

# Spatial Identity: Identity through Memory and Space in John Banville's *The Sea*

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## Abstract

John Banville's *The Sea* (2005) has its entire story drawn on memory. Through a close textual analysis, the paper examines the novel through the framework of memory. The paper is structured around the ideas put forth by the philosopher Edward S. Casey and examines how memories play a significant role in forming an identity within the individual and how memories are formed from spaces. Banville through his narrative techniques through the character indirectly presents the reality of the world. His withdrawal into the past by Max in the novel is not part of a theme but rather a unique narrative strategy employed by Banville. An individual has a sense of connection to their world with frequent interactions with the spaces around them. The research investigates how the spaces instigate the journey to the past in the character Max Morden. The sea and the house where Max spent his childhood are the spaces that aid in giving a sense of identity to Max who feels lost after the death of his wife. In a journey of searching for himself, he ends up visiting the place where he spent a holiday vacation during his childhood. It is through the engagement with these spaces and recollected memories from them that the character Max ultimately comes to a self-realization of his lost identity and in the end feels a sense of belonging to the world.

**Keywords:** memory, identity, space, sea, house

## 1. Introduction

John Banville's *The Sea* (2005), is analyzed in this paper through a textual analysis of the concept of memory. Memory is a common subject that has been approached throughout history, with a wide range of subjects ranging from trauma, inspiration, escapism, recreating the past, etc... Light is shed on the functions of memory in revealing ontological issues by specifically referring to an individual's identity, while also highlighting the efficiency of recreating and reinterpreting the past on the existence of an individual. Memory can also be examined by the focus on the relationship between memory and space in the selected novel by John Banville.

The modern world experiences rapid changes and transformations in all aspects: as products being produced at a quick pace and those same products are consumed in the blink of an eye, and yesterday's values are not today's values. Hence, this rollercoaster sort of age, makes people stable and gives meaning to an object, or an individual is known as memory. Lois Lowry states, "*Memories are forever*" (1993, p. 131) stressing the importance of memories on individuals and societies. Memory has a robust relationship with identity (Yuksel, 2021, p. 1). The past, irrespective of being remembered or forgotten by certain individuals, can be found alive through collective traditions, and rituals of memory that shape a society. The past is recreated and enlightens the present, ultimately leading to a new and unknown future. *The Death of the Past* states that, "*For all societies, the past has been a living past, something which has been used day after day, life after life, never-ending*" (Plumb, 1969, p. 11). The past being an embodiment of learned experiences is emphasized in *The Practice of History*, "*The future is dark, the present burdensome; only the past, dead and finished, bears contemplation. Those who look upon it have survived it; they are its product and its victors*" (Elton, 1967, p. 11).

Individuals through their senses and their observations try to comprehend the society/surroundings they live in by attributing emotions to the experiences they face be it joy, laughter, pain, sadness, etc... and these experiences are stored by memory. Memory can be approached cognitively, and by being physically constructive. An individual's process of individualization and individuality are referred to by memory, because, "*By remembering, we form an idea of our self and shape a sense of our identity; thus, we end up embodying the memory that inhabits us*" (Plate & Smelik, 2009, p. 1).

The past of an individual can be recreated voluntarily and at the same time, it can be spontaneous depending on circumstances. One dynamism of memory is the ability to form spatial memories. An individual can be considered as a temporal spatial being when interacting with the world or the place they are at, they tend to do it through a bodily perception. This spontaneous or voluntary mode of interaction with the surroundings of a particular place triggers in the individual a different form of memory which is the memory based on

a place. An individual's existence is ensured by spatial memory, which does not necessarily require an individual to memorize or understand the location. It can be ensured by the process of internalization by the individual in attributing a particular emotion or a set of emotions to that space/place. The idea of spatial memory enabling an individual to be familiar with a particular place is partially true. Still, it can also enable the individual to feel a sense of belonging to the place, such as the birthplace of an individual. It can also bring about a sense of alienation if the individual's existence is threatened by that place. The internalized places by the individual in the end give a sense of identity to them and at the same time become a part of their psychology. The journey of self-discovery and that of identity by revisiting those past places is represented by the spatial reconstruction of the individual's memories. In this process, memory becomes a space itself enabling an individual to revive or recollect their memories, "*the space in which a thing happens for the second time*" (Auster, 2010, p. 77). Memory by forming spatial memories plays an important role in constructing an individual's identity.

