the work as a social vignette divorced from its surroundings. Furthermore, by examining drafts for Bowen's contemporaneous non-fiction writings, as well as her draft for *The Last September*, I argue that Bowen is deeply concerned with questions of history and the creation of historical "truth." While her characters are often consumed with the desire to forget events going on around them, they exist on a landscape imbued with the tension of the Anglo-Irish War that constantly intrudes into their self-preserved detachment.

This chapter reveals that, contrary to endorsing or accepting her characters' desire to "not notice," Bowen dissects the consequences of such a perspective and underscores the danger it poses for Ireland. For Bowen, to not notice is to write oneself out of history and to deny the ethical imperative to remember in a way that respects individual loss. In order to highlight the dichotomy between the Naylor's desire to forget and the ethical obligation to remember, to notice, I argue that *The Last September* focuses on moments of danger when history intrudes upon Danielstown and its residents. It is the small details

of history, of her characters' lived lives, through which Bowen emphasizes the primary importance of who remembers the past and how. Ultimately, I argue that understanding the novel within both its historical context, and within the context of Bowen's non-fiction writings, reveals Bowen to be a novelist deeply concerned with understanding the full complexity of the Anglo-Irish War and committed to exploring the relationship between the novel, history, and remembrance in Ireland.

In chapter three, I turn to Jennifer Johnston, who is often read as the inheritor of Bowen's Big House tradition and whose novels have been similarly circumscribed by critical readings that fail to understand the ways in which she engages with and undermines that tradition. For Johnston, paying tribute to the past occurs not simply through officially sanctioned events and monuments but also through the physical movements and habits of the body. This chapter analyzes the four novels about the Troubles—in either the 1920s or the 1960s through 1990s—written after Johnston moved to Derry in order to better understand Northern Ireland's political situation. I argue that each novel emphasizes the role the body plays in acts of remembrance. To understand Johnston's notion of embodied remembrance, I draw on Paul Connerton's theories of bodily habits and rituals in *How Societies Remember*. In fact, for the characters in Johnston's novels of the Anglo-Irish War and the Troubles, history is often literally inscribed upon their bodies. Therefore, I expand on Connerton's understanding of the body's willful participation in rituals of remembrance by exploring the unwilling performance of the past by those characters whose bodies are marked by violence.

Fool's Sanctuary gives us Miranda, an elderly virgin who has preserved her body in a life-long remembrance of her executed sweetheart, and in *The Old Jest* and *The*

Railway Station Man, Johnston's central female protagonists confront the war-marked bodies of Cassius and Roger. I argue that for Johnston's characters, the past is an "indelible reality," carried on their persons as well as in their psyches. For Johnston, what is most significant is what her characters choose to make of their physical circumstances, the stories and histories they create. As they and those around them confront their reality, Johnston encourages her readers to consider the present impact of efforts to preserve and commemorate the past—whether that be the past of the Big House or the past of an Irish Republican. I argue that Johnston continually highlights the danger inherent in romanticized tales of heroism; juxtaposed with characters who see in their wounds a tie to an heroic past are those more generative moments in which her characters seek ways to move forward into new bonds between individuals that cross traditional borders. Thus, her novels signal the failure of rigidly ascribing to and promoting a single and at times violently guarded narrative of the Troubles.

This chapter treats four novels chronologically, in order to illuminate how Johnston's thinking about the body and remembrance developed over the course of a decade. I begin with *Shadows on Our Skin*, in which Johnston uses the relationship between Joe Logan and Kathleen to demonstrate that stories of violence and sacrifice lead only to further violence in the name of Ireland. I then turn to *The Old Jest*, which contains another border-crossing relationship, this one between Nancy and Cassius, which Johnston uses to examine and build upon territory charted by Bowen in *The Last September*. Third, this chapter examines Johnston's most optimistic novel of the Troubles, *The Railway Station Man*. The novel pairs Helen and Damien, who are both committed to individuals over political causes; Johnston emphasizes that this stance is the

only path forward out of the past. Thus, the novel also contains Johnston's most explicit discussion of commemoration in the form of the ruined railway station and Helen's series of paintings, and I argue that these commemorative forms further illuminate Johnston's intervention in traditional understandings of remembrance and memorialization. Finally, the chapter concludes with *Fool's Sanctuary*; written at the height of the Troubles, the novel explores Miranda's decision to "keep faith" with the memory of Cathal. Miranda's act of remembrance has no audience and thus fails both as an act of heroism—as Johnston redefines it—and as an intervention in the historical record. I argue that the novel reflects Johnston's concern with the current state of Irish politics, as well as her continued interest in the embodied nature of remembrance. By exploring Johnston's emphasis on the significant role the body can play in carrying forward narratives of Irish history, we are able to better understand her contribution to female novelists' interrogation of twentieth-century modes of commemoration.

Chapter Four concludes my project, focusing on Deirdre Madden, whose novels *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness* represent ethically charged understandings of individuals' relationships to each other and to our understanding of what it means to honestly and appropriately commemorate the past. Through the sensitively crafted, minute exchanges between her characters, and via their internal struggles, Madden is able to rewrite what it means to commemorate the victims of Northern Ireland's sectarian violence. This chapter is founded on the premise that fiction's tendentious relationship to history enables it to foster new modes of discourse about that history. Madden's work challenges the genre of the Troubles thriller; in each novel, she constructs women for whom traditionally female, domestic objects and actions

provide the most powerful connections to the past and to the very public, political, and therefore “masculine” realm of the Troubles.

To understand the ethical debate in which Madden engages, I turn briefly to her most recent novel, *Molly Fox's Birthday*; there, Madden uses a character's documentary film on memorials to advocate for a shift from First World War sites such as the Menin Gate to feminine, domestic, and individually focuses memorial projects such as the AIDS quilt. With this recent project in mind, this chapter analyzes Madden's first novel, *Hidden Symptoms*, in which she begins to explore the relationship between the self and the other and the ways in which that relationship is shattered by the experience of sectarian violence. Through Teresa, I argue that Madden deftly and bleakly depicts the individual cost of the Troubles, not just in terms of the number of lives lost, but also in the hidden marks left on the survivors. I use Felman's and Laub's work on witnessing in order to examine the ways in which Teresa's refusal to bear witness leaves her unable to form human connections. Madden explores her characters' traumatic pasts in order to encourage our recognition of the ethical links between individuals and the demands those links place upon history and memory. More specifically, she utilizes female protagonists to examine and redefine the role of Ireland's women in twentieth-century practices of commemoration. Thus, in this chapter I turn to Emmanuel Levinas's writings on ethics in order to explore Madden's continuing attempts to understand, interpret, and remember the Troubles through the lens of women's daily lives, and to illuminate what separates women's experience of trauma and of healing from that of state-sponsored, “official,” and “male” approaches to remembering the past.

We see this attempt most prominently in *One by One in the Darkness*; I examine the ways in which Madden's characters in this novel "represent violence to themselves," thereby engaging in acts of remembrance filled with agency and potential, rather than simply the memory of the past. Madden's novel urges a focus on the body that requires that we account for the lived lives of others in ways that preclude further violence. Thus the forms of commemoration she envisions are open, nonlinear, allowing for a multiplicity of narratives. Madden rejects overarching stories of sacrifice, martyrdom, or mythic heroism; in the place of these enduring means of understanding and assimilating the traumas of Ireland's history, she advocates an ethically determined relationship between past and present that replaces the state's homogenization of national memory with a memory focused on the minute, the individual, and the domestic.

If narrative is itself "an agent of making history," then the texts discussed in this project explore the history of Irish conflict as it is written and rewritten by Ireland's female novelists. For Roy Foster, "constructing a nation, as any historian or poet knows, revolves around the tension created when the affirmation of personal identity intersects with the invention of epic" (Foster xx). Foster, like many others, privileges poetry as the form that, especially in Ireland, best reveals the interworkings of history, memory, and politics. Yet fiction, too, has a significant and illuminating role to play in our critical understanding of the links between remembrance and literature in Ireland. One facet of this relationship, which Ireland's female novelists enable us to better understand, is that the Irish novel is not neatly linked to "the growth of a sense of national identity" (Foster 4). The novels in this project explore the boundaries of Irish identity and Irish nationalism through their engagement with the topic of Ireland's conflicts; the end result

is a vision of identity not as “an immutable graven image, but as a protean and fabulous beast” (55). While Foster argues that this is the lesson taught “by historians over the past two generations,” it is not solely the provenance of historians, but also that of Ireland’s recent generations of novelists, whose work holds out for examination images of the “protean and fabulous” permutations that Irish identity can encompass when individuals engage in a process of remembering and commemoration that fosters ethical ties to the past and to memory. The texts discussed below were selected based on their engagement with the dynamics of and questions raised by such a relationship; they explore the ramifications of what it means to remember the authentic signs that bear witness to “the particularity” of violence that accompanies Ireland’s twentieth-century conflicts.

¹ Here, I reference both the Troubles of the Anglo-Irish War in the Republic and the more recent Troubles in Northern Ireland.

² The First World War does not form the basis for one of the chapters in this study; however, I will survey the literature and criticism pertaining to the shifting collective memory of WWI in Ireland in my first chapter. This project begins after the First World War in order to focus on the changes that began to take place in memorial culture in the wake of the Troubles. The contested memory of WWI in Ireland has been examined in detail by diverse critics including Fran Brearton, David Officer, Edna Longley, Terrence Brown, and John Wilson Foster. Rather than focus on external conflict on a grand scale, I focus in my case studies on the ways in which Irish women novelists use Ireland’s internal, intimate conflicts as a means for examining the ethical dilemmas and obligations entailed in commemorating civil strife.

³ This was, Gillis notes, the first use of this passage from Ecclesiastes as part of a commemorative structure.

⁴ In her work, Nancy Miller does not link the term “feminist” to a particular historical moment; Miller writes that Elaine Showalter “identifies feminist writing (as opposed to what she calls feminine and female literature) with the period 1880 to 1920 and women’s right to vote ... [and] ... Marianne Hirsch chooses to restrict the use of the term ‘feminist’ to the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s” (20n). Miller, on the other hand, chooses to focus on a definition of feminist literature centered on that literature’s “oppositional” status. Like Miller, I view feminist literature as that which responds to and disrupts dominant ideologies. This project, then, takes the definition Miller has uncoupled from a historical context and attempts to recontextualize it, to define what it means to construct a twentieth-century feminist literature of conflict.

⁵ By comparison, works such as Frances Yates's *The Art of Memory* (1966) and Patrick Hutton's *History as an Art of Memory* (1993) trace the role of memory in cultures from the classical period onwards, revealing that memory did not occupy the same acknowledged and in some sense inescapable position it has come to occupy in discourse of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

⁶ The links between Irish literature and its historical context reveal not only that "a collective memory and a collective identity require some active agents who create and transmit that memory," but also that, in the case of Ireland, such agents are frequently literary (McBride 260). While recent studies of collective memory pay close attention to cultural questions such as the history of commemoration and the role played by religious and social rituals, the role literature plays in the genesis and proliferation of narratives of remembrance has yet to be sufficiently explored. (See, for instance, J. Gillis, *Commemorations* and I. McBride, *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*.) In *The Irish Story*, Roy Foster quotes Donald Akenson, who writes that "historians ... are the keepers of collective memory," but this oversimplifies the process through which collective memories are created, transmitted, and preserved via literary narratives (Akenson qtd. in Foster xiv). Furthermore, studies of memory and literature often prioritize examinations of the significant shaping role individual memory plays in the lives of poets, writers, and their poems or texts. However, an examination of the ways in which novelists seek to intervene in and alter the narratives of remembrance offers additional insight into the significant connections between literature and culture; literature and politics; and literature and ethics in Ireland. The impact literature can have on the Irish people's sense of history, and vice versa, is well documented in cases such as that of Frank McGuinness's play *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. In her article "Dancing Unto Death," Fran Brearton observes that the play was one which people felt "should" exist in the Irish canon. The play challenges understandings of the Northern Irish experience in WWI, and thus "there is a sense," she writes, "that the following assumption still holds: McGuinness has done for the Ulster Protestants what they could not (cannot) do for themselves – critique their own historical myths" (97). While Brearton points out that such an assumption is misleading, the fact that such a conclusion was reached at all indicates the intricate connections between literature and history in Ireland; literature has the potential not simply to be historical fiction, but in fact to prompt history's rewriting.

⁷ However, the recent turn to revisionism in historical studies, especially those of Irish history, further complicate the already problematic relationship between history and memory and raises questions such as: In the wake of revisionism, is memory still responding primarily to/against History? If history and memory are now equally malleable and subject to critique, is there an "truth" or stable identity to which we have access? What is the role of ethics when collective memory and history are both challenged and called into question?

⁸ In "Where Wolfe Tone's statue was not": Joyce, monuments and memory," Luke Gibbons argues that there have always been two ways of moving through the "social spaces" of modern cultures (and in particular, for his analysis, modern cities). The first is "the orderly procession of state power through the main thoroughfares, with all its pomp and splendor," while the second is that of the "flaneur, or city stroller...who roams the

streets seemingly at random, but often in the shadow of a counter-public sphere” (McBride 140). Gibbons’s image offers a useful analogy for the figural movement of writers through the collective memory of Irish society; rather than occupying the “orderly processions” of memory, the work explored in this study acts “in the shadow,” subverting and challenging the orderliness of the historical and offering new narratives that privilege the marginal and, often, the domestic above the public.

⁹ Attridge’s work does run the risk of assigning the author to a passive role in his or her relationship to culture, with the author as simply a recipient of cultural material which then forms the creative omphalos of his or her work. My work posits that the author works from a cultural location, but one in which she is an active participant, purposefully “absorbing” certain materials while rejecting others in order to radically intervene in the continuation of that culture.

¹⁰ Instead of “monumental expressions of remembrance,” then, these writers provide their readers with models for individual practice (Turpin 114). As theorists of remembrance and commemoration point out, individuals become involved in memory work for a variety of reasons; yet often, they are involved “*not* in order to create social scripts or schemata for the interpretation of . . . war” but rather “in order to struggle with grief, to fill in the silence, to offer something symbolically to the dead” (Winter and Sivan 18). Winter and Sivan argue that, “in most of their immediate concerns, they tend to fail . . . It is more a question, at the very least, as to whether healing at the personal level follows” (18). Again, commemorative acts are acts performed primarily for the benefit of the living; as individuals struggle publicly with their private grief, however, they come into contact with others doing the same and, from these encounters, narratives for the remembrance of the past begin to coalesce.

¹¹ In *The Ethics of Memory*, Avishai Margalit explores both the individual’s and the community’s obligation towards the past, asking: are we obligated to remember the past, and what is the nature of that obligation? (6). Margalit distinguishes ethics from morality, stating that “because it encompasses all humanity, morality is long on geography and short on memory. Ethics is typically short on geography and long on memory” (8). Morality does not require that an individual care about another individual, but instead relies on a system such as Kant’s categorical imperative to determine how we should treat all individuals. Ethics, on the other hand, which for Margalit determines how we regulate “thick relations”—those with parents, friends, and fellow citizens—requires that we care. To remember ethically, one must first move from memory to caring; it is only via this intermediary step that memory and ethics can be linked. This dissertation seeks to trace the dynamics of whether and *how* texts create ethical collective memories of Ireland’s past in their responses to contemporaneous social and political concerns.

**Chapter One: Resisting the urge towards magnitude – commemoration, ethics, and
the Irish novel**

Making sense of the “memory boom”

To better understand the “dynamic recasting” in which Bowen, Johnston, and Madden participate, it is first necessary to understand the historical and theoretical landscape within which their work is situated. The period during which novels such as *The Last September*, *The Railway Station Man*, and *One by One in the Darkness* were written was, and continues to be, one dominated by memory. *The Last September*, published in 1929, appeared four years after the first publication of Maurice Halbwachs’s *On Collective Memory* (1925).¹ Halbwachs’s work is the start of the twentieth-century “memory boom” and critical attempts to formally theorize memory and commemoration in the aftermath of the First World War, which profoundly changed notions of how history and memory must respond to violence²; therefore, the focus of this project is on texts that appear after its publication and that respond to the debates over memory—individual and collective—that it instantiated. While soldiers—both republicans and unionists—from all counties of Ireland fought in World War I, and while the debate over the proper memorial forms for remembering these soldiers in the Republic and the North has been deeply contested, this project does not examine literary examples of World War I memorials. Instead, the focus of this work is those moments of civil strife in Ireland’s history: the Anglo-Irish War in the 1920s and the Troubles that began in the 1960s. The particular issues that arise when trying to establish practices for remembering the dead—ones that do not themselves become a call to further sectarian violence—set the

commemoration of Troubles victims apart from those who fought in World War I. While the motivations of the Irish who enlisted in the British Army during World War I were complex and while Ireland has struggled to find proper memorial forms that will encompass wide-ranging personal narratives, the questions raised by the Troubles are unique, enmeshed as they are in ongoing violence that ended only just over a decade ago.

In 1925, when Halbwachs published *On Collective Memory*, the wounds and losses of the First World War were still the dominant cultural referent for memory on the continent and in England. But for Ireland, the First World War was closely followed by the Anglo-Irish War, Partition, and the formation of the Irish Republic, and each of these events vied for narrative and commemorative primacy. For both the new Republic and the North, questions of memory and commemoration were tied to uneasy questions of nationalism, loyalism, and history. Here, D. George Boyle's definition of the distinction between history and memory is helpful; in his contribution to *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (2001), he writes that the "historian seeks to distinguish history from memory, in that the historian tries to reconstruct a past which the individual, or the society, cannot have known. R. G. Collingwood offers the example of the history of the Roman Empire, and in so doing depicts a state of things that no contemporary ever saw whole" (Boyle 259). History, when it is "finished" cannot be the provenance of any one individual: its scope is larger than the individual's capacity for understanding. Memory, in contrast, is never "finished." The individual is able both to understand his or her own memories and to absorb pieces of a collective memory based upon the groups to which he or she belongs. Hence, collective memory does not offer a "whole" understanding, but instead offers inroads into a multiplicity of remembered possibilities. History tries to tell

the story of a whole people; memory, even when collective, does not try to offer the *one* story, but instead one of the *many* stories.

The uneasy relationship between history and memory is particularly evident in the tension between public and private narratives of the national “story.” As Stephen Katz and Alan Rosen point out, “each nation filters and accommodates [memory] in its own way to produce a version of collective national identity” (xvi); the issue in Ireland, and for twentieth-century Irish novelists, is how to create national stories that do not “remember *at*,” thereby further entrenching sectarian divides (Longley, “Northern” 235, author’s italics). State-sponsored, officially sanctioned commemorative practice is inextricably tied to the creation and continuation of narratives that often represent “the war dead as a necessary sacrifice essential for affirming national identity and confirming national destiny” (Malvin qtd. in Turpin 113). But it is this reaffirmation of national destiny that is deeply problematic for Irish history and Irish memorials because “wedded to this commemorative material culture are expressions of loss, accusations of blame, conflicting interpretations of the past and present, and telling insights into rival territorial ideologies” (McDowell 338). Instead of the national story then, writers in this project turn to memory and remembrance, seeking to show that commemoration can challenge history, rather than simply affirm it. This process inherently contains an ethical component, because it is memory, John Selber argues, that allows for ethics: “neither history nor ethics would be possible without memory. Without memory, we would live in a timeless present, an undifferentiated now, that specious moment between what was ... and what may be. Memory is a necessary condition for living in time.... Without memory and time, there could be no intentions or actions or duties; hence, no ethics” (55). Yet

both memory and history have the potential to deny ethics by conforming to “homogenizing” narratives. Such narratives tend to erase or deny those experiences that do not fit the official or widely accepted story of the past, creating fissures and repressive histories that compound many individuals’ experience of history as “trauma.”

Therefore, the distinction between history and memory is but one of many that critics and historians working in the field of memory studies must make. In conjunction with the memory boom of the twentieth century, there is an ongoing critical debate surrounding the terminology of memory. Jay Winter advocates for a shift from the term “memory” to the term “remembrance,” arguing that “memory is limited to the individual with personal experience of the past they are remembering; remembrance is a social phenomenon in which individual ideas about the past are created, shaped, or passed on” (Todman 26). Winter has also been careful to note the distinction between memory and collective memory, reminding us that “the terms ‘memory’ and ‘collective memory’ appear with such frequency and ease that readers may be under the impression that there is a scholarly consensus about what these terms mean” (Winter and Sivan 1). As Winter and Sivan imply, there exists very little consensus about the meaning of each term; ultimately, for Winter, “if the term ‘collective memory’ has any meaning at all, it is the process through which different collectives, from groups of two to groups in their thousands, engage in acts of remembrance together” (Winter, *Remembering* 4). Thus, Winter privileges the term “collective remembrance” over the term “collective memory.”

Winter advocates for a focus on remembrance in part “as a strategy to avoid the trivialization of the term ‘memory’ through inclusion of any and every facet of our contact with the past, personal or collective. To privilege ‘remembrance’ is to insist on

specifying agency, on answering the question who remembers, when, where, and how?” (Winter, *Remembering* 3). Remembrance, then, is fundamentally active. It is not a process of “remembering at” or a process of simply remembering; rather, to engage in remembrance is to participate in the process of creating a collective story of the past. Winter’s focus on agency is particularly constructive for discussions of Irish fiction by women and the interventions their work makes into the largely male-dominated trajectory of commemorative practice. Remembrance, though concerned with representations of the past, is inherently forward-looking and socially aware. The latter aspect provides the most significant distinction between the concept of remembrance and that of memory; while society influences the way we discuss our private memories, Winter and Sivan are adamant about the distinction between talking about one’s own memories and participating in “collective remembrance” (6). The latter, they remind us, is an act of “public recollection” that entails “gathering bits and pieces of the past, and joining them together in public” (6). Thus, the following chapters use the term “memory” when referring to individuals’ personal memories, and “remembrance” when discussing moments in which individuals’ employ their personal memories to advocate for the creation of new histories that seek to envision a way out of violence. In these moments of remembrance, characters seek to use to influence public acts of and sites for commemoration. What these novels trace, then, is the move from private memory to public memorial, interrogating the ethical choices we face along that path and urging readers to consider the social and political ramifications of both individual remembrance and collective commemoration.

In his discussion of Bloody Sunday, Brian Conway sets forth a useful schema for understanding the levels of what he calls “memory work” in which society engages:

(1) individual, (2) small-group, (3) social, and (4) institutional. ... At the micro individual level of analysis, memory work has to do with what individuals do to keep the past alive and fresh. ... When individuals come together at the small-group level to remember the past a second level of memory work is created. ... I refer to these human actors ... as ‘memory choreographers’ ... These choreographers bring clues, ideologies, and resonances to their work and these mediate how they represent the past and negotiate the spaces between local conditions and global contexts, private remembrance and public commemoration, and official memory and vernacular memory. (Conway 5-6)

By working together in small groups of “memory choreographers,” individuals come together to design public acts of commemoration, and these public acts bring us to the social level of memory work, where “struggles between different social groups over ownership of the past [come] to the fore” (6). Here, Conway’s work intersects with Halbwachs’s; within the realm of the social, an individual’s membership in particular groups shapes how he or she remembers the past and the stories he or she creates.³

Ultimately, what memory work seeks to do is inculcate a particular viewpoint at Conway’s fourth level: the institutional. Once a particular viewpoint of the past is adopted and promulgated at the institutional level, it is no longer one group’s story but rather society’s story. Conway notes that “commemoration, then, is the outcome of social engagement – people developing ties to other people – and folding these ties into strong,

long-term relationships with frequent interaction” (9). In other words, memory work is then “something that involves human effort ... over time and that can be ‘successful’ or not” (12). By contrast, memory by itself, distinct from “memory work,” is a private event: the individual’s expression of grief over his or her loss.

For Conway, as for Winter, the process of remembering is an active one, imbued with agency. Thus, the memory work—the “remembrance”—performed at the individual level always embodies a vision for public commemoration at the social and institutional levels. For Bowen, Johnston, and Madden, that vision entails reinserting the lived human body into the practices and tropes of remembrance thereby demonstrating the impossibility of using the victims of violence as mythical, universal figures in memorials that support particular sides of a political cause. Thus, the term remembrance is used when discussing an individual character’s thoughts or acts in memory of a lost loved one and the term commemoration when discussing her vision for the public memorialization of the victims of violence. As Winter and Sivan note, “those who make the effort to remember collectively bring to the task their private memories. They also use language and gestures filled with social meaning. But the key mid-point ... is action. He or she acts ... as a participant in a social group constructed for the purposes of commemoration” (Winter and Sivan 10).

Here Winter and Sivan align with Halbwachs, noting that it is social groups—which form, act, and disperse according to the needs of the social order—that create and perpetuate collective remembrance, in Winter’s and Sivan’s case, or collective memory, in Halbwachs’s. While this understanding of the social aspect of collective has been widely adopted, not all critics assume that membership in a particular group is a

prerequisite for accessing certain collective memories. In her book *Prosthetic Memory*, Alison Landsberg argues that “modernity makes possible and necessary a new form of public cultural memory” that “emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum,” or one might add, in the pages of a book (2). Landsberg argues: “In the moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history ... the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person’s subjectivity and politics” (Landsberg 2). Landsberg goes too far in arguing that experiencing the Holocaust Museum allows a non-Holocaust survivor to take on a “prosthetic memory” of the Holocaust. However, what Landsberg does usefully argue is that the encounter with the historical can shape an individual’s understanding of and relationship to the present. And this, ultimately, is why we tell stories of the past, and why those stories and the truths they embody are so often deeply contested. While “agency is arduous,” it is not without its rewards; ownership of a contested history gives a group control over the commemoration of that history and the historical narrative commemorative acts in turn create (Winter and Sivan 10).

From Patrick Hely to “Wolf Tone to Bobby Sands”⁴

We see the struggle for control over “the Irish story” not just in the twentieth century but as far back as at least the sixteenth century as well. In early-modern Ireland, during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, historians sought to control the stories

of Catholic martyrs, propagating them in order to strengthen the community; this means of categorizing and understanding the dead was later adopted by Irish nationalists in the nineteenth century and Northern republicans in the twentieth century, as a means of creating an unbroken genealogy of suffering for Ireland. The concept of apostolic succession moves individual deaths from the singular to the collective, inscribing those deaths within a totalizing narrative, as detailed by Alan Ford in “Martyrdom, history and memory in early modern Ireland.” Ford begins from the premise that “no one can deny the power of political martyrdom in modern Irish history” (43). In the twentieth century, Ford notes, “the blood of those who died for the nationalist faith has repeatedly been invoked to inspire and stiffen the sinews of their successors fighting to free Ireland from foreign rule,” creating “an apostolic succession of heroic suffering” (43). Ford argues that critics have identified this “much-studied political tradition,” but have struggled to “come to terms with the protean power of martyrdom,” because they have failed to enumerate the religious tradition that undergirds the political mobilization of the figure of the nationalist martyr (43). To understand fully the complex political and religious iconography at work, we must return to the early-modern period of Irish history:

The early and mediaeval churches were notable for their distinct lack of martyrs. Indeed, early Irish Christians had to invent new forms of non-lethal martyrdom to compensate for the embarrassing shortage of deaths due to religious persecution. As a result, the roots of modern Irish martyrdom are to be found much later, in the sixteenth-century Reformation and Counter-Reformation. (44)

During this period, “the horrifying reality was that Christians [on both sides] were once more being put to death for religion” and “as a result, early modern martyrdom flourished most on the frontiers ... of Christianity,” including Ireland (45). The renewed violence went hand-in-hand with a “renewed interest in the history of martyrdom,” as priests and historians sought to compile the names of Irish Catholic martyrs and construct “native martyrologies” (46).

In the late-sixteenth century, writers in Ireland began to collect and record the stories of Irish martyrs; their chronicles were then taken up during the seventeenth century by European historians (50). Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that the process of documenting martyrs differed from that of the beatification of saints:

Initially, it was entirely a matter for particular churches and bishops, and, indeed, for those who wrote and circulated the accounts of the martyrs’ sufferings and deaths ... Only gradually did the papacy centralise the increasingly elaborate judicial inquiry ... And even after Urban VIII had formalised procedures in 1625 and 1634, martyrdom remained a special case. For saints it was necessary to inquire whether the candidate had led a life of heroic virtue. But martyrdom was by its very nature more dramatic and less complicated: all was focused upon the heroic death. ... unofficial, local martyrs frequently gained wide followings without ever receiving, or even seeking, official sanction. (51)

Martyrdom, then, was not only more dramatic but also more democratic; the inclusion of individual deaths in the martyrologies of the time was in part dependent on the agreed upon collective memory of the local community. In accepting a particular story of an

individual's death, the community elevated him or her to the status of martyr; thus, the concept of martyrdom took on a particularly powerful role within the community, allowing groups to create their own narratives of apostolic suffering that linked them to the larger narrative of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, but also provided "a new Irish Catholic identity" that would later be linked to Irish nationalism (55).

During the seventeenth century, Ford explains, "the Irish people were indeed being drawn together in their commitment to Counter-Reformation Catholicism, ... forging a separate and distinct sense of Catholic identity in which common religious belief and suffering transcended previously insurmountable barriers ... to create an ideology of Catholic faith and fatherland" (63). While Ford calls upon the idea of the nation as a fatherland, it is more appropriate, in discussing a faith with such strong Marian ties, to see in the rise of a distinct Irish Catholic identity the precursor to the shared image of Mother Ireland that would become increasingly prevalent in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ireland and Irish literature. As Ford rightly claims, "the power of the concept of martyrdom in early modern Ireland was such that it could forge a new understanding of historical events" (65). It is this same power that modern-day martyrs evoke, taking up their place in a chain that runs from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century martyrologies to "Wolfe Tone to Bobby Sands" (43). Linking nationalist deaths to this tradition of both religious and political martyrdom provides a means for understanding each death as part of an ongoing practice of heroic sacrifice.

Thus, when determining how to memorialize those who died, in either the troubles of the 1920s or those of the 1960s and forward, many contemporary monuments call on the familiar rhetoric of early-modern martyrdom. This includes both Loyalist and

Nationalist memorials, although critical attention is focused primarily on Catholic, republican memorials. In Ireland, there has long been a “complex relationship between official memory and vernacular memory” embodied in the public sculptures created to commemorate Ireland’s dead (Conway xi). Between 1920 and 1960, “most public sculpture in Ireland . . . was devoted to the commemoration of the fallen of the Anglo-Irish War and of World War I,” and “the ordinary soldier or freedom fighter depicted in them was the bearer of meaning” (Turpin 107). Memorials constructed in the 1920s, John Turpin argues, “were . . . politically focused,” but “also of an unimaginative kind. They are made up of limestone figures of volunteers who died in the struggle, depicted in trench coats and bearing arms” (Turpin 109). Drawing on “the contemporary European figure carving tradition,” the memorials are “heroic celebrations of local heroes” built in the nineteenth-century tradition and evoking even earlier concepts of sacrifice and martyrdom (109). Such memorials established two histories: the “heroic foundation narrative” in the Free State and the unionist commitment to Britain in the North. The Anglo-Irish sculptures in the Republic and the World War I sculptures in the North achieved these ends through the same means: obelisks, cenotaphs, images of soldiers, and listings of names—all nineteenth-century forms invested with long-standing connotations of nation building:

The profusion of memorial erected in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were built primarily in the service of the nation state. . . . They were triumphant and celebratory. . . . Because monuments and memorials of this era were intended to inculcate a unified sense of history, difficult or controversial subjects were avoided. (Bickford and Sodaro 70)

Thus, when the first cenotaph in Dublin was erected in 1923, it bore a Celtic cross along with reliefs of Michael Collins and Arthur Griffiths; Kevin O'Higgins was added four years later. However, these choices made the cenotaph "a highly personalized, partisan, and political monument despite its inscription, in Gaelic, 'For the glory of God and honour of Ireland'" (Turpin 108).⁵ Thus, the cenotaph was first removed by De Valera, then replaced with a simpler obelisk in a "retreat to the formal language of classical commemoration" (108). Yet soon thereafter, commemorative medallions were again added to it, making the monument a site for contesting the meaning and narrative of Ireland's history.

Marked by individuals, the cenotaph could not serve its purpose as a place for the remembrance of all the nameless dead. Yet as Bickford and Sodaro point out, "the purpose of monuments during the nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries was not to memorialize the dead as individuals or remember the tragedy of their deaths, but to celebrate their sacrifice for the great nation" (71). Thus, such figures focus "on determination rather than on gesture or action" (Turpin 109); figures are emblematic of a singular cause, without room for individual interpretation. While Bickford and Sodaro argue that World War I memorials represent a move from remembering "only those great doers" to "a greater sense of equality and inclusion," in Ireland and Northern Ireland those individuals included in the memorials are included not as singular beings but as martyrs who sacrificed themselves in the name of a national or unionist cause (Bickford and Sodaro 73).

This is the case even for those memorials that celebrate well-known participants, such as Albert Power's design at Limerick, which replaced a monument to Crimean War

victim Viscount Fitzgibbon: “Power commemorated four local men, all executed in 1916. He placed an allegorical figure of Erin with broken shackles on top, assisted by two volunteers. A statue of Tom Clarke, a veteran Fenian, stands to one side pointing to the Proclamation of the Republic, of which he was a signatory” (Turpin 110). Although Tom Clarke is featured on the memorial, his image is circumscribed within the national narrative; he points to the Proclamation and is shadowed by the allegorical figure of Erin. The monument leaves no room for interpretation or challenge; instead, it fits neatly within a particular narrative of the struggle to establish the Free State. While the “pedagogical impulse” of earlier twentieth-century memorials is often intended to encourage the viewer to take up his or her place in the national narrative, the authors studied here each argue that, to be successful, the impulse of contemporary monuments to the victims of deeply intimate, neighborly violence must be oriented towards an understanding of the individual, rather than the collective (Bickford and Sodaro 73). Watkin argues that “after World War II we switched from a culture of monuments to one of memorials” (Watkin 212). Rather than a focus on heroes, today’s memorials are often focused on the fallen as members of a particular community of victims.

While in the Republic, visitors can find numerous official, state-sanctioned memorials to the 1798 Rising, the Easter Rising, and the Anglo-Irish War, the memorial landscape in Northern Ireland is, by contrast, largely community driven: “There are no state-sponsored memorials to the civilian dead within (or without) Northern Ireland,” Brian Graham and Yvonne Whelan note (489). Instead, local “neighbourhood committees” run most commemorative sites because “existing legal mechanisms to deal with the past that meet cross-community consensus” are absent (Wing 31). As a result,

memorial sites in Northern Ireland often “[serve] as icons of identity and spatializations of memory that transform neutral spaces into sites of ideology” (Graham and Whelan 477). As communities move away from “ephemeral forms of commemoration, such as wall murals” and towards “permanent monuments, statues, plaques, and memorial gardens, the commemorative landscape [created by these permanent replacements] [seem] largely to form part of competing claims for hegemonic victimhood by trenchantly opposed identities and spatialities proclaiming their irreconcilable differences (480). Such memorials are examples of the fact that “memory work – against the Durkheimian interpretation of commemoration and ritual as sources of consensus – can be highly contested, fragmented and polarizing” (Conway 147). In this way, contemporary memorials can no longer comfortably inhabit the same forms and tropes established in the nineteenth century as a representation of the “power and ‘always already’ quality of the nation-state” (Landsberg 6). While at the time, such monuments might by their very “monumentality ... have undercut [their]... memorial effect, standing in for memory rather than provoking it,” today such monuments also fail because there is no singular “memory” that can easily be represented. The possibility of “cross-community” commemoration is what Bowen, Johnston, and Madden struggle with, attempting to offer models for memory work that can move beyond neighborhoods and themselves generate healing, without attempting to force consensus or create a singular narrative of the troubles.

The forms that these novelists gravitate towards reject triumphalist designs and listings of the dead, opting instead for more domestic, abstract forms: walls that suggest houses, gardens that require our continued attention and ministrations, fountains, and

even the body itself. Their novels establish a lineage for commemorative forms in which nineteenth century models give way to a new breed of memorial that functions similarly to Alison Landsberg's idea of "prosthetic memory." For Landsberg, prosthetic memories open the experience of the past to all individuals—without requiring that the individual be subsumed into the grand, national narrative. Earlier memorials, she argues, are founded on the idea that to create collective memory, monuments had to engender a "common national identity" that erased difference; "by contrast," she writes, new models such as her own "do not erase differences or construct common origins. People ... are led to feel a connection to the past but, all the while, do remember their position in the contemporary moment" (9). It is this duality that Ireland's contemporary female novelists ask us to inhabit: to recognize that, while inhabiting our own position as individuals, we must also recognize and respect the singularity of each death and resist the urge to create totalizing narratives to explain away the violence.

What is needed, these writers argue, are new commemorative symbols that reinforce the understanding that the "study and practice of memory are ultimately about and for the present and future" (Gutman, et al. 1). By looking "beyond their own contexts," communities are able to locate new methods in which "memory and its associations with a particular past are not an impediment for the future but a prerequisite to enunciate a narrative (bridge) over the present" (3, Levy 16). Rather than just remembrance, such practices are equally engaged in "explaining and educating," and as such contain within them a future oriented ethical charge (Bickford and Sodaro 69). Thus, to be successful such narratives must not be wholly focused on the past: "[f]or those who study memory, there is a nagging concern that memory studies is inherently

backward-looking, and that memory itself – and the ways in which it is deployed, invoked, and utilized – can potentially hinder efforts to move forward” (Gutman, et al. 1). That memory work can hinder attempts to end community violence and illuminate a new paradigm for the future is certainly true. Where Ireland’s commemorations focus on linking the Troubles dead to earlier narratives of martyrdom, commemoration does more harm than good. The symbols used in commemorative practice “evoke different meanings for different people depending on their retrievability, rhetorical force, resonance, institutional retention, and whether or not the symbol motivates human action” (Conway 11). However, when the symbols used are themselves contentious and tied to ongoing violence, commemoration serves only to mire the present in a contested past.

An ethical literature of remembrance

The ability to move forward from memorials that replicate sectarian divisions to those that foster cross-cultural understanding requires a focus on the ethical implications of commemoration. As Watkin points out “the ethical demands of contemporary philosophy, that one take full responsibility for the other person before one considers them in relation to oneself, have serious implications for our understanding of mourning, loss and commemoration” (19). What this means is a return, again and again, to a recognition of the individual loss: “magnitude should never take precedence over singularity,” however, “in the public sphere of commemoration it usually does” (212). The job of memory work, then, is to resist the urge towards magnitude: “Ethics, it would seem then, comes down to simple but far-reaching questions of counting” (Watkin 211).

Within the literary text, we see authors strive to offer their communities examples of ethical memory. In his book *On Mourning*, William Watkin states that he is attempting to create “an overall poetics of mourning and loss” that “reinstat[e] the centrality of language in our cultural responses to loss” (3). Watkin examines the elegy, delving into the specific poetic form in which the poet strives “like all memorialists, to create a physical location for remembrance from the manipulation of the material world” (7). Critical examinations of the literature of loss favor poetry as the primary genre through which questions of memory and remembrance are examined. Because the poetic “I” is so often easily understood as the poet’s own self—especially in the elegy—it is natural to move from examining a singular poet’s expression of grief into broader notions of what that expression signifies for our understanding of how cultures mourn. However, fiction too has much to offer; the writers studied here create characters who have lost, or who remember the moment of loss again and again, in order to explore the range of possible human reactions to loss and means for commemorating the dead.

To read these novels as fully as possible and to understand the alternative structures and stories they offer requires that we interpret texts in a manner described by Joep Leersson in *Remembrance and Imagination*. Leersson advocates for situating texts within “their wider intertextual, discursive and ideological environment”; however, he cautions that this does not simply mean that critics must position works within their “historical and social contexts,” because this runs the risk of “gravitat[ing] towards one-dimensional determinism” (*Remembrance* 5). This is especially true in the case of Ireland, where one-dimensional historical narratives vie for discursive control. Historical readings too often lapse into political endorsements and the propagation of Ireland’s

social and sectarian divides. Thus, for scholars of Irish literature in particular, “the challenge,” as Leerson notes, is to “study the movement of ideas and attitudes, images and perceptions within the cultural sphere, from journalistic to historiographical to literary to critical discourse” (5). Leerson’s approach shifts critical focus: rather than merely positioning novels historically, critics must study “the extent to which [novels] engage with ideas that are doing the rounds at the time, expressed in other non-fictional genres” in order to illuminate the ways in which such works “disseminate and transform such ideas and feed them back, in a specific form and rhetoric, into the cultural-political system” (5). It is such stories, those that question, trouble, revise, and “feed back” the memory of Ireland’s conflicts that this project explores in order to further our understanding of twentieth-century women writers’ contribution to the stories that seek to write, imagine, and understand “Ireland.”

The work of historian and literary biographer Roy Foster is central to this discussion, as he has offered one reading of the connection between literature and history in *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland* (2002), that dominates subsequent critical explorations; his influential work is often read as the definitive statement on “the way that narrative itself has come to be seen as an agent of making history” (xi). However, a close reading of the complex negotiations of history, memory, and the literary text undertaken by Ireland’s female novelists troubles Foster’s assertions. He begins with a series of questions: “What stories do people tell each other in Ireland, and why? What stories do they tell themselves? How therapeutic are the uses of invention?” (xi). The most intriguing detail here is the use of the word “therapeutic.” Inherent in this choice is the idea that invention, narrative, is a form of therapy to repair

the damage done by history. While Foster is dismissive of the therapeutic model, the works produced by Ireland's female novelists suggest that the model is, in fact, both viable and productive. In other words, here, the creation of *a* history, a story, rather than *the* history, allows for the fostering of new memories, new forms of witnessing and of commemoration that help to treat the traumas of history. Literature has a significant role to play in this process, because, as Eric Caldicott and Anne Fuchs point out, our symbolic worlds are "discursively generated," that is, thoughtfully and consciously formed, rather than intuitively or naturally preexisting (15). The novels explored in this project center around the minute, rather than the epic; the symbolic worlds they envision seek to escape from a singular, deterministic view of history and into one that encourages complexity rather than conflict.