John Banville (1945), a modern Irish novelist, in his works alludes to the work of other famous writers such as Beckett, and Proust. Banville mainly alludes to art history and literary theory which has gained him popularity as "*the most stylistically elaborate Irish writer of his generation*" (Turner, 2012). He also has an alias or an alter ego by the pen name of Benjamin Black, who writes detective fiction novels. Banville has a knack for using the history of his country of origin creating facts with this history and fictionalizing it along with the memories through the characters in his novels. In Banville's earlier novels, the most common theme was 'history'. Banville's *Birchwood* (1973) discussed Irish literature along with the history of Irish people. As he progressed with new novels, Banville started to deal with reality, moving from the historical past to shedding light on the Northern Ireland Troubles through fiction. This paradigm shift in theme produced his science tetralogy: *Doctor Copernicus* (1976) focussing on the life of scientist Nicolaus Copernicus. *Kepler* (1981) dealt with the life of master mathematician Johannes Kepler. *The Newton Letter* (1982) addresses the life of Isaac Newton fictionally. *Mefisto* (1986) was a fictionalized version wherein the character is obsessed with numbers, subtly hinting at Einstein. Banville in one of his interview states, "*Since I've started writing novels based in historical fact I've realised that the past does not exist in terms of fact. It only exists in terms of the way we look at it, in the way that historians have looked at it*" (Piątek, 2014, p. 147).

Banville inserts subjectivity into the characters and they bring historical discourses, and he has a way of moving the storyline and keeping readers engaged with his dynamic way of going back and forth from the present to the past and back again to the present. By analyzing the characters of Banville, to them the past is not something that is finished or the end of a chapter, but rather are valuable moments of their lives that include recollections, reinterpretations of the past events, and recreations. The novel under discussion, *The Sea* (2005) which earned Banville a Booker Prize in 2005 is dominated by the concept of memory. This novel is also considered Banville's well-renowned oeuvre. This paper aims to portray the robust relationship between memory and space (spatial memory/sea) which ultimately influences the identity of an individual (Max Morden).

This paper is presented in five sections. The first section presents the gist of the theoretical background on the concept of memory, identity, and spatial memory along with a brief info about the author. The second section of the paper presents a brief overview of memory and provides a review of literature related to the theme of the paper. The third section of the paper sheds further light on the concept of memory and how memory along with space aids in the formation of an individual's identity by referring to the ideas of Edward S. Casey. The fourth section of the paper explores how spatial memories of a place aid in the recollection and reinterpreting of the past and the end helps in constructing the identity of the character (Max Morden). In the final section of the paper, concluding remarks are given by pointing out the findings of the discussions and by an analysis of the novel *The Sea*, highlighting the robust relationship between space and memory.

## 2. Memory – A Brief Overview

Memory has long been a part of written and oral culture. In the past, artistic creativity was attributed to the art of memory. The gaps found between the past, present, and future of an individual or a society are bridged by memory. The term 'collective memory' coined by Hugo Van Hofmannsthal has an idea behind it that every social group develops a memory of its past that helps it to preserve and transmit its self-image (Bosch, 2016). In pre-modern societies, collective memory was asserted as, "... *premodern societies were inhabited by a 'natural,' living form of collective memory, expressed ritually, orally, and visually, rather than closeted into static memorials or books*" (Sherlock, 2010, p. 40). Collective memories were passed down to other generations constructed by legends myths and folktales with the help of oral transmissions through stage performances and ritualistic performances. According to John H. Plumb, "*The past becomes the theatre of life*" (1969, p. 26).

Moving from the pre-modern societies to the Middle Ages, rote memorization was associated with memory. In rote memorization, the individual is equipped with the ability to train their memory to memorize places, events, etc. by rote. To recollect certain things or a misplaced object people in their memories tend to create a mental map. The essay, "*How to Make a Composition: Memory- Craft in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*" opines that "*The true force of memory lay in recollection or memoria, ... To achieve this power, people educated themselves by building mental libraries*" (Carruthers, 2010, p. 16). Hence by repetitions, memory can be approached to spread knowledge with the help of rote memorization.

The modern era of memory is however different as an individual's past is viewed as being burdensome, trauma, physical and mental pains, nightmares, and so on. In his essay, "*Memory, Temporality, Modernity*" Bill Schwarz comments:

*"This desire to flee from the past, and to transcend the incubus of memory, has many correlatives in the aesthetic and philosophical imaginations of high modernism. On the other hand, though, there are many contrary manifestations in modernist*

*thought in which memory, in a variety of conceptualisations, comes to be located as the means for salvation from a world in which no other access to the past exists and in which history has become the vehicle for pain and trauma, transmitting—as some believed, Joyce among them—into a nightmare” (2010, p. 42).*

Schwarz states that the process of the past transforming into a nightmare from what could seem to be a nostalgic feeling. The modern era of modernism tends to reject the traditions and customs of society while encouraging the formation of new principles and ideas. By considering the above statement, the present is threatened in the modernistic era and the past becomes a nightmare. The past casts a shadow over the present as it is seen as the embodiment of the ideologies that dominate people’s political, and religious life.

Maurice Halbwachs, in his work *On Collective Memory* (1925) refers to the past as a collective memory. By constructing memories from personal experiences along with the choices and the decisions made by the individual in the past and being influenced by society and forming a social construction, the past collectively becomes a ‘collective memory’. Halbwachs explains in detail about collective memory that, “*Collective frameworks are, ... precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society*” (1992, p. 40). Halbwachs further goes on to state that, “*the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of the society*” (1992, p. 51). Thus, individuals through these forced reconstructed memories lose their connection with the past, and herein lies the importance of memory in an individual’s desire to make peace with their past.

Research studies in the modern era suggest and transform memory as the ability to reestablish a psychologically integrated safe self. The goal of modern studies on memory is, “*The recent insistence on the role of memory might also mark a renewed desire to secure a sense of self in the wake of postmodern theories of the decentred human subject*” (King, 2000, p. 11).

Remembering the past involves a creative process of retelling, recreating, and reinterpreting one’s own experience or an event. All these actions are stems of memory. The past is in fact a dynamic phenomenon as it connects an experience or event to the present; it is neither dead nor finished. Pierre Nora describes memory in his paper “*Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*” that, “*Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present...*” (1989, p. 8). The concepts of the past and memory are closely intertwined, and the past’s dynamic aspect as well as its evolving nature paves a path for the various historical representations of memory. The past and memory in the entire course of history collectively play a role in affecting people and different societies. Thus, it has resulted in the emergence of numerous types or modes of memory namely; autobiographical, collective, cultural, historical, spatial, etc... This paper narrows this vast area of memory by focusing solely on space (spatial memories), how spaces form memories in an individual and the role played by space in triggering an individual in recollecting his/her memories.

### 3. Space and Memory

Spaces or places, play a major role in forming an individual’s identity. They help an individual to shape themselves as both the individual and the space have frequent interaction with one another by being exposed to the family, home, and the environment. Everyone has their way of perceiving a particular place based on their experiences, feelings, and emotions associated with that place which brings about a sense of belonging to that place while also affecting one’s identity. An individual’s perspective about a place depends on how that individual perceives it as, “*... every specific space offers material opportunities and limitations and also shapes – through its ‘atmosphere’ -human emotions*” (Rohkrämer & Schulz, 2009, p. 1343).

In *Remembering*, Edward S. Casey, an American philosopher known for his research and works focussing on the philosophy of place and space states; “*It is the stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experiences that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability. An alert and alive memory connect spontaneously with place, finding in it features that favour and parallel its own activities*” (2000, p. 186). Here Casey attempts to show the kind of relationship that exists between a memory of an individual to a place by stating the intrinsic nature of the place to identity and memory. Places, together with the experiences and emotions with individuals face, are essential parts of memory. Memory has a habit of naturally interacting with the experience of a place and being a pleasant experience or an unpleasant experience that evokes trauma in an individual. As a result, memory itself becomes a medium of space where the past is brought back to life in the present. And it is mostly the memories that are place or space-oriented, that have an impact on an individual’s individualization process. To the earlier statement, Casey further adds, “*We might even say that memory is naturally place-oriented or at least place-supported. Moreover, it is itself a place wherein the past can revive and survive*” (2000, pp. 187-188).