Resisting homogeneity and instead focusing on the potential inherent in the fissures of memory amounts to an ethical act of redefinition. For these writers, "Memory is related to identity, the two feed one another.... I am not only what I do, I am also what I remember" (Wiesel 14); therefore, to live ethically, one must also remember ethically. How does one practice ethical memory? Most simply, ethics is a "commitment to justice" that "names the obligation to empower the hitherto deprivileged, silenced, or colonized other" (Harpham *Getting* 17).⁶ Ethical memory, then, seeks to remember that which has been forgotten by official History by reclaiming forgotten narratives in a manner that does justice to the subjects directly affected by and often effaced from the historical record.⁷

The idea that forgotten narratives can be reclaimed, that they can disrupt, coexist, and compete with one another, troubles the argument set forth by Philipp Wolf in "The

Anachronism of Modern Cultural Memories, and an Ethics of Literary Memory.” Wolf draws primarily on German critics who return to a conservative understanding of collective memory that originates in the work of Edmund Burke.⁸ He identifies two criteria that for him form the “core of memory studies”: the first is the “constructivist assumption” in which “collectives or individuals will adopt any memory or historical narrative if it appears to make sense within their present historical or personal context” (331). The second is the “identity-giving” function of memory (332). It is this second criterion which Wolf then links to literary production, arguing that literary texts are used to “‘construct a collective memory’ ... [that] is expected to guarantee the coherence and identity of a nation” (332). Both are predicated on the nation investing its citizens with a sense of personal responsibility for the nation’s well being, and this is where Wolf makes the link to ethics. He writes that, according to Heinz von Foerster, people “will realize that the perceived world is also always [their] own world, a kind of extension and part of one’s own body. Consequently, [individuals] will develop some attachment to this world – sympathy, empathy, solidarity” (344). For Wolf, the “most elegant medium” by which individuals can be persuaded to care, to engage ethically with the nation’s well-being, is through literature, “which, although made-up, makes us easily suspend our disbelief” (344). Thus, literature becomes a means for “individual connectivity and identification along with normative or ethical discrimination” (346).

While Wolf is correct in identifying the ability of literature to engender “individual connectivity” and ethical engagement, he misinterprets the relationship between literature and memory. He believes literature fixes identity by providing a “clear structure of values”; on the contrary, literature performs an opposite function by

presenting new ideas and disruptive voices that challenge any essentialist construction of Ireland and the Irish. Wolf also writes that “cultural memory” only works as a “stabilizing framework” when it is “internalized as ... self-evident” and is considered not “*made* ... [but] *found* or *given*” (335). Literature, in this system, can only reveal to the reader those memories that were already self-evident and present in the culture; in fact, this is not at all how the novels discussed below function. Instead, we must view literature as a “practice” of creativity in which creation is “both an act and an event, both something that is done and something that happens...it cannot be purely a willed act; but...it cannot be purely an event” (Attridge 22). In other words, together with the active process of memory, twentieth-century Irish literature by women partakes in a dynamic practice that accepts and even fosters a certain degree of instability as an inherent part of the collective memory of Ireland.

In each of the works explored in subsequent chapter, characters’ ability to challenge received collective memories is predicated on their acts of bearing witness to uncomfortable historical truths and to the lived lives of individuals, through their own practices of remembrance. To bear witness to history is to participate in the creation of collective memory; it is at once an individual action and a public event. By witnessing, by testifying, one engages a listener who is then also a witness, forming a “collective” that expands outwards, that remembers and can bear witness to a particular history. In this sense, history is the trauma or crisis to which literature responds, reminding readers that “history [is] neither simply represented nor simply reflected, but ... reinscribed, translated, radically rethought and fundamentally worked over by the text” (Felman and Laub xiv-xv). Within the novels encompassed by this project there are many instances of

such witnessing, via which the novels as a whole ask us as readers to reevaluate the ways in which we remember and commemorate the past:

To bear witness is to take responsibility for truth ... To testify ... before the court of history and of the future; to testify, likewise, before an audience of readers or spectators—is more than simply to report a fact or an event or relate what has been lived, recorded and remembered. Memory is conjured here essentially in order to *address* another, to impress upon a listener, to *appeal* to a community. To testify is always, metaphorically, to take the witness stand ... To testify is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative to others: to *take responsibility* ... for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general ... validity and consequences. (204, author's italics)

In order for an act of testimony to occur, however, there must first be, as Dori Laub points out, both a witness and a listener.⁹ She writes that the listener, here, the character within the text who receives the story of the past, “comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels ... The listener, therefore ... has to feel the victim’s victories, defeats and silences, know them from within” (Felman and Laub 58). In the case of characters who have experienced the violence of historical conflict, it is the telling of the story, how it is told, to whom, and where the emphasis is placed, that we as readers must understand in order to comprehend the dynamics of witnessing at stake in these narratives. It is only by understanding these primary relationships that we can then build outwards, seeking to understand the ties to

memory and commemoration called for by these moments of witnessing. What takes place within the texts studied here is a gradual building process that culminates with the reader, who, by virtue of reading the narrative, becomes engaged in the process of witnessing, forging a link between text and reality that asks readers to reevaluate their own processes of commemorating the past.

For the characters whom these authors create, bearing witness also carries an inherently ethical, embodied component that begins in the moment in which one individual acknowledges the face of another. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas argues that “the epiphany [of the] face [determines] a relationship different from that which characterizes all our sensible experiences” (187). That is to say, “For Levinas, the ethical imperative issues from the human other, and exceeds all knowledge” (Harpham 56). The face-to-face encounter instantiates an ethical obligation that compels the acknowledgement of another’s individuality. If history is the history of individuals who make up a larger social body, then the recognition of another’s subjectivity requires a corollary understanding that both the individual and social bodies demand ethical treatment. If ethics entails “a respect for others” and is a “commitment to justice,” then ethical memory is memory that seeks to incorporate, without annihilating, the other in a manner that does justice to previously elided or forgotten voices, moments, and truths. In “Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other,” Derek Attridge gives an “alternative reading of the genitive construction in *the creation of the other*, according to which [the] text, and perhaps something of [the self] is created *by* the other” (21). Therefore, he states, “my subjectivity will have been altered to some degree” by creativity (21); this process leaves neither unchanged, but both intact; *both* are

irrevocably altered, in a process that then alters the course of memory. Furthermore, when writers develop such links between their characters, those characters are imbricated in ethical networks that require the reevaluation of deeply felt memories and beliefs.

The demand that past violence be recognized and acknowledged requires that what is remembered will therefore chronicle not only “the survivors” but also those whose “defeat accompanied every victory” (Bowen *Mulberry* 57). Elizabeth Bowen writes in “The Bend Back” that “if the greater part of the past had not been, mercifully, forgotten, the effect upon our modern sensibility would be unbearable; it would not be only injustice and bloodshed that we should have to remember but the dismay, the apathy, the brutalizing humiliation of people for whom there was no break” (57-58). Yet it is exactly that which has been forgotten, the dismay and humiliation, that Bowen’s, Johnston’s, and Madden’s characters ask those they meet to remember. For them, it is the act of bearing witness to what has been forgotten that is necessary in order to remember ethically and thereby guard against the repetition of the past. Ultimately, it is the act of bearing witness, with its ethical charge, that leads in the texts discussed below to a concomitant reevaluation of the ways in which remembrance is translated into commemoration.

Myth and sacrifice

In order to better understand what is at stake in the twentieth-century literature of conflict, and in particular that written by women, it is useful to examine a text that occupies similar territory. Bernard MacLaverty’s *Cal* serves as a foil for the ethical questions taken up in more nuanced detail by Bowen, Johnston, and Madden. In

MacLaverty's work, one of the "key questions" posed centers on "the ways in which the personal becomes—or always already is—political (and vice versa)": "And where—if anywhere—are the spaces for ethical choice?" (Haslam, "Critical Reductionism" 43). Richard Haslam notes that in *Cal*, MacLaverty "rightly provides no easy answers" (43). However, the novel slips into a dangerous "confessional conceptualisation of the conflict in Northern Ireland as a zero-sum game of all-or-nothing territorial control" (Cleary qtd. in Haslam "Critical Reductionism" 46). It becomes clear, in reading *Cal*, that the concept of apostolic succession is still very much at work in twentieth-century Ireland. The danger such a view poses is that "moral outrage" or "stoical resignation" become the only possible responses to violence (H. Hart 388).¹⁰ What MacLaverty fails to give his readers is a third, middle ground between understanding and outrage. Given this dichotomy, it becomes too easy to slip into a "paralysing ambivalence" that becomes complicity (Cleary qtd. in Haslam "Critical Reductionism" 46). It is this paralyzing ambivalence, the tendency to "universalize rather than particularize" that limits the ethical potential of memory in *Cal* (Patten 132). The issue is one of scale: rather than focus on the individual, lived humanity of the victims of the Troubles, MacLaverty turns to the language of religious sacrifice. On such a scale, it is impossible to honor an ethical obligation to the individual dead.

Instead, for *Cal*, the only means of understanding Ireland's history is through heavily religious notions of sacrifice and martyrdom, such that "references in the novel to sacrifices for a political cause ... regularly alternate with references to sacrifice for a religious cause" (Haslam "Blood" 45). In addition, the language of photography, of the camera shutter, permeates the novel, highlighting the voyeurism that defines *Cal*'s

relationship to the violence in which he becomes an unwilling participant. The combination of photographic imagery with images of sacrificial violence results in a novel that is “itself implicated in, and judgmental about, the sado-masochistic cultural forms it anatomizes and inhabits” (Corcoran qtd. in Haslam “Critical reductionism” 47). However, the novel’s judgment cannot supersede its complicity, for it offers no options to its characters other than to continue a struggle for justice that is defined by violence.

The novel begins with the body: Cal stands “at the back gateway of the abattoir, his hands thrust into his pockets, his stomach rigid with the ache of want” (MacLaverty 1). In front of him, cows go to the slaughter, and “the sweet warm nauseating smell of the place” invades his perception (1). MacLaverty presents the reader immediately with descriptions of blood and viscera, as the Preacher—an evangelical Protestant—stands ready to “catch the spout of blood” that the local doctor has prescribed for “any anaemic with a strong stomach” (3, 2).¹¹ Meanwhile, Cal’s father approaches, his coat “japped all over with blood and stiff with cold fat” (3). Unlike his father Shamie, or his schoolmate Crilly, Cal does not work in the abattoir because he hasn’t “a strong enough stomach” (19).¹² This is also the reason Cal provides for wanting to remove himself from the IRA. He tells Skeffington: “The problem with this kind of thing is that people get hurt,” referring to the murder of an RUC policemen, for which he served as the driver. Skeffington tells him that “compared with conventional war the numbers are small ... sounds callous but it’s true”; to which Cal replies: “I have no stomach for it” (29). However, while Cal can escape the daily work of the abattoir, he cannot leave the IRA as easily. Instead, Skeffington turns to the language of inevitability and sacrifice:

“Do you think any of us have?” Skeffington stared at him.

“Anybody who enjoyed this kind of thing would have to be sick. But it has to be done—by somebody. Because we have committed ourselves, Cathal, it is our responsibility. *We* have to make the sacrifices. You can’t just turn away and say you have no stomach for it.”

“But to kill a guy on his own doorstep?”

“He was a Reserve policeman—one of the enemy. This is war, Cathal.

... You have to steel yourself, Cathal. Think of the issues, not the people. Think of an Ireland free of the Brits.” (29)¹³

Here, the language of political war blends with the language of religious sacrifice.

Skeffington’s credo, which Cal eventually accepts as a means of making sense of his guilt over Robert Morton’s death and his love for Morton’s widow, “represents what might be termed a theopolitics, in which the language and concepts of religion and politics are not substituted for one another but instead form an unacknowledged continuum, any part of which may stand for the whole” (Haslam, “Blood” 46). Cal’s focus is on the domestic, intimate nature of the act: that a man was killed on his own doorstep, his family nearby. Skeffington, on the other hand, demands that Cal think in abstractions, that he focus on the sacrifices that must be made to support the political future envisioned by the IRA.

For Skeffington, the particularity of individual deaths can only be understood in terms of the political whole. Later, when Cal accuses him of leaving out “the shit and the

guts and the tears,” Skeffington again argues “We must be strong enough, Cathal, to ignore all that.” He continues:

It is not a part of history. ... I know what you’re thinking. But I was in Derry that day. They had us cowering behind a wall. There was an old man lying in the open. In the rush one of his shoes had come off and was lying on its side. There was a big hole in the heel of his sock. Can you believe that? Will that be recorded in the history books? I could hear him dying, Cathal ... And we were all Irishmen living in our own country.

(102)

While the novelists discussed in the following chapters do, explicitly and carefully, try to record the little details akin to the “big hole in the heel of his sock,” MacLaverty’s characters use this image only as a means of reinforcing the need for retribution, the need to focus on issues, rather than people. In a move that is the exact opposite of Skeffington’s, characters in novels such as Bowen’s *Last September* or Madden’s *Hidden Symptoms* use such details as a means of denying an all-encompassing view of Ireland’s political strife, refocusing the reader’s attention on the individual human cost. For Skeffington and, we find, for Cal, such a refocusing is an impossibility.

Instead, Cal is only able to clearly see the cost of the Troubles when violence is visited on his own body: “He leaned on the dressing table and looked at the image of himself staring back naked. The swelling in his mouth had gone down a bit but the lower half of his body was covered in blue-black bruises” (MacLaverty 69-70). And later, “At night after the bath he watched in the mirror the progress of his bruises and saw them turn from blue-black to a jaundiced yellow” (82). Yet Cal is unable to make the connection

from his own bruised body to the bodies of others. When the bodies of others are at risk, he slips into a disturbing voyeurism that denies the immediacy and human cost of violent acts, including his own; his relationship to other bodies within the novel is mediated through the language of the camera lens and shutter image. Again and again he engages in moments of voyeurism that further deny the possibility of an ethical connection between individuals. MacLaverty introduces the voyeuristic gaze into the novel early, through the pornographic images that Cal remembers circulating through his school as a child: “They were of slightly out-of-focus women whose eyes were reflecting the flash-gun. They were lying naked with their legs open, smiling sheepishly. ... To see them properly, Cal had to hold the picture a couple of inches from his face” (23). These women are captured by the “flash-gun,” but as abstractions, slightly out of focus and thus stripped of the clarity that might force Cal, as an adult, to remember them individually with any sense of discomfort.

The women in the images are simply props for the male gaze, and this impersonal sense of the female body dominates the descriptions of women within the novel.¹⁴ For instance, when Cal drives for Crilly on an assignment to rob an off-licence, he watches the door to the shop from the car: “The door swung shut after [Crilly] on its spring but in the instant that it was open, as if it was the shutter of a camera, Cal saw two women customers look up in fright. ... Then suddenly the door sprang open and in its shutter-instant Cal saw the two women lying face down on the floor” (MacLaverty 92). This moment establishes “a link between violence and photographic representation” that MacLaverty first alludes to with the phrase “flash-gun” in the novel’s earlier scene (Haslam “The Pose” 197). As the novel moves towards its end, that link “is extended to

voyeurism in an incident that takes place some weeks later” (197). By design, Cal encounters Marcella in the library where she works. Observing her, he notices that “the profile of her breast had become a plateau touched at the tip by the book. Cal wanted to close his eyes. To make a shutter-image of it, just as he had made one of the two women sprawled face down on the floor of the off-licence” (MacLaverty 109). Here, “gaze becomes another mode of violence,” and Cal’s sexual desire for Marcella is inextricable from his fears about the violence that Crilly might enact on the bodies of the women in the shop (Haslam, “The Pose” 197).¹⁵

Most troubling, however, is Cal’s description of his desire for Marcella: “He imagined her as the Sleeping Beauty in a drugged coma and how he would kiss her and touch her without her responding. ... She would be displayed for him” like the women in the pornographic photographs (MacLaverty 196-197). She is an eroticized figure of desire, abstracted and “displayed,” rather than an individual who embodies an ethical obligation. Hence, when Cal does make love to Marcella in the book’s final pages, he cannot actually look at her. When he first hears her name in the library, he is panicked that she might be Morton’s widow but cannot remember what “that Marcella” looks like: “It must be her. He tried to recall the woman’s face but could not. ... He felt a great need to recall her face. He could only summon up a bland set of features he knew were not hers” (12). To recall her face would be to recognize his own ethical obligation towards her, and by extension, towards her husband. Unable to accept what that would mean, he sees only features that could not belong to her. Similarly—knowing that she would never sleep with him knowing his role in her husband’s death—he cannot look at her during the act. Instead, he forces her to turn away from him: “She obediently lay on her stomach. ...

With her face turned away from him at last he became excited” (221). Cal’s focus on the shutter-image, his voyeuristic gaze that mediates his understanding of the women around him, melds sex and violence together in a way that, like the religious language of sacrifice that pervades the novel, denies individuality. MacLaverty presents the reader with individuals who serve roles: victim, martyr, object of sexual desire, but does not question or complicate those roles. Instead, we are led to believe, as Ciaran Carson famously said of Seamus Heaney’s volume *North*, that “these things have always happened” (184).

Thus, as Cal seeks to understand the guilt he feels over Morton’s murder, he turns to the familiar language and imagery of religious sacrifice. While at Mass he hears a sermon on Matt Talbot “who after a decade of drunkenness in Dublin turned to Christ” (MacLaverty 49). After his death, when “his friends were laying him out for burial, they found that his waist was lapped in chains. He had been wearing them for so long and had them so tightly tied about him that it was almost impossible to remove them from the mortified flesh of his body” (50). Cal thinks of Talbot’s “steel will” in an echo of Skeffington’s direction to “steel himself” (50). While Cal “has lost his faith, he nonetheless continues to construe his plight in terms of religious concepts and imagery linked to Matt Talbot” (Haslam, “Blood” 43). After he and Shamie are burned out of their home in a Protestant neighborhood, Cal takes up residence, at first illegally, in an abandoned cottage on the Morton farm. Sleeping on the hard floors, he thinks of Matt Talbot; having placed himself so close to both the source of his guilt and the source of his sexual desire, Cal figures himself as a penitent punishing himself for his sins.

MacLaverty reinforces Cal's understanding of himself in religious terms, likening Cal to a Christ-figure. After the Mortons discover him living in the abandoned cottage and permit him to live there, Marcella helps him to furnish the space.¹⁶ Cal "[carries] the mesh frame of the bed to the cottage on his bowed back," and Marcella describes their work as "Operation Stable. There being no room at the inn" (156, 157). MacLaverty's description of Cal is echoed and reversed in Cal's later description of Grunewald's painting of the crucifixion: "The weight of the Christ figure bent the cross down like a bow" (245). Because Cal understands himself in decidedly religious terms, when he is arrested by the police, standing "in a dead man's Y-fronts listening to the charge," he is "grateful at last that someone was going to beat him to within an inch of his life" (246).¹⁷ In this moment, Cal pictures himself as a sacrificial victim; but what is more significant is that MacLaverty's ending leaves Cal's narrative open to inclusion in the national story of martyrdom and sacrifice. He is branded a traitor by Skeffington for leaving the IRA, then names himself an informer after he calls the police to point them to the bomb Crilly planted in the library; however, he is arrested by the police for Morton's murder, based on information provided by either Crilly or Skeffington when they are interrogated. The reader, then, is left to wonder whether Cal will be branded as a traitor, or have his history rewritten to make him a nationalist martyr to the republican cause. What we do know, however, is that these are the only two options MacLaverty constructs. A more nuanced understanding of Cal's motivations and his actions is not open to those within the novel.

Peter Mahon reads Cal's actions through the work of René Girard and the language of sacrifice. For Girard, "violence ... is the heart and soul of the sacred," while violence itself "is endemic to human society, and there is no solution to this problem

except for the answer that religion gives. Since that answer is given in the rituals of killing and their rationalizations as ‘sacrifice,’ the solution that religion provides is also an act of violence” (Girard qtd. in O’Neill 91-92). To escape the cycle of violence, Girard argues, communities “select a scapegoat as a ritual sacrifice. ... ‘Ritual,’ in other words, ‘is nothing more than the exercise of “good” violence”” (O’Neill 97). Armed with this understanding of the relationship between ritual and violence, Mahon explores “the text’s engagement with sacrificial and scapegoat structures and mechanisms,” and argues that “sacrificial reading is irreducibly violent precisely because it intervenes in violence violently: it seeks to divert violence away from the community onto someone or something else” (Mahon 73). This is precisely the ethical issue with novels such as *Cal*, which see the diversion of violence as the only way forward, rather than looking for cessation to the cycle of violence. Mahon argues that the sacrificial victim “serves to protect the entire community from its own violence; it prompts the ... community to choose victims outside itself” (Girard qtd. in Mahon 88). However, here Mahon goes too far; Cal is not a victim outside the community. While readers might understand Cal as a figure who wishes to step outside the Loyalist/Republican dichotomy, MacLaverty’s narrative does not allow him to do so. We are given no evidence to suggest that the community will understand him as anything other than a member of the IRA.¹⁸

Rather, we are given to understand that there is no escape from the dichotomies of Northern-Irish society. In the novel’s best-known and oft-quoted lines, Cal describes Ireland thus: “To suffer for something which didn’t exist, that was like Ireland. People were dying every day, men and women were being turned into vegetables in the name of Ireland. An Ireland which never was and never would be. It was the people of Ulster who

were heroic, caught between the jaws of two opposing ideals trying to grind each other out of existence” (MacLaverty 129).¹⁹ In this understanding of Ireland, Cal and Robert Morton are no different from each other; both suffer because of the inevitability of violence; their individuality and their own acts are irrelevant: “Cal relives the night of Morton’s murder and comes to the conclusion that it is the tit-for-tat series of reprisals that drives and escalates the Troubles ... and is thereby responsibly for the spread of reciprocal violence that engulfs ‘the people of Ulster,’” Mahon writes (78). This view, he further argues

invariably effaces the differences between antagonists,” such that “‘one’ can be the same as ‘two,’ ‘Protestant’ can be the same as ‘Catholic,’ ‘innocence’ can be the same as ‘guilt,’ ‘justice’ can be the same as ‘non-violence.’ In such a place, it becomes very different to appeal to something—innocence, religion, non-violence, justice—that could bring the relentless cycle of violence to an end. (78)

Here, Mahon pinpoints the problem with *Cal* and other Troubles thrillers that fail to “suggest that there is a common underlying humanity that is shared by the forces of paramilitarism and the forces of the law” (79). By effacing their differences, *Cal* sets up a parallelism in which “Cal and Robert blur ... precisely because their desire is violently mimetic” (79). This move denies the ethical call to singularity expressed by William Watkin, the need to count “the dead as one, and then count them as one again” (qtd. in Sloan 53). Here the dead blend and blur, becoming a singular entity that proves nothing except the “tragically deadlocked reciprocity” of Ireland’s violence in which “a single victim can be substituted for all the potential victims” (Mahon 81, 86).

In such a system, it becomes impossible to remember or commemorate the dead without turning to totalizing narratives of understanding. *Cal* participates in and perpetuates these narratives, unable or unwilling to posit a choice that would challenge the “set of complacent conventions” in Troubles novels which assume “that it is an irrational and bloody slaughter without solution; that both sides, republican and loyalist, are as bad as each other” (Bennett qtd. in Haslam “Critical Reductionism” 40). To formulate it another way, such novels tend “to universalize rather than particularize the situation, circumnavigating the Ulster condition through one-dimensional narrative and thematic limitation” (Patten qtd. in Haslam, “Blood” 52). This is precisely what readers find in *Cal*, with its constrained dialogue of voyeurism and sacrifice, and precisely the type of narrowed understanding from which we find twentieth-century female novelists striving to write alternative possibilities. *Cal* thus provides a template for the dominant Northern Troubles narrative that fails where the novels discussed in the following chapters succeed. MacLaverty’s shortcoming—and the general problem shared by novels in this vein—is that while the language of determinism and sacrifice strives to be universal, in the case of the Irish Troubles novel, it cannot also be particular or ethical.

Changing commemorative practice

Ultimately, *Cal* fails to alter or recast the relationship between history and memory. In contrast, the novels to which we now turn offer not merely a commentary on the tendentious relationship between the two, but a movement towards a rethinking of remembrance and commemorative practice. In *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, Ian McBride notes that, “in Ireland, perhaps more than in other cultures, collective groups

have ... expressed their values and assumptions through their representations of the past. There is no evidence, moreover, that this preoccupation is abating; if anything, questions of collective memory and commemoration have assumed new prominence in recent years” (McBride 3). In much of the literature of the twentieth century, particularly the fiction that seeks to narrate new relationships to the past, the preoccupation stems not from a desire to replicate old models but instead from a compulsion or desire to offer new ones. For Bowen, Johnston, and Madden, “the complex and conflicting memories of the Troubles continually demand, like restless ghosts, to be addressed, reconfigured and reproduced, despite, or because of, the powerful paradox of conflict memory” (Graff-McRae 54). For these writers, “to challenge the role of memory is not to destroy or defile but to invigorate. When memory is beyond reproach it is deadened and emptied of all responsibility, deprived of the sustenance of legitimate enquiry” (Melling 257). In order to resist the calcification of memory, to invest remembrance with the power to create mutable, open commemorative forms, these novelists each focus on the primary importance of empathy over sympathy: “*Empathy*, unlike *sympathy*, is a relatively recent word, first appearing in English in 1904, three centuries after *sympathy* entered the language” (Landsberg 149, author’s italics). Empathy, when realized, instantiates an ethical bond that enables us to see “how to be responsible for the dead, all of them one by one” (Watkin 218). In their focus on empathy, these writers recognize that, in many ways, First World War memorials were meant as a warning. That warning went unheard, and the “rupture of language and imagery which followed the Second World War was profound and enduring” (Winter, *Sites* 8). The language of 1918 did not suffice for the

scope of the atrocities of the Holocaust. Nor could it suffice for the particularity of the violence of the Troubles.

¹ Halbwachs argues for the socially constructed nature of memory: he writes that the “principal locations of memory” are social in nature and revolve around groups such as the family, class, and religion. For him, then, “the past is a social construction mainly, if not wholly, shaped by the concerns of the present” such that “collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present” (25). In those moments where I use the term “collective memory,” I am specifically referencing *On Collective Memory* (1925); his understanding enabled critics to theorize the ways in which individual memories contribute to the formation of new, often disruptive collective memories that reshape present understandings of a collective past.

² In “Memory and Naming in the Great War,” Thomas W. Laqueur notes that “In January 1915—one can date this remarkable change with a precision not usual in cultural history—a new era of remembrance began: the era of the common soldier’s name” at sites such as the Menin Wall, “or its self-conscious and sacralized oblivion” at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior (Laqueur 152). In each of the First World War graveyards of France, a “stone of Remembrance” was raised, inscribed “Their *NAME* liveth forevermore” (153). This was, he notes, the first use of this passage from Ecclesiastes as part of a commemorative structure. Enormous emphasis was placed on remembering the names of individual soldiers, in a way that also emphasized their tie to the nation, in order to create a “social body” once again “whole and manifest” (158). In contrast, while many of the commemorative practices seen in texts such as Madden’s similarly emphasize the remembrance of an embodied, named individual, they do so in a manner that highlights absence and domesticity, rather than the wholeness of a social or national body. The overall effect of this shift is to emphasize the bodily nature of the individual, to bring the ethical obligation of that individual’s humanity to a central place in memory, thereby focusing on the need for an ethics of remembrance and of commemoration.

³ For both Conway and Winter, Halbwachs’s work is a touchstone and is fundamental to the development of their own theories of history, remembrance, and commemoration. However, Winter is adamant that scholars must move away from the term “collective memory.” In contrast, Conway’s focus on “memory work” employs terminology from sociology that builds from an acceptance of Halbwachs’s definition of collective memory. Still, Conway’s work remains useful for this project because the levels of memory work that he delineates again draw attention to the significance of agency and provide this project with an understanding of how memories move from the individual, into the public realm, and then become codified in public acts of commemoration. However, this project follows Winter in advocating a shift to the term “remembrance” in order to draw a clear distinction between individual memories or received histories and the active process of participating in and advocating for new understandings of the past.

⁴ Ford dates the first phase of early-modern Irish martyrology to the 1580s and 1590s and gives the example of Patrick Hely, Bishop of Mayo, and Con O’Rourke, killed by Sir William Drury in 1578.

⁵ In fact, in 1923, this inscription and its chosen language reinforced the political nature of the monument.

⁶ Harpham's definition of ethics results from his emphasis on two terms: the "other" and the "ought." For Harpham, the other is the "structurally obscure but commanding figure" around which "all forms of the ethical imperative gather" (2). He draws his focus on the other not from its Hegelian origins, but rather from the Kantian philosophical tradition's critique of Hegel. He writes that, following on Kant, "Contemporary thinking seems inspired by the idea of an otherness that remains other, that resists assimilation, accommodation, and reconciliation" (6). Thus, for Harpham, the work of Levinas is central, and like Levinas, Harpham understands ethics as an obligation, an "ought," that "issues directly from the encounter with the luminous and alien other in its human density" (7).

⁷ Furthermore, "Ethics, it turns out, is 'a way of encompassing conflict which allows the continuance of personal relationships against the hard and apparently inevitable fact of misunderstanding, mutually incompatible wishes, commitments, loyalties, interests and needs, a way of mending relationships and maintaining the self in opposition to itself or others'" (Stanley Cavell qtd. in Harpham *Getting It Right* 28). Bringing together discussions of collective memory with discussions of ethics, therefore, has specific potential for discussions of the role of memory in literature focused on the troubles.

⁸ For instance, Wolf cites the work of Ansgar Nünning, Jan Assmann, Harold Welzer, and Aleida Assmann. Wolf links his understanding of cultural memory to a tradition that originates in a shift that took place during the Romantic period, and thus identifies Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) as the "core text of modern conservatism" (337). While Wolf acknowledges that many theorists have rejected Burke's model, he advocates a return to Burke's "version of the 'people's spirit,'" and argues that it is this which "comes close to being a highly successful idealist concept of cultural memory, called up, with slight variations by Hegel and Herder," and later, F.H. Bradley and F.R. Leavis (341).

⁹ And, we might add, in the case of narrative, a reader. Laub writes that "testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking to *somebody*: to somebody they have been waiting for for a long time" (Felman and Laub 70-71). Even in cases in which novels are written primarily or partially in the first person, they presume a reader. That reader is drawn into the role of "addressable other" (68). Novels, like testimonies, are narrated for an audience of readers, and thus continually expand upon the body of witnesses to their particular history.

¹⁰ Henry Hart makes this argument in relationship to Seamus Heaney's volume *North*, and in particular the poem "Punishment," but his central point is equally applicable to the view of Ireland's history and politics that MacLaverty depicts in *Cal*.

¹¹ Peter Mahon argues that the Preacher "becomes an allegorical figure of the religion and politics that needs to feed off the blood of the Northern Irish people," pointing to the central problem of *Cal*: the presupposition that blood sacrifice is a necessary and inevitable piece of Ireland's history (74).

¹² Shamie is particularly disappointed that Cal has given up the job at the abattoir, as he is one of the few Catholics employed there. MacLaverty includes a number of border crossings in the novel: Shamie, a Catholic, employed by a Protestant slaughterhouse, Cal,

his son, employed by a Protestant farmer and given rides to and from work each day by a Protestant employee, and Marcella, a Catholic—albeit from the Continent—married to an RUC officer. However, MacLaverty employs these moments of cross-cultural tension to show the impossibility of the political situation in Northern Ireland, rather than to provide, as Jennifer Johnston does, moments in which her characters find new understandings of their surroundings.

¹³ Cal, unlike Johnston's Damien, is not allowed to remove himself from the Movement. Though in *The Railway Station Man* Manus tries to bring Damien back in, Damien has moved beyond the simplified us/them dichotomy that defines Manus's and, in *Cal*, Skeffington's thinking. MacLaverty, however, provides no alternative to Skeffington's doctrine. While for Cal, "the reed of the living cattle" is "much more acceptable than the smell of the abattoir," signaling again the difference between Cal and Skeffington or Crilly, that difference is not enough, in MacLaverty's novel, to allow him the possibility of escape (MacLaverty 103).

¹⁴ Here, MacLaverty's depiction of female bodies is reminiscent of Seamus Heaney's poem "Punishment"; Heaney's eroticized depiction of the Windeby Girl is perhaps the most frequently discussed and debated reflection on the nature of responsibility and complicity in the midst of sectarian violence.

¹⁵ Readers find further evidence for Cal's mental link between sexuality and violence in one of his recurring dreams: "Once he had a gun in his hand. She was naked and beautiful and always in the upstairs bay window. She was always in a state of great agitation, which Cal knew was sexual ... He knew she needed his help, but when he sprang from the gate to her window-sill and into her room she showed stark terror ... Then she burst out of the side window. The air was filled with her screaming ... always she was below, skewered on some railings, screaming endlessly" (MacLaverty 46).

¹⁶ Mrs. Morton allows Cal to live in the cottage rent free because if he "paid rent [he] could complain. This way [he has] no legal rights" (154). MacLaverty casts Cal as tenant in the eighteenth-century sense, with no rights to his land, subject to the will of his Protestant land-lady. Cal sees himself in these terms as well, thinking of himself as "a menial at the gate-lodge to the house of his mistress" (128). This regression serves not to point out the injustice of the system under which Catholics lived in Northern Ireland, but again to emphasize the stasis and circularity of Irish history.

¹⁷ There is a literal precedent for Cal's likening of himself to a Christian martyr, not simply in terms of Alan Ford's concept of apostolic succession, but also because "the protestors were frequently represented in 'sacrificial terms' through posters showing 'battered, tortured or starved prisoners in Christ-like posture, the wire of Long Kesh transformed into a crown of thorns, the H-block blanket into a crucifixion cloth'" (Kearney qtd. in Haslam, "Blood" 47). MacLaverty evokes Long Kesh as well; in Crilly's home Cal sees "a picture on the wall of a ragged child with one glistening teardrop standing on his dirty cheek. Beside it was a plaque of wood and burned into it with a needle were the words MADE IN LONG KESH CONCENTRATION CAMP. It has a badly drawn clenched fist surrounded by barb wire and the words IRELAND UNFREE SHALL NEVER BE AT PEACE" (MacLaverty 87).

¹⁸ Mahon's use of Girard also misrepresents the intimacy of the violence of the Troubles; even when victims are seen as "sacrifices," it is more often in terms of a history of

martyrdom such as Ford describes, rather than an attempt to find a third-party victim outside either community onto which to displace violence as a means of dispelling it. In fact, many times death is a punishment for those who step outside the bounds of their community of belief. Such victims perpetuate strict boundaries, rather than helping to dismantle them.

¹⁹ For Marcella, Ireland's violence is directly linked to its' "childishness," and this childishness has robbed it of any sense of a future: "Ireland. It's like a child. It's only concerned with the past and the present. The future has ceased to exist for it," she tells Cal (188). Soon after, Cal admits to beating someone up at school, which brings Marcella back to Ireland's political situation: "It's back to violence again. It frightens me. That people should want physically to hurt one another. I suppose at school it's the thing to do—young men of the species showing off to become the leader of the herd—but you would think people would grow up" (190). For her, the continued violence in Ireland is a sign that the country has not, or will not, "grow up." Instead, she believes Ireland has become immune: "Violence is a bit like antibodies," she writes in her diary, "Small doses build up until you can reject and be immune to the most horrific events" (201). Here we see a belief in Ireland's atavism, simply expressed in different terms. It is this sense of inevitability—that *Cal* gives in to and thus perpetuates—that other writers strive carefully to resist. Inevitability can, as Cal shows, too quickly become complicity and acceptance.

Chapter Two: The “uneasy rustle of remembrance” in Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September*¹

An art cannot deal with memory without also confronting forgetting.
- Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler

“The idea of the past”

In reading both her fiction and her nonfiction, it becomes clear that, for Elizabeth Bowen, not only places, but also history, loomed large. Her writing explores the nuanced relationship between history and remembrance—what she called “the bend back”—and seeks to illuminate their relationship to and role in the creation of fiction (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 54). For Bowen there was something to be gained by writing of the past, particularly in her second novel, *The Last September*, published in 1929. It is her only novel “set back deliberately in a former time” (124); in fact, Bowen was adamant that readers be conscious of the novel’s “pastness” throughout their reading of her work (124). In setting her novel in September 1920, in the midst of the Anglo-Irish War, Bowen encourages readers to explore the recent past and the friction between her characters’ stories and historical accounts of the period. In her essay “The Bend Back” (1950), Bowen asserts that “we must not shy at the fact that we cull the past from fiction rather than history” (57).² Fiction is central to Bowen’s understanding of how we remember. For her, fiction is imbued with the power to create and re-create an historical past. Thus, *The Last September* should be regarded as a central and pivotal text in Bowen’s oeuvre. It is in this, her second novel, that she explores the recent past, writing from the vantage point of Oxford, England, in 1928, looking back to and seeking to understand the implications of the Anglo-Irish War.

Bowen herself noted that while “the past of centuries back . . . may be the more spectacular,” it is “the ‘near’ past” that holds “an ultimately more disturbing appeal” (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 57).³ For this reason Bowen, like many other novelists, turns in *The Last September* to a period only eight years distant in an attempt to understand what was rapidly being codified into history. In her fictive recreation, the past she crafts and preserves differs from history in many respects, but one is most vital for understanding what Bowen means when she says that “it is not the past but the idea of the past that draws us” (58). It was Bowen’s belief that history “only chronicles the survivors”; it is left to fiction to chronicle the remainder. In an unpublished monologue written for a performance at Kinsale, she tells her audience:

History has no beginning. . .
 Who first invaded, and when, and how,
 . . .
 Is for speculation, theory and legend.
 Assaults and battles of which there are no records
 Become mythical. (Bowen, “Kinsale” 1).

Rather than the details, she continues, “what we know is the outcome” (16). In these meditations, Bowen reveals herself as a writer deeply concerned with the way the details of the past and those who lived it should be remembered. In 1928, in the aftermath of the First World War, the Anglo-Irish War, and the Civil War, September 1920 was still a moment in need of explanation. *The Last September*, though not generally considered amongst Bowen’s war writings, is therefore a reflective piece on war and war’s effects that bears further scrutiny.

To read Bowen's second novel thus requires a reappraisal of the ways in which *The Last September* has traditionally been perceived. For many critics, the novel is an example of the Big House tradition: a novel of country manners upon which history and its effects have no bearing. For others, the novel reveals Bowen's reservations about modernism: Maria DiBattista argues that "hospitality, the refinement and ritualization of neighborliness into patterns to grace the interactions of every days life, is for [Bowen] the tradition most imperiled by modernist upheavals in customs and governments" (227). In this reading, *The Last September* becomes a museum piece, a novel intended to preserve and present a lost culture: "Although inspired by an urbane sense of satire, [*The Last September*] does not aim to deride the times and traditions it represents so much as to resurrect them through a 'perspective cut through the years'" (235). However, to read Bowen's novel in this manner is to see her only as a Big House novelist intent on stubbornly maintaining the past. This perspective is one dominant strain within criticism that attempts to explain both Bowen's broad contribution to twentieth-century literature and, more particularly, *The Last September*. Other readings of Bowen's work locate her within a dynamic tradition of war writing, yet these critics tend to pass over *The Last September* as belonging strictly to the former realm of Bowen criticism. In fact, Bowen's second novel should be read as a work that is deeply historical and therefore deeply concerned with the ways in which history is remembered and presented to future readers. Bowen's concerns are reflected throughout *The Last September* in her style and in the novel's structure, both of which are at times deceptively traditional. However, when examined carefully for those moments that trouble dominant readings, *The Last*

September reveals itself to be a novel at once aware of and determined to participate in the creation of historical narrative.

As Heather Jordan notes, Bowen was “faced with a reality that could not be apprehended by means of conventional fictions” (1). Thus, “Bowen’s search for the buried link between memory and experience led her to write fictions that perpetually created and recreated the connections she saw amongst war, loss, and words” (5). The result is a novel with a “deliberately muffled, blurred effect,” in which “history reaches the reader through refraction and indirection” (Sands 2; Scanlan 79).⁴ Historical events must come at the reader indirectly because so many of Bowen’s characters refuse to acknowledge what surrounds them. Their determination to “not notice” is futile, however, as history irrupts into the novel throughout, challenging the Naylor’s complacency and allowing Bowen to explore the ambiguity of her feelings regarding the role played by the Anglo-Irish in the events of the 1920s.⁵

Bowen wrote that she did not “idealize the September of 1920,” the month in which she felt her story “chose to be set” (Bowen, “Preface” 3).⁶ Rather, *The Last September* “reflects [her] own disjointed and uneasy perception of Ireland” (Walshe, *Elizabeth Bowen Remembered* 12). The book also reflects Bowen’s beliefs about the novel as a form and the way in which it allows readers to remember and preserve a history that is more than simply a record of outcomes. In her notes for a lecture on the novel, Bowen records a passage from Genji:

... I have a theory of my own about what this art of the novel is, and how it came into being. ... It does not simply consist in the author’s telling a story ... on the contrary, it happens because the author’s own experience

... has moved him to an emotion so passionate that he can no longer keep it shut up in his heart. Again and again something in his own life or in that around him will seem to the writer so important that he cannot bear to let it pass into oblivion. There must never come a time, he feels, when men do not know about it. That is my view of how this art arose. (Bowen, "Notes" 1-2)

For Bowen, what require preservation are the ordinary objects and activities of life during that last September, not necessarily to venerate them, but to examine and better understand them. This is the ethical debt her novel pays to the history of the period; the "something" so important that it cannot be allowed to "pass into oblivion" is, in *The Last September*, the complex relationship between those who lived within the demesne walls and the events taking place in the "other" Ireland outside the walls.