To feel one’s existence in a place or the world, an individual’s, or a human’s (also considered as a spatial being) body memory plays a role as the body of an individual and the place live in a dialogic relationship all the time. This is pointed out by Casey through his lines, “*... the lived body puts us in touch with the physical aspects of remembering and the physical features of a place. ... And if it is the body that places us in place to start with, it will be instrumental in re-placing us in remembered places as well*” (2000, pp. 189-190). Therefore, the body of an individual is crucial as the positioning of the body in a particular place leads to the onset of the formation of memory of that same place. The physical emotions that occur due to the process of remembering and the experiences of the places in which the incidents occurred are bridged by the individual’s body through its act of positioning. The body of the individual is triggered due to spatial memories when the body positions itself at the same place and replaces the body of the then-present body with the body of the present. The process of ‘remembering’ is the main cause of this trigger of body memory.

The construction of these spatial memories is due to the places. An individual’s emotional attachment to a place occurs from the way the individual shapes their memories from their emotions to it and hence, places have a crucial role in an individual’s memories. Spatial memory is formed by the feeling of an individual belonging to somewhere or someplace. Dolores Herrero states, “*Closely linked to place,*

memory is also an ongoing process, a constant dialogue between past and present” (2017, p. 233). This spatial memory formation from the memory of a place can be in two ways. One is when an individual while thinking of that place ascribes to it a meaning and shapes that meaning into their memories. The second is when the place influences the individual causing memories to rise or be created from the emotions they faced. Since meanings and emotions associated with places are crucial in the formation of memories, places need not be ideal structures, as in the selected novel the place is the ‘sea.’ An individual feels a sense of belonging to a particular place or has an urge to run away or escape from that place, due to their spatial memories, which are manifestations of their psychological experience there.

Ultimately, an individual who expresses their existence largely through the spatiality of their being perceives a place with its familiar as well as unfamiliar objects. When the individual recalls a perceived location, they are mentally transported there and become aware that time has gone. They also recognize how important that memory was to their journey of self-discovery. That perceived place then becomes a factor in the forming of spatial memories.

#### 4. Max’s Spatial Identity in *The Sea*

An individual after creating their own spaces through their experiences and the materialization of their emotions from their consciousness, that space becomes a part of the individual becoming embodied in them. When an individual recollects from memory, of a particular place, that space with its feelings and associated emotions becomes meaningful to the individual. Memories are formed and are activated every time the individual recollects the past. In the selected novel, playing an important role in the recollection of memories of the protagonist, Max is ‘the sea.’ This section of the paper examines the role of ‘the sea’ and ‘the house’ in influencing the recollection of memories and constructing an identity in Max Morden in detail.

Max Morden returns to the place where he spent most of his childhood and at most a summer was spent. This is the space from where Max narrates the story and readers come to know of the spaces. Max returns to the town named ‘Ballyless’ due to a recent traumatic event that he experienced, a year earlier his wife, Anna, had passed away and to grapple with his emotions Max returns to The Cedars where he had memories of his childhood. The house of Max Morden is an important space wherein Max withdraws into his room for self-reflexivity and writes away his emotions to complete the project by hiding from society. And ‘The sea’ is another important space where Max withdraws, in remembrance of his wife. Here the focus is on analyzing these spaces that Max seemingly tends to have a relationship with, mainly on the way Max narrates and how his identity is constructed through these spaces.

The Cedars was not a traditional family home. The home was a holiday home that belonged to the Graces. The Graces were a family that Max had been friends with and rented when he visited during his summer vacation. It is in this space that Max at first had a glimpse into the outer world after crossing the thresholds of a familiar space. Max’s return home is pointed out by Joseph McMinn as a factor found in most of Banville’s characters, “*all of his narrators look back to their origins and their immediate past for some clue to their sense of tragic and farcical confusion. The underlying and enabling myth is, of course, one of lost innocence*” (1991, p. 5). This says that the return to home is mainly due to a largely unfulfilled yearning from Max. Despite being aware that his attempt to find a ‘lost innocence’ of himself will only lead to that of disillusionment, Max is unable to resist his desire to return to this space of his childhood. Max narrates this irresistible desire, “*Amazed, and disappointed, I would go so far as to say appalled, for reasons that are obscure to me, since why should I desire change, I who have come back to live amidst the rubble of the past?*” (Banville, 2005, p. 4). Banville’s protagonists tend to speak as though the current version of themselves is no wiser than their younger versions, the only difference being that they are older now.