Bowen explores the relationship between the two Irelands of *The Last September* through both her characters and the places, the houses and objects, that are at times more vibrantly alive than the living individuals who inhabit them. Her characters are largely governed by an overwhelming desire to forget, or to "not notice" in the first place, while her places—Danielstown, the ruined mill—absorb the tenor of the land surrounding them and become settings that remind the reader of the uneasy, "unwilling bosom" of land upon which they exist (Bowen, *The Last September* 92). *The Last September* is a novel in which, Neil Corcoran argues, "nothing ever quite gets started," making the plot "one not so much of event as of interim, a long-drawn out waiting – restless, hesitant, unresolved" (Corcoran, "Discovery" 316). Nor is it a novel of overt violence, and this has caused some critics to pause and question its meaning and significance: "The curiosity [of *The*

Last September],” writes Maria DiBattista, “was and remains historical—how could Bowen write of country visits, tennis parties, and provincial balls in the nuance-drenched manner of Proust at a time when Ireland was convulsed by violence, its countryside the site of ambushes, its estates the burial grounds of rebel guns?” (232). The answer is that Bowen writes in the manner she does, and of the events she does, in order to display and implicitly critique war and its impacts, through the twin vehicles of refraction and indirection.

In fact, the indirect method Bowen uses in writing of the Anglo-Irish War is in keeping with her understanding of how individuals remember history; her views are neatly captured in an unpublished radio broadcast written for the BBC. Entitled “A Year I Remember – 1918,” and broadcast on March 10, 1949, the script depicts the exchange between a “childish voice” and an “old voice” in which the child asks to be told the story of “Waterloo day” (Bowen, “Year” 1). It begins: “...there were dotted over the country old ladies remembering Waterloo. They dwelled, one was given to understand, upon that memory perpetually, in a mystic hush. The cottage of one such old lady was pointed out to me ... the past, like a ground-mist, lay over the rockery in the front” (1). Yet when asked, the old voice begins her story of Waterloo day not with details of the battle but with the observation that “a rabbit bolted across our garden path. Our dog hot after it. Cruel” (1). The child, eager for more information, presses: “What else do you remember?” and the older woman, “suddenly agitated,” tells the child, “I tore my little apron. Such a dainty thing – tore it right across” (2). The child becomes “slightly desperate,” as the story is not the one she expects to be told: “But don’t you remember what they were saying? The cheering – wasn’t there? Peals of bells? Bonfires? – Weren’t

you very happy?” (2). The old voice is “slightly outraged at the suggestion” and cannot fathom a reason to be happy about the day she tore her apron. “It broke my heart,” she says; “That was Waterloo day. Such a dreadful tear – I’ll never forget” (3). The past, the narrator tells us, is “made up of large shadows, uncertain visions, and small things” (19). What the individual remembers is not, Bowen points out, the grand historical narrative; rather, it is the little details, the everyday disappointments.

In *The Last September*, the everyday details of the past help the reader to understand the Troubles of the early 1920s “as [they] take root and [live] in local memory rather than as [they are] sublimated into universal narratives” (DiBattista 243). For this reason the Troubles are most present in the novel as an ominous undercurrent, a backdrop that, try as they may, the Naylor cannot fully eclipse from their notice. In an undated letter, the writer Sean O’Faolain writes to Bowen after reading her first novel *Friends and Relations*, describing her method as one “like a sea shaken from underneath . . . That is I feel a great part of your art – [your] . . . unsolidity” (O’Faolain 1-2). It is through her “unsolidity,” through the moments in which history irrupts into the pages of *The Last September*, disturbing the forgetfulness of Danielstown’s inhabitants, that Bowen explores the novel form and its relationship to history and remembrance.

September 1920 in County Cork

In her preface to the 1952 American edition of *The Last September*, Bowen notes that the novel’s “factual background . . . may, for non-Irish readers, need explanation” (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 125). She describes the “Troubled Times,” in which “roving armed conflict between the Irish Republican Army and British forces” dominated day-to-

day life; “The Army lorry heard in the breathless evening, the purposeful young man glimpsed in the Danielstown woods, the shot in the ruined mill, the barbed-wire fence around the dancers, and the ambush in which the subaltern Gerald, falls – these are fiction with the texture of history” (125). In this sense, the novel’s meaning cannot be read separately from its setting. While John Coates warns that “the existence of a seemingly obvious frame of reference for *The Last September* may mislead the critic” into seeing the Troubles, the decline of the Ascendency, and the setting as “the defining factors of the book’s meaning,” it is necessary that readers approach the novel with a basic knowledge of the events of September 1920. These events haunt Bowen’s work, and it is impossible to understand fully the tone and import of the brief moments of conflict that insert themselves into *The Last September* without understanding the contrast between the novel’s Ireland and its nonfiction counterpart.⁷

When Elizabeth Bowen wrote *The Last September*, the Anglo-Irish War and the Civil War that followed remained a ghostly presence not yet fully understood and not yet distant enough to be wholly relegated to History. More importantly, the novel is Bowen’s only book set in a clearly identified past. “In all others,” she says, “I wanted readers to contemplate what could appear to be the immediate moment [but] ... for *The Last September*, that went into reverse – the ‘then’ (the past) as an element was demanded” (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 124). Set in the midst of increasing violence in County Cork and just prior to the escalation of violence throughout Ireland that led to Britain’s eventual declaration of martial law, both the place and the time of Bowen’s novel are significant. This is not simply because Danielstown resembles the Bowen’s ancestral home, Bowen’s Court, but rather because, in *The Last September*, Elizabeth Bowen

examines the impact of what she called “life with the lid on” for those living through a war they were unwilling to acknowledge (Glendinning 81). While it is possible to read *The Last September* without much knowledge of the historical events taking place in the world that surrounds the fictional Danielstown, Bowen’s novel becomes infinitely richer and more layered when located within its context.

For all that history seems to take place on the margins, *The Last September* is a surprisingly faithful depiction of Cork in September 1920. Historical accounts written by British soldiers serving in Ireland and in Cork during this period align closely with many of the details of *The Last September*. For instance, Lieutenant Colonel Hughes-Hallet writes in his account: “Cork was not a happy station. There was soon trouble, started by Sinn Fein gangs cutting off the hair of girls seen to be chatting with soldiers” (Sheehan 199). The Naylor’s hear of a similar event during the Montmorency’s visit to Danielstown; Sir Richard is “delighted when he hear[s] from the postman, and [is] able to pass on, how three young women in the Clonmore direction had had their hair cut off by masked men for walking out with the soldiers” (Bowen, *The Last September* 84). Lois’s response is nonchalant, distant: “I wonder what they do with the hair?” (85).

Lois’s distance from the events that happen off-stage in Clonmore is mirrored in Gerald’s own. When we are first introduced to Gerald he is on his way to a tennis party at Danielstown; to him, it is a pity that no one will call the fighting in Ireland a war: “If anyone would, we could clear these beggars out in a week!” he tells them (49).⁸ For him, being stationed in Ireland means going to tennis parties, spending time with Lois, and going on patrols where little happens. Many of the reports from British soldiers stationed in Ireland in the early 1920s confirm the historical accuracy of Gerald’s sense of

frustration and lack of clear direction. Michael Hopkinson notes that “for political reasons the British government determined that the main responsibility for dealing with the challenge from the IRA should fall to the police and that the military should be confined to a supporting role” (Hopkinson 50). Thus, both Gerald, as a British subaltern, and Lois, as a young female member of the Anglo-Irish, are part of a leisure class of sorts, with no clear sense of who they are or what their roles are meant to be.

However, Lois’s and Gerald’s experiences, while historically accurate, serve to mask the growing tension that existed simultaneously with their tennis parties and military dances. They are exemplars of “life with the lid on”; around them, in the year leading up to September 1920, a number of significant events contributed to the escalation of violence in counties such as Cork, in which both the IRA and the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) were strong presences. On September 12, 1919, the British government proscribed Dail Eireann, and in February 1920 followed this action with the introduction into the House of Commons of the Government of Ireland Bill (Hopkinson xiv).⁹ While the Bill was under consideration in London, events in Ireland continued to escalate. Beginning in 1919, RIC barracks in large parts of the south and west of Ireland were evacuated, and the IRA continued to grow in strength. In response, the British government called for ex-servicemen to bolster the ranks of the RIC; these recruits, known as the Black-and-Tans because of their uniforms, were soon joined by the Auxiliary Division of the RIC, which although affiliated, was independently organized and run (Hopkinson 108).

As a result of the heightened forces, both the police and the military conducted raids between January and April 1920, leading to the arrest of three-hundred-and-

seventeen Sinn Fein members (Sheehan 20). Those arrested went on hunger strike, demanding political status. Hopkinson explains that “originally, Dublin Castle took a hard line on the issue, but when faced by massive demonstrations in Dublin culminating in a general strike, agreed to parole for unconvicted prisoners” (Hopkinson 36); however, all prisoners on hunger strike were sent out for medical attention, and all those examined were subsequently released; “of the 90 released, 31 were convicted prisoners” (36). Subsequently, “the morale of the RIC was badly shaken ... as these men immediately returned to their homes and organized the murder of those members of the RIC who had been instrumental in effecting their arrests” (Sheehan 110). In the months following May 1920, the IRA continued to attack RIC barracks; in response, the RIC and Black-and-Tans—joined in June by the Auxiliaries—together began the reprisals that would characterize the remainder of the conflict, beginning with the “burning of public buildings, businesses, and factories in Tuam on July 20, 1920” (Grob-Fitzgibbon 169). Hopkinson observes that “it was in the late summer of 1920 that the character of the War abruptly changed. Before, it ... consisted of erratic and limited actions, but following the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act and the resultant change in IRA tactics, the conflict became widespread, brutal and ruthless on both sides” (79). The British government had passed the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act to quell rising violence. The Act incorporated and expanded on the provisions of the Defence of the Realm Act, extending “the jurisdiction of court-marshalls,” establishing “courts of summary justice,” and expanding the power of military courts (Hopkinson 65).

In the midst of these legal maneuvers, what is perhaps most significant in terms of Bowen’s novel is the role County Cork played in the conflict. The IRA was particularly

strong in Cork city, which had also, “as befitted the largest of the Irish counties with a strong nationalist history, ... played a leading role in the development of the Irish Volunteers” (Hopkinson 104). In fact, in “A Record of the Rebellion in Ireland in 1920-21, and the Part Played by the Army in Dealing With It,” Sir Hugh Jeudwine records that “up to the time when martial law was proclaimed there was a Battalion headquarters and two battalions of IRA in the city ... the total strength was about 1,000. These battalions were at one time very good and their officer class was probably the best in Ireland” (P. Hart, *British Intelligence in Ireland* 39). While the IRA was a distinct presence in Cork, the British Army factors much more noticeably in Bowen’s account of the period. The descriptions given by British forces stationed in Ireland during this time coincide strikingly with Bowen’s depiction of Danielstown. Hughes-Hallett notes: “When I first arrived, all seemed to be at peace – tennis parties and so forth in the surrounding country” (Sheehan 194). Another Lieutenant Colonel, Evelyn Lindsay Young, provides a similar report of that fall: “Days rolled on peacefully. Soon one began to believe that there could be no such thing as a hidden gun or gunman. Life was glorious in that late September” (155). Both Young’s and Hughes-Hallett’s reports signal that, up to this point, the IRA had targeted the Army far less than they had the RIC; however, due to the strong presence in Cork of the parties on each side of the war, the county was a center for the escalating violence Ireland experienced in late 1920.

During the months that followed, the Army, too, was drawn into the conflict. Perhaps the most famous instance of the war, Bloody Sunday, occurred on November 21, 1920.¹⁰ Bloody Sunday marks the beginning of the war’s “tit-for-tat” killings and contributed to the declaration of martial law on December 10, 1920. At first, martial law

extended only to those counties where much of the violence was centralized: Cork, Tipperary, Kerry, and Limerick, but was soon extended to Ireland as a whole (P. Hart, *British Intelligence in Ireland* 27). Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*, is, therefore, set just as events and violence approach the heaviest and most destructive period of fighting. In his "Report on the Intelligence Branch of the Chief of Police, Dublin Castle, from May 1920 to July 1921," Ormonde White notes that "from August, 1920, to July, 1921, 6,311 raids and searches were carried out in the Dublin district alone" (69). These events added to the reprisals and burnings already taking place throughout the south and west of Ireland:

The list of reprisals in the late summer and autumn of 1920 reads like a sombre catalogue of small towns ... Thurles, Upperchurch, and Limerick in late July, Templemore on 16 August, Balbriggan on 21 September, Ennistymon, Lahinch and Miltown Milbay on 22 September, Trim on 27 September, Mallow a day later, Boyle on 5 October, Listowel, Tralee and Tubbercurry also in October, Templemore again on 1 November and Ballymote and Granard on 4 November. (Hopkinson 80)

This is the context for the novel Bowen said "chose to be set" in September 1920 (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 124).¹¹

The summer and autumn of that year marked a turning point in the Anglo-Irish War; yet the particular events—McSwiney's hunger strike, IRA attacks, RIC reprisals—go virtually unnoticed or exist only as an ominous backdrop to the day-to-day lives of Bowen's characters. Those reading the novel when it was published in 1929 would have recognized that the book is set on the cusp of widespread violence. Still, Bowen's focus

in *The Last September* is not on, and hardly even touches upon, the IRA or the RIC. Instead, she focuses on those on the margins: the British Army and the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. In so doing, rather than sensationalizing or exploiting history's violence, Bowen allows history to infuse the novel with a sense of threat, one that the Naylor family try desperately to keep at a distance. Yet as readers, we are constantly made aware, through Bowen's language and her choices, that such distance is illusory and unsustainable. The decline of the Naylor family's world is not a possibility, but rather an imminent threat.

In addition, Bowen's novel redefines and resets the margins of Irish society during the 1920s. As Roy Foster points out, "Bowen longed for order, abstraction, classical symmetry, yet wrote most brilliantly at times of dislocation and conveyed in her best writing a sense of chaos: her style is, in itself, a subversion" (103). In *The Last September*, Bowen examines the end of Anglo-Ireland's political and cultural dominance. She does so, not by looking at those in a place of power or those with a grasp of events taking place during the period, but rather by creating and examining a family that has, determinedly, made itself marginal and unaware. In an interview conducted by the BBC in 1950, Bowen said her "artistic intention" was to explore "a smashed-up pattern with its fragments impacting on one another, drifting and cracking ... [because of] the horror beneath the surface, the maintenance of the surface of a subject fascinates me. In fact, the more the surface seems to heave or threaten to crack, the more its actual pattern fascinates me" (Bowen qtd. in Foster 103). In *The Last September*, therefore, Bowen examines the surface of the Naylor family's world in order to signal the threats and cracks her characters strive to conceal. She creates characters who would have been perceived by her contemporary readers as a dominant social class only recently in decline, then

repositions them as already marginal at the time of their defeat. Her recasting highlights the novel's recognition that the Naylor, and by extension the Anglo-Irish, occupied an untenable position within twentieth-century Ireland.

“And we shall all be so careful not to notice”

In *The Last September* history is the unrecognized touchstone, that which flashes up at moments of danger but also that which the novel's characters try steadfastly to deny. Their willful ignorance leads to a novel “full of holes”; as Neil Corcoran writes, “ellipses and lacunae characterize [the novel's] dialogue, its detail and its plotting, and several times it opens into irresolvable aporia” (Corcoran, “Discovery” 315). The logical disjunctions in Bowen's novel signal the untenable nature of her characters' denial. Their existence, complicated as it is by “the hyphenation that ... is less a sign of their hybrid identity than the mark of ... double allegiances,” constantly requires that something be left out of the conversation, suppressed in order to maintain the veneer of genteel existence (DiBattista 277). Yet for all their efforts, history makes itself felt throughout the novel. *The Last September* presents readers with a time of illusion fiercely maintained by those who would rather not notice; and yet the dominant narrative voice of the text is not one of nostalgia, though it is often perceived as such.¹²

Instead, in *The Last September* Bowen examines and lays bare her characters' varied relationships to their current historical moment. She does so not to explain or condemn the Anglo-Irish culture, of which she was a member, but rather to answer a perceived ethical obligation to understand fully the cost of not noticing. Bowen's novel demonstrates that, in the wake of the First World War, both the concept and the purpose

of memory shifted. Jay Winter writes that “a century ago, the concept of memory was harnessed by a host of men and women as a means to constitute or fortify identities, in particular national identities.... That age has gone” (Winter, *Remembering* 19). In its place, he argues, “memory still stands, but as a source of fractured, national, ideological, and cultural forms, forms which are resistant to linear construction” (19). Bowen’s novel was composed in the midst of this broad change and reflects the tension between old and new forms of remembrance; her characters also remind readers that nationality in Ireland was a fractured, contested concept, even when memory was used to cement one’s identity. As Heather Jordan observes, “For the first time in her own fiction Bowen was exploring the divisions of nationality as they had impinged on her own experience. The characters in her novel are caught in various traps contrived from their lack of comprehension of their citizenship in either personal or political terms” (54). Lack is thus at the heart of *The Last September* and is represented throughout in both the novel’s formal qualities and the willful ignorance of its characters. These formal and intellectual gaps allow Bowen to parse the significance of the novel’s titular month—not simply to better comprehend her own complex nationality, but also to engage ethically with the collective memories being forged in the aftermath of the Troubles of the 1920s.

Bowen’s characters hardly seem concerned with the violence around them, let alone how it will be remembered; in fact, rather than seek to remember their surroundings, many are engaged in trying actively to forget their circumstances. This is embodied most noticeably in Lady Naylor’s Wildean stance against anything that would force her to recognize the Ascendency’s declining relevancy.¹³ She tells her visitors: “From all the talk, you might think almost anything was going to happen, but we never

listen. I have made it a rule not to talk, either” (Bowen, *The Last September* 31). Lady Naylor’s character has her roots in an Irish tradition of ironic social commentary that links Bowen to Wilde; Bowen never crosses the line into satire, but instead creates a character whose willful ignorance allows readers to see the impending downfall of her social class. Lady Naylor represents what Jordan calls the “intractable passivity of the Anglo-Irish” (53). Jordan argues that such figures “are the objects of some of Bowen’s harshest criticism,” and “their desire to live securely within sheltered pasts becomes as harmful as their inflexibility” (54). In the end, for Jordan, the Naylor and their followers “appear merely ludicrous” (54). Yet to read them as such is to undercut the complexity of Bowen’s approach and her deep sense of irony.

A full comprehension of Bowen’s ironic project requires the insights afforded by her manuscript draft of the novel. In this early version, even Lady Naylor recognizes the problems inherent in her stance. After telling the Montmorency’s that she never listens to the talk surrounding Danielstown, in the manuscript Lady Naylor continues, addressing Hugo: “Yes of course theoretically Hugo, one should face facts but I see no object in running after them, especially when they are nothing to do with me and one can do nothing about them” (Bowen, *The Last September* MS 40). Lady Naylor’s stance here reveals a deeper perception of the situation in Cork in 1920 than is immediately clear in the published text. In the draft, there is an awareness of “the immobility of the historical and social situation” (Concilio 284). While Lady Naylor is complicit in the violence because she believes that events are “nothing to do with [her],” she is also aware of her own impotence to change the course of events coming to a head in the autumn of that year. Here, the Naylor’s passivity is more nuanced; by comparing the printed novel and

its earlier incarnation, readers can better understand and embrace the irony that is central to Bowen's depiction of the Anglo-Irish.

Given that her older generation of characters, led by Lady Naylor, so adamantly wish to remain ignorant, it is easy to read them merely as satirical representations of the Anglo-Irish. Yet Bowen employs irony here, rather than satire. In her lecture notes for an English class on the short story taught at Vassar, she writes, "irony ... require[s] space. ... I suggest Irony is a spirit—an angle—an atmosphere. Essentially, it requires subtlety, and control" (Bowen, "Short" 38, author's underlining). She ends, with great emphasis, with the belief that irony "is not belligerent" (38, author's underlining). Bowen believed that satire, on the other hand, requires little room and is, at its core, mean spirited (39). Thus, Bowen's purpose is not to satirize the class of which she was a part; rather, she sets out, using the ironic wit that was so much a part of her person, to create a nuanced critique of the Anglo-Irish's stance, juxtaposing characters such as Lady Naylor with those of a younger generation who do notice and who challenge the Naylor's determination not to see surrounding events pressing in on Danielstown.

Throughout the novel it is the younger generation, Lawrence and Lois, who strive to notice, to step outside the boundaries of the Naylor's polite society and connect to a more vital reality. During the first evening of the Montmorency's visit, Bowen reveals to her readers the immobility and flatness of the Naylor's existence. In the dining room, "the little party" sits down to dinner "under the crowd of portraits" (Bowen, *The Last September* 28):

Under that constant interchange from the high-up faces staring across ...
Sir Richard and Lady Naylor, their nephew, niece, and old friends had a

thin, over-bright look, seemed in the air of the room unconvincingly painted, startled, transitory. . . . While above, the immutable figures, shedding in the rush of dusk smiles, frowns, every vestige of personality, kept only attitude—an outmoded modishness, a quirk or a flare, hand slipped under a ruffle or spread over the cleft of a bosom—cancelled time, negated personality and made of the lower cheerfulness, dining, and talking, the faintest exterior friction. (28)

The description of those long dead, whose images are captured in the portraits that hang high above the heads of the “diminished” figures of the present, are described with a flair and sense of vibrancy utterly lacking in the Naylor and their guests. Lois and Lawrence each attempt to bring the real world into the Naylor’s dining room, and both are quickly silenced; Lawrence notes that events “seem to be closing in. . . . rolling up rather,” and soon after this Lois breaks in with an invitation to Mr. Montmorency that they go “dig for guns” on the plantation (29). While Lois relates the news that “three men on the place here swear there are guns,” Sir Richard breaks in, deeming Lois’s news “nonsense”: “I will not have the men talking, and at all accounts I won’t have them listened to,” he decrees (29). Lois tries to pursue the topic, but Sir Richard informs those gathered that they would be better off not knowing such information. Again, the doctrine of not noticing is invoked.

However, again, close attention is needed, for Bowen reveals that no one is wholly innocent or fully able to maintain their ignorance. In the novel’s subsequent pages, the Naylor and their guests sit out on Danielstown’s front steps as a British Army lorry passes on the lane outside the demesne walls. The full import of the lorry’s passage

is lost in recent printings of the novel. Readers today observe as the residents hear “the sound [moving] shakily, stoopingly, like someone running and crouching behind a hedge” (Bowen, *The Last September* 38). The “jarring [echoes]” down their spines and they hear “with a sense of complexity” (38). The word “complexity” is oddly placed here; it is unclear and perhaps even illogical that characters who so desperately cling to a simplistic understanding of their surroundings would perceive the movements of an Army lorry with any complexity. And, in fact, this was not Bowen’s original wording. In both the manuscript and the first edition of *The Last September*, her characters listen “with a sense of *complicity*” (Bowen, *The Last September* MS 49; Bowen, *The Last September* (1929) 39, my italics). Their complicity belies their ability to not notice and heightens the irony of Bowen’s depictions. For all their resolve, Danielstown’s older generation is aware of, but remains unwilling to engage with, events outside their walls. But their willed ignorance cannot, as they listen, absolve them of sharing in the responsibility for current events.

Bowen’s carefully crafted passages reveal the constant tension between historical and ahistorical forces that is at the heart of *The Last September*. In describing the novel in her 1952 preface, she writes that the Anglo-Irish position “was not only ambiguous but was more nearly heart-breaking than they cared to show” (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 125). Originally, this line concluded, “than they dared allows themselves to admit”; it then became, “than they could bear to show,” before taking its final and most critical wording (Bowen, “Preface” 5). In the novel itself, readers must be vigilant and pay close attention not only to her older generation of characters but also to the younger, and to those guests—the Montmorencys, Marda, and Gerald—who occupy a middle-ground,

serving as catalysts that allow Bowen to subtly explore the nature of remembrance and forgetting.

That Bowen was thinking about how the past becomes a story and from a story, history, while writing the novel is clear from a passage she discarded from an early version of the novel. The passage occurs on the verso of a manuscript page of *The Last September*; the whole is crossed out with pencil, and is an earlier version of a conversation between Marda and Hugo. In the published version of their exchange, Marda asks Hugo: “Were you here when I bled so much at that children’s party?” (Bowen, *The Last September* 116). To which he replies: “Not actually, but I have always heard of it. Didn’t you lose a ring?” (116). The story of Marda at the children’s party has become one part of her history, the story of her lost engagement ring another. She tells Hugo that the ring was lost “at another party, at a more suitable age. It was the most lovely ring I ever had ... The jeweller said it must be emeralds because the lady was Irish, ... I had had no idea I had such an expensive nationality” (116). Known even to those who were not present, the story has moved past the realm of individual memory and become a widely circulated touchstone used to explain and define Marda.

Yet, in the manuscript fragment the story has a more explicit significance:

“If I came back here with four wedding rings on each hand, Lady Naylor ~~would run~~ still wouldn’t forgive me. It’s extraordinary ~~the way~~ how early in life one becomes a legend. There’s so little [beyond?] one ... This country is full of walking tombstones. And there’s no country where to be really dead is less of a handicap.”

“It’s too small a country,” he said, “and overgrown with memories. One hasn’t the room to spread ... I wonder have I a legend?” (Bowen, *The Last September* MS 188 verso)

This passage reveals the underlying significance, for Bowen, of the version of Marda that Hugo knows without ever having previously met her. It is her “legend” and signals the way in which such stories dominate the interactions of characters. Even when unspoken there are legends that circulate about each individual; furthermore, in Ireland, Marda notes, to be “really dead” is not a “handicap”—one’s legend still circulates.¹⁴

However, Bowen’s novel slowly reveals that, while personal legends are freely accepted and circulated, the political present holds equal power and cannot be wholly ignored in favor of the personal past. Throughout the novel various objects and settings serve to return the Anglo-Irish War to the foreground of the novel and its characters’ consciousness. In their book, *The Art of Forgetting*, Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler write that “any art practice aspiring to deal with memory can only do so by taking into account what memory struggles in vain to resist. An art cannot deal with memory without also confronting forgetting” (16). Bowen is deeply aware of this in *The Last September*; she recognizes that, as Forty and Küchler state, “‘memory’ only becomes interesting through its struggle with forgetfulness” (16). In *The Last September*, that forgetfulness takes an active form; according to Freud, forgetting is not due to the “passive attrition of time” but is instead an “active force,” one often “intentional and desired” (qtd. in Forty 5). Within Freud’s theory of mental processes, “what passed for forgetting [is] in reality the repression of the Ego, which obscure[s] the impressions received by the mind from consciousness” (5). For Lady Naylor, Sir Richard, and the Montmorencys, that which

challenges the life they desire for themselves at Danielstown is shuttered off, repressed and in this sense “forgotten,” but only so long as nothing occurs to challenge their forgetfulness.

Moments of danger

In *The Last September*, the events of the Anglo-Irish War enter into the novel as irruptions, disturbances in the natural order of Danielstown’s days and the patterned existence of its residents. In “The Bend Back,” writing after World War II, Bowen notes that nostalgia had become “a prevailing mood – to which, it may be, writers yield too much” (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 54). For Bowen, in 1928 as in 1950, the past is not a source for nostalgic reminiscing about “the better days” (54); rather, her interest is in the conflict between her characters’ desire to live in a state of nostalgia for an imagined *present* and the irruption of the actual present into their lives. In their determinedly preserved oblivion the residents of Danielstown embody what Bowen describes as the “direct memory” of childhood. In the Naylor, Bowen provides her readers with one past: a past in which “there was emotional simplicity – rebellions perhaps, but (we think) no conflicts. And, framing the whole picture, we see security” (55). Lady Naylor and Sir Richard embody this childlike relationship to their surroundings, convinced that nothing could disturb or destroy the existence they look upon as an inherited right. However, their sense of security is a myth, one Bowen will not allow the reader to be drawn into, using the second route to the past, “factitious memory,” to remind us of the other Ireland outside Danielstown.

For Bowen, factitious memory is that art by which “we are made to seem to remember that which we have not actually known” (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 56). The reader is led into an “historic past, which must be ... re-created in terms of art. ... He must be made to feel familiar with where he is; ... what might be harsh, alien, formidable or shocking about its elements has to be toned down” (56). For the biographer or the novelist “pitching his story back in time,” she notes, “the appeal of the past is moral – here are displayed, in action, virtues of boldness we had dreaded to lose” (57). In this past, the edges are artfully muted in favor of a heroic image that presents both events and figures in their best light. This past is intended to remind and to instruct. This, it might seem, is the past Danielstown embodies: one that preserves the best of a passing age and presents its best face to the present. Yet the image is false, as Bowen reveals. She utilizes the guise of factitious memory, that technique she believed best suited to capturing the past “of centuries back,” with its romantic, heroic, “spectacular” aspect (57), and brings it technique to bear on the near past with its “ultimately more disturbing appeal” (57). It is this near past she is concerned with in *The Last September*; thus, her novel works by fostering in the reader a familiarity, a sense of false security, that mirrors the Naylor’s own. We are led into Danielstown, where that which would shock has been eliminated, but we are not permitted—as Danielstown’s own residents are not permitted—to remain secluded and unknowing. Instead, the events of the Anglo-Irish War intrude upon our awareness, troubling our sense of complacency and Bowen’s façade of factitious memory.

By crafting moments when history intrudes into *The Last September*, Bowen enables readers to understand more fully the relationship between history and

remembrance. As Paul Delaney notes in “History, Anxiety, and Elizabeth Bowen,” her understanding of the relationship between the two is a “conservative Anglo-Irish rehearsal of the radical thesis of Walter Benjamin” (Delaney 99). In his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin postulates that “the true picture of the past flits by” and “can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again” (Benjamin 255). Therefore, to “articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was,’” but rather to “seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (255). In *The Last September*, the moments when the realities of the Anglo-Irish War make themselves felt give Bowen’s characters the opportunity to intervene in the creation of history, to seize hold of a fragment of knowledge “which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history” (255). Yet her characters are, as we have seen, largely either unable or unwilling to do so.

In Lois, however, we find one amongst Danielstown’s residents who is willing to push beyond the boundaries of their careful life and to recognize the plot’s moments of danger. Lois first experiences such a moment after the dinner party that leaves her unsettled by the constant need to defend oneself against the knowledge of the Troubles. Harboring her dissatisfaction, she wanders away from her aunt, uncle, cousin, and guests. As she moves further from the house, it is as if the protective shield cast over Danielstown’s inhabitants slowly loses force, and the tone of the passage changes from one of girlish memories to one of slight menace and a deepening awareness of the surrounding countryside: “A shrubbery path was solid with darkness, she pressed down it. Laurels breathed coldly and close: on her bare arms the tips of the leaves were timid and dank, like the tongues of animals” (Bowen, *The Last September* 41). Lois forces

herself to move forward, exercising the courage for which “there [is] no occasion” in her life and which has thus “like an unused muscle slackened and slept” (41).

The manuscript draft for this passage reveals Bowen’s effort to capture the mix of danger and new vitality Lois experiences in her fear. In the published version, Lois’s “fear beyond reason” is a challenge that causes her to rush “forward eagerly, daring a snap of the chain, singing ... dramatic with terror” (Bowen, *The Last September* 41). In the manuscript draft, she dares “the moment” itself, “~~determined~~ set upon on the exercise of her unused courage, singing but with a hand pressed to her thumping heart” (Bowen, *The Last September*, MS 54). Later, Bowen writes that Lois “had an idea that by coming out ... into this ... frightful darkness she imitated life more closely, ... captured ... some realness” (55). These lines are deleted from the published novel in favor of a more subtle evocation of meaning within the scene. Here, Lois thinks of herself “as forcing a pass” (Bowen, *The Last September* 41). The gap she forces herself through is one from not noticing into awareness of the haunted nature of the land around her. Unlike her family, “sealed up in lamplight, secure and bright like flowers in a paper-weight,” she steps forward: “Now on the path: grey patches worse than the dark: they slipped up her dress knee-high. The laurels deserted her groping arm. She had come to the holly, where two paths crossed” (42). The crossing is, as much as the later, oft discussed mill, a site of Gothic suspense within Bowen’s modernist novel. Here, the world outside Danielstown and the world within the demesne walls intersect, enabling Lois to see beyond her own circumstances and into the reality the Naylorso so vehemently deny. To ensure that we understand the transgression that occurs here, Bowen places not only Lois in this interstitial space, but also an Irish rebel. As Lois’s surroundings press in on her

consciousness, she realizes she is not alone; at first, she does not “hear footsteps, and as she [begins] to notice the displaced darkness” she fears she is about to see a ghost (42). Instead, pressed back into the holly, “blotted out in the black,” she watches as “some resolute profile powerful as a thought” passes “within reach of her hand” (42). She is nearly moved, “in gratitude for its fleshliness,” to make some contact with the rebel, but refrains (42). Again, in the manuscript draft for this passage, Bowen struggled to alight on a precise description for Lois’s reaction—she is first envious of the rebel’s “humanity,” then his “importance,” and finally his “assurance” (Bowen, *The Last September* MS 55). Each of these emotions are compressed into the line “not to be known seemed like a doom of extinction” in the published novel (Bowen, *The Last September* 42). What is significant here is that Lois strives to step outside her own experience.

With the figure comes, for her, a new recognition of that Ireland of which Danielstown is not a part. Rather than calling out, Lois pauses in contemplation:

It must be because of Ireland he was in such a hurry; down from the mountains, making a short cut through their demesne. Here was something else that she could not share. She could not conceive of her country emotionally: it was a way of living, abstract of several countrysides, or an oblique, frayed island moored at the north but with an air of being detached and drawn out west from the British coast. (Bowen, *The Last September* 42)

Again, this passage was heavily revised in the interim between the manuscript and the published text. Originally, Lois tries to empathize with the stranger, the passion she imagines in him sets off a fleeting passion in her. While in the final version, “quite still,

without even breathing, she let[s] him go past in contemptuous unawareness,” in the manuscript draft “surrendering him to his business, she [has] a brief and splendid feeling of nationality,” and thinks, “there [is] something, then, besides vague regret” (Bowen, *The Last September* 42; Bowen, *The Last September* MS 56). By cutting this passage Bowen guards against a false, fleeting nationalism in Lois that would undercut the rigidity of the divide between Danielstown’s Ireland and that other Ireland outside its walls. As a niece of Danielstown, if not a child of the demesne, Lois can contemplate the stranger’s passionate connection to his country, but she cannot embrace or experience it herself.

For Lois, Ireland is an abstraction; it lacks the vital pull she imagines the passing stranger must feel. As she runs back to the house she fully intends to tell the waiting house and its inhabitants her story; however, “as [she goes] up the steps breathlessly her adventure beg[ins] to diminish ... Conceivably she had surprised life at a significant angle in the shrubbery. But it was impossible to speak of this ... what seemed most probable was that they would not listen” (Bowen, *The Last September* 43). This moment points to what John Coates calls “one of the most curious features of *The Last September*”:

the significance of events which do *not* happen. Indeed what does not take place (but very well might have done) is as important as what actually does. The novel propounds the features of the crisis familiar in Modernist literature, the abrupt break in the pattern of history, the loss of confidence in the autonomous personalist, the discontinuity of the self and the

uncertainty of its contact with the outside world, the failure of social contact and communication. (213)

For Lois, what does not happen still forces an abrupt shift in her understanding. Thus, with her newfound awareness of a wider Ireland comes, as well, a deeper cognizance of the boundaries erected by history and custom in the minds of her relatives. While she, younger, still mutable, and capable of being influenced, tries to imagine the stranger's emotions and allegiances, she is also old enough to realize that her relatives will not share in her inquisitiveness.

Though Lois does not speak of her encounter, as *The Last September* progresses it becomes clear that the moment has made a lasting impression on her, and she continues to press against the borders of her careful life. In fact, it is she who brings up the topic of war to Hugo during one of their drives, exclaiming: "What is it exactly ... that they mean by freedom? What does it affect? What is it besides an excuse for war?" (Bowen, *The Last September* 86). Her directness, and perhaps her insight, appear to daunt Hugo, who replies, "I suppose ... some kind of final peace—stability" (86). Yet Lois recognizes that such an aim is "absurd," for "the more one keeps on, the further from it [peace] one is. It's a hopeless kind of beginning" (86). Her observations reveal that, though "she [cannot] conceive of her country emotionally," she is more aware of the implications of current political events than those at Danielstown realize or would condone.

The same prescience is apparent in Lois's interaction with Michael O'Connor. This time, Hugo is witness to the meeting of Bowen's two Irelands. Here, again, Lois broaches dangerous subjects, asking Michael whether or not his brother Peter's wife is currently living with them and, in doing so, indirectly inquiring about his rebel brother.

“She is, Miss Lois,” he responds; “but she is destroyed with it all and disheartened. . . . And the military from Clonmore have the hearts torn out of us nightly . . . Sure you cannot go a step above in the mountains without them ones lepping out from your feet like rabbits” (Bowen, *The Last September* 90). Rather than continue on this tack, Lois returns to the subject of Peter, asking “diffident[ly]” whether they have had any news of him (90). ““We have not,’ [says] Michael, expressionless. His face resume[s] its repose. The sum of detachment and sadness [is] this special kind of nobility. ‘And I don’t know what is to be the end of it,’ [he resumes], with a return to his conversational manner” (90). In this brief passage, the political reality that surrounds and in some sense divides Lois, niece of an Anglo-Irish landowner, from Michael, brother of an IRA rebel, flashes up, only to be diverted. Lois’s diffidence is misleading; her question cuts to a subtext Michael will not engage with or acknowledge, either in Hugo’s presence or to Lois, with her ties to Gerald and the British Army. His own “expressionless” face serves as a warning; the moment is one in which the entire, fraught relationship between the Anglo-Irish, tied to the Irish countryside but seen by the Irish as indelibly linked to the British, and the “true” Irish, such as O’Connor, is delicately and pointedly captured in the adjectives Bowen selects to describe their conversation.

What follows Lois’s and Michael’s exchange is equally significant. They part with platitudes and remarks upon “the beauty of the evening,” and Lois drives on, Michael and the mountain farm watching them go; “looking longest after them, like an eye, a window glitter[s]” (Bowen, *The Last September* 91). Neither Lois nor Hugo can fully explain the feeling left behind by their encounter: “both felt that their pause, their talk, their passing had been less than a shadow” (91). The fleeting nature of their

interaction with Michael O'Connor leaves Hugo feeling compelled to make some remark. He notes that the Michael with whom they spoke is not the one he remembers, enquiring whether that one—"a foxy man with a chin"—has a son named Peter (91). Hugo's question provides Lois with the opportunity to fill in the missing subtext of her conversation: "He has. I expect you guessed—he is on the run. 'Proscribed,' don't they call it? He could be shot at sight. ... They got him once but he escaped again—I was so glad. ... But don't speak of it—one cannot be too careful" (91). Here, Lois echoes her aunt's and uncle's injunction against speaking of the Troubles, but with an entirely different purpose. She seeks to protect Peter, rather than herself. For Lois, knowledge of the Troubles is not something to be guarded against but rather something that requires careful consideration. Yet for all this she betrays her naïveté, assuming moments later that Gerald, although a British Army officer, would never shoot Peter while in her company. Here, Bowen neatly reveals Lois's character: she is more willing than her older relatives to accept the events of the Troubles as a day-to-day part of life in Cork, but she is still unable to grasp the visceral nature of the violence that defines those events.

Lois's inability to comprehend the full import of events marks her as a member of a stultified Big House. In his article "History and Ellipsis in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*," Neil Corcoran writes that "where typically in [country house] novels characters are brought together so that they may inter-relate in plots of social, amatory and erotic intrigue, in Bowen the relations never get very far" (Corcoran 316). The novel is characterized by "interim" rather than event (316). Lois is unable to connect fully to any of those surrounding her—be it Gerald, her own relatives and friends, or the farmer Michael O'Connor. Instead, within each of their conversations, the most significant piece

of information is always left out: “what is elided in brief reference, casual aside, throwaway remark and willed silence is what Peter Hart ... calls ‘a kind of total war in miniature’” (321). For Corcoran, these omissions signal Bowen’s “authorial scruple before the face of a history whose most violent effects defy the capacity of her own fiction” (321). However, it is not that Bowen recognizes the inability of fiction to convey the realities of war. Rather, Bowen’s scrupulous documentation of the gaps in her characters’ conversations and in the details of the novel’s setting or the particular timing of events reveals a central facet of Bowen’s understanding of the “ultimately more disturbing appeal” of the near past (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 57). By eliding details, including the name “Cork” itself, Bowen allows the Troubles to haunt the novel, relying on readers’ knowledge of the events of the 1920s to fill the gaps. She alludes to the violence without doing those who lived through it the injustice of sensationalizing or fictionalizing it to suit her purposes.

Instead, the Troubles are an unseen but constant presence; when the novel is set against historical accounts of the months surrounding September 1920, readers are better able to see the scope of the Naylor’s denial and the danger of those moments when history’s violence makes itself known. Peter Hart’s account is one historical evaluation of the period, and Corcoran argues that:

To read Hart against Bowen is to take the full, hideous force of the reality behind the words that float nebulously through the novel, signifiers deliberately unattached to the enormity of their references... There is a real, if paradoxical, sense ... in which history is most present in *The Last September* when it is most absent. (Corcoran 321)

History, while relegated to the novel's margins, is not eliminated. Bowen's is not simply a Big House novel that happens to take place in September of 1920. It is a novel that "from first to last takes its pitch from the month of its name," according to its author (Bowen qtd. in Coates 206). To understand the novel's import, then, the reader must pay attention to the ellipses, the gaps, the moments of danger that force Bowen's characters and her readers to confront history. As Delaney argues throughout "Acts of Remembrance," "Bowen's awareness of the presence of ... secret histories and hidden Irelands complicates her response to the Big House myth ... This is not to claim that Bowen had an intimate knowledge of those histories. Rather, it is to suggest that she was aware that those histories existed" (Delaney 99). What Delaney fails to note is that in the aftermath of the Troubles, the secret histories and hidden Irelands of *The Last September* became the dominant stories—the legends and folklore that would inform and inspire new generations decades later. By 1928, when Bowen was writing her novel, stories of the IRA rebels were already widely circulating. What she sets out to document is a different story—not the story of the victors, but the story of Danielstown's defeat.