An individual’s bereavement depends on places and spaces. Here, Max’s bereavement is both at The Cedars and ‘the sea.’ Avril Maddrell states that, “*Humans have a vast memory capacity which leads to the development of autobiographical memory*” (2012, p. 59). In *The Feeling of What Happens*, autobiographical memory is said to be, “*an aggregate of dispositional records of who we have been physically and who we have usually been behaviourally, along with records of who we plan to be in the future*” (Damasio, 2000, p. 220). Thus, identity can be formed by these autobiographical memories and here the death of Max’s wife ruptures his identity and goes down memory lane by revisiting the past.

*The Sea* begins with the lines, “*THEY DEPARTED, the gods, on the day of the strange tide*” (Banville, 2005, p. 3). Max with this narration makes the readers aware that he is recollecting a particular day from his past. Max is reminded of the past once he sees the sea and it brings back memories. He further goes on to describe the sea, “*... the spectacle of that vast bowl of water bulging like a blister, lead-blue and malignantly a gleam... The waves were depositing a fringe of soiled yellow foam along the waterline*” (Banville, 2005, p. 3). Strangely ‘the sea’ also brings back a bad memory of Max from which he decided to never swim again, “*I would not swim again, after that day... I would not swim, no, not ever again*” (Banville, 2005, pp. 3-4). Another of Max’s recollections of the sea is when he says, “*... like something thrown up drowned out of the sea*” (Banville, 2005, p. 29). This collection of memories of the past was from the days when Max spent his summer holidays as a child. The recollection occurs at the time when Max relives them after witnessing the tragic loss of his wife. This physical feature of the sea and the house revisited by Max asserts that emotions ‘coalesce around and within certain places’ (Maddrell, 2012, p. 62). This coalescence could not be the result of memory’s ‘inhabitation’ of that space as it might be a result of that space being the catalyst for memory, further encouraging interaction with the components of memory and loss that go beyond mere representation.

After the death of Anna, Max finds it difficult to live in the house and Max decides to revisit his childhood town by the sea by removing himself from the spatial remains of his home with Anna and coming to the spatial area of his childhood with the notion of a change of

space would give him a brief sense of relief from his present grief. And here the space, the place of his past might offer him a sense of consolation. But this space, The Cedars, turns out to be a space where his childhood trauma is embodied and epitomizes death, “*Then I reflected that I had come here precisely so that it should be a mistake, that it should be hideous, that it should be, that I should be..., inappropriate*” (Banville, 2005, p. 149). Max might have escaped from the memories of one place but ends up in another space where his childhood past is triggered and he suffers even more.

From adolescence to adulthood, Max lost his friends and parents and now as a grown man, at the beginning of the novel, he returns to The Cedars after the death of his wife. Anna was the only continuous presence with Max after the previous deaths and now even she was dead, “*Everybody seems to be younger than I am, even the dead*” (Banville, 2005, p. 35). Max found refuge in memory as a means of escaping from the harsh reality of the present and along with Anna during her terminal illness they both, “*sought escape from an intolerable present in the only tense possible, the past, that is, the faraway past*” (Banville, 2005, p. 99). Max also felt that his parents were responsible for his inability to enjoy his childhood, “*Only they were in my way, obscuring my view of the future*” (Banville, 2005, p. 35). The death of Anna takes Max to the place of his childhood where he witnessed a traumatic experience. It was there where he lost two of his friends, he made during his holidays there, twins Chloe Grace and Miles Grace, who died by drowning in the sea after deliberately swimming out to the sea.

It is ‘the sea,’ the space that causes Max’s memory of the past and the space which ultimately makes him confer to himself a new identity of his own. In the sea, Max feels a sense of calmness too, “*Down here, by the sea, there is a special quality to the silence at night*” (Banville, 2005, p. 71). The sea also reminded him of the times he was sick and the silence of the sickroom used to feel like the silence of the sea that he felt now, “*It is a place like the place where I feel that I am now, miles from anywhere, and anyone*” (Banville, 2005, pp. 71-72). As Dylan Trigg in his work on the trauma of a place describes an individual returning to a place at a time of emotional undoing as, “*a tremendous faith in the power of a place as a source of unity*” (2009, p. 90). Here Max does this in returning to Ballyless after the death of his wife which left him emotionally undone. Max is aware of him poking the past again and again like a sore tooth and does so by returning to the place, the place filled with numerous hidden emotions, the place at a time he lived before Anna happened. He acknowledges that by stating that, he has been travelling to Ballyless for years as it was the only space where he could be at that time, “*The past beats inside me like a second heart*” (Banville, 2005, p. 13). Max thereby effectively shows, “*the dynamic persistence of an event that continues in spite of the absence of its original containment*” (Trigg, 2009, p. 91) effectively conceding the power a space holds when it has a haunted undercurrent fused to it. A place is experienced “*not as meaning and representation but as contact and confirmation*” (Hetherington, 2003, p. 1942). Being in the space of his childhood, Max recollects and connects with the memories of his past, and the loss he experienced in the past interweaves with the loss of his present (Anna).