To tell this story, Bowen must foster in her readers a full understanding of the Anglo-Irish's complicity in their own downfall as a result of their determination not to notice. She creates a novel that struggles to retain "that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger" (Benjamin 255). Or, in this case, to a young woman—Lois—who sees flashes of the Ireland outside Danielstown but is unable to fully understand or retain the importance of what she sees. That Lois is herself part of the ruling social class is what leads Delaney to call Bowen's philosophy of history a "conservative Anglo-Irish" version of Benjamin's radical,

Marxist *Theses*. For Benjamin, “the struggling, oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge” (260). He notes that reliving an era “is a process of empathy,” yet it is with the victor that we empathize (256). “Hence, empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers” (256). Bowen, however, asks readers to develop an empathy that, rather than cement the ruling stories of the Troubles, complicates received narratives. She challenges readers to empathize not with the victors, but with the defeated; in particular, the Big House itself. For Bowen, it is not a social class, but instead a location, and more specifically, a house, that becomes the repository for empathy and for historical knowledge.

Memory and topography

It is Danielstown, rather than Lois, the Naylor, or their visitors, that is most aware of the events surrounding and threatening its self-isolating inhabitants. Throughout the novel, the language used to describe Danielstown is watchful and expectant; there is a pervasive sense of the threat represented by the land itself. In the opening pages “the large façade of the house [stares] coldly over its mounting lawns” (Bowen, *The Last September* 4). Moments later, readers gain a sense of the house’s permeability, to light specifically, but also, we sense, to the events and surrounding dangers of the current moment: “All the way up the house the windows were open; light came diagonally from window to window through the corner rooms” (5). The openness of the house is reinforced by its “curtainless windows,” its windowsills “blistered by sunshine” (7). Danielstown’s permeability leaves the house “exhausted,” and thus what first reads as an

open airiness is translated into awareness that Danielstown's boundaries provide only a false sense of security:

The screen of trees that reached like an arm from behind the house—embracing the lawns, banks and terraces in mild ascent—had darkened, deepening into a forest. Like splintered darkness, branches pierced the faltering dusk of leaves. Evening drenched the trees; the beeches were soundless cataracts. Behind the trees, pressing in from the open and empty country like an invasion, the orange bright sky crept and smouldered. Firs, bearing up to pierce, melted against the brightness. (25-26)

The land surrounding the house is anthropomorphized here, given arms that reach out and at first seem to protect Danielstown, “embracing” it and dividing it from its surroundings. Yet if we look closer the screen of trees has in fact “darkened,” and the forest that “envelopes” the Big House melts against the orange sky pressing in “like an invasion”; the trees, overwhelmed, become at once borderline and invader.

Descriptions of Danielstown such as this one and those that follow dominate the opening chapters of *The Last September*. On the novel's first evening the residents and their guests gather on the steps, where “light [holds] the trees with a toneless finality” (Bowen, *The Last September* 36). Now, the sky is “whiter than glass,” but is “steadily drained by the dark below, to which the grey of the lawns, like smoke, as steadily [mount]” (36). Danielstown sits above the tension, “highest of all with toppling imminence, like a cliff” (36). Embedded into the flow of the narrative and her characters' post-dinner conversations, such descriptions are easily passed over. But taken out and examined in detail, Bowen's language reveals its full import and ominous undercurrent.

The “toneless finality” of the light marks a passage, even as those whose time is passing refuse to notice that fact. The land around Danielstown is drained, darkened, and the “grey of the lawns” lends to the scene a ghostly, deadened aspect. Even the imminence of the house, “like a cliff,” cannot protect it; a few pages later the Army lorry takes “pleasure in crawling with such a menace, so slowly along the boundary, making the scope of peace of this silly island, undermining solitude. In the still night, the sound,” Bowen writes, has “a breathlessness, as of intention” (38). The sound of the lorry is yet another incursion into the false security of Danielstown. Unlike the darkening skyline, it is a sound that intrudes on their consciousness, one that cannot be ignored and one that reminds the listeners, if only briefly, of their complicity in its presence.

The moment is of course short-lived, and the Naylor quickly return their guests’ conversation to safer topics: the lower tennis court and youthful competition. As the lorry passes on “a pressure [lightens]” and the Naylor and their guests quickly decide to retreat back into the protection of the house itself (Bowen, *The Last September* 39). Thus, Danielstown’s walls serve as a dividing line between perception and reality and as a marker of all that its residents would deny. Throughout the novel it is the house, more fully-drawn than some of its inhabitants, that observes the struggle between its enisled self and the “unwelcome bosom” of the land in which it exists (92). In “Housekeeping: Women modernists’ writings on war and home,” Lee Rumbarger writes that

a roof and four walls in the texts by modernist women ... are a sentient shell that absorbs or is broken ... penetrated by traumatic occupation.... In short, these writers represent women’s experience of war and modernity

through the home as trope, figuring the house as alive, and often as an extension of the consciousness of the woman who lives inside. (7-8)

Rumbarger's thesis certainly holds true in many cases; she uses Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* and Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* and *Mrs. Dalloway* as key examples. But in *The Last September*, Bowen uses "a roof and four walls" to a different end: in this novel the house is sentient, but it is not a shell or extension of the consciousness of the lady of the house. Instead, the house possesses a distinct consciousness all its own, with a better comprehension of the troubled landscape on which it sits than any of its inhabitants manage to achieve. The house becomes the vehicle through which Bowen expresses the consciousness, not of a singular woman, but of an historical moment.

Danielstown, despite its residents' ignorance, emphasizes the fact that during the Anglo-Irish War, any place, but frequently domestic places, became the front lines of the conflict. As Rumbarger writes, "in situating the home as a front in modern war, ... writers are saying something important about what it means to be a citizen of a modern world and a participant in national narratives of war and peace" (3). But again, what Bowen explores is those who refuse to participate, who cannot properly be called citizens of the modern world, because rather than recognize that world, they cling to the vestiges of the past. By combining their willed ignorance with the modernist trope of the home front as the front line, Bowen enables readers to see clearly the cost of the Naylor's position. In their refusal to participate in national narratives, creating instead their own isolated narrative in which nothing will change and life within Danielstown's walls will continue as it always has, the Naylor's occupy an imagined space. Their Danielstown jars

with the consciousness of the house itself, which in its sentience recognizes the threat it faces. Driving back into the demesne after their visit to the O'Connor's farm, Lois experiences a moment of clarity, seeing the house as it actually exists:

The demesne trees of Danielstown made a dark formal square ... She wondered that they were not smothered; then wondered still more that they were not afraid. Far from here, too, their isolation became apparent. The house seemed to be pressing down low in apprehension, hiding its face, as though it had her vision of where it was. It seemed to huddle its trees close in fright and amazement. (Bowen, *The Last September* 92)

Here Lois achieves a momentary vision of the house as readers have been encouraged to see it throughout the novel: threatened, isolated, occupying an untenable position.

As Hugo and Lois continue their drive back to Danielstown, they cross an invisible border-line, and Lois's momentary insight fades. The house, described moments before as "a very reservoir of obscurity ... from the doors one must come out stained with it," is now "a magnet to their dependence" (Bowen, *The Last September* 93).

Danielstown's residents are marked by obscurity not just in the going out but also in the coming home, for as Lois and Hugo return to Danielstown, their thoughts are not on their conversation with Michael O'Connor or on his fugitive brother but rather on "all they would have to tell of the Mount Isabel Party" and "all they [expect] to hear of Sir Richard's day in Cork" (93). Danielstown functions, then, as at once a place of memory and forgetting within the novel. For the characters within *The Last September*, it is a haven of obscurity where troubling realities can be set aside. The house itself, however, perceives and absorbs that which its residents would forget. These memories exist along

the land's boundaries, momentarily seen by Danielstown's residents and guests when they are outside the walls, but forgotten upon their return to the house itself.

One such outside, liminal space that challenges the complacency of Bowen's characters is the often discussed, ruined mill. Though built to satisfy economic rather than mnemonic means, the ruined mill occupies a central place in any discussion of memory and forgetting within Bowen's novel. Describing its intrusion into their consciousness, Bowen writes: "The mill startled them all, staring light-eyed, ghoulishly.... These dead mills—the country was full of them, never quite stripped and whitened to skeleton's decency: like corpses at their most horrible. ... Hinges rustily bled where a door had been wrenched away" (Bowen, *The Last September* 178, 179). The simile Bowen chooses lends a gruesome aspect to the ruined building; rather than a true ruin, it is half-decayed, a fleshly object whose aspect fills Lois with "a fear she didn't want to get over, a kind of deliciousness" (178).¹⁵ As Phyllis Lassner points out, "the mill scene suggests that violence is embedded in the novel, even if no one seems capable of committing it" (Lassner 51). Yet it is not just the scene that unfolds between Lois, Marda, and the rebel that suggests the violence that hovers in the background of *The Last September*, but also the mill itself. Figured as a decaying body upon the landscape, it too suggests the violence that permeates Ireland, and especially County Cork, during that last September.

Yet the mill serves a second purpose. Not only does it allude to the violence that haunts the land surrounding Danielstown but it also signals the colonial history that similarly haunts Ireland and is the cause for the present violence. According to Adrian Forty, "the Western tradition of memory since the Renaissance has been founded upon an

assumption that material objects, whether natural or artificial, can act as the analogues of human memory. It has been generally taken for granted that memories, formed in the mind, can be transferred to solid material objects” (Forty and Küchler 2).¹⁶ The decay or destruction of such objects, then, “is taken to imply forgetting” (4). From her copious notes and translations, we know that Bowen was interested in an earlier iteration of the power of objects to convey memory: that developed by Proust. “Proust was the first among a succession of modernist writers to be interested in the power of objects to trigger memory – yet Proust was careful to stress that this process was always haphazard, that objects could never be relied upon to deliver memories to consciousness” (16). Proust was a central source of inspiration for Elizabeth Bowen; her own works, perhaps naturally then, develop a system of remembrance that relies upon the chance encounter, the uncanny, almost Gothic frisson of recognition encapsulated by sites like *The Last September’s* ruined mill.

The mill’s ability to spark the recognition it does, in Lois particularly, is dependent upon its half-decayed, corpselike state. Were it to be pure ruin, the mill that, while “banal enough in life to have closed this valley to the imagination,” would be in death banal enough to be forgotten (Bowen, *The Last September* 179). However, “transfigured by some response of the spirit, showing not the decline of its meanness, simply decline,” the mill takes on “all of a past to which it had given nothing,” gaining in the process both its power and its ghostliness (179). Invested with “all of a past,” the mill refuses forgetting and forces its history into Lois’s, Marda’s, and Hugo’s consciousness. Figured thus, the mill intrudes on and disrupts any possibility of not noticing, a fact

reinforced by the literal body of the rebel sleeping within it; he seems at first to be one of the dead himself but is reanimated, reawakened by Marda's and Lois's presence.

The scene moves through a range of emotions, conveying an ambiguity that invests their exchange with an undercurrent of meaning similar to the earlier exchange between Lois and Michael O'Connor. Startled by his presence, Marda and Lois feel "ashamed," presumably at having intruded on a sleep so deep that "he could not feel the nettles," but also, perhaps, at having come face-to-face with that of which they are meant to remain unaware (Bowen, *The Last September* 181). Awakened by their retreat, the rebel says, "gently," "What's that?" (181). To the reader, it is odd that Bowen chooses "gently" as the adverb describing his speech; yet, throughout, their exchange is subdued and muted, as if we were watching from a distance. While the rebel orders them not to move and "a pistol [bears] out the persuasion," the women are merely "embarrassed at this curious confrontation. . . . They [cannot] but feel framed, rather conscious, as though confronting a camera" (181, 182). Thus transformed, the gun in the rebel's hand becomes an instrument of observation and recording, rather than violence. They are captured and confined by it, forced to confront the political movements taking place around them.

The recognition is again short lived, however, as it is each time Bowen's characters are made cognizant of uncomfortable facts. The narration moves away from Lois, Marda, and the rebel, to Hugo, and so the reader is not privy to the moment when the rebel fires his gun. Instead, we hear the shot from Hugo's perspective, "making rings in the silence" outside the mill (Bowen, *The Last September* 183). As Esty points out, "In a moment that is never directly narrated and is only recounted in bare fragments, the rebel's gun appears to have gone off, grazing Marda's hand; the whole episode ends

abruptly with a hushing-up and no one—neither characters nor readers—can be quite sure what has in fact happened” (Esty 266). For Esty, this scene is reminiscent of the Marabar Caves of *Passage to India*, in which “colonial antagonists encounter each other with an obliquity that is unmistakable; colonial violence is temporarily broached, obscurely sexualized, narratively displaced, and finally just dispersed ... until the two sides [retreat] uneasily behind the *cordons sanitaires* of a dying imperialism” (266). Others similarly read the mill as a site of “repressed sexuality, politics and economics” where “Anglo-Irish ghosts clearly reside” (Wightman 60n). Still, ghosts are not required for the mill to serve its purpose. The scene is more powerful for its inclusion of the living, though ghostlike, figure of the sleeping rebel. The mill is a place of repressions but also a place where the uncanny, the unacknowledged, is able to break into the narrative expressly because the exchange occurs in a liminal, gothic space in which traditional boundaries and the stubborn need to not notice are forced into abeyance. As Ingrid Gunby writes, “in Bowen’s work, the psyche and the physical world are profoundly interdependent,” and this, above all else, is what the mill scene reveals: the power of place to overcome the natural reticence of Bowen’s Anglo-Irish characters and force them to consider their history as well as their present (213).

In her drafts for an article simply titled “Ireland,” Bowen writes that “ruins ... by now seem natural to the country.... [they] are, for the traveller, nothing but picturesque. Nor have these monuments much to say to the modern, utilitarian, growing Ireland – yet, each stands for a scar on history, for a vestige never obliterated” (Bowen “Ireland” 2). Originally, this phrase concluded, “for a ... memory never quite submerged” (2). Bowen’s later prose aptly describes the mill she wrote of in 1928 in *The Last September*;

it is a memory “never quite submerged,” refusing to fully decay and instead rising up out of a landscape otherwise likened to “a Watteau interlude” (Bowen, *The Last September* 179). In *Pictures and Conversations*, Bowen noted that for herself, “what gives fiction its verisimilitude is its topography” (Bowen, *Pictures* 34). In *The Last September*, truths are embedded in the landscape. It is here that the reader discovers an ongoing subtext that disrupts the story told by the Naylor’s lawn parties and tennis matches. This alternate narrative challenges the complacency not only of Bowen’s characters, but also of her readers, and it is here that the novel makes its contribution to discourses of remembrance and commemoration.

The Last September as commemorative object

In *The Last September*, Bowen’s narrative techniques allow for a multiplicity of views; the result is a novel that blurs the line between public recollection and private remembrance, becoming itself an object of commemoration of an entire population and period. As Gunby writes, “it is important to stress how little support Bowen’s writing gives to notions of autonomous individual identity” (217). In fact, the act of reading was, for Bowen, invested with the power to create ties between individuals and to extend the boundaries of memory. In her outline for a lecture on “Language,” Bowen stresses that “there is, in people, a fundamental desire to be articulate and that un-articulateness is the cause of damage and pain” (Bowen “Language” 6). Thus, *The Last September* is Bowen’s attempt to articulate the experience of the Anglo-Irish War. For her, the novel was not simply a story, but “a story used” (Bowen, “Poetic” 2). In *The Last September*, the narrative of Danielstown and its inhabitants preserves and sustains the memory of a

recent past whose loss Bowen felt acutely. However, more than this, Bowen seeks to illuminate a thesis she set forth explicitly years later in her drafts for an essay entitled “The Poetic Element in Fiction.” There, she writes:

We cannot really accept, even in our most introverted individualism, the idea of a one-man world, of the solitary consciousness reflecting everything else. And that really, [the] fact that it concerns itself ... with an unnumbered cast of persons ... does constitute the hold and the future promise of the story ... the fact and reaction, the consequence of one person upon another and one action as following another, will always be desired and will always [need] to be made plain. (Bowen, “Poetic” 11-12)

At its heart, *The Last September* is precisely that which its characters try to deny: an act of noticing, of observing and accounting for a period that, in 1928, still needed to be “made plain.”

In *Remembering War*, Jay Winter reminds readers: “history is not simply memory with footnotes; and memory is not simply history without footnotes. In virtually all acts of remembrance, history and memory are braided together in the public domain, jointly informing our shifting and contested understandings of the past” (Winter 6). Therefore, “when collective groups come together to recall significant events, events which tell them who they are as a group,” they create what Maurice Halbwachs termed collective memories; but, Winter stresses, “when they no longer form a group, or when other life events intervene ... then the collective changes or disintegrates, and with it goes ‘collective memory’” (154). In Winter’s view, it is impossible for memory to exist “independently of the people who share it” (154). Yet this is precisely what literature

provides: a story that can be accessed by individuals across groups, creating its own collective of readers who seek to understand, assimilate, and remember the stories they read.

Literature, read with this purpose, becomes a means for bridging the gap between readers and between the book and its audience. Bowen understood her own writing this way; in a series of letters exchanged between herself, V.S. Pritchett, and Graham Greene, Bowen writes, “you make a society each time you write a story . . . My books *are* my relation to society” (Bowen qtd. in Jordan 2). For Bowen, to write and to read is to forge a tie to other writers and readers. “Had I not arrived at some understanding of people, by my age, it would be shocking,” she writes in the draft of *Pictures and Conversations* (Bowen, “Pictures” 2). In a passage highlighted by the box drawn around it on the typescript page, she notes: “What I have learned [about people], I have learned by writing about them – in the course, that is to say, of writing about them. Life, I used to be told, is a great teacher, but art was for me, in my case, a greater one: more moral, more humane, more dispassionate” (2). For Bowen, the moral, and even ethical, component of the literary act cannot not be discounted. In her introduction to *The Mulberry Tree*, Hermione Lee argues that Bowen’s “loosely humanistic definition of the novel as ‘the non-poetic statement of a poetic truth’ . . . seems[s] to be indebted to James’s belief in the perfect dependence of the ‘moral’ sense of a work of art on the amount of life concerned in producing it” (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 7). Bowen had another way of putting it: in “The Poetic Element in Fiction” she carefully emends her typescript to express fully her understanding of the novel’s purpose, writing that as the novel form matured “the story began to struggle to be grown-up – reflective, ethical, and lest it not be credited,

circumstantial” (Bowen, “Poetic” 2). The ethical element of Bowen’s own writing is reflected in her belief that her stories are her relationship to society and in the attempt to preserve, rather than to apologize for or to rehabilitate, the Anglo-Ireland that passed out of existence in the early 1920s.

The Last September, read in this light, is an extended act of remembrance as defined by Jay Winter in *Remembering War*. In his introduction, Winter advocates for a shift from the term “memory” to “remembrance”; such a shift, avoids “the trivialization of the term ‘memory’ through inclusion of any and every facet of our contact with the past ... To privilege ‘remembrance’ is to insist on specifying agency, on answering the question who remembers, when, where, and how?” (3). Then when and where of Bowen’s work are simple questions to answer; it is the “how?” and an additional question, “why?” that are more elusive. Remembrance in Bowen’s novel takes place primarily through an emphasis on physical objects and places. Yet it is perhaps odd to talk about remembrance in a novel that is, on its surface, so little concerned with death. While the decay of Anglo-Ireland permeates the novel, it is only at its conclusion that two deaths—Gerald’s and Danielstown’s—force the Naylor to take notice.

In describing her character’s reactions to Gerald’s death, Bowen highlights the power of everyday objects to shape how we understand the present and create our memories of the past. In “Things That Do Speak in Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September*,” Carmen Concilio writes that “one of the main concerns of Modernism has been the role played by common, ordinary objects in works of art” (Concilio 279). News of Gerald’s death reaches Clonmore “like a wave that for two hours, since the event, had been standing and toppling, imminent” (Bowen, *The Last September* 292). At the

barracks “in Gerald’s room some new music for the jazz band, caught in a draught, flopped over and over. An orderly put it away, shocked” (292-293). The piece of music is shocking in its ordinariness, its reminder of Gerald’s life, even as it confronts the orderly anew with the memory of his death. Concilio notes that the “floating music papers ... literally cry out the death of their possessor, but paradoxically also call him back to life.... [A]nd as happens with Joyce’s epiphanies, [this object] reveal[s] both an excess and a loss of meaning” (Concilio 290). Bowen reveals here her interest in the power of everyday objects to convey that which words fail to encompass. Thus, when Lois learns of Gerald’s death a few pages later, she thinks of “Francie’s tender and proud smile, covering up her egg,” and is “enlightened and steadied by grief, as at the touch of fingertips” (Bowen, *The Last September* 297). In this moment, Lois recognizes that “life, seen whole for a moment, was one act of apprehension, the apprehension of death,” which for Bowen can only be achieved through interaction with the daily objects of life (297).

Therefore, the “how” of remembrance is, for Bowen, embedded in the everyday. Via these links her characters access broader truths, and so the orderly is shocked by Gerald’s music pages while Lois is reassured by her image of Francie. While the Modernist focus on everyday objects is put to careful use in *The Last September*, it is also a trope Bowen admired in other writers such as Woolf: “The bus, the lamp-post, the teacup – how formidable she found them, *everyday things!*” she writes in her review of *Orlando* (Bowen qtd. in Concilio 281). Bowen too found a formidable power in everyday objects, which both close friends and readers remarked upon. Gerard Hopkins of Oxford University Press wrote to her in 1935, saying

Whatever you write is alive and moving with a sense of emotional reaction to living which fuses the medium and the content into a vital work of art.

Your language is never merely a means of conveying thought: it is part of a whole which cuts through every dimension of experience, and makes something which is part of, rather than merely a recording of, life.

(Hopkins 1)

Writing specifically of *The Last September*, Sean O’Faolain detailed his own experience reading the novel: “I envy you your control, and your sense of drama in small things. I feel so vulgar and ‘screamy’ before your books” (O’Faolain 1). O’Faolain goes on to describe the novel as one in which “everything evaded the obvious, and the casual pressure of your hand had the power of conveying a great deal to the reader” (1). He criticizes her slightly for Gerald’s death, saying it “seemed a pity,” perhaps too obvious an occurrence in an oblique book that largely avoids the explicit facts of war (1). Yet the novel in part derives its power from the intrusion of the actual into the world of Danielstown. Gerald’s death marks a turning point, the moment in which the Naylor’s complacency is directly challenged and the escalating events of Ireland in late 1920 exert increasing pressure upon Danielstown’s residents. Gerald’s death foreshadows the house’s death, and while the third and final section of *The Last September* is titled “The Departure of Gerald,” the departure that occurs in the novel’s final pages is of greater consequence to Bowen and to her novel’s purpose.

Here, she shifts time forward, from September 1920 to February 1921, closing the novel with Danielstown’s “execution”:

A fearful scarlet ate up the hard spring darkness; indeed, it seemed that an extra day, unreckoned, had come to abortive birth that these things might happen. It seemed ... that the country itself was burning; ... At Danielstown, ... the thin iron gate twanged (missed its latch, remained swinging aghast) as the last unlit car slid out ... Then the first wave of silence that was to be ultimate flowed back confidently to the steps. The door stood open hospitably upon a furnace. (Bowen, *The Last September* 303)

In this closing moment, for the first time, Sir Richard and Lady Naylor see “too distinctly” the ramifications of their determined oblivion (303). Yet the Big House’s destruction at the novel’s close serves more to brand the house on the reader’s memory than to destroy it. In capturing the moment of Danielstown’s death, Bowen figuratively thwarts the power of the IRA to burn the house’s symbolism along with its physical structure. In destroying Ireland’s Big Houses, the IRA committed what Forty and Küchler call an act of iconoclasm: “the most conventional way of hoping to achieve forgetting,” by destroying that which has previously been used to help a culture remember (10). But as they note, “rather than shortening memory [an object’s destruction] ... is just as likely, whether intentionally or not, to preserve it” (12). The burning of the real Big Houses was what Küchler terms an attempt to “[finish] memory,” an act intended to “mark [a moment] of transition from one political era to another,” and an assertion of power over the narratives of that new era (53). In response, *The Last September* uncovers the complexity of the Anglo-Irish War, asserting that its narratives are not, in fact, finished, but are revived with each reader.

In “Elizabeth Bowen’s Troubled Modernism,” DiBattista calls on Bowen’s familiarity with and respect for Proust, evident not only in the epigraph she chose for her novel, but also in the many references to Proust throughout her non-fiction writings. Like Proust, for Bowen, “looking back on a finished time entails—both for the writer and the reader of the novel—its own violence” (DiBattista 235). For readers of *The Last September*, the violence that is enacted and reenacted, the destruction of Danielstown, serves to highlight Bowen’s belief that “the Troubles troubled everything” (Bowen qtd. in DiBattista 226). Encapsulated within *The Last September* is a culture in decline, its members trying to hold to what they know as the relevance of that world collapses around them. Ultimately, what Bowen seeks in the pages of *The Last September* is a relationship to the past akin to what Virginia Woolf describes when she says, “I am trying to find in the folds of the past such fragments as time preserves . . . There was a napkin, a flower-pot, a book” (Woolf qtd. in Kemp 100). Through these small objects, and through her emphasis on the sentience of Danielstown itself, Bowen’s novel prepares readers to understand the significance of its final moments; “that conflagration [the burning of Danielstown that closes the novel] returns the novel to the violent ‘realness’ of history, which the narrative, in its retrospective account of a vanished past, had struggled to evade all along” (DiBattista 234). In their study, Forty and K uchler ask: “Might it be possible to construct a history not of memorials, but of amnesiacs?” (8). In a sense, this is what Bowen’s novel creates—a history of those who would forget their own history—a history that will not allow them, or us, to forget.

¹ The “uneasy rustle of remembrance” is a phrase from Bowen’s first novel, *The Hotel* (Bowen qtd. in Glendinning, 76).

² Bowen continues: “Raw history, in its implications, is unnerving; and, even so, it only chronicles the survivors. A defeat accompanied every victory; faiths failed; millions went under leaving no trace. If the greater part of the past had not been, mercifully, forgotten, the effect upon our modern sensibility would be unbearable: it would not be only injustice and bloodshed that we should have to remember but the dismay, the apathy, the brutalising, humiliations of people for whom there was no break. How few, down all history, have been the favoured few – of the past as a whole we might say, ‘We are well out of it!’ The human dilemma, the dilemma inherent in being human, was at no time less than it is now. As things are, the past is veiled from us by illusion – our own illusion. It is that which we seek. It is not the past but the idea of the past which draws us” (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 57-58).

³ In fact, the novel is imbued with the sense that, as Faulkner writes in *Requiem for a Nun*, “the past is never dead. It’s not even past” (Faulkner 80).

⁴ Bowen’s approach also represents the view of history presented by Paul Ricoeur in *On Interpretation*: “Insofar as it no longer exists, the discourse of history can seek to grasp it only *indirectly*. It is here that the relationship with fiction shows itself as crucial. The reconstruction of the past ... is the work of imagination. The historian, too, by virtue of the links ... between history and narrative, shapes the plots that the documents may authorize or forbid but that they never contain in themselves. History, in this sense, combines narrative coherence with conformity with the documents. This complex tie characterizes the status of history as interpretation” (qtd. in Williams 224).

⁵ Julia Williams writes that “critics are divided on whether the novel is a memorial to or a condemnation of the Ascendency class as whole” (Williams 222). In fact, both readings are too reductive, and the novel instead occupies an ambiguous middle ground in which no one is safe from careful evaluation.

⁶ In her draft for the preface to *The Last September*, Bowen originally simply states “the September in which this novel is set”; the phrase is then changed to “that month in which my story chose to be set” (Bowen, Preface MS 3). With this alteration, Bowen emphasizes the significance of the novel’s temporal setting.

⁷ The Anglo-Irish War of 1919-1921 is also commonly referred to as the Irish War of Independence and also, by some, as the Irish Rebellion. What to properly call this period, which was never a declared war between Britain and Ireland, is still a somewhat fraught question for historians. Michael Hopkinson writes that “to use the term ‘War of Independence’ or ‘Anglo-Irish War,’ as with ‘Derry’/‘Londonderry,’ reveals an implicit bias. Many know it as ‘The Tan War’ and some resort to the ubiquitous Irish euphemism ‘The Troubles.’ For decades, the British followed the official lead at the time: it was a rebellion. Of late they have used the neutral-sounding term ‘Anglo-Irish War,’ ignoring the fact that many Irish fought on the British side” (xx). Hence, each potential name for the conflict contains inherent assumptions about one’s political or historical stance.

⁸ Historical reports written by members of the British Army align with Gerald’s point of view; General Jeudwine complained that “the enemy is making war on us while we are not making war on him but are vegetating in passive defence, maintained with difficulty” (Hopkinson 53). There was the sense that, given just slightly more time and more freedom, the IRA could easily have been defeated. This was an especially common opinion in the aftermath of the treaty, which was received by the British forces as an ill-

timed and unfair victory for the Irish. Gerald echoes Jeudwine in Bowen's manuscript: "For as they were now, hands tied, what was the good of them? They were as swords beaten not with ploughshares but parasol-handles" (Bowen, *The Last September* MS 87).

⁹ The bill "made provision for the establishment of two devolved parliaments and administrations, one in Dublin and the other in Belfast. A Council of Ireland, to consist of representatives from both parts of Ireland, was proposed to supposedly offer some basis for a future United Ireland" (Hopkinson 27).

¹⁰ On Bloody Sunday, Dublin members of the IRA "killed fourteen men and wounded others, many of whom were connected with the British Intelligence effort. In retaliation, Auxiliary cadets killed twelve people at a Gaelic football match and later killed two captured IRA officers and a third man 'while [he was] trying to escape' from Dublin Castle" (Sheehan 120).

¹¹ The historical nuances of the Anglo-Irish War require much more than a brief introduction to be fully understood; however, it is important to note that, as Hopkinson points out, "the Irish War of Independence has provoked a massive amount of interest, [and] IRA guerilla warfare and the Black and Tan reprisals have rivaled the issue of the British government's culpability for the Great Famine as the most emotive subject in Modern Irish history" (xvii).

¹² John Coates writes that "tempting as it may be to view Danielstown simply as a historical limbo it is a mistake to do so" (Coates 205). Danielstown is not a no-mans-land, but rather a landscape rich with "inner dynamics" whose code must be understood to fully grasp the novel's import (205). For Coates, Bowen's inner dynamics reveal the author's acceptance of history "and the destruction it brings about with a matter of factness which critics of her work have not shown" (206). Similarly, Jed Esty notes that Bowen is frequently read as either a "nostalgic apologist" for the Anglo-Irish or a "cold-eyed chronicler of their historical doom" (Esty 259). Yet neither of these alternatives aptly describes what is at stake for writer or reader in *The Last September*; she is neither matter-of-fact about nor does she apologize for her class. Rather, Bowen's novel embodies a reasoned and deeply ambivalent examination of a particular historical moment.

¹³ Although Bowen's debt to Jane Austen is frequently commented upon, Lady Naylor also has her roots in an Irish tradition of social commentary that includes Oscar Wilde; Lady Naylor's comments are frequently Wildean in tone and content: "One cannot help what people say, though it is always annoying. Not that I ever do know what they say. I make a point of not knowing. You know how I've always turned my face against gossip, especially these days: it's annoying to find it everywhere, even at one's own parties. It's a very great danger, I think, to the life of this country" (Bowen, *The Last September* 78).

¹⁴ To see evidence of Bowen's belief in Marda's words, readers need only look to Laura, who remains a presence throughout the novel, though she died long before the autumn in which it is set.

¹⁵ Other locations within the novel receive similar treatment and are described in bodily terms; for instance, at the military dance, "the Rolfes' door swung open and shut; bursts from the gramophone came downhill like somebody coughing" (Bowen, *The Last September* 218). Here, the simile conveys a sense of the sickly nature of the British Army—they are stationed in Ireland, but lack efficacy.

¹⁶ Maud Ellmann makes a similar argument about Bowen's work in *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page*: "There is something elegiac in [Bowen's] treatment of objects and appurtenances ... Things, in Bowen, offer none of the expected comforts of solidity; they stand, like Freudian fetishes, as monuments to lack and loss" (8).

**Chapter Three: Embodying the “indelible reality” of the past in the novels of
Jennifer Johnston**

Negotiating “the distorted past”

In the 1970s, during the rise of the Troubles, Jennifer Johnston moved from the relative safety of London to Derry, one of the central cities in the sectarian conflict: “I began to feel extraordinarily uneasy about being in London,” she reveals; “I feel that if you’re not living in your own country for a long time, you become alienated, very seriously, from it” (Johnston qtd. in Mikami 524). For Johnston, staying away from a place for too long consigns it to the past, making it no longer fully accessible, such that “every time you go back you’re entering ‘the past’, this little box, rather than entering reality” (524). After a certain period—or during moments of fracture—to be absent is, for Johnston, to lose access to a vital piece of knowledge:

I wanted to be there. I didn’t want to participate, but I wanted to be there and I wanted to try and understand how people were feeling and what was going on. So I ended up in the north of Ireland, where I had never lived [...] I sat on the edge and I realized how people were suffering and I realized that there was really nothing that anybody could do to stop this suffering. (524)¹

On the one hand, Johnston’s comments run the risk of making her seem a tourist of violence, going to Northern Ireland to observe, but remain aloof from, the Troubles. Yet on the other hand, Johnston’s comments signal that, for her, to write of the Troubles

without having seen the situation in the Northern first hand would have been its own equally troubling form of literary tourism.

By 1974, Johnston had published three novels, including *How Many Miles to Babylon* (1974), one of her best-known works and a novel focused on the First World War; but she felt these novels were precursors to novels on the Troubles, a topic about which she desired to write but felt unable to approach. In an interview in 2007, Johnston explains her early approach to writing about Ireland's conflicts:

I think you've got to start somewhere, and when I started writing prose I had it very seriously in my mind that I wanted to write about the Troubles, that were very bad at the time. Yet I couldn't face taking them head-on. So I started to write about WW1, which I have also been fascinated with, and in a way it was a metaphor of the Troubles, of how people try to keep their lives normal, their feet on the ground even though terrible things are going on around them. (Marsden)

In moving to Derry, Johnston sought to better understand the “gap . . . between the North and the South,” striving for accuracy in her representations of Ireland's history in her next four novels (Mikami 524). Those novels—*Shadows on Our Skin* (1977), *The Old Jest* (1979), *The Railway Station Man* (1984), and *Fool's Sanctuary* (1987)—“look at Irish history in a slightly sardonic way,” she explains, “because I think we are amazing manipulators of history” (524). Again and again, readers see this manipulation and its effects in Johnston's work. For her characters, who face the Anglo-Irish War and the Troubles, the past is inscribed onto the present via both word and deed. The act of

remembrance takes place not through official commemorative practices or formal memorials but rather through the physical movements and habits of the body.

Johnston's novels emphasize the significant role the body can play in carrying forward specific narratives of Irish history and thereby "refuse any simple or monolithic representation of either revolutionary nationalism or Anglo-Irish ascendancy" (Moloney 139).² In *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton argues that "images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past ... are conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual) performances" (4). For Connerton, "we can ... preserve the past deliberately without explicitly re-presenting it in words and images. Our bodies ... keep the past ... in an entirely effective form in their continuing ability to perform certain skilled actions" (72). Yet often, for Johnston, it is not the body's abilities but rather its limitations that carry the past forward: many of her characters have been physically marked by violence. Their daily "performance" of the physical violations of conflict signals the deeper mental wounds they have suffered as a consequence of Ireland's violence. This is a different notion of commemoration, one in which bodies are forced to display the markings of the past rather than willingly forming practices of remembrance. For these characters the past is ever present; what Johnston explores is the narratives these figures choose to construct out of their physical markings.

For some, their wounds are a link to a romanticized, heroic past; in these cases, Johnston explores the dangers of bodily remembrance. But in their more generative form, her characters' wounds become a means for moving forward and forming connections between individuals. Each of the novels above is concerned with the connection, or lack thereof, between characters and how those connections survive or fail in the face of

violence, past and present. In the introduction to her interview with Johnston, Caitriona Maloney notes that *Shadows on Our Skin*, *The Old Jest*, and *Fool's Sanctuary* are all “novels which represent adolescents growing up and encountering Irish political identity as a crisis” (139). *The Railway Station Man* should also be added to this list, for though it details the relationship between Helen and Roger, Damien and Jack both play pivotal roles in the novel's narrative. In each of these novels, Johnston challenges traditional divisions in order to show the reverberations of Ireland's violence in each subsequent generation. George Hunter argues that Johnston's narrators write “in order to be remembered in the future” (Hunter vi); more than this, they write in order that events and stories be remembered as lessons for the future. Connerton notes that “the production of more or less *informally* told narrative histories ... is a feature of all communal memory” (17). Johnston's novels, then, seek to show characters who construct and transmit their own informal narrative histories.

Understanding Johnston's work as an exploration of the intersection of private historical truth with public discourse positions her within existing critical understandings of Irish literature and collective remembrance; however, to read Johnston thus is also to challenge the majority of existing explorations of her work. Seamus Deane has offered one of the best-known critiques of Johnston's work, comparing it to Jane Austen's two inches of ivory and arguing that her novels offer little beyond enclosed social vignettes (Weekes 191). However, as Ann Owen Weekes notes, this comparison “is unfair, because from the first Johnston has not hesitated to traverse the treacherous, mined ground of Irish division, domestic and national, and to register with a continually refined instrument the depths of disturbance” (192). Rather than two inches of ivory, what Johnston offers

are “pioneering textual journeys” that deftly expose the impact such divisions have on individual relationships (192). Thus, “the complication in Johnston’s fictions that leads to the disastrous outcome is most often a friendship across the political and social divide. She shows two people developing a profound loyalty in private that is then challenged, and wrecked, by their public obligations” (Rosslyn 108). We see this again and again: for Joe and Katherine in *Shadows on Our Skin*; for Nancy and Cassius in *The Old Jest*; in varying ways for Helen, Damien, and Roger in *The Railway Station Man*; and, finally, for Miranda and Cathal in *Fool’s Sanctuary*.

Each work refuses easy generalization; instead, Johnston writes against the idea that “the Irish are prisoners of their past, impelled towards violent confrontation with their atavistic passions” (McBride 5). In the midst of the Troubles this notion held, for some, an axiomatic quality that enabled the violence to be dismissed as an inescapable element of Irish nature. Johnston creates characters who embody this notion—Mr. Logan, for instance—but also offers readers characters who challenge its determinism and emphasize that the inescapability of the past is a shibboleth. These four novels envision a new order with varying degrees of success—Johnston has referred to *Shadows on Our Skin* as a “really rather silly book”—but each “sets off with great clarity the contrast between the originality of human beings in their personal relations, and the coerciveness of the social and historical forces they live among” (Mikami 530; Rosslyn 108). Because each novel is focused on the small details of human relationships it is easy to see why Deane draws a link between Johnston and Austen. However, he does so as a means of reducing Johnston’s import, as a pejorative relegation to the realm of women’s writing:

private rather than public, unaware of political realities, and therefore unworthy of extensive critical engagement.

In fact, Johnston's work often falls prey to poor readings that argue her novels are little more than contemporary Big House novels clinging to the vestiges of an earlier age.³ While many of Johnston's novels do share their settings with the Big Houses of Bowen's day, leading critics to view her solely in a Protestant Ascendancy context, Johnston also looks on her characters and the world they inhabit with a sharp sense of the danger inherent in their desire to cling to an old system of existence. Like Bowen, Johnston explores the decline of the Big House and the purposefully maintained naïveté of its residents in *The Old Jest*. Yet where Bowen gives her readers Lois, a girl who brushes up against the outside world yet never fully enters into it, Johnston gives us Nancy, a girl who has "for what it's worth [...] made her decision" (Johnston, *The Old Jest* 152). And as a counterpoint to Nancy, readers have Miranda, another daughter of the Big House, whose loyalty to Cathal calcifies her, turning her life into a memorial and Termon into a living tomb.

In each of the novels discussed in this chapter, the Anglo-Irish War and the Troubles invade private spaces, forcing characters to consider the relationship between past and present violence. As Rachel Sealy Lynch observes, "political realities and their accompanying shocking violence are always lurking in twentieth-century Ireland, and their potential to destroy private lives is constantly emphasized" (253). The violence of both the 1920s and the later Troubles impinge upon even the least political amongst Johnston's characters; Helen, a painter who moves to the Republic as an escape after her husband is killed in the North, loses two men to the Troubles in *The Railway Station*

Man. Yet Johnston's novels are not simply vignettes designed to impress upon readers image after image of "personal space ... invaded and destroyed ... by political reality" (252). Instead, Johnston's focus is on the human, bodily cost of the intrusion of the political into the personal—if such distinctions can even be made between the two realms within her novels. To understand her primarily as a Big House novelist is to neglect the significant contribution her work makes to twentieth-century representations of the remembrance of Ireland's troubles.

Still, critics often fail to acknowledge this aspect of Johnston's work: "Johnston came back to me as a writer of slight, dainty novelettes (never quite the full shilling, and I kept wondering why not), effortlessly composed, melancholically evoking the passing of a culture without ever being *parti pris* or letting herself be swayed by the ghosts she conjured" (Lubbers 222). Lubbers's dismissal of Johnston is particularly troubling, as it undermines the form and care that make Johnston's work effective. Her "dainty novelettes" are carefully wrought miniatures that enable her to explore in detail the effect of history upon her characters. While more recent readings such as Heather Ingman's *Twentieth Century Irish Fiction by Women: Nation and Gender* give Johnston's work both more extensive critical attention and more credit, none to date have fully explored the link between the body, remembrance, and political violence in the novels Johnston wrote after moving to Derry—both those of the Big House and those set during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Reading these novels together allows for a deeper understanding of what Johnston seeks to achieve, and what Felicity Rosslyn argues is her central concern: "how to live honestly in the presence of the distorting past" (111). Memory is inextricably tied to this concern; "Characters' memories, positive or negative,

desired or unwanted, dictate the progress of many of Johnston's novels" (Hunter vi). Each of the characters in these novels provides readers with examples that, taken together, instruct readers in ways of remembering ethically and the dangers inherent in the political uses of memory.⁴ What is of abiding interest is the way in which characters' actions move them across the borders between public and private, personal and political, memory and remembrance. Johnston explores moments in which characters blur the lines between spaces, stepping outside imagined borders and communities, allowing Johnston to detail the effect this has on both their understanding of Ireland and on their corporeal, lived bodies.

It is the bodily aspect of Johnston's work that deserves further critical analysis.

Jennifer Jeffers writes that

the idea of the body has not been adequately explored in criticism with regard to the Irish novel.... the materiality of the body is lost in both the public and private sphere, and yet it is the body—or contestation of the body—that is at the heart of the Christian religion, important to societal regulation, and precisely the recipient of violence, punishment, and incarceration in Ireland. It is the body in the Irish consciousness that first and foremost needs to be interrogated. (29)

Jeffers is primarily interested in the performativity of the body, the ways in which men's and women's bodies in Ireland adhere to or challenge concepts of gender. Yet there is another way in which the body in Irish fiction and consciousness must be examined: as a participant in commemoration and bearer of memory. Central to this exploration is Connerton's notion that "commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative only

in so far as they are performative; performativity cannot be thought without a concept of habit; and habit cannot be thought without a notion of bodily automatism” (5). If the body is a site of memory and itself houses a particular narrative of history, what then does it mean to violate that body?

This chapter is concerned with the body as a material object, with how Johnston treats its corporeality, particularly in moments tied to remembrance of the dead. In his doctoral dissertation, George Hunter notes that often it is “the materials found throughout Johnston’s novels that aid or prompt memory. . . . Remembered events are deliberately reconstituted out of specific, often tangible materials” (vi, 11). Many of these materials are songs or literary passages; however, equally significant is the body itself. In her novels, Johnston shows that the body is a locus for remembrance. She challenges the formality of commemoration and the understanding that memories are primarily passed forward through public rituals centered on monuments. Instead, Johnston shows that the individual body is a powerful site for informal practices of remembrance that carry forward narratives of the past. Sometimes, those narratives close off the possibilities of the present, forcing her characters into received patterns that reenact division and violence. At other times, character’s engagement with a body marked by physical violence provides the catalyst that enables him or her to envision a different present and future.

“My body’s black and sore”

First published in 1977, *Shadows on Our Skin* is the first of Johnston’s four novels to deal with either the Troubles of the 1920s or the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

While her first three novels are set in County Wicklow, *Shadows on Our Skin* moves, as Johnston did, to Derry. The novel takes its title from the song “Time to Kill,” from Celtic rock band Horslips’s album *The Tain* (1973). Johnston uses lyrics from the song as an epigraph to the novel, and they set an ominous tone for what Kennedy Andrews deems “the most pessimistic of all” her work (228):

Now we’ve got time to kill
 Kill the Shadows on Our Skin.
 Kill the fire that burns within.
 Killing time my friend.

My body’s black and sore.

I need to sleep.

Now hear the heaven’s roar.

I can’t escape. (Johnston, *Shadows* epigraph)

The lyrics’ focus on the body presage moments throughout the novel in which her characters’ bodies are either the markers of violence or themselves sites for Ireland’s violence. Violence permeates the text; it is fully integrated into the narrative, such that there is a certain nonchalance to the young narrator’s description of Derry: “It was that sort of day. A ructious day. There weren’t many people about. Down below him in the distance a couple of shots were fired... The street lamps were flowering and people had not yet drawn their curtains so the dusk glittered” (10).⁵ Joseph Logan begins the novel composing poems during his math class; his poetic descriptions mix with a matter-of-fact notation of the evening’s violence, and from the blending of the two Johnston quickly

establishes her young narrator as an individual for whom both the poetic imagination and the visceral violence of Derry are equal parts of everyday life.

Into this backdrop Johnston places the Logans: Joe, his mother and father, and his older brother Brendan, returned from London. Readers' first introduction to Mr. Logan is via his "great deep, gut-splintering coughs" (Johnston, *Shadows* 11). He sleeps in a room that smells of "sweat and beer and sickness" that has "always smelt the same as long as Joe could remember" (12). Mr. Logan's "eyes [open] to cunning slits, gauging, biding, then a little more they [part] to show misty pupils surrounded by a web of red streaks. Mucus pull[s] at the corners" (12). Johnston's characters repeatedly comment on Mr. Logan's physical condition: Brendan describes him as "maimed by life," while Joe describes his body as "a dead weight which he [drags] across the room" (34, 27). Mr. Logan himself, in a plea for sympathy, tells Joe: "I should have died [...] instead of being mutilated, body and soul. Aye, soul too" (27). Joe, instead of providing an audience for his father's stories, imagines his father's death and composes a poem in his head: "I will clap my hands and cheer / Because you are no longer..." (27). Through Joe's observations we see Mr. Logan as a man physically and mentally reduced by the past. While Joe's internal narrative rejects any redemptive view of his father, when Brendan returns from London this elder son quickly slips back into his father's stories and songs.⁶ For Mr. Logan and Brendan, calling on these images "of the past ... serves to legitimate a present social order" of renewed violence (Connerton 3). Connerton further argues that "to pass judgement on the practices of the old regime is the constitutive act of the new order" (7); conversely, then, preserving the practices and songs of the old regime serves

to create the sense of an unbroken narrative linking the past with the present for political purposes.

Johnston's father-son pairing, then, physically and mentally embodies the notion of sectarian violence as an inescapable atavistic passion inscribed on each subsequent generation in the North:

Focusing on a Catholic family, on a hero who translates Gaelic poetry, on tenements rather than Big Houses, and on the ancient Celtic ruin of Grianan Oiligh, the Grianan of Ailech, Johnston suggests the universality of compulsive repetitions. Regurgitating the rebel songs of Ireland, the Logans, father and eldest son, justify their activities with the history and songs of the past, the Irish equivalent to Tennyson's paean to fruitless slaughter. (Weekes 197)

However, reading the novel solely as a confirmation of "the universality of compulsive repetitions" is too sweeping a generalization (197). It is true that Mr. Logan and Brendan are "men desperate to maintain the myth of the martyr, adept at exploiting the legend, but incapable of acknowledging the more brutal realities, the flaws, the faults, the inconvenient son" (Dolan 199). But to focus only on Brendan and Mr. Logan is to ignore three equally significant figures: Joe, Mrs. Logan, and Kathleen.

Readers' first introduction to Joe's mother occurs amidst a moment of violence: "the shooting seemed quite near suddenly, and from round the corner came the sound of glass breaking. Joe hesitated and then his mother appeared, her head bent forward against the sleet, her legs pumping her up the hill" (Johnston, *Shadows on Our Skin* 13). Through small moments like this one, Johnston establishes the setting for the ongoing conflict

within the Logan family: his father's nostalgia for the Movement and desire to see his sons follow in his footsteps, juxtaposed against his mother's desire to escape, to move forward, symbolized by the fact that "throughout this violence-torn novel, Joe's mother desperately, wearily ... cleans and boils everything in her path" (Lynch 254). She recognizes that for her husband, "remembrance is a lucrative and self-serving hypocrisy," nothing more (Dolan 199). In contrast, she resists grand narratives, and if Brendan is his father's son, Joe is his mother's. Through these pairings Johnston quickly establishes the novel's central dynamic: that of a family that serves as a microcosm for the tension in Derry.

Johnston emphasizes this dichotomy through her characters' bodies; Joe's mother wants to ensure her sons' escape from their father's nostalgia, and so, for her, Brendan's return from London is a defeat. Throughout his parents' argument over Brendan's return, Joe is focused on their physical actions. He watches his father's "red hands [...] puffy with disuse. [...] The hands moved apart and then together again and were still, two rather unpleasant animals on the cloth" (Johnston, *Shadows on Our Skin* 16). When his father is excited about Brendan's return to Derry, "the hands [dance] slowly for a moment" (17). In contrast, his mother breaks an egg into a frying pan; "it spat, reflecting her own anger. She dodged her head sideways a little to avoid the stinging fat" (17). Her mouth is "tight and tired" as she tells her husband: "we brought him up. I slapped him when he was bold [...] You told him fairy stories about yourself and the Movement" (18). Johnston uses Joe's parents and their tired bodies—one from an old wound and too much drink, one from the struggle to run a safe home and get her children "out of trouble"—as a leitmotif throughout the novel.⁷ In scenes such as this one, Joe observes

his parents as they are continually pitted against each other, one constantly looking backward to a romanticized past, the other firmly focused on the dangers of the present.⁸

For a time, it seems that Mrs. Logan will be able to protect at least one of her sons and that Joe will escape the cycle of violence; he befriends Kathleen Doherty, a schoolteacher from County Wicklow, now living in Derry, whom Ann Owen Weekes calls Johnston's "first fully drawn ethical woman" (198). Joe meets her just before he learns that Brendan has returned home; together, the Logan boys and Kathleen form a lens through which Johnston can explore the impact of history on the next generation of Derry's young adults. Kathleen, like Mrs. Logan, is determined to remain removed from the Troubles, advising Joe that he "mustn't be too rigid about things. Look at every object with an open mind" (Johnston, *Shadows on Our Skin* 51). Kathleen takes Joe out of Derry to Grianan, providing him with a momentary escape from the city. A British soldier patrols their bus at the checkpoint out of Derry and as they depart waves up at them. When Joe refuses to wave back, Kathleen chides him: "I don't suppose he exactly likes being here, any more than we ... he's a kid. Something like that... Do you think he knows what he's doing here?" (87). Joe tells her "I've heard them coming in the night..." to which she responds, "I know, I know. ... I feel the way you do most of the time," she tells him, "but then I know ... I know really ... they're not all bad. Like I said, kids. ... I saw one in a pub in Belfast one night crying because he wanted to go home" (87). Kathleen, unlike the other characters in *Shadows on Our Skin*, is able to see beyond simple divides. Where Joe sees only a British soldier, she sees an individual. In fact, she is an early example of Johnston's interest in characters who form strong bonds across

boundaries. Engaged to a British soldier, for her the divides in Northern Ireland cannot be as easily maintained as they are for Brendan and Mr. Logan.

Kathleen's and Mrs. Logan's examples instill in Joe a definition of heroism that serves as a counterpoint to Mr. Logan's and Brendan's. During a British Army raid on their street, Joe discovers a gun in Brendan's bed. Rather than let his brother be discovered he hides the gun in his schoolbag and carries it throughout the next day. By protecting his brother and removing an object of violence from his home, Joe does what Kathleen has asked of him and moves beyond seeing Derry in terms of easy divisions. He discards the gun off the quay: "It seemed to fall so slowly [...] He stood, rooted to the ground, waiting for it to disappear, be gone. It splashed into the water [...] he dropped the bag on the ground [...] A white gush of water poured out from the side of the ship. There was turbulence. There was definitely no longer a gun" (Johnston, *Shadows on Our Skin* 166). Joe comes to think of his act as "his heroic secret" (167).⁹ He tells Brendan: "I dealt with the whole thing" (172). For Joe, it is not standing up to the soldiers or getting involved in his father's stories that defines heroism but rather removing the potential for further violence from his home.

Yet Joe is still a child, and while his relationship with Kathleen is the one positive force in *Shadows on Our Skin*, it is defeated "not by the inevitable forces of history but by [his own] anger and his brother's jealousy" (Weekes 198). Joe tells Brendan of Kathleen's engagement to a British soldier not out of any political beliefs of his own but simply because he is angry at his brother. Joe finds out that Brendan has told Kathleen everything: "Brendan whispered so softly that Joe had to lean forward to catch his words. She didn't want to know, a voice was crying in his head" (Johnston, *Shadows on Our*

Skin 181). Brendan's involvement with the provisional IRA has soured, and so he plans to escape again to London; before he goes, he confesses everything to Kathleen. He misreads her kindness as romantic interest and tells Joe "She'll be over at the end of July. We'll maybe ... I'd like ... You never know what might happen..." (181). Realizing that Brendan thinks he has a future with Kathleen, Joe blurts out the truth, "his own voice coming out, cold and ugly" (182). Joe's only motivation is his own jealousy, and he is too young to realize the consequences of his actions. He insists to Brendan that Kathleen tells her fiancé everything. "Everything, he insists. [...] 'Wait,' he said with madness in his voice, 'till she tells him what you told her last night'" (183). Joe's childish outburst has deep repercussions for Kathleen and for Brendan, but he cannot see beyond his own anger. In this moment, Johnston lays bare the fact that any division between public and private, domestic and political, is a fiction. The two blend and layer one upon the other, "emphasiz[ing] [the] link between national and domestic violence" (Weeks 198).

The unintended victim of Joe's outburst is Kathleen. He immediately realizes what he has done, running away until he is forced to stop, thinking "I have told the truth, but only to destroy. I too am destroyed. So forever is the destroyer destroyed" (Johnston, *Shadows on Our Skin* 184). He thinks of Kathleen telling him "Everything will be alright tomorrow," but realizes "now she too would hate him. Worse, despise him" (184). For Joe, this is the moment in which he realizes that "perhaps everywhere you went people were lost, searching with desperation for something they would never find. Mutilating themselves and each other in their desperation. There was no safety" (184). Again, the refrain of "Time to Kill" enters the novel, emphasizing the circularity of the text and of the situations in which Brendan and Joe find themselves. Neither has managed to escape

from the Troubles, neither the young boy-poet who has no interest in being involved, nor Brendan, who plans to once again leave the Troubles behind.

Still, it is Kathleen who suffers most for Joe's outburst. When Joe goes to see her she is being forced out of her apartment. When she opens the door to Joe he realizes that "he wouldn't have recognized her if he'd seen her in the street. Except for her clothes ... Her hair had been cut short like a man's. Her face was swollen. One of her eyes was almost closed" (189). As she packs she tells Joe: "I'm only bringing my clothes and books. I don't want anything else. [...] I've thrown out all the clothes I was wearing yesterday when they ... when ... if I'd the money, I'd throw out everything I owned yesterday" (189). Johnston leaves open to interpretation whatever is contained in Kathleen's two ellipses, but there is the suggestion that the violence she suffered at the hands of the IRA was more than simply a beating. Critics have pointed to Kathleen's name as an irony (Lynch 253). However, this choice is perhaps Johnston's most significant move in the novel. Naming her character Kathleen purposely draws upon the image of Ireland in its embodiment as Cathleen, an allusion that is reinforced by the fact that Kathleen is originally from Wicklow, rather than the North. In numerous works, such as Seamus Heaney's poem "Ocean's Love to Ireland," the country is depicted as a woman violated by England. But in *Shadows on Our Skin*, Kathleen is beaten and violated by her own, driving home Johnston's sense that the legacy of violence between England and Ireland is simply more violence. Here, Brendan's "boys" have replicated the only way they know of punishing someone who has stepped outside the boundaries to which they believe a woman, and an Irish woman in the North, must conform. Through

violence written on her body, they attempt to force her to align with what they know and expect.

In her treatment we see echoes of the Anglo-Irish War in the Republic as well. There, women who fraternized with British soldiers often had their hair cut, as Bowen describes in *The Last September*. The fact that Kathleen's hair is likewise cut is another indication of the repetitious history to which Brendan and his generation have been subjected by the stories and "fairy tales" of Mr. Logan's generation. Here, "politics is the distortion of the human" in a very literal way (Kennedy-Andrews 228). There is further significance, however, in Johnston's choice. In *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton argues that "in reading literature one assigns the object in question a genre; in interpreting clothes one proceeds likewise" (12). Cutting Kathleen's hair is an attempt to assign her, visibly and physically, to a genre: that of traitor to the republican cause. Her body becomes a site upon which definitions of Irish womanhood are reenacted and reinscribed.¹⁰ She is forced to serve as a site of remembrance, not in any affirmative sense, but as a warning to those who would step outside the rigidly maintained narratives figures such as Mr. Logan seek to instill in the next generation. This marks Johnston's novel as in many ways deeply pessimistic. Published in 1977, at the end of five years that saw the highest levels of death and violence Northern Ireland experienced during the Troubles, her pessimism at the time was perhaps not without foundation (McKittrick, et al. 1563).

Yet the novel does not end on this note; instead, Johnston allows for a moment of possibility. Kathleen does, in the novel's final moments, forgive Joe for his role in her abuse: "I didn't want you to come. I wanted to go away from here hating everyone very much," she tells him (189). "Was it all ... all my fault?" he asks her (190). She grants

him a reprieve, telling him, “I don’t suppose it was. One day we’ll see ... one day we’ll forget it all. One day....” (190). His last words to her, “I’m sorry, Kathleen. I’m sorry. If...,” are cut off by hers: “If ifs and ans were pots and pans....” (191). Kathleen’s forgiveness of Joe is not total but it is enough that some critics have read the novel’s ending as somewhat redemptive: “Kathleen’s gift, then, coupled with her forgiveness and Joe’s sorrow, suggests that history which seems so repetitive is not inevitable but simply the product of independent, unimaginative human beings” (Weekes 199). Still, readers cannot escape the fact that Kathleen’s name and the ambiguity of what exactly she suffered at the hands of the IRA undercut a wholly positive reading of the novel’s close. It is not simply unimaginative human beings, but young men devoted to the continuation of the cause who attack Kathleen. As a result she leaves Northern Ireland rather than stay where such violence is visited upon the bodies of those like herself who challenge the continuation of a particular narrative of Ireland’s history and Northern Ireland’s future. Thus, the book stands as an indictment of the stories and songs that Mr. Logan repeats throughout, stories that serve only as an “abuse of memory, nothing more” (Dolan 199); the toll of that remembrance, for Johnston’s characters, is not simply mental but also deeply embodied in their physical selves.

“We don’t talk much do we?”

Johnston again emphasizes the connection between remembrance and the body in her next novel published while living in Derry, which returns to the Anglo-Irish War and the Big House. *The Old Jest* opens on August 5, 1920, just one month prior to the setting of Bowen’s *The Last September*. In Nancy we see echoes of Lois; Nancy has just turned

eighteen, writing in her diary: “Today I want to start to become a person” (6).¹¹ Readers leave Lois at the end of *The Last September* at the start of her own process of becoming—leaving Danielstown after experiencing a failed love affair and coming for the first time to recognize the import of events outside the demesne walls. Here, Nancy moves a step further, actually breaking the literal and psychological boundaries of the Big House in an attempt to better understand her own personhood.¹² For Nancy, that understanding begins with the recognition of the violence that permeates Ireland. Unlike Lois, for whom the war “might all just as well be going on in the Balkans,” Nancy confronts Ireland’s dead early in Johnston’s novel (Bowen, *The Last September* 131). Yet at this juncture the dead blend one into the next; they are given their proper names, yet they are simply a tally, a listing of those lost, much like the names inscribed on traditional war memorials:

There always seems to have been a war. I suppose in forty years things will be much the same, in spite of what people say to the contrary. Even in this small village so many people have been killed. There was my Uncle Gabriel who fell at Ypres, and has his name memorially written on the wall of the Church, with the Rector’s son and Mrs. Tyrell’s brother, who, Aunt Mary said, was a rake and a philanderer, but nonetheless no one would have wanted him to be blown to smithereens by a bullet from a bearded Turk. Father Fenelon’s brother and Sammy Carroll from the station, and Paddy Hegarty, the fish man’s son, who lost the sight of his right eye and is now a little gone in the head. There are more from round and about only I can’t think of them all at the moment. Then Phil Ryan

was killed when the British shelled Sackville Street, and Barney Carney was shot last week coming out of a dance hall in Bray, by the Black and Tans. (Johnston, *The Old Jest* 6-7)

At the outset of Johnston's work, Nancy, like those around her, experiences death in the aggregate—as a commonplace of everyday life. She lists individual names but those individuals are tied only to the place where they fell, or to the barest of commonly known personal details and connections. Thus, she can describe them as “blown to smithereens” and “a little gone in the head.”¹³ Her descriptions are distant, disengaged, because their deaths are far removed from her sphere of experience at Ardmore.

It is only when Nancy steps outside the Big House that she begins to become “a real person” who recognizes the individual cost of Ireland's wars. Like Lois, she is sheltered, but unlike Lois, she does not shy away from her encounter with an unnamed stranger. Seeing a cigarette butt outside the hut that she felt “had been waiting for her,” she feels that her private space has been invaded (Johnston, *The Old Jest* 16). She leaves a polite, childish note asking the stranger not to return; he, in turn, leaves her an equally polite note begging her pardon, “pinned to the door with a long gold cravat pin” (37). She calls him out, seeking an encounter with the man she has decided is “a joker” (37). Rather than a gothic echo, he becomes a flesh-and-blood figure. When he tells her “I'm just a passing stranger,” she stops to consider him: “He had a really rather splendid face. Tired. Splendid. Used” (38, 44). She seeks the frisson of danger Louis felt in her encounter with the stranger outside Danielstown, but for Nancy, curiosity and naïveté draw her out. He represents opposite of the gentile existence she's been offered so far, instructing her that

The first fact of life you have to grasp if you want to get anywhere at all is that life isn't full of sweetness and light and gentlemen standing up when ladies come into the room. On the contrary, it's full of violence, injustice and pain. That's what you're afraid of seeing when you open those locked doors, peer into caves. The terrible truth. (59)

She names him Cassius because he has, she says, referencing Shakespeare, a "lean and hungry look" (73); the name, evoking the historic Gaius Cassius Longinus, who along with Brutus led the Liberators responsible for the assassination of Julius Caesar, seems at first a figment of a young girl's romantic imagination. However, the name also foreshadows what we will later learn of Cassius: that he is a former British Soldier, now a Republican fighting for Ireland's freedom. For Nancy, the name Cassius evokes the romanticism of Shakespeare's line, "so often shall the knot of us be called the men that gave their country liberty" (73); focusing on Shakespeare's romantic speeches rather than his character's "sticky end," Nancy reveals her innocence (73).

However, true to his role as Liberator, Nancy's interactions with Cassius begin to open her eyes to the insular nature of the world in which she has been raised. The very fact of his possession of a gun causes her to realize: "I have never seen a gun at such close proximity before. The soldiers carry them [...] Uncle Gabriel used to go shooting, but somehow those guns never had any direct connection with me before" (Johnston, *The Old Jest* 80). Although Nancy seeks to romanticize Cassius she is soon forced to face the brutal reality that the events that follow cannot be romanticized. In her interactions with Cassius, Nancy crosses the boundary between the Big House and its surroundings.

When she returns home after her encounter with Cassius, Nancy begins to see Ardmore more clearly. Like the Naylor, Nancy's family exists in a willfully maintained world separated from the violence that surrounds them. Yet Ardmore is cosmopolitan, located a quick train ride from Dublin, and the events surrounding them permeate more regularly into their lives than into the lives of those ensconced in Danielstown. On August thirteenth, Nancy finds her Aunt reading the morning paper. Mary is focused on the racing page rather than the news; for her, maintaining the aura of racing day requires that she "never read the news on racing days" because as she tells her niece: "such terrible things keep on happening. ... I like to enjoy myself on racing days. It's perfectly simple" (Johnston, *The Old Jest* 82). A few lines later, Nancy breaks into their conversation with "we don't talk much, do we? [...] We say things to each other, make a noise, but we don't talk" (82). "I wouldn't say that, dear," her aunt replies, "It's part of the mythology of youth that people go round burning themselves up inside. It's not like that at all, pet. Most people lead and want to lead calm, equilibrious [...] lives" (83). Her aunt's perspective denies the politicized and violent times in which they live. The irony of her words—even at Ardmore their calm, equilibrious lives are disrupted by the violence surrounding them—troubles Nancy, but she does not yet have the experience or understanding to comprehend why. She can, however, identify that while she loves her aunt, she "[does] not want to be like her" (84).

When Mary leaves for the races, Nancy picks up the paper and turns instead to the news section: "Two civilians shot near Navan. Burning of military stores in Carrick on Shannon. Discharged prisoner shot by roadside near Limerick. Military activity in Dublin, many persons arrested. Well known journalist shot by sentry. Fighting resumes in

Armenia. Shocking Galway crime. Lord and Lady Kilmaine, who spent last week in Dublin, have arrived in London. Arrivals at Kingstown per Royal Mail steamers include....” (Johnston, *The Old Jest* 84). She drops the paper to the floor, finding the listings “in black and white [...] meaningless” (84). Unlike her earlier listing of the local dead, here, Nancy begins to recognize the ethical demands of the individuals chronicled in the papers: “I should have been a seagull, she thought, watching it all from the clearness of the air. Then I could have remained indifferent with impunity. There would have been no demands. She thought of [...] the smoke from the burnt-out buildings, the bodies uselessly crumpled by the roadside” (84). Instead, Nancy’s relationship with Cassius begins to awaken in her a desire to understand Ireland’s reality, and she can no longer remain indifferent.¹⁴ Now, she finds the newspaper’s laundry listing of current violence mixed with society happenings inadequate. Freed from Ardmore, Nancy is able begins to “become a person,” one who recognizes the human cost of the Anglo-Irish War.

Thus, Johnston’s novel includes key moments in which Nancy begins to comprehend the body’s corporeality and how that corporeality is marred by violence. Within Ardmore the body is mundane, a thing to be protected but not truly used; outside its walls, however, Nancy confronts the body’s reality. In Nancy’s final encounter with Cassius before she learns his true identity and before she is witness to his murder, she finds him lying on the beach; “she could see that a long puckered scar disfigured his thin body. It ran from just below his collar bone down the left-hand side of his chest and disappeared inside his trousers” (Johnston, *The Old Jest* 139). She asks him about it and learns that it is the result of a wound received at Ypres on Saint Crispin’s day.

He put out his hand and took hers. He ran her fingers all the way down the scar, pressing them into the soft puckered flesh. Her fingers cringed away from the feel of it, but he held them tight and wouldn't let them go. Down under the top of his trousers to the hard jutting bone of his hip and then back up again to his shoulder. Then down again. His ribs moved gently like a calm, rippling sea. The scar itself was quite unlike the grainy flesh around it to touch; it was like a long, macabre mouth, with the pale marks of stitching criss-crossing the lips, pulling it awkwardly together. He let go of her hand.

'Horrible!' she said again.

She looked down at her fingers, which had never touched anything like that before.

'Now,' he ordered, 'you do it. You touch it yourself.'

Gently she ran her fingers up to his shoulder.

'You see.' (140-141)

In this moment, Cassius instructs Nancy in the physical effects of violence wrought on the human body, forcing her to be tangibly aware of the war and its effect on him. What Cassius tries to teach her, and what Nancy learns for herself in the novel's final scenes, is that the markings of violence go beyond his "horrible scars" to inform who he is; this is what he asks her to see, and it is the crux of Johnston's second slim novel of the troubles: that violence leaves an indelible mark on the psyche.

For Nancy, leaving Ardmore's safety ultimately means becoming herself changed by violence. She delivers a message for Cassius, only playing at being involved, without

understanding the consequences of her actions. As a result, twelve British soldiers are killed at the races. When Aunt Mary arrives home her first comment is: “We’ve had the most terrible time!” (Johnston, *The Old Jest* 147). Mary’s companions, Celia and George, tell the story with relish, while Nancy listens silently. Each focuses on her own individual experience of and response to the violence, paying little heed to the actual lives lost. When Bridie breaks in to say, “that’s twelve less English soldiers to torture our poor boys,” Nancy, “to her own surprise,” vocally agrees (151). Mary chides her for knowing “nothing about it at all” (151). Nancy insists that she is learning, but she cannot yet see a pattern in the violence: “If I could see the pattern, then maybe I could understand. There has to be a pattern. It can’t all just be futile in the end” (158). She still has not come to fully understand Cassius’s argument that, after this war, “there’ll be another one ... I mean people fighting together now will fight each other. It always happens like that” (70). Instead, she seeks Cassius out, hoping to warn him to make his escape.

However, in the end, Nancy is witness to Cassius’s death and is marked by it.¹⁵ When he leaves the hut he is immediately accosted by “a line of men [materializing] from the darkness” (Johnston, *The Old Jest* 162). Rather than stay inside Nancy runs towards him, implicating herself in his deeds. Cassius calls on her youth to protect her: “She is a child. She brought me a few scraps of food from time to time. [...] The girl is irrelevant” (162). The soldiers let her go, but not before she stops to ask: ““What will happen?” [...] ‘They will take me to prison. That’s all,’” he reassures her, then tells her to “Turn round and walk” (163). Still naively trusting, she walks past the soldiers, but turns in time to see Cassius discard his gun just before he is repeatedly shot. She runs back to him, caught by them “just before she reached the body, stroked now by the gentle sea. [...] Red in the

waves, turning to pink, washing, cleaning the wounds” (163). “I’d really like to know why they did that” she tells the soldier walking her home. “They make the decisions, we do what we’re told,” he tells her (165). Because Cassius did not view the world that way, they “wanted him dead,” the soldier tells her; “There’s your answer. Go on home now, Miss, and keep your face shut” (165). When she looks at her face at home, “her eyes [are] swollen with tears and shock” and she falls naked into bed (165). She has been literally and metaphorically stripped of her illusions about the violence in Ireland and of her childish trust in those around her.

When she awakes the next morning, she fixates on her own body in trying to make sense of what occurred: “The only thing to do is get up. She [sits] up and [swings] her legs over the side of the bed. Her second toe [is] still longer than her first one. Nothing [has] changed” (Johnston, *The Old Jest* 166). At breakfast her aunt bemoans the fact that she did not sleep well, unable to “stop thinking of that awfulness yesterday. I suppose there’ll be reprisals now. [...] I wonder if they found the man they were looking for. [...] Harry and Maeve are coming to lunch [...] In a way I hope they don’t find him. I’d hate to think of anything terrible happening to him. [...] It really hasn’t been a very happy few days. [...] I rather suspect that Harry and Maeve are going to get engaged” (166-167). Aunt Mary’s mixture of concern over Cassius—who to her is still a nameless, faceless republican—mixes with mundane concerns about lunch, Nancy’s behavior, Harry and Maeve’s engagement. Nancy reveals nothing of what she knows, shielding her aunt and protecting Mary’s carefully maintained naïveté. She, on the other hand, is now aware of the boundaries around her and it is that awareness, combined with her discovery of Cassius, that mark her as one of Johnston’s adolescents who comes to adulthood in an

abrupt moment of violence. For Nancy, there will be no retreating back within the safety of Ardmore. Soon, they will be forced to sell and Nancy will move to Dublin, beyond the Big House walls. Readers are left with the sense that Nancy, schooled by Cassius and by her grandfather in the human cost of violence, recognizes that easy narratives of Ireland's conflict and its history cannot be simply or ethically maintained.

“I mourn the needless dead”

In *The Railway Station Man*, first published five years after *The Old Jest*, Johnston returns to the present, bringing the violence of the Troubles into immediate relief in the novel's opening. “To watch is my isolation,” Johnston's primary narrator, Helen Cuffe, informs the reader; “I have no other function. [...] I remember occasionally in the daylight the shuddering of the house when the explosion happened. Windows then, taken by surprise [...] and for days the smell of smoke” (Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* 122).¹⁶ Here, the violent act is brought to the foreground without delay; instead, Johnston is finally able to face the violence head-on, as she desired to do years before when she felt incapable of doing so. In this moment, her narrator takes full control of the narrative; the novel serves as an obituary for her son, Jack, and her lover, Robert. In “Monument and trauma: varieties of remembrance,” Joep Leerson writes that “those who control obituaries control history” (“Monument” 203). In *The Railway Station Man*, Johnston presents readers with a narrator in control of her own story. Furthermore, Helen is also a painter, and through the dual modes of her paintings and her writing she seeks to control her own version of history and remembrance.

Helen begins her story with a description of her cottage, moving outward from there to the village. She then circles back to her own side of the hill, reluctantly, to describe the railway station:

Brambles and scutch had grown up on the permanent way and the platforms were covered with thick grass and weeds. That was until the Englishman bought it about three years ago and he and Damien restored and refurbished it until you would never have known that it had suffered nearly forty years' neglect. It is now derelict again and the weeds are beginning to take over once more. The engine shed by the level crossing was almost demolished when the explosion happened. [...] No one has bothered to rebuild, or even shift the rubble, nor I suppose, will they ever... The buildings stand there, and will presumably continue to stand there until they fall down, as a derelict memorial to the deaths of four men.
(Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* 123)

The railway station, the novel's central symbol, is also the single moment in these four novels in which Johnston explicitly mentions a memorial to the "needless dead" (311). The station becomes a scar upon the landscape, analogous to the scars upon the bodies of so many of Johnston's characters. Those critics who have written on *The Railway Station Man* focus on the station as a manifestation of Roger's post-traumatic stress; Mara Reisman views the building as Roger's attempt to communicate with the outside world, and "because the railway station is never viable, [he] is unable to make this communicative connection" and "communicate with the world on his own terms" (Reisman 95). The train lines that run through the station do not connect to anything, thus

the trains could never run again, even with the station in working order. Yet the station serves as more than simply a symbol of Roger's self-contained failure to communicate. As Reisman correctly points out, the station is a symbol of the idea that there is no "perfect working future" in this picture; however, the picture is not Roger's failure, but the failure of the future that Manus and his followers envision and that leads to the explosion that kills Roger, Helen's son, and two unnamed men. For Helen, the derelict remains stand in commemoration—they have become "part of the local folklore"—not in order to romanticize or honor the actions of heroes or martyrs, but instead to point to the futility of the ongoing violence (Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* 123).

By not covering over or aestheticizing what has occurred the ruins point to the destruction caused by the Troubles, rather than glorifying either side in the conflict. As the number of Troubles monuments in Northern Ireland increases, "victims are now entering the memorial record on a more individual basis" (Longley, "Northern" 230). Thus, some contemporary Troubles monuments struggle with how to commemorate *all* the dead without upholding one side over the other, while other monuments explicitly call on nineteenth-century models in order to evoke ideas of heroism, martyrdom, and a need for justice that is often a veiled call for revenge. In contrast, for Helen the abandoned railway station forces those who confront it to face the reality of the violence that permeates Johnston's novel. The railway station again challenges the notion that memory's primary role is to "constitute or fortify identities" (Winter, *Remembering* 19); here "memory still stands, but ... [is] resistant to linear construction" (19). The station challenges easy borders: it is located in the Republic, not the North, yet it is a site of Troubles deaths; it is a ruin, an unintended memorial, not actively maintained by either

side of the conflict. Yet for Helen, this is the source of its meaning. By not covering over or hiding the effects of the violence, the derelict station stands as a challenge to simple narratives of Ireland's history.

Instead, the station must be explained in detail, and Helen is careful to introduce it, in its unintended, unofficial memorial form, before reluctantly introducing herself. We learn first of the explosion, then the station, then Helen. The end of the novel moves back outward, culminating in the explosion that causes the windows in Helen's home to crack "shards, slivers, splinters, [sliding] scattered across the floor" (Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* 310). Aside from this detail the specifics of the accident are hazy. Helen's focus is on the damage done to the bodies of those who died: "After they had gathered together the bits and pieces, the sad human detritus from the hedges and the surrounding fields, after identifications, investigations, and enquiries, it was officially stated that four men had died. [...] I mourn the needless dead" (311). Helen's focus on the bodies of the dead links *The Railway Station Man* to Johnston's other Troubles novels and their sustained concern with the bodily effects of violence. Readers are forced to face the visceral nature of the Troubles and to recognize the ways in which such violence denies the individual humanity of its victims—victims who, here, are both innocent bystanders and participants in the Troubles and who are indistinguishable from one another in death. It is this that the station ruins stand in commemoration of: the dissolution of individual lives, rather than any grand narrative they might be used to serve.

For Helen, her own recollections of the dead are "part of [her] private being," while in her role as painter, "on canvas [she] belongs to the world" (Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* 311). Her paintings serve as memorials recording "the pain and joy

and loneliness and fear” she sees (311). Here she can record “all those questions. God given. And no answers” (312). One of Helen’s unspoken and unanswerable questions is why Manus—leader of a group of republicans who act on their own outside the official structure of the Provisional IRA—has survived when four others have not. Helen and Damien are the only ones who know of Manus’s role in the explosion, and Helen is unable to forgive. She paints for the rest of the world, but for herself she reveals that: “In moments of viciousness, [she] quite like[s] to think of Manus running up over the bare hills. Cold hills with little shelter. [She] like[s] to think of him alone, frightened, exposed under the bright moon, the flinty stars, running. Running. Running” (312). Helen’s unrepentant hatred for Manus closes the novel and seems to suggest a deep pessimism that undercuts her work as an artist and memorial-maker, echoing the pessimism for the future of Ireland readers find in *Shadows on Our Skin*, but here bringing the effects of the Troubles not just to Derry and the North, but also to the Republic. However, while Helen narrates and thus controls the novel, it is Damien who provides its most interesting and most telling figure.

While Damien is mentioned from the novel’s outset—it is he who builds Helen the studio in which she paints and writes—the first description of him the reader receives is in the context of a childhood fight he had with Jack: “I remember that. Blood is so bright. I don’t remember why or anything like that, just the bright blood on your shirt when you came to the door. Someone told me he was mixed up in something” (Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* 152). The blood from their fight leads Helen to think of the more recent and more ominous violence in which she believes Damien may be involved; in fact, readers learn that Damien has worked with Manus Dempsey in the past. Jack goes

to find him at the station, telling him “Manus said he thought we ought to get acquainted” (158). Damien tours him around the station, explaining that he likes Roger because “He knows when a person does something well” (158). Jack later asks Damien: “What the hell are you doing in the Movement anyway?” Damien explains, “I’m not in it. I’m sort of alongside it” (170). Johnston establishes Damien and Jack as opposites: two adolescents drawn to the Movement, but for very different reasons. Jack strikes Damien as someone who “drifted in and hasn’t bothered to drift out again. Dangerous. [...] No blinding commitment” (169). Whereas Damien has been raised, much like Brendan, on his grandfather’s stories of his time as a Connaught ranger.

However, where Brendan is drawn into his father’s stories, Damien is able to discuss his grandfather from a detached and analytic perspective that belies blind commitment:

He went to Dublin a couple of times, I mind, for reunions or something. My father used to take him to the train in Sligo. He’d bring his medals in a little black box. He always came back a new man...not just an old fogey telling his stories to the kids, because no one else had the time for him. [...] He used to talk. Maybe that’s where I get my clacking tongue. Sit outside the kitchen door on summer evenings or by the fire in the winter and talk about the wars he’d seen, his old friends, the travelling, the great times they’d had together. India, terrible tragedies, happy days...all together like some kind of fairy story, only it was true. He would just sit there and let the brightness of his past catch up with him. I had all the time in the world to listen. And he’d talk about Ireland. You’ll have to shoot

them out, he used to say. They'll never go any other way. If you want them out you'll have to shoot them out. They simply don't understand the need that people have for freedom. People would rather be poor and suffer and be free. The English...he always talked about the English...don't understand a stupid thing like that. So you'll have to shoot them out, lad, and the quicker the better. (Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* 171)

When Jack asks, "Wasn't he right?" Damien's response is, "He didn't think it was right. He thought it was inevitable...like an operation without an anaesthetic, painful and possibly maiming" (171). Damien makes a telling connection to the human body and the bodily cost of the Movement. Unlike Jack, who is caught up in Manus's ideology, Damien reveals himself to be focused on the individual, human cost. By likening the whole to a single human body, subjected to a painful operation, he notes that the success of the movement cannot be achieved without human pain. For him, this is the dividing line; unlike Jack or Brendan, Damien cannot easily accept the human cost of the Troubles.

Damien's ability to recognize the human cost of conflict, and his willingness to question received narratives, links him to *Shadows on Our Skin's* Kathleen. If Kathleen is Johnston's first fully ethically drawn woman then Damien is her first fully ethically drawn man, one who escapes the dichotomies that destroy so many of her other characters. When Helen finally asks him outright if he is in the Provos, he laughs: "No [...] You've asked the wrong question" (Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* 268). Helen, frustrated, says she's "screwed herself up to hear some sort of truth" and he should "get on and tell it" (268). To which Damien responds:

What's truth? Manus's truth and my truth wouldn't come within a mile of each other [...] At eighteen, seventeen, sixteen, whenever it is you stop thinking like a child, well to put it a bit differently, start to be your own man. [...] I thought ... well that there has to be more to the whole damn thing than just kick the Brits out and then wham ... paradise. I thought a bit about how I felt people should be able to live. I talked around a bit. Listened. Read the papers. You've a lot of time to pass when you don't have a regular job. [...] I joined the Sticks [...] the Worker's Party. [...] I used to run messages for them. Do odd jobs [...] that was before they ... modernised [...] Not for awhile though I haven't. Not for... I lost the heart for that sort of thing [...] I don't see much point in killing people. I thought I was a great guy once upon a time. A God-save-Ireland hero.