*The Sea* is a skilfully narrated novel, where Max Morden’s soliloquy from his remembrance of the past is weaved with many stories that emerge from the places Max visits in the novel, ‘the sea,’ ‘The Cedars,’ and ‘the home’. These stories amount to the significant losses and the relationships that he experienced in his life. The places he worked, evoked the memories of his father who was absent after his parent’s marriage fell through. Max also describes how the names of places triggered in him certain memories, “*... provoke in me a confusion of feelings that includes a sticky sort of sadness, anger or its after-shock, and a curious yearning that is like nostalgia...*” (Banville, 2005, p. 198). Max need not go to a particular place to re-live, the names of the places themselves stir up in him a feeling of nostalgia of memories from his past. With the resurfacing of memory, the name of a place is also effective and affective in nature to the individual in the past and the present.

Max in this place almost kills himself in the sea while being in a drunken stupor, which would ultimately put an end to his sufferings. But by narrating his recollections of the past along with the stories of the death of the twins (Chloe Grace & Miles Grace) and his wife Anna confronts himself and undergoes a sense of purgation of his entire self by revisiting the past. After revisiting his childhood place embodied with emotions of his wife’s death by retelling the story of how his wife suffered, he suffered in the town of Ballyless, Max ultimately finds a purpose to carry on with his life despite his losses. It begins with him being honest with himself, at first, he gives a detailed description of the last moments he shared with Anna on her deathbed (Banville, 2005, p. 238). At the time of his revelation at the end of the novel he admits the truth of not being physically by Anna’s side at the time of her death, “*Anna died before dawn. To tell the truth, I was not there when it happened*” (Banville, 2005, p. 263). Max finally finds peace within himself after having gone through a rollercoaster of emotions. The ‘sea’ that he told of at the beginning as an ominous sign of something bad with the gods having departed, turns out at the end of the novel, that it is at the same ‘sea’ where Max finds in himself a drastic change:

“*As I stood there, suddenly, no, not suddenly, but in a sort of driving heave, the whole sea surged, it was not a wave, but a smooth rolling swell that seemed to come up from the deeps, as if something vast down there had stirred itself, and I was lifted briefly and carried a little way towards the shore and then was set down on my feet as before, as if nothing had happened. And indeed nothing had happened, a momentous nothing, just another of the great world’s shrugs of indifference. A nurse came out to fetch me, and I turned and followed her inside, and it was as if I were walking into the sea*” (Banville, 2005, p. 264).

## 5. Conclusion

Memory is a never-ending process, as it always keeps on developing through recreating and reinterpreting the past. So, it can never be dead or finished. This paper expresses the role played by the spatial memory of the individual in establishing an identity for that individual. The identity of Max Morden was shaped by the places where he had spent his holidays and the attached emotions to these

spaces were strengthened by the childhood memories, which hold the psyche of the child and determine the child's psychological development. The paper also reveals how an individual's memory of a place that was a significant part of their life while growing up has a role in constructing the individual's identity. Also, a sense of belonging and a sense of security one feels while recollecting their spatial memories is also discussed in the paper.

In the end, the readers see a different version of Max from the one they saw at the beginning of the novel. The Cedars, the sea, the tides, the house, and the town of Ballyless and the memories from these spaces enable him to come to terms with the passing of his wife, Anna. All these spaces witnessed the first of everything in Max's life, it was in these places that he had his first romance and witnessed his first death. After his wife's death, Max loses himself, and only after returning to these spaces that he recollects from memory finds himself back again, and accepts his new reality of having to face his next phase of life without Anna. Banville evokes the emotions of Max who was living with the feeling of loss through the spaces around him which led him to renegotiate his self-identity, with the spaces around him, and finally make himself carry on with his everyday life.

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