(268-269)

Damien, unlike Manus, believes in democracy, “a social state in which all have equal right, without heredity or arbitrary differences of rank or privilege” (OED). He is not overzealous or idealistic but rather deeply committed to the worth of the individual. This belief links him to Helen, and “the friendship which develops between Damian and Helen represents a border crossing for both characters, a movement on the part of each beyond inherited values and attitudes”; the two “achieve a durable if unequal friendship denied to Joe and Kathleen” (Kennedy-Andrews 237). Their beliefs divide them from Jack and Manus, the former still a child and easily mutable, the latter primarily committed to “running things his way” and the belief that “the gun is mightier than the word” (Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* 269).¹⁷

In contrast, Damien is “more committed to individuals than he could ever be to a political ideal” (Lynch 255), and Helen is likewise described as “valuing the human body and its connection, not to the technology of war, but to nature” (Ingman 59). Thus when she and her son share breakfast and the newspaper, and he sarcastically quips, “You mean the fight for freedom continues?” she responds with, “I don’t mean any such thing. I mean a man was alive yesterday and now he’s dead. That’s not fighting for freedom” (Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* 136). Jack is dismissive: “Why get worked up about a man’s death? We all die. We’re all here one day and gone the next” (136). “It’s the snatching, playing God ... that’s what’s the outrage” she tries, unsuccessfully, to explain (136). For Jack, “its just words, news. Manipulated words. [...] Not nearly as affecting as a good play” (136). Later she tells him that “you should never hold anyone in contempt. [...] You can hate them ... whatever ... hate me if you want to, but the other, no” (153-154). Helen recognizes that to have contempt for the individual is to deny his or her humanity, to open up the possibility of violence. For her, to hate is still to recognize the individual person, to focus on his or her humanity; to have contempt for someone is to dismiss him or her, to strip away the recognition of another’s personhood. As Kennedy-Andrew argues, “where Jack cynically dismisses individual human suffering as the unavoidable by-product of necessary political action, Helen can only see the world in terms of individuals” (233). Unlike his mother, Jack cannot see the individual behind the manipulated words, and so when Manus approaches him offering him a role in his plans, he is quickly swayed by the ideology.

While Jack’s lack of concern leads him to Manus, Helen translates her concern for the individual into her art, in a series of paintings that focus on the physicality of

Damien's body. Seeking inspiration for her work, she goes for a swim and returns to find Damien on the shore. "Bugger," she thinks, "don't let there be any hassle. No demoralising happenings" (Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* 227). Damien brings her a towel, seemingly unconcerned by her nakedness. She tells him he ought to try the water himself and turns around to see him "jogging naked towards the edge of the sea. ... Scrawny. She dropped down on her knees and picked up her sketch book. Stringy. Jack wasn't like that" (228). The quick sketches she makes become the basis for a series of paintings; the first canvas acts as "a magnet drawing out of her head an implacable coherence that she had never felt before. Each stroke had its purpose, it's truth. The gaunt bones of the young man became a great stalk growing up through the centre of the canvas" (232). She puts "her entire body into the act of painting" (Ingman 59).

When the series is complete, she shows them to Damien: "The four canvases were standing against the wall. In the fourth painting the beach and the sea were empty expanses. A seagull moved across the glare of the sun and footprints displaced the sand, leading from a pile of clothes to the edge of the sea" (Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* 287). "Where am I? [...] What have you done with me?" Damien asks her, "his voice [...] slightly panic stricken" (287). "You're gone," she tells him (287). Helen's paintings represent a form of freedom. They are not the pessimistic images that Damien fears they may be, of himself disappearing, but instead they represent his escape, out of the narratives that define both Jack and Manus. Thus, we also learn soon after this that Damien leaves town rather than confront Manus and be involved in his use of Roger's shed. Roger himself ends up inviting Jack and Manus to see the structure; Johnston completely removes Damien from the circle, and because of his absence he is one of the

two men to survive the explosion. Through Helen's paintings and his own actions, Damien becomes easily recognizable as Johnston's most optimistic figure, with the most potential to continue on, outside the circles that trap so many of her other characters.¹⁸ In fact, an early draft of the novel bears the title *The Man on the Beach*, indicating that Damien is in fact as central to the novel's import as Roger, who ultimately becomes its titular character (Johnston, *The Man on the Beach*). While Johnston resists any wholly optimistic or redemptive ending for the novel, as Manus is the other survivor of the blast, in this third novel of the Troubles Johnston begins to envision a way out for her characters, one that resists heroic narratives through its focus on the individual body over ideology, and one that is captured in the novel's two memorials: the ruined station that resists easy appropriation and Helen's paintings that envision Damien's escape. While the station represents a scar on the landscape—one that memorializes the violence—her paintings emphasize the physicality of Damien's pure, unmarked body. Through her art, Helen is able to shift her focus from the ruins and her own hatred to the possibility and hope Damien embodies.

“All I can do is keep faith”

Johnston's fourth and final novel written during the height of the Troubles further explores her concern with the role of the body in commemoration and remembrance. In *Fool's Sanctuary*, published a decade after *Shadows on Our Skin*, Johnston returns readers to the Big House, where her narrator, Miranda, patiently awaits her death. Miranda wonders about the fate of Termon, “this white elephant,” that “thirty years ago ... would have been bought by the nuns” (Johnston, *Fool's Sanctuary* 316).¹⁹ For herself,

Miranda hopes the house might “just left to fall down” (316). She envisions it as “a romantic ruin full of ghosts. [...] Stories upon stories would be told, truths and half-truths argued over. That would be the most acceptable solution for the ghosts. Then the house would truly become their sanctuary” (316). Left to become a ruin, the house would occupy a liminal space much like Bowen’s mill in *The Last September*, where figures step out of their present-day lives and into an imaginative space that allows strange confrontations to occur. Instead, in the present moment of the text—in which “things are [...] better perhaps in some ways”—it is Miranda herself who serves as a sanctuary for Termon’s ghosts, her body and mind called into service in commemoration of the past (316); she exists primarily in her own mind, rehearsing again and again her memories, bringing to her side “as [she] was never able to do through [her] living years” the “cast of [her] play” (317). Her cast consists not of all Termon’s dead, but of those who were at Termon over the span of a single weekend. In that weekend, Miranda’s life essentially stops, frozen at the age of eighteen. “Of course, if Mother had been alive, had been with us that weekend,” she tells readers,

nothing would have been the same. I would not have been the same Miranda, nor Cathal the same Cathal. Idiotic to really muse on such things. We are faced all the time with the indelible reality of the past. Even if we dare to shut our eyes to the truth, it is still there waiting to outface us when we open them again; if we open them again, perhaps I should have said. (318)

“Maybe I should have married after all,” she continues, “if only to keep this place alive and kicking [...] But I didn’t allow myself that freedom” (318). Instead, both Miranda

and Termon have calcified into old age, and as the novel opens she is in a house that faces an uncertain future.

In the opening pages of the novel, Johnston sets out each of the main themes with which the remainder of the text concerns itself: freedom, action versus inaction, and Ireland's future. "I felt briefly at one time a longing to fight for freedom, but I merely cried for freedom; an inadequate contribution to the struggles of a nation" Miranda confesses (Johnston, *Fool's Sanctuary* 316). Though she has longed at times to "do a bunk, like [her brother] Andrew, get away," she has stayed, remaining faithful to Cathal's memory and the freedom he fought for. *Fool's Sanctuary* examines the consequences of each character's choices: Andrew's choice to leave Ireland, Cathal's choice to save Andrew and Harry from death at the hands of the IRA, Miranda's father's choice to ignore the reality of the political situation outside Termon's walls, and most importantly, Miranda's choice to "keep faith" in remembrance of Cathal. Each of the characters struggles with the idea of freedom, both for the individual and for Ireland as a whole, just as each struggles with whether or not to act in support of his or her vision for Ireland's future.

It is this struggle that Miranda outlines for the reader through her narration; by relating her cast's actions over the course of one weekend, she lays bare the consequences of their choices. "I am almost ready," she tells us, "Just one more time I must assemble the cast. I must search for the clue. Maybe there is no clue. Maybe the truth is anarchy. Maybe there is no truth. Maybe there is only pain. No" (Johnston, *Fool's Sanctuary* 321). She refuses the idea that there is no greater truth in her narrative, no clue to be had, and instead tells the story once again. She moves into third-person narration as

the tale shifts backwards, to an unnamed date in the early 1920s. Her brother Andrew's regiment has been sent to Dublin. He has made it through "that dreadful war," but Miranda resents his posting in Ireland as a soldier for the British Army: "He shouldn't have come. He should have refused point blank" (325). Nanny points out the childishness of her statement, "Isn't he a soldier and don't soldiers have to do what they're told? [...] Orders is orders," but Miranda is full of the absolute, black-and-white political views that mark her naïveté (325).²⁰ In this moment, Johnston deftly and succinctly establishes the isolation afforded to Miranda and her father in their lives at Termon by virtue of their history and standing.

Miranda and Mr. Martin are, in fact, doubly isolated. As members of the Ascendency, still in possession of Termon and the land surrounding it, they create a buffer between themselves and the world around them. Like the Naylor, they are able to cling to ignorance of the events in the surrounding areas—as for the Naylor, Cork with its high levels of conflict is their nearest city—and continue to move amongst the Ascendency circles to which they belong. However, unlike the Naylor, Mr. Martin and Miranda believe themselves enlightened, arguing for freedom for Ireland and opportunity for those such as Cathal. Thus, they are persistent outsiders; "it is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory. To the extent that their memories of a society's past diverge, to that extent its members can share neither experiences nor assumptions" (Connerton 3). Neither accepts the story, the shared memory of Ascendency society, which would separate them from Cathal and from their ideals of freedom. Miranda, like her father, cannot see that freedom comes at the cost of her own place in society. When Andrew tells her that in forty years' time "there'll be no

place for us here,” she is insistent, that, “of course there’ll be a place” (Johnston, *Fool’s Sanctuary* 419). Andrew sees Termon for what it is, but like his daughter, Mr. Martin cannot recognize the contradictions Andrew delineates: “Such strange words you use ... This country is in a state of evolution and you use the words stunted and stilted. I hardly think you are being fair ... It would seem to me that when your country is in a state of evolution, you should be there, living through it” (345). Yet Mr. Martin’s statement is a fallacy; he is not truly living through Ireland’s evolution either. He cannot see what is, to Andrew obvious, that there are “areas in this country where people like [the Martins] are no longer safe” (345). “I am no threat. [...] I can see a future” he insists (345). Miranda, in her retelling, shows the Martins in all their innocence, proclaiming a vision for a future they are not fighting for but expect to realize nonetheless.

In contrast, Andrew views them as “acquiescent people” who have just enough power and conviction to do themselves and those around them harm (Johnston, *Fool’s Sanctuary* 419). “People like you and father do more harm than good,” he tells her; “Let’s be nice to the natives. Let’s invite them to lunch. Now look what’s happening in the country. They think they know how to run the damn place. They think they can win this silly affair by shooting people who don’t agree with them” (339-340). Yet much as Andrew insists, neither Mr. Martin nor Miranda can see beyond their respective plans for drainage ditches and Irish freedom. It is this short sightedness, this innocence, that Cathal tries to preserve. Yet Termon fails to provide a sanctuary for Miranda, for her father, and eventually, for Cathal.

When Cathal enters her narrative, the focus remains on Miranda’s innocence. He has just arrived from Dublin, and she feels unsure of what to say to him: “I feel like a

stranger, someone quite new to you. [...] Let's sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the deaths of kings" (Johnston, *Fool's Sanctuary* 328). She asks him about Dublin, and he tries to share with her the charged nature of the city—"the atmosphere is electric [...]" Everything looks normal, but when you breathe in... [...] There's real anger and fear" (329). He tells her that they have "lifted a lot of the boys," and the reader begins to understand that Cathal is involved in the IRA. Thus, Miranda and Cathal represent another of Johnston's border crossings—a young woman from the Big House in love with an Irish Republican. However, she is unable to see him as such, asking him to "drop it," both in order to give himself a chance to realize the university education Mr. Martin has made possible for him, and to give them "a few days of forgetting" while he is at Termon (330). Cathal tries to explain that he "[hasn't] the right to just look out for [himself]" (331). In an echo of Damien's grandfather, he tells her: "We have to drive them out ... I hate the thought of people being hurt too. I promise you that. I don't fight for any reason except for freedom. You understand that don't you. [...] It has to be war. [...] I wish I knew how to... oh Miranda... you don't live in the real world" (331). "There are so many different worlds," she tells him, unable to recognize that her world is being challenged by the world Cathal inhabits in Dublin.

Miranda's adult self breaks in to chide her youthful one: "If I could change time around, I could have said, Run Cathal. Run [...] because though we love you, Father and I, we won't save you. You will save us and all we'll be able to do will be to remember that fact forever" (Johnston, *Fool's Sanctuary* 332). This is, in fact, what Miranda does. Unlike Nancy, who seeks out Cassius in order to better understand what is happening outside Ardmore, Miranda tries to bring Cathal, Andrew, and even Harry into Termon's

sanctuary, to isolate them all from the world and keep them “the way we are now, at this moment, for ever and ever” (333). While she fails to do so—Cathal is killed and Andrew leaves—she does manage to preserve herself as a memorial to Cathal:

Of all of us Cathal was the only one who saw any reality at all.

He was perhaps the only one who knew how to love.

That sounds mad, but we were all so busy loving our notions of ourselves, that we had no energy left to offer love outside ourselves. (368)

It is Cathal’s death that makes Miranda capable of this observation. This event fractures the sanctity of Termon and forces her to look for the first time beyond her notion of herself to the reality of the political situation that surrounds her.

From Cathal, Johnston notes in an interview, Miranda learns heroism “real heroism, not fake heroism” (Moloney 142). It is Cathal who warns Andrew and Henry that orders have come down from the IRA in Dublin to execute them; he urges them to leave, even though he knows it will likely bring about his own death. His last act is to protect them, out of faith to Miranda’s father and the family to which he is deeply bound. But they cannot protect him in return; Cathal is out of place both at home and at Termon. He notes that two of “our lads” were shot the previous day, but that “[his] father would say it was no more than they deserved. Dear Mam would pray for their immortal souls [...] but she does that for the other lot too [...] She can’t see that bloody uniform as a threat. It doesn’t leave much room for heroics” (Johnston, *Fool’s Sanctuary* 330). At Termon he is faced with Andrew, who thinks he’s “got too big for his boots” (339). Johnston deftly reveals Cathal to be caught between an old Ireland in which he would never have been allowed to court the daughter of the Big House and a new Ireland in

which he might have “some sort of future” (339). The reality, of course, is that there is no future for Cathal’s brand of “real heroism” in this Ireland; his loyalties cross boundaries and are, like Damien’s, deeply committed to individuals rather than ideologies. Thus, for all that he is a member of the IRA, he cannot bring himself to allow Andrew and Harry to be killed. In an effort to protect Miranda from the realities of the political strife in which he, Andrew, and Harry are involved, he sacrifices himself in the process. However, he will not be remembered as a martyr but rather as a traitor. It is only Miranda who seeks to remember him, only she and her family who know the reality of his death. As Miranda falls asleep after Cathal is taken she thinks: “All I can do is keep faith [...] That is the only possible thing I can do. [...] ‘God, help me to keep faith. Forever’” (434). And this is, in fact, what she does: “I have known the embraces of no man,” she tells the reader in the novel’s final lines (435).

By preserving herself and Termon, Miranda makes not just of the house, but more importantly of herself, a memorial to Cathal’s death. Heather Ingman argues that the novel becomes, “both in tone and content, ... an elegy for female lives omitted from the narrative of Irish history” (57). Yet Miranda does not lack agency; she makes the decision to keep faith and continues to make that choice throughout her life. She is not omitted from history because of external actors but rather by her own decision to preserve herself in remembrance of Cathal. What Johnston points out, however, is the futility of Miranda’s act. Miranda has never become a mother, never married or fulfilled any stereotype of Irish womanhood, but at the same time, she will leave nothing behind but Termon: “I walked like King Wenceslas’s page, in his footsteps leaving no trace of my own [...] I lost my taste for danger when they killed Cathal. [...] At the time it seemed

the right thing to do, creep in Father's warmth; avoid confrontation with the world. Of course, looking back from here, I see how wrong I was" (Johnston, *Fool's Sanctuary* 320). By avoiding confrontation, by making of her body a memorial to Cathal, she has actually failed to publicly memorialize him or the heroism he stood for. Isolated from the world, she holds a solitary vigil removed from any conversation that would force others to question the circumstances of Cathal's death or that might help to move forward a new vision for Ireland's future. Instead, her "story stops" with Cathal's death; "Looking back ... she realizes that the eruption of violence into her life has stunted her development" (Ingman 56); she has in fact, echoing Nancy, "never become a whole person" (Johnston, *Fool's Sanctuary* 346). Ingman goes on to argue that Miranda's "stasis is willed, a protest against a world that robbed her of her chance of love" (Ingman 56). It is also an attempt to preserve Cathal's memory, but that protest fails because it has no audience.

Instead, Miranda makes keeping faith into a private ritual. Ritual, as defined by Steven Lukes, is "rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thoughts and feeling which they hold to be of special significance" (qtd. in Connerton 44). For Miranda, the rules are simple: keep faith with Cathal by refusing to form ties with any other man. Cathal's memory is her object of thought and constant meditation and as such she is "stunted," "stifled," though not in the ways Andrew might have predicted (Johnston, *Fool's Sanctuary* 345). However, rituals are also meant to have beginnings and endings, temporal markers and boundaries; Miranda's ritual has no end—only its start with Cathal's death. In this way, Johnston emphasizes the fact that Miranda has removed herself from the normal cycles of life, engaged in a timeless practice that is made futile by isolation.²¹

Miranda's practice of remembrance in many ways serves as a response to the mutilated bodies that people Johnston's other novels. She is physically unmarked by the violence that overtakes Cathal, and her aging, virginal body defies the physicality of a normal, lived life. Yet Johnston shows that even this unmarked body is mentally scarred and stunted by Ireland's history of violence. Miranda attempts to explain her actions:

I thought there was no other way to repay...what a mean little word....repay; clinking of coins and rustling notes.

Repay is rubbish.

Words are so elusive at times.

Align my life with his death; that's dry, but more what I meant to do.

Offer up my solitude. (Johnston, *Fool's Sanctuary* 404)

However, in the end she realizes her futility. Instead, what she is left with are nightmares in which she imagines and reimagines Cathal's death: "I suppose they shot him in the head. We never knew" (369). The image of them "shattering his gaunt face, the rock-pool eyes in which I had seen my own reflection" comes to her "sometimes in nightmares. That wasteful spilling" (369). She is focused not on her own loss, but on the mutilation of Cathal's body, the violation of his existence as an individual committed to others over a singular cause.

Not knowing what occurred has so impressed itself upon her that she fills in the images she has not seen, returning again in the novel's final pages to her dream of his death:

The splintering bone, the blood. I heard no sound, just saw the yawning of his skull as the bullets broke into it. [...] Had Cathal's body ever been

returned, or even turned up years later by some Bord na Mona machinery, or pulled from the sea, I might have reassessed my promise to God. I might have opened my isolation to some other person. Maybe not; a promise is, after all, a promise and I'll have Nanny if not God to face in the next world. (Johnston, *Fool's Sanctuary* 435)

Thus, Miranda ends the novel as she began it: isolated in Termon and unable to fully comprehend the violence that is now beginning again in the North. Miranda thinks with “indifference” of the “events of the last few years, the restirring of the pot of violence” (435). This places the novel’s close in the early 1970s and lends gravity to its final line: “Have pity on us all” (435). In this fourth and final novel directly concerned with the Troubles in Ireland’s history, Johnston does not envision an easy way forward or a form of commemoration that might guide participants towards a better future. Instead, the novel reflects her own continuing concern, after a decade of violence, over whether or not Ireland would find a way forward.

Facing ourselves

In 1997, Johnston remained skeptical about the future of Northern Ireland and her own ability to fully understand circumstances there. In an interview with Hiroko Mikami, she tells him, “I really don’t understand what’s going on in the north of Ireland. ... All I could do is write a really rather silly book like *Shadows on Our Skin* ... It’s nicely written but it’s quite a silly book” (530). Johnston’s self-deprecation belies the ways in which her four novels of Ireland’s Troubles carefully explore the effects of conflict and the

remembrance of conflict on the lives of individuals. “What is important to me are values,” she stresses,

My fixed point is how you react to people you love. I’m a woman and I’m Irish, but above all else I’m a writer and those other two things just happen to be part of my life. I’m trying to confront the agony of individuals getting on with their lives and not going mad in the process. It isn’t all about sad, broken Ireland ... What I care about is how we manage to live with the big issues going on around us and how we manage to face ourselves. (qtd. in Kennedy-Andrews 231)

Yet Johnston’s characters cannot wholly escape the “big issues” that impinge upon their lives; instead, Johnston explores how they respond to moments of fracture that challenge the integrity of their lives and their lived bodies. Her characters, like their creator, seek to “expose some truth” (Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* 259). What Johnston emphasizes, and what makes her work significant to the trajectory of Irish women’s fiction that engages with conflict and commemoration, is her constant recognition that “nothing is ever total truth” (Johnston qtd. in Pushkarevskaya 76).

Instead, in each of Johnston’s four novels readers find “small truths” that emphasize the fraught nature of history and remembrance. Ann Dolan argues that “in the aftermath of civil war, memory is a contested thing” (202). Thus, for Johnston, paying tribute to the past occurs not simply through officially sanctioned events and monuments but also through the physical movements and habits of the body. Her novels examine the past as an “indelible reality,” carried on characters’ persons as well as in their psyches. Each work signals the danger inherent in rigidly ascribing to and promoting a single and

at times violently guarded narrative of Ireland's history. Johnston privileges individual, informal narratives and examines how those narratives intersect with broader stories of Ireland's history. Her work questions the tendency of large-scale, official commemorations to "create the face of a movement, sacrificing individual identities to speak for their cause" (Hunter 3). Instead, Johnston stresses "the potency of [the] illusion" created by history, and the threat such illusions represent to the individual; Lanters notes that "the failure of human beings to communicate is a theme which runs through all of Jennifer Johnston's novels" (230). Where communication fails, where characters such as Jack refuse to recognize the importance of individuals over ideology, death is the result. In contrast, where characters are able to form ties across traditional boundaries, where they "[reject] binary thinking and ... [recognize] the need to conceive difference without opposition," Johnston provides readers with examples of generative relationships that point to a possible escape from the Troubles (Kennedy-Andrews 23). Rather than public ceremonies, her characters engage in personal remembrance and the creation of memorial structures that provide an alternative to singular narratives of history. Although she remained unconvinced that she could fully understand the Troubles, her characters seek to do so in ways that are ethically motivated. Their attempts at embodied, individually centered practices of remembrance find their realization in the works of another Irish novelist: Deirdre Madden.

¹ Johnston uses ellipses liberally throughout her writing. For purposes of clarity, ellipses I have introduced to her texts are marked by brackets: [].

² Moloney's argument is similar to that made by Elmer Kennedy-Andrews: "The Troubles gave a special urgency to the literary impulse, and opened up new themes and emotional possibilities for the prospective artist. The writers, we might say, were hurt into writing ... Yet politics and society did not take over the creative imagination completely: the most significant feature of the literature has been its resistance to, and

liberation from, orthodoxy and ideology, its commitment to the ‘world elsewhere’ made possibly by language” (Kennedy-Andrews 7). Kennedy-Andrews’s reading is somewhat too essentialist to capture the nuance and range of writing from the North, nor can it explain a writer like Johnston who moved from London to Derry during the Troubles in order to better understand events there; however, like Moloney, Kennedy-Andrews identifies a commitment to challenging easy divisions that is present in each of Johnston’s texts discussed in this chapter.

³ For instance, in “‘This White Elephant of a Place’: Jennifer Johnston’s Use of the Big House,” Karl Lubbers willfully misreads Johnston in an attempt to fit her into a particular mold. For Lubbers, her novels lose focus when they move away from the mansion, away from linear narrative and into circuitous explorations of time and memory. He argues that in *The Old Jest* and *Fool’s Sanctuary* her focus on the big house “seems to dissolve, and the mansion is reduced largely to a frame to be filled by random sketches or to a stage on which other dramas than that of the collapse of Irish feudalism are enacted” (Lubbers 223). His work fails to recognize that rather than losing focus, Johnston is manipulating literary and narrative forms in order to critique received historical narratives that extend beyond the decline of the Ascendancy.

⁴ Elmer Kennedy-Andrews argues that “Personal life and personal relationships form the locus of authentic existential fulfillment in Johnston’s fictional world. Events are structured according to a moral economy in which private space and personal relationships constitute a superior ‘feminine’, civilising domain that is constantly threatened by the dehumanizing, ‘masculine’ forces bearing down on it from the public, political world” (229). Again, this dichotomous reading of Johnston’s “fictional world” represents an oversimplification of the spaces and characters she creates. For Johnston, Ireland is not simply masculine or feminine, political or domestic, public or personal.

⁵ The houses, too, bear the markings of violence. Joe remembers that after his brother Brendan first left for London, “Dad had been bad for weeks after. . . . He had put his fist one night through the window in the front room, and Mam had filled the black hole with cardboard which had stayed there for the best part of a year. But things were starting to get bad then and soon they weren’t the only people with cardboard in their window” (21). What begins here as a moment of private, domestic violence soon becomes visually indistinguishable from the public, political violence surrounding it.

⁶ Mr. Logan lapses into song throughout the text; his words are peppered with lines from rebel songs that become indistinguishable from his own speech. In this way, Johnston shows that Mr. Logan has no sense of self beyond his past role in the Movement. For him, there is no way forward except through the stories and songs of the past.

⁷ In a later scene, for instance, Mrs. Logan is described as “[clutching] her arms around herself as if she were trying to hold her bones from falling apart” (66-67). For her, as much as for her husband, the toll of the Troubles is a bodily one.

⁸ Kennedy-Andrews likens Mrs. Logan to Sean O’Casey’s Juno: “like Juno, Mrs. Logan places more importance on people than on ideas or ideologies, and rejects any form of political agitation” (228). But her position is an untenable one given the household and the city in which she resides. This is the crux of Johnston’s first Troubles novel, and the locus of its pessimism. In the end, Mrs. Logan is unable to protect either Brendan or Joe. For this, Kennedy-Andrews critiques Johnston’s work: “What we have . . . is a powerful

humanist lament at the tragic effects of political violence, a resigned or fatalistic repudiation of politics in general which never quite escapes irony. Ultimately, the novel's pessimism lies in its failure to imagine any alternative agency of social change to Nationalist paramilitary chaos" (228).

⁹ Joe's heroism is a precursor to *Fool's Sanctuary*, in which, through the figure of Cathal, Johnston fully develops her depiction of "real" heroism in the context of sectarian violence.

¹⁰ Kathleen's treatment at the hands of the IRA is an example of the "campaign of public sexual degradation ... of Catholic women who forged relationships with British soldiers" (McDowell 347). In addition to cutting women's hair during the Anglo-Irish War in the 1920s, during the Troubles in the 1960s-1990s women were also tarred and feathered. In the poem "Punishment," Seamus Heaney likens the Windeby Girl found in the bogs of the Jutland peninsula to her "betraying sisters / cauled in tar" in Ireland (Heaney 31). However, Heaney's depiction of the Windeby Girl engages in a "strange intimacy, a distorted type of domestic love" (Wallace 105). She is sexualized as an object of the poet's voyeuristic fascination; rather than the poet displaying empathy for her, he "identify[ies] with the romantic dead with nothing less than erotic passion" (H. Hart 404). In contrast, Johnston describes Kathleen through the viewpoint of young Joe Logan, whose school-boy crush never crosses into sexual desire. By observing Kathleen's punishment at the hands of the IRA through Joe, Johnston keeps the focus on the ethical and individual costs of the Troubles, rather than falling into the universalizing, mythologizing stance Heaney adopts in "Punishment."

¹¹ There are other allusions to Bowen as well: sitting on the front steps, her Aunt Mary tells her "Put a cushion under your behind, dear, or you'll get piles" (Johnston, *The Old Jest* 12). This less genteel echo of Lady Naylor's admonition to Lois that she's "storing up rheumatism" sitting on the steps is an indication of the differences between Bowen's Anglo-Irish War novel and Johnston's (Bowen, *The Last September* 35). Though Johnston's novel signals back to her predecessor's, Nancy's world is less polished, less sequestered, than Lois's. While each exist in families determined, at moments, not to notice, Nancy's Aunt Mary is aware of her own short-sightedness in a way that the Naylor's are not.

¹² If Nancy at moments echoes Lois, so too does her home reference Bowen's Danielstown: "The house was still and loving. The hall clock ticked and the furniture around me breathed quietly, in the way that furniture does at night when everything is silent. ... I felt very safe, well protected. I wondered was that right or wrong, but didn't come to any conclusions" (50).

¹³ Hearing of the deaths, she thinks, "perhaps they're all better off where they are; that's what Bridie suggests anyhow ... I don't think I agree with her. In spite of the terrible things that happen, I feel it is a great privilege to be alive" (Johnston, *The Old Jest* 6-7). Though she does not have the experience or understanding to articulate it, Nancy reveals herself to be primed for developing an ethical understanding of another's individuality, for "becoming a person." For Nancy's Aunt Mary, the isolation of Ardmore has stunted her; Nancy asks her: "Is it very terrible being grown up?" Mary tells her "Pet, I wouldn't know. I don't think it's ever happened to me. Perhaps now," when she is forced to think about selling Ardmore and moving outside of its shelter (97). Johnston conveys the sense,

like Bowen, that the Big House is a place of extended childhood and naïveté, where one can cultivate a lack of understanding of one's surroundings.

¹⁴ Nancy's shifting sense of her surroundings informs her exchange with her grandfather later that day. Their conversation begins in the mundane: he is frustrated that he cannot see anything along the railway line, and she reminds him that there is never anything there, "only the field and the railway line" (87). "I see things," he tells her, "I pass my day seeing things. These are very good glasses. Exceptionally so. German field glasses. Military issue. [...] Loot," he adds momentarily (87). His mention of the military prompts a silence, broken when Nancy finally asks him about her father. She asks if he remembers Robert. But instead of Robert, her grandfather tells her about the soldier from whom he took the field glasses: "I just took them from this fellow who was lying in this gun emplacement. He was dead. Yes. A blooming Dutch fellow. Loot, I supposed you'd call it. It was frowned upon. A bad example and all that. I remember his face as if it was yesterday. Odd that. He had quite a decent face. Bloody savages those Dutch. After all, if I hadn't taken them, someone else would have" (87). After a long moment, he asks for her reassurance: "Wouldn't they?" She prompts him again to tell her about her father. She is frustrated that while he can remember "the face of a dead Boer," he cannot remember her father. In response, he simply tells her: "If you kill someone, they tend to leave their face with you. As a sort of present" (87). While Johnston does not dwell on this moment, simply slipping it into their conversation then moving that conversation forward, the line is a telling one, emphasizing again the personal toll of violence.

¹⁵ If we were to find her again in a later Johnston novel, she might be like many of Johnston's other, older female narrators such as Helen or Miranda, mentally marked by the violence that is often physically inscribed on the bodies of her male figures.

¹⁶ Sections of the novel are "written" by Helen, while others are told from Jack's point of view. The novel also moves into third person narration, but told from Helen's perspective.

¹⁷ Jack's childishness is apparent in his exchange with his mother over things as mundane as their breakfast. While one day he "hates" Cornflakes, the next day he must have them, the previous day "a passing phase. Today, [he] needs Cornflakes" (136, 174).

¹⁸ Equally significant is that unlike Helen, Damien is not wrapped up in any hatred or inability to forgive. Helen confesses to Roger: "For such a long time I've wanted to say this to someone...but the right person never seemed to be around. I have never had either a priest or a psychiatrist...or perhaps a friend. You know Dan was shot? ... That in itself was terrible. That brutality. Unforgivable really. I found it unforgivable. I still feel that, each time I read about another...snatching of a life...I feel that same unforgiveness rising inside me. I don't mean I want vengeance or anything like that. I just feel I'd like the...well, perpetrator to know that I will never forgive him. Or her" (242). Damien is still both physically and mentally unmarked by the violence and so for him, escape is still possible.

¹⁹ We quickly gain the sense in the novel's opening pages that Termon is in many ways a place outside of time, removed and islanded from its surroundings. Mr. Martin maintains this illusion with his schemes and plans for reforesting the land around Termon, further physically dividing it from its surroundings. He is, perhaps, even more active than the Naylor's in trying to stem any encroaching knowledge of Ireland's political state.

²⁰ Even the older Miranda breaks into the narrative to comment on her younger self: “I suppose I was happy; filled with such expectations. I suppose everyone of eighteen or thereabouts is filled with expectations. No one understands then, the illusory nature of happiness” (326). Her father, she notes, manages to cling to his happiness throughout his life by refusing to engage with the world in its actuality: “He was cocooned from the world by his own dreams. Like someone in a fairy tale he was hedged around by his own trees, his theories. . . . He saw nothing else with the clarity he preserved for these things” (326).

²¹ Miranda employs ritual, whereas Mr. Logan employs myth; myths serve as a “reservoir of meanings” available for use in other structures (Connerton 56). Rituals, in contrast, have less potential for variance (57). Johnston explores the dangers of both in those moments where commemoration intersects with history in Ireland.

Chapter 4: “The horror of little details” – Remembering the Troubles in the work of

Deirdre Madden

... When through

*with day, going to bed, leave no milk or bread
cluttering the table. It will attract
the dead. But under the gentle eyelid
of the magician, let him contract*

*a vision of the dead in all you've seen,
and let the spell of earth smoke and sharp rue
be true to him like a transparent fugue.*

*Nothing can destroy an authentic sign,
And whether from the grave or from a room,
Let him praise a ring, bracelet, and a jug.*

— Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, “VI”

“Something to write”

For novelist Glenn Patterson, “the simplest reason ... anyone would sit down and spend a year and a half, two years [writing] something that they hope will eventually be published as a novel is that there is a gap, there is something to write” (Cliff 15-16). For many Northern Irish novelists in the latter decades of the twentieth century, that gap is found in Troubles narratives. Writers and critics alike have addressed the need for new and increasingly nuanced stories of the trauma individuals experience in the wake of sectarian violence, and fiction is uniquely able to debate the questions raised by the Troubles and to foster new modes of discourse about Northern Ireland’s violent history. Fiction’s distinct ability to address not just the practice, but also the ethics, of commemorating violence stems from the genre’s frequently tendentious relationship to history. While poetry often becomes itself a moment of commemoration, employed as it is on monuments, memorials, and in state ceremonies, novels such as those examined

here explicitly reflect on and challenge our means of remembrance. In doing so, Deirdre Madden can create new narratives for the past and advocate new practices of commemoration. However, critics such as Eve Patten argue that fiction from the North largely fails, and rather than critiquing commemorative practices, becomes little more than “a personal auxiliary to public history” (Bell 131).¹ For Patten and others, fiction from the North can be compartmentalized into sub-genres, including Troubles thrillers or sensationalist romances, and then dismissed.² Recently, however, critics have begun to reevaluate Northern Irish fiction, and more specifically, Troubles fictions that are not also Troubles thrillers. Amongst these are Liam Harte and Michael Parker, who speak to the difficulties authors face in trying to overcome reductive critical views of Northern Irish fiction:

In their overt and oblique attempts to address issues of violence, justice and moral responsibility as they pertain to individuals, ... novelists have continually had to negotiate a series of ethical, aesthetic and ideological difficulties. Among the most formidable problems are those of “familiarity” and “repetitiveness,” both of which relate to the challenge of reaching an audience and leading it beyond the gross simplifications and distortions served up by ... sensationalist narratives ...

(Harte 5)

Novelists must also contend with the claim made by Ronan Bennett, that “that serious fiction about the North has ... [misrepresented] the ‘Troubles’ as little more than ‘an appalling tragedy, devoid of political content’” (Harte 5).

While those such as Bennett have reinforced the tendency of critics seeking to explore the connection between art and violence in Northern Ireland to turn immediately and exclusively to poetry, Neil Corcoran notes that “where the poetry of Northern Ireland since 1969 has been ‘a poetry of obliquity’ ... the novel of the period has been ‘much more straightforwardly addressed to the situation itself and the issues it raises’” (Corcoran qtd. in Kennedy-Andrews 9). In part, this difference can be attributed to the distinctions between poetry and narrative, as the latter is able to meditate on and engage with a timeline of events and experiment with points of view, character, and perception; the end result is, in the best of cases, a detailed exploration of both the public political “situation” in Northern Ireland and an examination of the personal and domestic effects of violence on the individual. Through narrative, writers of fiction are able to examine the individual experience of trauma and resist the tendency to subsume the individual story into an official, historical framework. For writers such as Madden, the ethical treatment of Northern Ireland’s sectarian violence in fiction requires the rejection of such totalizing structures of remembrance. Against these structures Madden sets narratives that seek to address violence ethically and humanely, yet without neglecting the political content of the Troubles.

In each of her seven novels Deirdre Madden works to illuminate the significance of identity and remembrance, revealing piece by piece their effect on the wide range of characters she offers her readers. Her works are at times devastatingly straightforward, while in other moments the reader is forced, like the men and women she constructs, to work painstakingly towards a moment of lucidity. The apparent lack of artifice in Madden’s novels can be deceiving; often, her narration conceals a complex net of human

emotions and deep-seated traumas. Her characters, in responding to each other's memories and experiences, map out the difficulties they face in attempting to truly understand and empathize with lives outside their own. Throughout, what is most significant about these sensitively crafted, minute exchanges is that via her characters' internal struggles, Madden is able to rewrite what it means to remember and publicly commemorate Northern Ireland's sectarian violence, asking characters and readers alike to comprehend both the significance and "the horror" of "little details."

For Madden, the primary "gap" that requires a narrative explanation is the relationship between the self and the other, especially when that relationship is complicated and fractured by the experience of sectarian violence. Harte and Parker note that, "in a culture where Otherness continues to function as a haunting presence within the definitions of identity, often inducing uncertainty and a profound sense of threat, much contemporary writing both replicates this tense introspectiveness and exhibits a strong desire to reach beyond this state" (4-5). For "the fictional world of the novel," in which, like the "actual world of the state, domestic spaces suffer increasing violation by political forces," otherness is at once dangerous and potentially liberating (236). Central to a movement away from the Troubles thriller, with its often sensationalist and static view of the forces behind the violence, is a conscious, careful engagement with that "Otherness." For Madden, otherness involves, more specifically, the ability to identify and empathize with the experiences of others. For her characters, many of whom have immediate, personal experience with sectarian violence, identification is fraught with the memory of past trauma, which in some cases transforms otherness into pure threat.

By exploring moments of fraught and failed connections, Madden's work, like Johnston's and Bowen's, fills the need for ethically charged Troubles fictions. Her focus throughout is on the experience of trauma and the ways in which characters either bear witness to their personal history or remain unable to do so. Her novels demonstrate that "only after the event, in the process of telling it and incorporating it into their own personal and historical contexts, do those who have direct experience of violent events, whether as perpetrators, victims or witnesses, manage to deal with it" (Kennedy-Andrews 153). Yet in addition, Madden's fiction counteracts previous misrepresentations of the North by grounding explorations of traumatic experience in philosophies of ethics and remembrance; such a foundation allows her to explore the political content of her works without losing sight of the human element and enables her to humanize tragedy without casting it as simply an appalling, atavistic status quo.

In her novels, readers find that the ability to remember ethically is embedded in an obligation to care for others, transforming them from a potential threat into an individual with whom one empathizes. In *The Ethics of Memory*, Avishai Margalit points out that "memory is partly constitutive of the notion of care. If I care for someone or something, and then I forget that person ... this means I have stopped caring" (28).³ Such a relationship to the other is difficult to maintain, particularly for those who have experienced the violence that is the antithesis of ethics. Yet Madden's novels reveal that caring, which moves individuals beyond "our indifference towards the faceless other," is the necessary precursor to an ethically centered practice of commemoration (34). Her writing shows readers that it is indifference that leads to both violence and the maltreatment of the remembrance of Troubles victims; furthermore, indifference to the

“particularity” of individual suffering is, as she shows, what allows victims to be both subsumed into official narratives of history and used in sensationalist thrillers. Madden writes against both of these misuses of the past and of remembrance in novels such as *Hidden Symptoms* (1986) and *One by One in the Darkness* (1996). By engendering debate and “dis-ordering” inherited stories, Madden’s work rewrites what it means to remember Northern Ireland’s sectarian violence and creates new stories that challenge dominant ideologies (St. Peter 1).

Madden’s work, positioned as it is within a dialogue about the ethics of remembering and commemorating political violence, represents a new mode of Irish Troubles fiction most noticeable in the writing of Ireland’s female novelists; of Bowen, Johnston, and Madden, it is Madden whose most clearly inhabits this new mode.⁴ For critic Gerry Smyth, the Troubles narrative takes three forms: “the Realist thriller, the ‘national romance’ ... and ‘domestic fiction’ (‘in which the private, feminised realm of love and desire offers an escape from the public, masculine realm of political abstraction’)” (Smyth qtd. in Kennedy-Andrews 8). Madden’s novels do not fit any of these proscribed categories. Instead, her novels represent a fiction of commemoration, works that seek to engage in a serious manner with the ethical questions sectarian violence engenders. For Madden, a feminine practice of commemoration is grounded in individual experience and seeks to recognize and honor the “particularity” of sectarian violence. Her narratives of the Troubles are committed to what Elmer Kennedy-Andrews calls the “‘world elsewhere’ made possible by language” and embodied in narratives that resist “orthodoxy and ideology,” two charges that have been leveled at her first novel, *Hidden Symptoms*, by critics who neglect to notice the deeply ethical debates in which

characters such as Theresa and Francis are absorbed (Kennedy-Andrews 7). Unlike the Troubles thriller, Madden's novels engage with the Troubles in order both to show the gaps and fissures that such violence leaves in its wake and to seek out new means of commemoration in Northern Ireland; her novels consistently exhibit the desire to write a narrative that can imagine a way out of violence, and it is only by reading her three novels in which the Troubles figure—*Hidden Symptoms*, *One by One in the Darkness*, and *Molly Fox's Birthday* (2008)—that we can fully understand Madden's goals and identify the gaps in which she has continually found "something to write" (Cliff 6).

"Remember me"

In both *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness*, Madden constructs characters for whom it is the horror of everyday objects and details that most powerfully connect them to their past and to the violence of the Troubles, forcing figures such as Theresa, Robert, and the Quinn sisters to face their memories of violence. As such, the novels seek to create commemorative practices focused on domestic items, tasks, and the visceral reality of the human body, rejecting overarching narratives of sacrifice, martyrdom, or mythic heroism.⁵ Madden's most explicit description of commemoration occurs in her most recent novel, *Molly Fox's Birthday*, in which an art historian, Andrew Forde, narrates a television documentary entitled *Remember Me: The Art of the Memorial*. This documentary provides Madden's most direct expression of the debate that informs her earlier novels, and therefore usefully demonstrates what is at stake in both *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness*. The unnamed narrator of *Molly Fox's Birthday* describes the documentary to the reader as it unfolds on her television.

For her, Andrew's documentary reveals something of his own response to memorials in the aftermath of his brother's death in Belfast; for Madden's readers, the documentary serves another purpose, neatly and succinctly tracing the recent evolution in critical discourses on memory and commemoration. The documentary opens with "a flowing sequence of images, stained glass, paintings and cathedral facades," but when the program begins, these scenes are replaced by the image of the Menin Gate:

The camera pulled back ... and then panned over the lists and lists of the war dead. "What do we intend," [Andrew] asked in a voice-over, "when we memorialise? Is it simply to do honour, and if so to what? To the person or to our memory of the person? Is it that we want someone not to be forgotten? And is that genuinely possible? Is not our wish to, quite literally, set in stone, our thoughts and feelings, our memories and our idea of someone who is now dead – is not that wish in its very essence a futile one?" (Madden, *Molly Fox's Birthday* 160)

The questions Andrew asks are those whose answers are sought in a multitude of studies conducted in recent decades by art historians, historians, literary critics, and theologians.⁶ While Andrew's questions immediately place the reader in the midst of a highly theorized debate, it is the memorial itself, the Menin Gate in front of which he stands, that holds the key to understanding what Madden seeks to achieve as the scene progresses.

The Menin Gate stands in reality and in *Molly Fox's Birthday* as a symbol of the standards for commemorating the dead that came into being following the devastation of the First World War. The Gate is one of many memorials built in the wake of the War to

focus on the *names* of the war dead. In “Memory and Naming in the Great War,” Thomas W. Laqueur notes that the First World War marked the first major sea change in commemorative practices, with names becoming central to the memorializing of the dead. Laqueur reveals that, aside from nobility, Shakespeare’s Henry V’s line, “‘None else of name,’ ... largely sufficed to efface the overwhelming majority of dead soldiers from public memory in ancient times, when battlefield stelae stood watch over their collective ashes, until the fall and early winter of 1914, when all of this changed” (Laqueur 150).⁷ The change to which Laqueur refers is, of course, the impetus to preserve the names of each individual soldier killed in the Great War. He furthermore points out that we know the names, ranks, and even time of death of the first and last soldiers killed in the First World War, yet they are buried “within twelve miles of the site of the Battle of Malplaquet, where in 1709 the duke of Marlborough lost twenty thousand men. We do not know, or at least there is not commemorated at the battlefield, the name of a single one of them” (150). What Laqueur’s work makes abundantly clear is that, until the First World War, the preservation *by the state* through *public* commemoration of individual war dead is almost unheard of, either in memorials or state ceremonies.

It is in the context of the changing relationship between the living and the dead that contemporary viewers must seek to understand the significance of Menin Gate. Sir Reginald Blomfield, the designer of the monument, described the new First World War cemeteries as “memorial[s] of those lost in the war such as [had] never been dreamt of before” (qtd. in Laqueur 152). One of the main design challenges in creating the “major monuments of the western front,” including Menin, was “to find room for the plethora of names” each was to have inscribed upon its walls (154). Menin was at first to bear

40,000; during construction that number was increased to 58,600, but in the end only 54,896 would fit, and so the remaining names were displaced to other memorials (154). The war cemeteries of the First World War were a “genuinely new” phenomenon, as were the monuments built in their midst. Menin Gate, then, is a powerful symbol and marker of the way in which human remembrance changed between 1914 and 1918.

As the opening image of Andrew’s documentary, Menin Gate serves an additional purpose, grounding what follows within a specific theoretical debate and set of cultural practices. In his fictional documentary, Andrew then moves on to explore “the difference between public and private memorialising,” moving “from the Menin Gate to a huge cemetery from the First World War, inspecting individual graves as people tended to them, placing flowers and flags” (Madden, *Molly Fox’s Birthday* 160). The individual graves and large-scale structures emblazoned with row upon row of names stand in stark contrast to the documentary’s next image, “the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Westminster Abbey” (160). Yet the two very different memorials—one defined by names and the other by their lack—serve a shared purpose. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson notes that the “tombs of Unknown Soldiers,” while “void ... of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, ... are nonetheless saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings” (9, author’s italics). These tombs, like the Menin Gate, are inextricably tied to an official memory of history that first-and-foremost serves the nation by helping it to define itself in the wake of war. It is precisely their public nature—the monuments’ participation in subsuming the individual into national discourse—that makes this form of commemoration problematic for Madden’s characters; in response, they seek to find new ways to commemorate the individuality of Troubles victims and their families.

Therefore, in contrast to the documentary's initial images of official forms of commemoration, the next frames reveal Madden's belief that another important change has taken place in late twentieth and early twenty-first century conceptualizations of remembrance and commemoration. Against the image of names upon stone and vast, regimented memorials to the battle dead, Madden sets the image of the AIDS quilt:

He used an exhibition of quilts commemorating people who had died of AIDS to ... show how the nature of memorials had to change ... Quilting had always been considered a folk tradition rather than an art form. It was an area of female activity, unlike stone cutting or wood carving, the products of which were more enduring and therefore had always been seen as more suitable for memorials. 'For the one thing we always wanted to believe about such constructions – tombs, statues, monuments – was that they were built to last. Unlike the things they represented, they would *endure*.' Cue to weathered headless angels in a Victorian cemetery, full of broken statuary. While the AIDS quilts were undoubtedly a continuation of a certain tradition, they also indicated a radical break with the past, 'a new kind of memorial for a new idea of the self.' (Madden, *Molly Fox's Birthday* 161-162)

What is most significant about this passage is the fact that Madden has Andrew move from Menin, an official, military, and male site of commemoration to the mutable, domestic, and female site of the AIDS quilt. Such a memorial defies traditional ideas of monuments and of commemoration. Yet the quilt is imbued with as much ceremony and as much attention to individual names as the more traditional monuments whose practices

it revises. By moving to this domestic, feminine object of commemoration, Madden returns to territory tread in both *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness*. The documentary in *Molly Fox's Birthday* represents a distillation of Madden's attempts to understand and revise the public commemoration of individual victims; as such, understanding what takes place in Andrew's documentary helps readers to understand what is at stake in Madden's earlier novels. By employing Menin Gate and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier to deftly summarize and weave into her text an entire critical discourse on commemoration, Madden crafts in her fiction a new theory of the memorial, one she has been building towards since her first novel, *Hidden Symptoms*, was published in 1986.

History without witness in *Hidden Symptoms*

Critics of Madden's first novel, *Hidden Symptoms*, often oversimplify its protagonist, Theresa, and fail to recognize that the paralysis that defines her is not due to hatred or bigotry but is instead due to a refusal to be inscribed into existing definitions of what it means to bear witness to and commemorate the Troubles victims. They argue that the novel suffers because "the hidden symptoms the title refers to, the character's personal condition and the hatred towards the other community, persist in being the foremost factor of the Northern Irish people's suffering and of the city's memory" (Benito de la Iglesia 47). Tamara Benito de la Iglesia's article, "Born Into the Troubles: Deirdre Madden's *Hidden Symptoms*," is representative of a number of responses from critics who claim that Madden reifies sectarian divisions and expresses an overall belief in the idea that violence has "irredeemably [permeated]" Belfast and Northern Ireland

(40). For these critics, Madden's characters are "immobilized" and serve only to expose "the impasse of life in the Troubles" (St. Peter 118). However, their readings miss the central fact that Theresa's paralysis serves a distinct purpose within *Hidden Symptoms*, allowing Madden to explore the ramifications of sectarian violence for those who are still living but who are equally victims of the Troubles. Theresa is Madden's depiction of what happens when no alternatives to public, official narratives of history are available: Theresa bifurcates herself from her surroundings and is unable to see any place for her own memories in existing forms of commemoration. This, rather than any inherent bigotry or hatred, is the source of her paralysis, and it is this that Madden seeks to impress upon her readers.

The opening scene of *Hidden Symptoms* encapsulates a central theme, not only of this novel, but also of much of Madden's oeuvre. *Hidden Symptoms* begins with the memory of a brief moment in Theresa's childhood when "she thought that the saddest thing she had ever seen was a Bavarian barometer with a little weather man and a little weather woman" (Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* 9). Her sadness stems from the simple fact that "always when Hans was out Heidi was in and vice versa: never together, always alone, so near, so far, so lonely" (9). Thus, "one wet day, in pure compassion, she had tried to winkle the little lady out of her niche by means of a hooked finger, so that she could join the little man in his lonely vigil, but with a loud crack the mechanism broke, and the barometer was later thrown away" (9). In this moment of "pure compassion," Theresa attempts to give the little Hans and Heidi something that she will find herself unable to achieve in her adult life: connection, rather than the loneliness and solitude that she suffers from after her brother's murder. The small, domestic object with which

Madden opens her first novel serves as a premonition of the effects of violence on Theresa and, more broadly, on Belfast as a whole. In fact, the hidden symptoms to which the novel's title alludes encompass, amongst other things, the veneer of normal human relations that hides an inability to establish meaningful, ethical connections between individuals. It is this lack that is, for Madden, the origin and prolonging cause of the city's illness.

The loneliness Theresa experiences also serves to introduce Madden's abiding focus on the "little peripheral pains" that lend credibility to individual experience (Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* 10). Theresa notes that while she later pokes fun at herself for the pain she feels at seeing "tins of soup for one," still, "there had been some truth, undeniable truth" in her discomfort, because "when something happened which was truly dreadful it was the little peripheral pains which made the central agony so inescapable and so intense" (10). Madden returns to this idea again and again—the idea that trauma can only be truly felt and experienced through small, domestic objects and everyday pains—because it is the focus on "little" things that allows her to reveal a broader truth about the human experience of loss. The empathy Theresa that experienced as a child is the origin of an ability to connect to others that she will lose after Francis's death. Here, the reader sees that for Madden, it is via the connection to others through daily experiences that meaning is established and communicated.

For Theresa, however, this broad truth comes to offer little consolation. She has walled herself off, her previously empathetic nature replaced by a rigid self-preservation; when the present narration of *Hidden Symptoms* begins she is divided from her surroundings, such that by this time, "only on things literary [will] she pass judgment

with any degree of assurance” (Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* 11). Theresa’s focus on literature is a vehicle for Madden’s examination of contemporary Belfast, and so in the literary realm, at least, Theresa’s opinions are quick and concrete. When questioned about an article she is reading, she says unhesitatingly that it is “trash” (11). Theresa objects to the author’s view that “Belfast, bombed, blitzed, beaten and bankrupt though it may be, is undergoing some sort of literary renaissance, that it is becoming a type of cultural *omphalos*” (11-12). The idea of home as an *omphalos* of sorts for a writer is one eloquently explored by Heaney in his essay “Mossbawn.”⁸ There, in a passage entitled “*Omphalos*,” Heaney explores the significance of the term: “I would begin with the Greek word, *omphalos*, meaning the navel, and hence the stone that marked the center of the world, and repeat it, *omphalos, omphalos, omphalos*, until its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside our back door” (Heaney, “Mossbawn” 3). For Heaney, the *omphalos* is a “first place,” a place out of which the world widens to encompass not only the origin of one’s childhood but also the comprehension of the adult (3). This place, then, acts as center and stake for the poet’s imagination, which returns again and again to Mossbawn, to the yard pump, and to “the foundation of the *omphalos* itself” (6).

Belfast cannot be for Theresa the corollary of Heaney’s Mossbawn because the city is permanently marked by the violence of her brother’s death. Thus, Heaney’s essay, first broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in 1978, describes a reality and a relationship to one’s childhood surroundings utterly at odds with Theresa’s view of Belfast. For her, the idea of Belfast as a new “cultural *omphalos*,” a rival for the Dublin of the Irish Literary Renaissance, is nothing more than “a nonsense” (Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* 12). Instead

Theresa, as a person for whom the majority of life has taken place in the midst of the Troubles, sees in Belfast a city dominated by sickness and ugliness:

West Belfast looked bleak from the bus window. Had it been a city abroad, in France, say, or Germany, she would have been frightened ... but she could cope with Belfast, because she had watched it sink since her childhood from “normality” to its present state. She even found this new Belfast more acceptable than the city of her earliest memories, for the normality had always been forced, a prosperous façade over discrimination and injustice. (13-14)⁹

For Theresa, “Ulster before 1969 had been sick but with hidden symptoms,” an “articulate man in a dark, neat suit whose conversation charms and entertains; and whose insanity is apparent only when he says calmly, incidentally, that he will club his children to death and eat their entrails with a golden fork because God has told him to do so, and then offers you more tea” (14). But now, “Belfast [is] ... like a madman who tears his flesh, puts straw in his hair and screams gibberish” (14). Theresa’s equation of Belfast with its dual mad-men, one dominating pre-1969 history, the other the post-1969 present, reveals that she relates to it as she would to a living person. She views her relationship to the city as a relationship with an individual whose moods and actions must be evaluated and understood; yet that relationship is extremely fraught and, like the little weather-man and weather-woman, broken.

Still, in *Hidden Symptoms*, Belfast is not simply “a site of unreason and Gothic horror” (Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* 146). Rather, the slippages and gaps the reader experiences when trying to understand Teresa’s Belfast are the novel’s most significant

narrative element: through them, the reader sees Belfast as Teresa sees it. That is, he or she sees a city irrevocably marked by the fact of Theresa's twin's murder. While she relates to the city as if it were an individual, one whom she holds partially responsible for Francis's death, she is wholly unable to express this relationship to those around her. Although she uses the metaphor of Belfast as a madman to explain the city to herself, she cannot convey this same sense to others, cannot bear witness to and thus overcome the traumatic nature of her experience.

The reasoning behind Theresa's choice becomes clearer when we examine what is at stake for her in the remembrance of Francis's death. Shoshanna Felman, writing in her book, *Testimony*, about Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, explains that:

To bear witness is to take responsibility for truth...To testify...before the court of history and of the future; to testify, likewise, before an audience of readers or spectators ... Memory is conjured here essentially in order to *address* another, to impress upon a listener, to *appeal* to a community. To testify is always, metaphorically, to take the witness stand...To testify is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative to others: to *take responsibility*...for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general...validity and consequences. (204)¹⁰

Witnessing is itself, then, a narrative form of commemoration. To speak of Francis's death is to create history, to attempt to create truth. Yet the normal modes for speaking of and understanding the deaths of Troubles victims do not fit Theresa's truth. Her mother clings to the idea that "our Francis was a martyr, wasn't he?" (Madden, *Hidden*

Symptoms 43). This term, “martyr,” enables her to understand and commemorate his death in nationalist, politicized terms. Theresa hesitates to agree. She replies, “but he had no choice, had he? ... I mean, martyrs usually have a choice ... They just killed Francis because of his religion, he had no choice” (43). Theresa’s mother is disturbed by this line of reasoning, which would leave her without the comfort of a familiar means for commemorating and comprehending her son’s death, and so Theresa acquiesces. She is unable to defend her own truth, that Francis “had no choice.” As a result, instead of speaking out she comes to mutely revile the attention paid to her and to her mother by those who know the circumstances of Francis’s death. She refuses to propagate the story of her brother’s martyrdom because it eclipses his individual experience of violence, incorporating it into a nationalist dialogue in which all victims of sectarian violence are remembered as martyrs to a cause; this narrative is, for Theresa, a failure of ethical remembrance that denies both the circumstances of his death and her experience of grief.

Theresa’s refusal to bear witness is first symbolized by the insurmountable breach between her mind and her experience of her own corporeality. Early in the novel, she dreams of the school she and Francis attended as children:

she had been puzzled, for she had dreamt of doors and windows in places which she sensed were not quite right ... Everything was confused ... And never again could she ask Francis for confirmation or clarification, because Francis was dead. She was alone now, and at the mercy of her own memory and imagination. (Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* 32-33)

The recognition of her solitude sparks a moment of spontaneous, uncontrollable grief: “while the body cried (the eyes wept, the mouth wailed and the fists tried to wipe away

the tears), her mind seemed independent of this spontaneous grief” (33). Theresa is unable to find any connection that will allow her to fully inhabit her own body, and without this foundational tie, she cannot connect to others as themselves embodied individuals whose shared humanity demands ethical treatment. The trauma of Francis’s death leaves her fragmented, both her memory and her relationship to her body in question; she cannot assent to Francis’s martyrdom but is seemingly left with no alternative means of commemoration. Instead, “whenever she tried to define for herself her own feelings, she kept coming up again and again with the same images, a wall, a pit, a hole. When Francis died, she felt she had fallen into a deep, dark pit, with cold smooth sides, out of which it was impossible to climb” (49). In this moment, Theresa is unable to envision the type of memorial Cate will describe in *One by One in the Darkness*, a “domesticated Vietnam wall,” and thus she cannot transform the agony of Francis’s death into a practice of remembrance free of the trammels of martyrdom or mythic heroism (Higgins 147).

Levinas and the face-to-face call to ethics

Theresa’s inability to testify leaves her unable to bear witness to the truth of her brother’s death, but it also—and as significant to our understanding of what Madden seeks to impart—leaves her unable to form connections with those she meets after his murder. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas argues that “the epiphany [of the] face [determines] a relationship different from that which characterizes all our sensible experiences” (187).¹¹ That is to say, “for Levinas, the ethical imperative issues from the human other, and exceeds all knowledge” (Harpham 56). In *Humanism of the Other*,

Levinas expands on this central truth by stating that the Other “is neither a cultural signification nor a simple given. He is, primordially, *sense* ... only through him can a phenomenon such as signification introduce itself ... into being” (30).¹² The face-to-face, or gaze-to-gaze, encounter instantiates an ethical obligation that compels acknowledgement of another’s individual, inviolable existence. Yet it is that obligation Theresa cannot acknowledge because to do so for one person would, for her, require that she do so for all, including Francis’s unknown murderer. Theresa finds that her brother’s death has left her incapable of “conceiv[ing] of Francis’s killer as an individual...but only as a great darkness which was hidden in the hearts of everyone she met” (Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* 44). Thus, “every face was a mask, behind which Francis’s killer might be hiding... From that day on, Belfast was poisoned for her” (44). Her belief in this “great darkness” strips her of the ability to make an ethical connection with any person she subsequently meets. In fact, when Kathy’s boyfriend Robert looks at her, he is “taken aback by the large, brown eyes, which had a pronounced cast, so that even while she looked at him she seemed to be looking elsewhere” (12). Her diverted gaze serves as a symbolic marker of her trauma. She is both literally and figuratively unable to look straight at another, refusing to acknowledge the ethical obligation such a moment would require of her.

Through Theresa, Madden introduces the idea that Belfast still suffers from hidden symptoms, namely its inhabitants’ inability to form ethical ties to one another. Their failed connections lead to a concomitant failure of witnessing and of remembrance. While on the surface, Madden’s characters appear to be normal individuals, in reality they are not embodied in Levinas’s terms, because they cannot connect to a vulnerability

that would allow them to understand the pain of others. In Levinas's "ethical metaphysics," the supreme belief and defining characteristic of existence is "*the superlative moral superiority of the other person*" (Levinas, *Humanism of the Other* xxvi, author's italics). The other presents himself or herself as a face, but more than this, as an invitation to speech. "Face and discourse are tied," Levinas writes; "the face speaks. It speaks, it is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse ... it is discourse and, more exactly, response or responsibility which is [the] authentic relationship [with the Other]" (Levinas, *Ethics & Infinity* 87-88). For such a discourse to occur, each individual must face another's discrete experience, embracing the vulnerability of such an encounter:

Levinas takes the key to embodiment to lie in its vulnerability, a vulnerability that opens the human to the suffering of others. 'The humanity of man, subjectivity, is a responsibility for others, an extreme vulnerability.' One is moved to alleviate the pain of others because as an embodied being, the self ... is happy through them, and is thereby also able to appreciate viscerally the pain of ... others. (*Humanism* xxxiii)

This is precisely what Theresa is not capable of embracing. Therefore, the ethical event fails; the moment of connection, of the face-to-face encounter with the Other and the discourse and subsequent vulnerability it entails are rejected, and meaning, signification, cannot be produced.

The reader sees the failure to form ethical ties most clearly, not in Theresa, but in Robert, through whom Madden shows the difference between Theresa's paralysis and Robert's apathy. He, like Theresa, refuses the ethical connection that is a prerequisite for

moving out of Theresa's "deep, dark pit" of emotion towards new forms of remembrance and commemoration. Robert lies awake next to his girlfriend Kathy, trying to understand "what Theresa had been getting at when she spoke of subjectivity," but he "[can] think only of evil and violence":

Every day he could take huge mysterious lumps of evil into his consciousness and the only worrying result was that he did not worry. That very day he had been upstairs in a bus which had been overtaken by a lorry carrying meat from the knacker's yard. For well over two miles he had looked down into the tipper, which was full of skinned limbs: long, bloody jawbones; jointed, whip-like tails. It had been a horrendous sight, but he had not averted his eyes ... he had gazed unflinchingly down into it. This was how things were.... He had accepted that lorry. He had accepted too much.... He remembered television news reports, where the casual camera showed bits of human flesh hanging from barbed wire after a bombing.... And he could look at such things and be shocked and eat his tea and go out to the theatre and forget about it. He could cope when it did not involve him personally. Now he found himself wondering how he would feel if it was Kathy whose flesh was hanging from barbed wire in thin, irregular strips and shifting in the window like surreal party streamers.... He tried to tell himself it was only a ghoulish thought, but he knew that for so many people this sudden change was a reality ... and his own lack of empathy saddened him ... Now he hated himself for having visited his morbid thought of violent death upon this innocent person

beside him, for he had not really been thinking about her ... He was afraid that his own innocent body might be destroyed violently and quickly and he had been too cowardly even to imagine such a thing, visiting his fear upon Kathy instead. (29-31)¹³

Here, Madden extends the ethical obligation contained in the recognition of another's face to his or her entire body. The trauma of the violence enacted on bodies in the *Troubles* makes it imperative that individuals recognize the whole, embodied nature of the other as a living, breathing body capable of being violated, in order to resist such violation. Robert attempts to make this jump, using the sleeping body of his lover, yet is unable to connect her bodily form with any feeling of obligation or morality; instead he feels simply fear, and displaced fear at that. Cowardly, he imagines her body violently destroyed because he cannot bear to imagine his own thus, thereby visiting a mental violence upon her that denies the ethical connection both their relationship and status as fellow subjects should entail.¹⁴ While for Theresa it is the trauma of violence that prevents connection, for Robert, it is simply fear and apathy; neither figure, trapped as they are within themselves, is capable of moving forward towards a new means of remembrance, which, as Madden shows, must have its foundation in an ethical connection.

A final moment between Robert and Theresa in *Hidden Symptoms* emphasizes Madden's point. Robert shies away from physical contact with Theresa, worried that "if he were to touch her all that immense anger and grief would thrill through him like electricity and he would be brought down to suffer there with her" (Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* 139).¹⁵ So too, when a note from Kathy leads him to the newspaper article

describing Francis's death, he discovers "a small photograph of the dead man, who look[s] so like Theresa" that he "[shivers]" (132). At this moment, Theresa enters; after seeing what he is reading she leaves angrily, and Robert, rather than follow her, "[attempts] to avert his eyes from the photograph" (133). Not only is Robert unable to sustain a visual connection to Francis's twin, to the living woman who would then demand his empathy, he is likewise unable to continue looking at the image which so resembles her that it too makes a demand he is unwilling to answer.

Only one character within *Hidden Symptoms* is willing, and in fact desires, to embrace the ethical obligation inherent in those he meets. While Teresa and Robert are the focus of *Hidden Symptom*'s plot and reveal Madden's primary concerns, it is Francis who occupies the novel's symbolic and thematic center, even in his absence. Early in the novel the reader discovers the personal reasons for Teresa's fraught relationship to Belfast: "Only on two occasions had she been completely convinced of the reality of Francis's murderer, and she had found it overwhelming" (Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* 43). First, she realizes it would be impossible to roam the world and not find his killer somewhere "and his invisible existence seemed to contaminate the whole world" (44). The absence of an individual, of a person who can be held solely responsible for Francis's death, leads Teresa to see potential murderers throughout the city. Yet as the novel progresses, readers find there are additional sources of Theresa's visions that assist the reader in unraveling what it is Madden seeks to achieve through Theresa's and Francis's story.

As Madden reveals more about Francis via his sister's memories of him, the reader learns that Theresa's most significant memories are those of a shared visit to Italy.

There, the twins engage in a discussion about God and religious belief. Francis tells her, “I see God in everything, but God also sees everything in me. There are eyes everywhere...but worst of all are the eyes of people. God looks straight out at me through the eye of every human being, asking me to look straight back at Him. But I know that I can’t because I’m not good enough” (Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* 53). To Theresa this sounds “terrible,” and she “can imagine few things worse”; but for Francis, the “infinitely worse” option is “not being looked at at all” (53). He asks Theresa to think of “all the people who ever were, who are and who will be, and then think that you are just one amongst them all, and that no one in particular is looking at you. No matter how good family and friends are, they can’t look you absolutely in the eye always and forever: it’s never perfect, never total” (54). Their conversation is vital to an understanding of what Madden seeks to convey in this early novel, as well as the novel’s significance in light of her later works. From Francis, Theresa learns the true significance inherent in looking at another: to do so, Francis teaches her, is also to approach God.

The “best and most dreadful truth” Francis understands is one embedded at the center of the philosophical writings of Levinas (Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* 54). In *Ethics and Infinity*, Levinas explains that the epiphany of the face is, as Francis describes, a link to God. “I am not afraid of the word God,” Levinas writes, “which appears quite often in my essays. To my mind the Infinite comes in the signifyingness of the face. The face *signifies* the Infinite” (105). Here, Levinas provides his answer to Geoffrey Harpham’s question: “Where, exactly, does an ‘ethical’ obligation come from—from the face of the other, human nature, ... our nature as rational beings, ... prevailing community standards, our duty as God’s creatures? Does it come from the inside or the outside?” (Harpham 27).

The answer is that the ethical obligation comes from the other, in whose face we see his or her ethical demand, but in which we also see the “trace” of God. It is Levinas’s trace of the infinite, then, that Francis identifies in all who look upon him, and thus it is he who is most able to identify the ethical obligation inherent in their look.¹⁶ Francis embodies the true humanist subject, able to see in others only the ethical demand, the connection to or trace of God, that Levinas describes in his philosophical writings. While he seeks to impart this knowledge to his sister, after his murder the gaze of the other and the ethical connection it embodies become for Teresa a painful experience of disconnect, rather than a moment of communion.

Critical Missteps

Throughout *Hidden Symptoms* Teresa remains unable to accept Levinas’s humanistic worldview; for her, Francis’s violent death represents an annihilation that is, as Levinas points out, the only way to fully deny or erase the ethical obligation of the other.¹⁷ That someone could fail to recognize Francis as a subject and could fail to honor the ethical obligation he embodies, when Francis himself so fully believed in and understood the meaning of being “seen,” destroys her faith in the individual. Madden represents this through Teresa’s loss of faith in Catholicism and her need to learn again to love God, and also through her own inability to “testify” to the story of her brother’s death. The trauma of Francis’s death paralyzes Theresa. She cannot move forward and embrace the search for new ways to commemorate her brother’s memory because to do so would require her to become vulnerable. Instead, Theresa is Madden’s image of what happens when individuals cannot see a way out of their own trauma and thus cannot see a

way to tell their stories without participating in making Troubles victims part of an official, and in Francis's case, nationalist narrative. The full implication of Theresa's paralysis is that it keeps her from sharing with others new means for paying tribute to the victims of sectarian violence.

Yet it is Madden's focus on the implications of Teresa's trauma that many critics have overlooked in their negative critiques of the novel. What is most problematic about the majority of the small number of critical works that engage with *Hidden Symptoms* is that they do not apprehend the significance of Teresa's failure to bear witness. Instead, critics read the book within the "essentialist," flawed, "liberal humanist" framework Eve Patten sets out for much of Northern Irish fiction. Benito de la Iglesia writes that Madden's characters, "whether they show their anger ... or pretend to be impartial and bored with the whole situation ... are ... examples of paralysed individuals in the middle of a society full of bigotry and hatred. They might theoretically defend their view but, in practice, they are not really committed to it" (46). She misreads Teresa's trauma as hatred, conflating her inability to truly look at someone, to ethically engage another in the wake of Francis's murder, with Robert's apathy. Teresa suffers from a paralysis of witnessing, not one of claustrophobia or one of essentialist loyalty to an inescapable sectarian divide.

Benito de la Iglesia is correct in stating that the personal, the political, and the religious intermingle in Madden's Belfast, as they do and have done for decades in the literal city itself; still, she pushes her analysis a step too far in arguing that Madden's focus is on the inescapability of loyalty. It is a fallacy to assume that "character's personal condition[s] and ... hatred towards the other community ... persist in being the

foremost factor of the Northern Irish people's suffering and of the city's memory" in *Hidden Symptoms* (Benito de la Iglesia 47). To see fully the error of this statement, one need only look again at Theresa's memories of Francis. Her recollection of their trip to Italy concludes in Lugano, where the two stop on their return to Belfast. Their journey, and Theresa's memory of it, ends with a final image of

a little Lugano fountain, the basin of which had been painted sky blue.

People had dropped coins into the water for wishes and good luck, and the blue paint was marked with brown or green rings where the coins had lain and corroded. A stream of bright, fresh water spurting to the sky through a thin bronze pipe. (Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* 87)

Thinking back to this image, Theresa again tries to "visualize the distant Heaven where Francis [is]," but "her imagination balk[s] and she [can] think only: perhaps a well of light; perhaps a stream of bright water ascending to the sun, spurting upwards and away from a small, blue, painted, tainted bowl" (87).

What Madden shows via this ordinary, domestic object is that Francis cannot be properly remembered on a grand scale; historical practices of commemoration fail, or they conflate Francis with an image of martyrdom and hero-worship that Theresa struggles against. Instead, through Theresa, Madden gestures at a more domestic, more individualized idea of commemoration, setting the image of a small, blue fountain against the more standard notions of the memorial embodied in a site such as the Menin Gate. The Lugano fountain is marked by the passage of individuals who have dropped coins into its basin, and as its water circulates it "[catches] and warp[s] the sunlight" (87). This memorial is dynamic and mutable, gesturing towards what reviewer Patricia Craig sees as

the most redeeming aspect of Madden's novels: "What ... makes her novels likeable, despite their refusal of qualities such as charm, high spirits, robustness, and aplomb, is a formidable descriptive gift which is harnessed to the small-scale and quotidian ... The characteristic Madden note is quiet and fastidious" (Craig 26). Madden brings the same sense of quiet and fastidiousness to her exploration of what it means to remember the dead and how those individuals should be commemorated. In *Hidden Symptoms*, her first attempt at creating a narrative that engages with such questions, she gives the readers Theresa; although Theresa cannot see a clear way out of her own pain, her vision of the Lugano fountain does offer a small consolation. It is by no means wholly optimistic, nor does it redeem Theresa from her paralysis; yet this image provides readers with a touchstone to return to when contemplating what is at stake both in Madden's first novel and in her fifth, *One by One in the Darkness*.

"A solid stone house where the silence was uncanny"

In *One by One in the Darkness*, Madden revisits the territory of trauma in order to further parse the boundaries of memory and remembrance.¹⁸ Madden's 1996 novel was written "between the summer of 1993 and July 1995," in the years surrounding the 1994 Ceasefire agreement (Harte and Parker 250n). Yet the novel itself is set shortly before the start of the ceasefire and intercut with the Quinn sisters'—Helen's, Cate's,¹⁹ and Sally's—memories of their childhood in the rural Northern Ireland of the 1960s and 1970s.²⁰ Liam Harte and Michael Parker point out that the novel's opening "sets the reader down in a stark, austere location, which is both a specific place and a metaphor, perhaps, of the nation as a whole. Though the places appears unprepossessing, it is

invested with love ... and an eeriness born of absence” (239). Specifically, that “eeriness” is what Madden calls a silence that is “uncanny” (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 1). The underlying reason for the uncanny nature of the silence in the Quinn’s “solid stone house” is not immediately clear (1). However, within the first chapter the reader receives further hints and intimations of the shift that has taken place between the sisters’ childhood and the novel’s present day. Returning home from London, Cate sits down to eat, thinking that “she always loved the first meal with her family when she came home ... It reminded her of the visceral, uncomprehending emotional closeness that had bound them together over dinners of baked beans and fish fingers eaten at the same table when they were children” (8). Cate locates her connection to her family deep within her being, in the “visceral,” bodily ties between them, rather than in a more reasoned, intellectual connection.

Cate relates to her own body in the same manner, returning to and emphasizing Madden’s sense that trauma and traumatic memory inhabit the body as a whole and often find expression via an experienced disconnect between one’s self and one’s body. At the airport on her way back to Belfast and from there to the Northern Irish countryside, she stops in the bathroom to check her appearance in the mirror:

Usually, looking at herself in the mirror comforted Cate. A quick glance would be enough ... But lately that trick had been failing to restore her confidence, and it failed today. So she put her finger up to her brow to touch a tiny, invisible scar at her hairline. ... Touching the scar quickly, so that no one ever realised she was doing it, restored a sense of reality, a

sense of who she was in a way that looking at her own reflection could not. (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 2)

For Cate, unlike Theresa, the connection to her body is an “originary emblem,” a “mark of authenticity” and “her literal and metaphorical touchstone,” capable of returning her to reality and restoring her sense of self (Harte and Parker 239). That self is one that is inextricably linked to the family with whom she sits down to eat upon her return to Northern Ireland. Yet the reader immediately recognizes that something has changed from their early childhood meals, something which has affected both their family gatherings and Cate’s need to turn to a literal, personal scar—rather than her public image—for reassurance:

...as they sat eating salmon on this Saturday afternoon, Cate was aware of the other thing that bound them to each other and that hadn’t been there in childhood ... Cate felt that just by looking at them, people might have guessed that something was wrong ... and that fear was like a wire which connected them with each other and isolated them from everyone else.
(Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 9)

The “thing” Cate describes is, as the reader might suspect, the murder of their father Charlie Quinn. The event itself is not described until the final pages of the book but it is an absence, both literal and figurative, around which the entire narrative is shaped. It is also an absence that Cate imagines as a bodily mark that can be easily read by all.

The early scene in the Quinn’s kitchen foreshadows a pivotal scene later in the novel in which Sally describes being in Italy and hearing about a car bomb in Belfast; it is this scene that links *One by One in the Darkness* to its predecessor, *Hidden Symptoms*,

and reveals Madden's purpose to her readers. Sally tells Cate, "I wanted to be there. I felt guilty for not being at home, not that it would have made the slightest bit of difference ... but it would have made a difference ... to me" (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 140). Cate replies, "Don't worry ... I know what you mean," and proceeds to think of "many such [similar] moments," though "one in particular ... [remains] vivid in her mind":

It had been an evening in winter, and she had been working in the kitchen, slicing up beef in thick strips to make a stir-fry. The news was on the radio, and she'd only been half-listening to it, until they started to report on a man who had been found shot in South Armagh the previous night. They were interviewing the local priest who had been called out to anoint the man's body where it lay, in a secluded lane. Cate stopped chopping and put the knife down, as she listened to the soft, hesitant voice describing the rain and wind of the dark night, the long wet grass in which the body lay ... and his soft voice, his sorrow, were compulsive and terrible. It entered Cate's mind like some gentle, awful thing from a dream, seeping from the radio into the bright, warm kitchen where she stood, looking now in revulsion at the cut, heaped meat on the bloodstained wooden board. She didn't know why, but she wanted then to be home. (140-141)

Cate's reaction is markedly different from Robert's reaction to seeing the meat lorry and connecting it to images on the news in *Hidden Symptoms*.²¹ For Cate, the news invades the domestic space of her home, and her reaction becomes a bodily one as she stares "in

revulsion” at the meat she was preparing. The scene demonstrates what Elmer Kennedy-Andrews observes in *(de)constructing the North*: “Madden’s interest is not in the act of violence itself but in the psychological effects of violence. More specifically, she is interested in the ways in which traumatised characters represent violence to themselves” (153). Madden’s focus on victims’ representations of violence marks her significant departure from the Troubles thriller, in which violence permeates life in Northern Ireland but is depicted with little attention to psychology or nuance. For Cate, the violence of Northern Ireland invades her London apartment, entering the domestic space of her kitchen and bringing with it an image of a literal, violently destroyed life that gains figurative representation in the meat on its “bloodstained wooden board” (141).

Like the meat lorry in *Hidden Symptoms*, the image forces Cate to think about the *bodies* of those killed in Northern Ireland. Again, Madden urges readers to recognize that it is not only the face of the other that instantiates an ethical obligation, but also his or her body. The scenes in Cate’s kitchen and Robert’s memory each create moments in which the two characters conflate what they are seeing with the bodies of victims of the Troubles. While Robert fails to bridge the gap between image and reality and fails to imagine a connection between himself and the violence, Cate immediately wants “to be home” (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 141). Her reaction confirms Levinas’s argument that “humanism, after all, is not merely the affirmation of the dignity of one person, of each individual alone; it is also an affirmation of the dignity of all humanity, the affirmation of an interhuman morality, community, and social justice” (Levinas *Humanism of the Other* xviii). For Cate, there is an obligation to bear witness to the

violence visited on the body of another that is inextricably linked to her own dignity and her own sense of self.

In this scene, Madden closes the gap between history and the individual. For Cate, “*bearing witness to the body*” means “demolish[ing] the deceptive image of history as an *abstraction* (as an ideological and/or statistical, administrative picture in which death becomes invisible)” (Felman 108n, 109n, author’s italics). Thus, “witnessing itself becomes...not a passive function, but an *act*” (Felman 109n). By placing her emphasis on the individual and on the particularity of “every unique horror,” Madden is able to speak to the need for a history of the Troubles that does not relegate violence to an atavistic and insurmountable belief in difference (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 181). She resists not only the voyeuristic or sensationalist relationship to violence seen in many Troubles novels but also the idea that such violence is an inextricable part of Northern Irish society. While her characters acknowledge that, in Britain especially, the violence in Northern Ireland is regarded as a fact of life, and “as conflicts go, it’s never been fashionable” because “it’s too localised,” they refuse to accept this casual dismissal of the violence that has invaded their lives (50). Others may truly believe that “there’s nothing to get gung-ho about in a body being found in a wet lane somewhere in, say, Tyrone on a cold, bad night,” but this is exactly the nonchalant relationship to violence that Madden resists (50). To her, and to her characters, there *is* something to get “gung-ho” about in a body, any body, which falls victim to violence. Thus, in Cate and Sally, readers find counter-images of Robert and Theresa. The Quinn sisters’ personal experience of violence has caused undeniable trauma, yet that trauma has also instilled in them a strong

empathy and belief in the ethical demands placed upon the individual by both the face-to-face encounter with another and also the very fact of his or her bodily existence.

Authentic Signs

Throughout *One by One in the Darkness*, Madden translates the embodied, ethical relationship between individuals, and between the living and their memories of the dead, into an exploration of new modes for commemorating the past. For instance, during their childhood the sisters accompany their father and grandmother on a trip to see a woman in Ardboe who can supposedly cure Sally's nosebleeds. On the way home, they stop at the Old Cross at Ardboe; while there, Helen realizes that "it [doesn't] matter that the [biblical] pictures [aren't] perfectly clear ... it [is] enough in itself that the cross [is] there; to think of it having stood there for all those hundreds of years amaze[s] her almost as much as it amaze[s] and delight[s] her father" (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 63). The cross creates a bridge to the past, an "odd combination of closeness and distance," that fascinates Charlie (63). Yet juxtaposed with this image, which strikes the reader as a fairly official one for the relationship between the present and the past, is the image of a tree on the opposite side of the graveyard. Charlie gives each of his daughters a penny, "to hammer into the tree ... From a distance it looked quite ordinary, perhaps a bit stunted, but when you got closer you could see that its trunk was almost more metal than wood, for people had hammered coins, pins and nails into it" (64). Each girl is told to make a wish as they place their token. While the tree is not as ostensibly or immediately related to history, as is the cross, it is a significant symbol within the structure of the novel. The tree serves as an unofficial, domestic monument, a figure

embedded with the wishes of a long line of individuals stretching back into a more immediate past than that of the Cross's existence, but the past nonetheless. The meaning of the site is different for each person who visits it, yet all have shared access to the tree as a symbol of power and of belief.

Furthermore, there is a sense of ordinariness, of communal practice and of pilgrimage, to the tree, and this is what Cate seeks to capture in the memorial to the Troubles victims she describes to Sally as adult in 1994. Her description returns the reader to the book's first line, "home was a huge sky" (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 1). Her ideal memorial seeks to capture something of the hugeness of that sky and the wildness of the surroundings alluded to in the novel's opening. In London, Cate thinks of herself "always not just noticing, but actually looking for things which had in them something of the intensity, the wildness she remembered" from her childhood (149). But, "best of all was the sky itself"; during her return home in the present day of the novel, she travels with Sally to visit her old primary school and finds herself gazing out the window at that sky, with its "watery lemon light splitting heavy, dark clouds," and attempts to define a way to commemorate the victims of the Troubles that can encompass and address a new form of remembrance (149).

The memorial Cate envisions is one that melds more traditional ideas of commemorative structures with a greater openness and connection to its surroundings:

'When all this is over,' she said to Sally, 'they'll probably want to make a memorial. I hope they do something original. They should build it around the sky.'

'What do you mean?'

‘I mean incorporate the sky into the design of it...whatever it is.’

Cate’s voice trailed away, and she continued to stare out of the window.

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. It would be a place which afforded dignity to memory, where you could bring your anger, as well as your grief. (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 149)

Cate’s memorial has not completely moved away from known forms for memorializing the dead; her three-walled room, with its lists of names, still reflects the early-twentieth-century focus on naming the dead. However, Cate simultaneously attempts to move away from the grandeur and pomp of First World War memorials such as the Menin Gate in order to achieve something lighter and freer, a memorial that allows the dignity of remembrance to be mixed with the more visceral human emotions of anger and grief. Cate’s vision reveals that “like any trauma, the Troubles can be dealt with if compartmentalised as a place which the individual can choose to visit or not. Throughout [*Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness*], Madden gives us variant versions not of the events but of the way in which these events are processed and presented” (Higgins 150). Madden’s interest is in an ethics of remembrance that does justice to the varied nature of what is remembered, rather than in the singular “truth” of what is preserved as history. Thus, throughout the novel, Cate focuses on light, on windows and openings, and on images of light breaking in through surrounding darkness; it is this

sense of escape, of growth, that she seeks to capture in her memorial in order to alter how individuals respond both to death and to the memorials that commemorate the dead.

Liam Harte and Michael Parker suggest that Cate's memorial, her "bright shrine," is "the antithesis of the 'solid stone house where the silence was uncanny,'" and is instead "an imaginative apprehension of purgation, a theatre of recuperation" (Harte and Parker 241). However, the memorial Cate has in mind actually seeks to capture the essence of Cate's childhood. When Cate returns to and visits the renovated kitchen in her Uncle Brian's and Aunt Lucy's home—the location of Charlie's murder—she finds it is "the difference that [is] the problem" (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 143). While the view from the home's window is the same, and the changes mean that "Cate [doesn't] imagine her father [laying] murdered on the floor," they also deny her access to the images from her childhood (143). "She had always thought of her childhood not principally in terms of time, but as a place to which she could always return. Now that was over. What was the word Lucy had used two years ago? 'Desecrated.' That was it. 'The place is desecrated'" (143). Yet this desecration is not solely due to her father's murder, but also to the renovations that strip the place of its signification both as the location of violence and of the pleasant memories of Cate's childhood. For her, remembrance is both bodily and spatial. Without the touchstone of Brian's and Lucy's kitchen, Cate is in some ways as divided from her past as she would be from herself without the familiar scar on her forehead to center her in moments of unease. Hence, Cate's idea for a Troubles memorial is also focused on space. In Emily Quinn's household the kitchen remains as Charlie knew it, such that a familiar space is preserved which is not the site of violence. This is what Cate seeks to achieve in her memorial: a

preserved space linked to, but not literally itself, a place of violence. Her memorial highlights the need for a place one can return to and in which one can bear witness in a way that cannot be achieved within the spaces in which violence has actually occurred.

However, her memorial is in other aspects still a rather traditional one, and it is actually Emily, the girls' mother, whom Madden uses to push her exploration of remembrance to its furthest point. Prior to Charlie's death, Emily is "fond of flowers and plants," but after he is killed her garden becomes "an obsession; the only thing in which she [can] become completely absorbed, often the only thing that [makes] any sense to her" (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 106). Madden goes on to write that Emily "made a garden of her husband's grave. She didn't know how to pray for him, so she cultivated roses on the earth that sheltered his body" (106). Doing so enables her "to bear time, because it hook[s] her into the circle of the seasons, and time would otherwise have been a horrible straight line, a straight, merciless journey at speed towards death" (106). Unlike this linear, "merciless" vision of time, Emily feels that her garden has allowed her to "[pull] Charlie back into the circle and back into her life, in a way which she wordlessly comprehended, and which offered her the nearest approximation she would ever have to comfort or consolation" (106).

Emily's solace comes from an understanding of time instilled in her by her father. He teaches her that time is akin to "the ocean, in that all things that had happened in the past were linked in an extraordinarily simple way. History was no more than the effect of one day following another ... spooling back from the present" (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 112-113). By cultivating the flowers on Charlie's grave, Emily keeps him linked into this cycle of days; her image of time is cyclical, symbolized by both the ocean

and a sense of time “spooling” backwards. In *Twentieth Century Fiction by Irish Women*, Heather Ingman notes that Emily’s garden “registers a protest, not only against political violence, but also against the demands of linear time, the symbolic order itself” (Ingman 165). Emily’s protest is, then, not just against death but also against a certain official understanding of history as a linear pattern of days, filled with cause and effect, moving forwards along an undeviating line. For her, a linear pattern of time means that, after Charlie’s death, he is wholly absent; in contrast, her garden “hooks” both herself and Charlie back into a vision of time from which he cannot be fully erased. Although the Quinn women have never renovated their kitchen, because “after he died ... they wanted it to remain as he had known it,” it is not this static image that best memorializes Charlie (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 21); rather, the garden Emily makes of his grave becomes Madden’s most fully realized new form of memorializing the dead in *One by One in the Darkness*.

Emily’s garden is successful both as a memorial that expresses the need for new forms of remembrance, and as a therapeutic expression of her grief, because it represents the nonlinear way in which trauma is experienced. Citing Cathy Caruth’s work on trauma, Geraldine Higgins writes that “in [her] work on the psychoanalytic aspects of trauma [Caruth] discusses its constitutively temporal aspect—the fact that it is ‘not a simple healable event, rather it is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly to be fully known ... it is not available to the consciousness until it imposes itself again repeatedly in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor’” (Higgins 155). Madden conveys the nonlinearity of traumatic experience via Emily’s garden, with its circular patterns that

mimic the non-linear structure of the novel itself; this structure also illuminates the truth that, for each of the women in the Quinn family, Charlie's death is both past and present.

The latter fact enables Madden to delay the revelation of the circumstances of Charlie's death until the final pages of the novel, such that Charlie's death haunts the reader, defining it as an incomprehensible, unknowable, yet constantly experienced traumatic event. Madden begins the scene with the recurring dream Helen had as a child, in which, "By the force of her imagination she would lift herself out of her bed, and pass through the roof ... Then she would soar ... The blackness of the universe was warm, soft as velvet, and studded with stars that twinkled" (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 179). Against this image is set the night of Charlie's death, into which Helen inserts herself as an observer. There, her recurring nightmare emphasizes the way in which Charlie's death is constantly experienced as at once past, present, and future:

Now when she lay longing for sleep, a different image unrolled inexorably in her mind, repeated constantly...

...she saw her father sitting at Lucy's kitchen table, drinking tea out of a blue mug. She could smell the smoke of his cigarette, even smell the familiar tweed of his jacket. He was talking through to Lucy, who was working out in the back scullery ... two men burst into the back scullery, and knocked her to the ground as they pushed past her; and then Helen's father saw them himself as they came into the kitchen, two men in parkas with the hoods pulled up, Halloween masks on their faces. He saw the guns, too, and he knew what they were going to do to him. ...

...in an abrupt reversal of the gentle descent of her childhood,
 Helen's vision swung violently away, and now she was aware of the cold
 light of dead stars; the graceless immensity of a dark universe. (181)²²

Eve Patten argues that images such as this one, of the individual suffering and “a grief [Helen] could scarcely bear,” work negatively to “obscure the exploration of community, identity, and motivation charted by a previous generation of writers” (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 181; Bell 132). However, this wholly misses the impetus behind Madden's focus on the individual.²³ Both the structure of *One by One in the Darkness* and the story it contains highlight the fact that the traumatic experience of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland requires new modes for commemoration. Thus, the novel seeks to offer the opposite of “consoling images,” presenting instead an exploration of trauma that aims to instill in readers a greater understanding of what is at stake in the telling of “each neighborly murder,” and therefore impress upon them the new forms of commemoration such events require and deserve. While Helen's nightmare closes the novel, it does not negate the significance of Emily's circular, spooling vision of time. Rather, Emily's garden is the closest Madden comes to the image in *Molly Fox's Birthday* of the AIDS quilt as a new, late twentieth or early twenty-first century mode of commemorating the dead.

However, many mistakenly read the darkness and trauma of the novel's close—ending as it does with Helen's nightmare remembrance of her father's death and the line “one by one in the darkness, the sisters slept”—as proof that “it would be a mistake to think Madden's *Darkness* offers some kind of solution or closure” (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 181; St. Peters 120). For these readers, *One by One in the Darkness*, like

Hidden Symptoms, ends, “despite brief moments of consolation, ... on a vision of utter bleakness” from which Madden’s characters, and, by extension, Northern Ireland, are offered no escape (Ingman 165). Yet the darkness in which the sisters sleep, “one by one,” has another antecedent in Cate’s memories of her childhood; there darkness is often a place of warmth and generation, the precursor to an awakening. In an early passage, Peter takes Helen and Cate to an island populated by nesting gulls:

Kate had never imagined how careful they would have to be... The gulls’ nests were just flat upon the ground, and there were so many of them you had to be careful where you walked. ... Some of the eggs had already hatched, but the fluffy brown chicks didn’t interest her as much as the dark wet stunned-looking ones that weren’t long enough out of the egg to have dried out and found their feet. Strangest of all were the eggs that were only partly hatched, so that when you leaned low over them you could see a tiny hole, a crack, and you knew that the bird was working away inside to free itself. Kate wondered what it would be like to be in an egg: shut up in a tiny space barely bigger than yourself, knowing nothing but that you had to tap and tap and tap until you broke into the light and fell out, uncoiling yourself. She imagined darkness and heat in the egg, and was so lost in this thought that when Helen touched her arm, she jumped. (Madden, *One by One in the Darkness* 19)

Cate focuses on the partly hatched chicks, “working away inside” their shells to free themselves from a darkness that is at once generative and confining.

By the novel's close, the reader recognizes that each member of the Quinn family is working to free herself (or himself) from the trauma of Charlie's death²⁴; while the darkness is not wholly the positive, warm darkness Helen dreamed of in her childhood, neither is it wholly the place of nightmare that she finds as an adult. Instead, Madden seeks to offer her readers and her characters a more tentative median ground, reminding readers of the multiplicity of meanings inherent in the remembrance of the past; thus, the "darkness" of Madden's final line encompasses both the nightmare of Helen's traumatic dream and the "heat" of a "tiny space barely bigger than yourself" out of which a reinvention, a new beginning, is in fact possible.

"But who after all are memorials for?"

In his introduction to Levinas's *Humanism of the Other*, Richard Cohen writes that "because of the scale of its inhumanity, the twentieth century, perhaps more than any other, provoked a particularly thorough and painstaking reexamination of the nature and worth of the human" (xvi). Madden's *Hidden Symptoms*, *One by One in the Darkness*, and *Molly Fox's Birthday* contribute to this reexamination by probing the questions raised by Andrew in the opening to his documentary, *Remember Me*. For Andrew, "the discrepancy . . . between the undeniable beauty of the memorial itself and the ugliness, the terrible violence of the deaths they record: acts of war, acts of the utmost inhumanity," has always been problematic (Madden, *Molly Fox's Birthday* 162). After his meditation on the meaning and beauty of the AIDS quilt, Andrew's documentary turns to the French memorial to the 200,000 people deported from France during the Second World War. "This is a profoundly moving place," he tells the viewer; "There is also something

terrible and desolate about it. It is not a place to which one would wish to return, but it is a place which stays in the mind and in the heart long after one has been here” (163).

The narrator expects the camera to move to another image. Instead, it focuses on Andrew’s face as he ponders the need for an even more extreme, more brutal memorial that will testify to the “affront[s] to humanity” it remembers (Madden, *Molly Fox’s Birthday* 163). Then, rather than end on this image, the camera moves again:

Now he was in a garden ... ‘But who after all are memorials for?’ Andrew asked as he walked slowly towards a bench and sat down. ‘Are they for the living or the dead? By their very beauty can they offer comfort to those who have suffered loss, those who are left behind? Surely the answer must be yes. Surely this is one of the important functions of a memorial, to redeem suffering through beauty.’

... The final shot found him walking through a cornfield, full of bright poppies. ‘I’m back where I started. The Menin Gate is a few kilometres west of here. That massive stone monument is a thing of its time. We live in a more vertiginous age, an age of doubt and reason. There’s something almost weightless about our world, I think, something fleeting and insubstantial that’s ill at ease with any pretense of certainty.’ (163-164)

In such a world, the remembrance and commemoration of the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland must be released from the constraints of traditional memorials. Madden’s novels argue instead for memorials and modes of remembrance that are grounded in a place to which individuals can bring “their anger and their grief,” places

that will also pay homage to the individual experience of the particularity of violence through its focus on small, domestic signs, rather than grand gestures.

Hidden Symptoms and *One by One in the Darkness* emphasize that, prior to such memorials, there must be the individual act of bearing witness to history. In Madden's novels, "Theresa and the Quinn sisters negotiate between the exigencies of loss and the demands of the living" (Higgins 158). What their negotiations reveal is that "testimonies are not monologues ... The witnesses are talking to *somebody*: to somebody they have been waiting for for a long time" (Felman 70-71). From Madden's characters, the reader learns that the ethical obligation instantiated in the face-to-face encounter with another human being, when it is recognized and honored, becomes "a way of encompassing conflict which allows the continuance of personal relationships against the hard and apparently inevitable fact of misunderstanding, mutually incompatible wishes, commitments, loyalties, interests and needs, a way of mending relationships and maintaining the self" (Stanley Cavel qtd. in Harpham 28). As a result, Madden's novels participate in a growing body of fiction that challenges not only established understandings of identity but also ask readers to contemplate how those identities are utilized and propagated by traditional modes of commemoration.

Against such traditional modes, Madden sets the domestic, authentic sign. In reading and seeking to understand Theresa's small blue fountain, Cate's "domesticated Vietnam wall," or Emily's flowers, Madden's readers are "drawn into the role of listener, of an '*addressable other*'" responsible for carrying forward her message (author's italics, Felman 68). Madden's literature seeks to "in effect *transform history* by bearing literary witness" (95). As readers, we are charged with the task of seeking to comprehend what

Heaney calls “each neighborly murder” and to translate that understanding into a cautious stewardship of remembrance. What takes place within Madden’s novels, from *Hidden Symptoms* to *One by One in the Darkness*, as the reader comes to understand upon arriving at *Molly Fox’s Birthday*, is a gradual building process in which characters either succeed or fail in bearing witness to their personal histories. In seeking to find an audience and transform the creation of commemorative practices, Madden’s characters discover the primary importance of the ethical relationship between individuals. This relationship, in its best form, governs and shapes individual relationships to both a personal past and a public history. As readers, we are meant to ask of ourselves, of our own memories and memorials, the questions that underlie each of Madden’s novels and that Andrew makes explicit in his documentary. At stake in our answers is the definition of a new, ethically charged mode of commemorating the past that can pay homage to “the horror of little details” and enable new, generative discussions of history and remembrance to emerge.

¹ For Patten, a perceived novelistic tendency to misrepresent the Troubles stems from two primary trends. The first is realism; he argues that, fiction suffers from a “representational onus” that has resulted in “the continued grip of a realist mode ... as the most appropriate means of national self-critique,” turning the Northern Irish novel into little more than “a personal auxiliary to public history” (Bell 131). Patten’s second parallel trend is “a novelistic obligation to offer a consensual (and usually apolitical) liberal humanist comment on the predicament. A series of slim novels set against the violence of the seventies and early eighties established a determinist formula which repeatedly located a well-meaning individual within a debilitating and ultimately damaging political context” (Bell 131).

² Including Ronan Bennett and reviewer Patricia Craig, who writes that Madden “purports to treat sectarian conflict in the North of Ireland, while cutting out history, politics, atavistic allegiances ... and indeed everything else ... Her approach to the terrorist element in Northern Irish life is the opposite of a thriller-writer’s: she takes no interest in the mechanics of plot-making, but only considers inherited hatred or bitterness in so far as it contributes to a kind of generalized malaise. So vague is she in this area, in

fact, that she fails to differentiate between separate kinds of terrorism. IRA, INLA, UFF, it is really all one as far as this author is concerned” (Craig 26).

³ Margalit goes on to clarify that not necessarily everyone we remember is someone we care for; “sometimes we remember people and events ... we hate” (30). What Margalit strives to make clear is that, “a conditional sense of memory is necessary for caring: If I both care for and remember Mira, then my remembering Mira is inherent in my caring for her. I cannot stop remembering Mira and yet continue to care for her” (30).

⁴ Thus far, however, very little critical attention has been paid to the specific achievements of the political fiction crafted by Irish women, although the idea that fiction is an area for making stories and rewriting histories has been well examined in recent decades. In her study *Changing Ireland*, Christine St. Peter writes that her focus is fiction “because it is particularly here that we discover elaborated narratives that refashion inherited histories, reimagine the past, and enable different futures. In other words, ... ‘making story’ can function to remake ‘reality’ in the human imagination and, consequently, in the material conditions of human life” (2).

⁵ As Geraldine Higgins notes, the novels themselves become “narrative structures in which to contain and interpret” such events, thereby “complicat[ing] both the location and locution of violence” (152).

⁶ See John R. Gillis’s *Commemorations*, Ian McBride’s *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, Jay Winter’s *Remembering War and Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Fran Brearton’s *The Great War in Irish Poetry*, Eric Caldicott’s and Ann Fuch’s *Cultural Memory*, Paul Connerton’s *How Society’s Remember*, Maurice Halbwachs’s *On Collective Memory*, and Patrick Hutton’s *History as an Art of Memory*, amongst others.

⁷ Laquer notes that we know that “Private J. Paul of the Middlesex Regiment, Rifles, who fought with the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) near Mons and died on August 23, 1914” was the first British soldier killed in the Great War (Gillis 150); he dates the change in memorial practices to the preservation of this information about each individual death during the war, beginning with Paul’s.

⁸ In fact, Heaney makes an appearance in both *Hidden Symptoms*—through the idea of the “omphalos”—and in *One by One in the Darkness*. In the latter novel, Helen is taken to hear Heaney read his poetry in Magherafelt, and there her father purchases a copy of *North* (Madden *One* 27). It is significant that, in the midst of a novel about the impact of sectarian violence on the lives of the Quinn family, Madden cites the volume of Heaney’s poetry that was both applauded and critiqued for its more explicit response to the violence in Northern Ireland. The inclusion of *North* in Madden’s narrative serves to further link her work to other literary responses to the Troubles, and asks the reader to consider her novel’s relationship to the central texts of Northern Irish literature.

⁹ Theresa is 22 at the time of the book’s narration. If we assume that the book is set in the present, that is, close to the year 1986 when it was published, then Theresa was born in approximately 1964, and was still a young child when the Troubles began.

¹⁰ In their introduction to *Testimony*, Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub imbue literature with a similar ability to testify to history. They write that theirs is a book about “how art inscribes ([or] artistically bears witness to) *what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events of our time*” (xx). In this sense, literature bears witness to the present crisis of history – that is, how to make sense of, to create stories that do justice to

the present, while at the same time remaining aware that this is also a shaping of what will be remembered of the past.

¹¹ Levinas constructs his philosophy of the other, of the ethical demand the other embodies, in both *Totality and Infinity* and *Humanism of the Other*. Richard Cohen writes that Levinas's philosophy "appeared finally in its most articulate and mature form" in *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*" (xxvi). *Totality and Infinity* was first published in 1961, while the latter work was published as a number of separate articles in 1967 and 1968. Both predate the three essays gathered in *Humanism of the Other*, and so "Levinas's reflections on humanism" in this latest work "appear at the time of, and represent, the full height and maturation of his thought" (xxvi). These later essays "defend[s] humanism—the worldview founded on the belief in the irreducible dignity of humans, a belief in the efficiency and worth of human freedom and hence also of human responsibility" (ix).

¹² In his introduction to *Humanism of the Other*, Richard Cohen points out that the chapters included in the volume were written and published "as separate articles before, during, and after the turbulent student protests in Paris known as 'May 1968'" (vii). Cohen also asks readers to note that "even more powerfully, the larger historical backdrop" of the twentieth century marks it as "perhaps the bloodiest in human history," and so "Levinas responds not only to the long philosophical tradition and its contemporary philosophical developments but also and poignantly to the political situation of twentieth-century France, Europe, and the world" (viii). It is appropriate, then, given the fact that Levinas's work intended to address concrete political and historical situations, to examine the ways in which his assessment of humanism in the twentieth century can assist readers in evaluating the humanistic explorations into remembrance and commemoration undertaken by writers of fiction such as Madden.

¹³ In an earlier conversation, Theresa tells him, "I write about subjectivity—and inarticulation—about life pushing you into a state where everything is melting until you're left with the absolute and you can find neither the words nor the images to express it" (28).

¹⁴ Richard Cohen writes that for Levinas "To be human is to care for the other above oneself, to overcome the natural indifference and countercurrent of being in nonindifference and compassion towards the other—the 'wisdom of love' ... is a painful wisdom, 'a skin turned inside out,' to use Levinas's striking phrase" (Levinas *Humanism* xxxiv). Robert is wholly unable to overcome his own indifference; rather than turning himself "inside out" in order to treat Kathy with compassion, he turns in on himself, protecting himself by visiting a mental violence on her image.

¹⁵ In one of the few moments in which Robert is forced into physical contact with Theresa, he has to carry her to bed after she arrives at his apartment and becomes too drunk to move herself. Once he maneuvers her into the bedroom he hopes "she [will] stay where she [is], because he [knows] that he [will] not be able to bring himself to touch her again" (107). He is struck most, however, by her confusion, remembering that "when he put his arm around her waist to heave her into the bedroom, she hadn't even known who he was. Three times she called him 'Francis'" (108). This moment echoes Odysseus's visit to Hades in Book Eleven of *The Odyssey*; he journeys to Hades to seek out his mother Anticleia, but three times she vanishes from his grasp as he reaches out to her.

Like many other moments from classical literature, this image is one that finds its way into numerous Irish works that seek to describe the experience of loss, including Michael Longley's poem "Anticleia" and Bernard O'Donoghue's poem "Ter Conatus."

¹⁶ There is also a look that Francis desires to maintain. He can think of nothing worse than *not* to be looked at. Thus, from him, Teresa learns that the desire to be looked upon is akin to that Levinas sees in Sonia Marmeladova in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*: "There is a scene in *Crime and Punishment* where Dostoyevsky describes Sonia Marmeladova looking with 'insatiable compassion' at Raskolnikov in his despair. He does not say 'inexhaustible compassion.' As if the compassion that goes from Sonia to Raskolnikov were a hunger that Raskolnikov's presence nourished beyond all saturation, by increasing that hunger, infinitely" (Levinas *Humanism* 30).

¹⁷ In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes "Murder alone lays claim to total negation. . . . To kill is not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely. Murder exercises a power over what escapes power. . . . I can wish to kill only an existent absolutely independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely, and therefore does not oppose them but paralyzes the very power of power. The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill" (198).

¹⁸ In the intervening ten years between *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness*, Madden published three novels: *The Birds of the Innocent Wood* (1988), *Remembering Light and Stone* (1992), and *Nothing is Black* (1994). These novels focus on individuals, on family ties and the place of the artist in contemporary society. Politics are largely absent, and it is only after the 1994 ceasefire that Madden published a new work that further probes the effects of the Troubles on the lives of those in Northern Ireland. That she sets the present-day of the novel just prior to the ceasefire is telling, as it bars any sense of complacency or closure from being too easily embraced by her characters.

¹⁹ In those portions of the novel that recall her childhood, the adult Cate is referred to as "Kate," having changed the spelling of her name after her move to London as an adult. For reading ease, except in those quoted passages that refer to her as "Kate," I use "Cate" throughout.

²⁰ Interestingly, the novel's three sisters are matched in their father's generation by three brothers: Brian, Peter, and Charlie. Like the sisters, who exhibit three different responses to the trauma of their father's death, their father and uncles likewise respond to the political situation in Northern Ireland in varying ways. Each man is politically involved, but to different degrees; however, in the wake of civil rights marches and Charlie's death, all are conflated in both the governmental and journalistic response to events.

²¹ The language Madden uses for this later image also differs markedly. Here, there are no "surreal party streamers," and Cate does not distance herself as Robert does; instead, she allows the words and images to suffuse her thoughts, becoming "compulsive and terrible."

²² Madden foreshadows Helen's nightmare and alerts the reader to the novel's circular nature in an earlier scene in which Helen "[grope] her way along the hall" to stand in "the open door of the kitchen" (130). She senses her father on the opposite side of the room, but knows that even without the "glow of his cigarette . . . she would have been able to sense his presence there"; the scene then shifts, and "there, in the darkness, it was

as if she had already lost him, as if his loved body had already been violently destroyed. They clung to each other like people who had been saved from a shipwreck, or a burning building; but it was no use, the disaster had already happened” (130). For Helen, each memory is reshaped by the newer memory of Charlie’s murder. There can no longer be a “before,” because her knowledge of what was then in the future has wholly altered her view of the past.

²³ Patten also fails to take note of a detail that Harte and Parker highlight in their exploration of Madden’s novel; the book delves into the “political chasm separating Brian from his brothers in a heated exchange following the Bloody Friday massacre of July 1972, when IRA bombs killed nine people and maimed 130 in Belfast” (Harte 236). The novel gives more attention to Bloody Friday than to Bloody Sunday, and Harte and Parker speculate that this is because “Bloody Friday drew a divided response from nationalists, whereas Bloody Sunday was met with universal condemnation” (251n). Thus, Madden’s novel does carefully explore community and identity, but such explorations are used in the service of furthering our understanding of trauma and remembrance, rather than as an end in themselves.

²⁴ In fact, there is an echo of Cate’s description of the chicks in Helen’s relationship to her visits home: “She’d said to Cate that her trips home at the weekend had been a safety valve, but it wasn’t true: it was more of an entry into a danger-zone, as though there were hairline cracks in her otherwise steely self-containment, and to go home was to push against that crack with her fingers and feel it yield and fear that some day it would split open completely” (24). While Helen is frightened by a sense that to push against the cracks would be to lose control, Cate’s vision is a much more positive interpretation of the possibilities available to those who would “uncoil themselves” from their self-containment.

Epilogue

While the Good Friday Agreement, which was signed on April 10, 1998, and went into effect on December 2, 1999, officially ended the Troubles, the question of where and how to memorialize the twentieth-century dead in both Ireland and Northern Ireland is ongoing. The novelists discussed in this project represent a distinct, feminist literary response to ethical obligations of remembrance that such a project entails. We see echoes of their call for spaces and rituals that incorporate the bodily practice of remembrance and the need for a recognition of the individual cost of violence in some of the memorial designs suggested over the past decade. The Bloomfield report, *We Will Remember Them* calls for “consideration [to] be given to a Northern Ireland Memorial in the form of a beautiful and useful building within a peaceful and harmonious garden” (qtd. in Graham and Whelan 476). Another proposal suggests that a memorial to the Troubles should take the form of a maze, where “within the maze, the names of all those who lost their lives would be hidden in the hedges along the way” (Sloan 58). Each of these projects contains a participatory, experiential component that asks visitors to enter into the memorial space, to come to a place of both anger and grief. More compelling than either of these concepts, however, is the project undertaken by David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney, Chris Thornton, and David McVea in *Lost Lives: The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland troubles*.

There remains a tendency in many memorials to gravitate towards a listing of names; but as the editors of *Lost Lives* point out, “to [their] knowledge there has never

before been a work which sets out to relate the circumstances of every single death in a conflict” (qtd. in Sloan 51). This, then, is what the project aims to encompass: not simply a roll call of the dead, but a non-partisan and straightforward account of each life and each death in the Troubles, beginning June 11, 1966, and continuing until May 8, 2006.¹ *Lost Lives* chronicles 3,712 deaths; the book weighs just over four pounds, and is itself a new form of commemorative object. Heralded as “a huge, sorrowful, brilliant book”; “a powerful series of parables on the absolute futility of violence”; “an act of redemption”; and “sombre, humane, and awesome in its scope and diligence,” what reviewers and scholars note most often is the book’s magnitude. Yet what the editors stress, akin to Bowen, Johnston, and Madden, is its call for particularity. Barry Sloan writes that “to read [*Lost Lives*] is to realize how, again and again, the deaths involved the invasion and violation of intimate, and private space” (Sloan 55).

What is called for in response, then, is a similarly intimate form of commemoration that serves the needs of both the living and the dead. And it is this call that McKittrick and his co-editors recognize in their introduction to the project:

When we began, in 1992, there was little or no appreciation of the needs of the bereaved. Our original aim was simply to compile a list of those who had died, since at that point no accurate inventory existed of troubles victims. That initial list turned into a brief description of the fatal incidents; that grew into a description of the people themselves; those descriptions evolved into a search for the many connections between different deaths. ... Then after four years, ... our ambition grew into providing a rounded picture of the circumstances of each death, describing

the victim more fully, together with how they died and who was responsible. (McKittrick, et al. 13)

The editors came to see their work not only as a chronicle of the dead, but also as an alternative history of the Troubles. “While standard history books concentrate on the broader sweeps of policy and events,” they note, “a reading of these entries gives a unique insight into the huge political and emotional impact which deaths can have on particular communities” (13-14). Such a memorial project would not be possible without the influence of feminist calls to recognize the personal costs of violence, bringing to lived reality an understanding of the bonds between remembrance, ethics, and the individual so cogently articulated in the writings of Ireland’s female novelists. Thus, *Lost Lives* is not a memorial to valor, to political causes, or to the nation. Instead, above all else it seeks to stress “what violence can do to individuals, and families and communities,” and to serve as “a lasting reminder that war is hell” (McKittrick, et al. 13, 15).

In advocating for ethically engaged commemorative practices and structures, Bowen, Johnston, and Madden share their purpose with the editors of *Lost Lives*. The call for new memorial forms that can encompass both the intimacy and the lack of consensus that dominate many of the conflicts of the twentieth, and now the twenty-first, centuries is something we see not only in Ireland, but in the United States as well. Two examples illustrate the changing standards and symbols for contemporary memorial practice; these projects are the types of physical memorials for which the novels in this project provide literary antecedents. Both September 11, 2001, and the Vietnam War lack the ability to inspire a unified collective memory accessible in the wake of the First and Second World

Wars. Instead, because recent conflicts have not been able to lay claim to the idea of “just war,” little consensus exists as to their nature and purpose; because of this lack of consensus, the issue of how to remember and memorialize the dead is fraught. In designing a memorial to those killed in the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center, architect Michale Arad focused not simply on a listing of the victims’ names, but rather on the affinities between them.² The memorial draws certain traditions from earlier nineteenth- and twentieth-century modes: individuals’ names are etched into bronze panels surrounding two memorial pools. However, rather than an alphabetical listing, the foundation charged with planning the memorial enlisted the help of media design firm Local Projects and a New York software artist named Jer Thorp (Matson). The planners asked families of the victims for “‘meaningful adjacencies’—names that should appear together on the memorial. Roughly 1,200 responses came back, asking that a victim’s name be grouped with specific colleagues, with family members or with friends who also perished in the attacks” (Matson). Some requests were detailed and complex—“half a dozen or so adjacency requests for some victims”—meaning that the sophisticated calculations required to meet each request could not be completed by hand. Instead, the names on the memorial were arranged using a complex algorithm that worked “in two stages”:

The first stage, really an algorithm unto itself, builds clusters of names from the adjacency requests. If person A needs to be near person B, and person B near person C, those three names will form a cluster. . . . Among the various indivisible bunches formed by the clustering algorithm were blocks with as many as 70-odd names. A second, space-filling algorithm

takes those puzzle pieces and fits them into place within the confines of the 76 bronze panels enclosing each memorial pool. [Thorp] says it took about a month to get the algorithms working, followed by months of tweaks as design requirements shifted. (Matson)

The algorithm's requirements were so complex, in fact, that two computer scientists had already turned the project down before Thorp and Local Projects were offered the design opportunity.

The algorithm allows the names of those who worked together to appear on the same panel of the memorial; for instance, victims who worked in the North tower are first grouped around the North Memorial Pool, beside the passengers and crew of American Airlines Flight 11. From there, the affinities between victims become more personal and more intimate: names are grouped by the company they worked for, by whom they were friends with or related to, or in one instance, by whom they died with: Victor Wald and Harry Ramos met on September 11th, while trying to escape the North Tower. In *Out of the Blue*, Richard Bernstein reveals that "Wald was sitting on the stairs at the 53rd floor, unable to continue, when Ramos and one of his colleagues, Hong Zhu, decided to stop and help Wald down any way they could. ... The three men eventually reached the 36th floor before Wald said he could go no further. Zhu escaped at the urging of a firefighter, but Ramos stayed with Wald" (Matson). The two men's names appear together on the memorial, as do the names of two brothers, John and Joseph Vigiano. The former was a firefighter, the latter a detective; both were among the first responders who died at the scene. John's name ends the grouping of firefighters from Ladder 132, while next to him,

Joseph's name begins the grouping of his department's Emergency Services Squad (Matson).

By placing the names of the victims according to nested levels of affinity—moving from the easily understood geographies of their deaths, through their places of work, down to the individual yet emotionally resonant intimacies of friendships and familial ties—the 9/11 memorial recognizes the later twentieth and twenty-first century call for memorials that go beyond “their names liveth forevermore” and attempts to capture the individuals behind those names. A website and on-site guides help visitors to locate individuals; the website also provides a photograph and biographical information for each person listed (Tischler). 9/11 Memorial President Joe Daniels claims that the memorial recognizes that “it's the connections in our lives that matter most” (Tischler). According to the founder of Local Projects, the memorial is about “making meaning not just for the people who know the individuals, but for the people who are going there. ... In that way, people can learn the human relationships and stories underneath the names themselves” (Tischler). Here, Jake Barton identifies the defining feature of contemporary memorial practice: the call to focus on particularity. Late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century memorials, especially those commemorating events whose historical meaning is deeply divisive, turn to the individual as a means of resisting totalizing narratives that serve only to fuel further conflict.

We see this call to remember the individual cost of modern conflict in local, unofficial memorials such as the one created by a toy store in Iowa City, Iowa: to commemorate the first one thousand soldiers killed in the Iraq War, the store placed one thousand toy soldiers in its window-front.³ The children's toys make undeniable the

human cost of conflict through the simple use of everyday objects. We see this call as well in the new Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund's nationwide "Call for Photos," started in October of 2011, just a month after the unveiling of the 9/11 memorial. The United States endured a charged struggle spanning over two decades to design and build an appropriate memorial to those who died in the Vietnam War. In fact, as of 2009, one historian had documented 461 Vietnam War memorials in the United States (Hagopian 5). Many of these memorials were dedicated in the midst of the war itself; of these, "most ... simply honored troops who had died" but others "questioned the purpose for which Americans were fighting and dying" (6). The contested nature of the Vietnam War and its chronological time frame make it a telling example of how memorialization began to change after the Second World War.

Patrick Hagopian describes a memorial established in 1971 by the Westphall family to their son David; located in Angel Fire, New Mexico, the memorial lacks many of the traditional tropes associated with earlier war memorials. "The Angel Fire memorial's attraction lies in its graceful architecture, its natural setting, and the story of a family's grief ... the scale of the chapel's interior is intimate, not grand" (10). Visitors to the memorial walk into a small, simple chapel set into the landscape. The memorial arose, in part, out of Victor Westphall's individual need to create something that would in some way compensate for the fact that he had not supported the war in which his son fought and died. His emotional and political motivations for building the memorial were complex, and the structure he created out of those motivations resists simplification:

Victor Westphall decided that David's photograph in the memorial should be flanked by those of others who had died in Vietnam—twelve others,

the number of marines who had died in the battle when David was killed. He solicited photographs of the dead from survivors around the country. Eventually, he gathered enough photos to allow twelve from each state in turn to be arrayed alongside David's, with the corresponding state flag flying at the site during each month-long display. Westphall frequently said that, to commemorate the dead on both sides, he would be happy to add photographs of Vietnamese Communist troops to the gallery. (8)

In the years immediately following the war, the Angel Fire memorial attracted a significant number of visitors, and there was a contingent who advocated that this memorial be designated the national memorial to those lost in Vietnam. This movement, led by the Westphalls, "was eclipsed by the efforts of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund" (9). In contrast, the VVMF emphasized the need to build a memorial on the Washington Mall, where it would be "at the center of the nation's commemorative landscape" (9).

The Angel Fire memorial achieves William Watson's call to count the dead, one by one, then one by one again: it "turned the singular into the general by beginning with one family's loss but augmenting it by showing a changing array of photographs of casualties other than David" (Hagopian 9). However, the monument represented too great a departure, symbolically and geographically, from the commemorative landscape and forms represented on the Washington Mall. Given the politically charged nature of the United States' engagement in Vietnam, it became vital to the VVMF that their losses be represented in Washington, bringing this contested war in line, at least in terms of its commemoration, with those other conflicts whose memory was not contested or

challenged. Thus, when the official United States Vietnam Memorial opened on the Mall, “the roll call of the dead recalls the fate of those who served, rather than anything they did” (399). Names are listed chronologically by their date of death or the date they were declared missing, privileging what happened to them in the arena of war over any attempt to recognize who they were outside the context of Vietnam. Instead, the VVMF had a less “idiosyncratic and ideologically contentious message bearing on the need for national ‘healing’ and societal acknowledgement of Vietnam veterans,” and this is the message that is carried out by Maya Lin’s memorial (10). Though its form attempts to challenge dominant memorial structures by taking visitors on a descent into the memorial itself, the listing of names still conveys the traditional idea that each soldier can be encapsulated and properly remembered through a listing on the commemorative wall.

The issue that arises for the VVMF today is that a new generation exists with no personal connection to the war dead. For them, the names are simply hard carvings on stone; as a result, there is now a move to create a corollary site to the Vietnam Memorial Wall called the Education Center. The main focus of the Education Center is to obtain pictures of each individual whose name is included on the Wall. Lisa Lark, a teacher from Dearborn, Michigan, started a campaign to gather photographs of all the individuals from her home state: “Seeing their faces allows the world to see them as the sons and daughters, husbands and wives and brothers and sisters that they were,” she argues, continuing, “I believe it is important for Americans to see the faces of those that gave their lives in service to our country” (Lark qtd. in Stewart). The VVMF states that these photos will “join other photos as part of VVMF’s Call for Photos initiative to collect a picture of each of the 58,272 service members listed on The Wall” (Stewart).

While the Call for Photos and planned Education Center each contain a strong political underpinning, what is most significant about these projects is their focus on the images of the dead. Photos will be shared not only in the Education Center, but also through an online Virtual Wall, where each person will have a profile page online (VVMF, “Virtual Memorial”). According to the website, launched on November 10, 1998, “the Virtual Memorial is a commemorative website created to extend the legacy of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. . . . The Virtual Memorial features more than 100,000 messages, anecdotes and photographs” (VVMF, “Virtual Memorial”). Now, the site seeks to build on the popularity of social media sites, capitalizing on the proliferation of information available online, but it does so in order to emphasize the individual nature of each death. There is a need embodied in this memorial to tell “the stories behind every name”; as such, the Center moves towards a new memorial culture that is fully and successfully embodied in the *Lost Lives* project: one that strives to recognize that a name in stone is not, by itself, enough to prevent future atrocities or provide a complex understanding of the past. In response, due to technological advances and the proliferation of readily available historical materials, many creators of contemporary memorial sites—physical and virtual, but with a shared need to inculcate practices of remembrance that do not promote further violence—seek new commemorative forms that allow them to emphasize the individuality of each of the war dead.

In Ireland, as elsewhere, readers find these new forms not just in community and governmental discussions surrounding the construction of memorials, but also, as argued throughout this project, in the country’s literature. The Irish novelists discussed here share “a profound belief in the value of conversation in defining human life and

existence” (Watkins 220). Their works engage leaders in a broad conversation about the ethics of memory, the nature of remembrance, and the proper forms for public “memory work.” Irish writers have been forced to grapple with questions of commemoration in the absence of an agreed upon national narrative of “just war” throughout the twentieth century. As Winter argues, for the early-twentieth century, “the enduring appeal of many traditional motifs . . . is directly related to the universality of bereavement in the Europe of the Great War and its aftermath” (Winter *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* 5). Absent that universality, the troubles, as Bowen writes, “troubled everything,” including the nature of remembrance.

In their novels, Bowen, Johnston, and Madden seek to offer readers not solutions to the troubling of memory, but rather modes for carefully and ethically examining the difficult questions raised by the Troubles. Their works represent feminist engagements with questions historically considered the purview not just of men, but of soldiers. Into the stories told and the histories written in Ireland, these female novelists reinsert the lived lives of women and the practices of remembrance they have to offer. Often, those practices run counter to national narratives in order to reveal the devastating effects of allowing the nation to control and shape the meaning of the dead. Thus, against the singular understanding, the urge towards magnitude, they offer a multiplicity of voices embodied in the domestic, the “authentic sign.” Their dynamic recastings of history and remembrance return again and again to the ethical ties that bind us, arguing that these ties must shape how we commemorate lives lost. They show us that to achieve this purpose—to count the dead as one and one again—is to move forward from the past and begin new rituals of remembrance that look to the future.

¹ The first edition of *Lost Lives* was published in 1999. An additional appendix was added to the 2004 edition, and a new edition was published in 2007 to correct factual errors, incorporate changes requested by family members, and include those Troubles-related deaths that continued to occur—though in vastly reduced numbers—after the Good Friday agreement took effect.

² While the question of whether or not to commemorate the victims of the September 11, 2001, attacks was not itself a source of conflict, how or if the memorial would acknowledge the contentious War on Terror that followed influenced discussion of the memorial's site and its form.

³ I learned of this memorial in a personal anecdote from Amy Hildreth Chen, PhD candidate at Emory University. The memorial is similar in nature to one created by residents of New Haven, Connecticut. In a public square, opposite the Broadway Civil War Monument with its traditional stele and figures of soldiers arming themselves for battle, is a constantly changing pile of stones. A laminated sign on a nearby tree tells viewers that a stone marked with the number of Americans and Iraqis killed that month will be added to the pile for each month of the conflict. Each of these unofficial memorials stresses the participatory focus on contemporary commemoration and calls for a recognition of individual loss over collective valor.

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