
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Uneven Peace: Spatial Memory in Kennedy's *Trespasses* and Magee's *Close to Home*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how Belfast is inhabited in Louise Kennedy's *Trespasses* (2022) and Michael Magee's *Close to Home* (2023), novels set in 1975 and 2013. Drawing on Michel de Certeau's account of spatial practice, and using spatial memory as a supporting concept, it asks how division is encountered through ordinary acts of walking, crossing, mapping, and remembering. The transition from conflict to post-conflict Belfast, it argues, is not represented as a movement from division to reconciliation. In *Trespasses*, sectarian telling, surveillance, and gendered scrutiny organise everyday mobility with immediate force. In *Close to Home*, these conflict-era spatial structures have partly receded but remain available for reactivation, while their afterlives intersect with insecure housing, cultural exclusion, class inequality, and uneven mobility. **Uneven peace**, a term adapted here from peace studies, names this condition: reduced political violence and greater physical mobility coexisting with unequal access to housing, opportunity, and urban belonging. The paper further accounts for the novels' different retrospective positions. Kennedy's reconstruction of 1975 and Magee's of 2013 do not simply represent memory; they participate in producing Belfast as a remembered urban space.

KEYWORDS

Belfast; spatial memory; Michel de Certeau; telling; the Troubles; uneven peace

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1. Introduction

Belfast has long been read through the visible signs of division: peace walls, interface areas, flags, security installations, segregated housing, and the routes by which people learn where they can safely go. Yet the spatial history of the city cannot be reduced to its most conspicuous barriers. Conflict also entered ordinary streets, schools, pubs, homes, workplaces, and journeys, producing a practical knowledge of place that exceeded official maps. Research on Belfast has accordingly moved from iconic barriers toward the mundane spaces through which division is reproduced. Coyles (2017) describes a "hidden city" in which roads, buildings, and planning decisions preserve conflict-era logics, while Coyles et al. (2023) show how forms of "everyday space" continue to divide communities after apparent normalisation. McAttackney (2024) similarly argues that post-conflict Belfast is constituted as much by absences, displacement, and uneven redevelopment as by surviving monuments to violence. Louise Kennedy's *Trespasses* (2022) and Michael Magee's *Close to Home* (2023) offer an unusually productive literary pairing for examining this transformation. Kennedy's novel is set in 1975, when military presence, sectarian classification, political surveillance, and paramilitary violence shape ordinary life in and around Belfast. Cushla Lavery moves between a Catholic school, her family's pub, pupils' homes, professional social circles, and the clandestine spaces of her relationship with Michael Agnew, a married Protestant barrister. Magee shifts the frame to West Belfast in 2013. Sean Maguire returns from university in Liverpool with an English degree but little economic security, moving through temporary housing, casual employment, court, community service, university-linked cultural spaces, pubs, trains, cemeteries, and sites of redevelopment. The comparison requires one important qualification. The novels are not transparent documentary snapshots of 1975 and 2013. Both are retrospective constructions. Kennedy published *Trespasses* in 2022, almost half a century after the period it recreates; Magee published *Close to Home* in 2023, roughly a decade after its 2013 setting. Their temporal asymmetry matters. Kennedy reconstructs a conflict-era world already sedimented through decades of public memory, whereas Magee returns to a more

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recent moment whose post-conflict promises can already be assessed from the vantage point of the 2020s. Some of the contrast between the novels therefore belongs to historical change in Belfast, and some to the different narrative distances from which those histories are recalled.

The difference between the novels is not adequately described as conflict versus peace. Both represent Belfast as historically saturated and socially differentiated. What changes is the dominant mode through which division is encountered. *Trespasses* foregrounds a world in which sectarian and military structures directly regulate ordinary conduct. *Close to Home* depicts a city where those structures have partly receded, but where their afterlives intersect with class, housing, cultural capital, trauma, and the uneven ability to move into other social or geographical worlds.

This paper uses the term *uneven peace* for that condition, but not as a claim to coinage. Carey, González, and Gläbel (2022) use the phrase in research on postwar Sri Lanka to describe divergent experiences of peace among groups that do not share equal security and rights. Northern Ireland is historically and politically different, not least because the peace settlement followed negotiation rather than military victory. The present paper therefore adapts the phrase to literary-spatial analysis. Here, uneven peace describes a condition in which reduced political violence and greater physical mobility coexist with unequal access to stable housing, cultural capital, economic opportunity, security, and the capacity to imagine a future elsewhere.

The paper addresses three questions:

Q1: How do *Trespasses* and *Close to Home* represent the spatial divisions of Belfast across conflict and post-conflict contexts?

Q2: How do characters' everyday spatial practices reproduce, negotiate, or cross boundaries associated with sectarianism, gender, class, and political violence?

Q3: How does spatial memory alter the operation of boundaries once the most continuous forms of conflict-era territorial control have receded?

This paper argues that the novels register a transformation in the spatial organisation of division rather than its disappearance. In *Trespasses*, political identity is legible through territory and ordinary mobility is continually exposed to military, sectarian, gendered, and surveillance structures. In *Close to Home*, mobility is less systematically constrained by those structures, yet the city's historical divisions persist through memory, neighbourhood attachment, class-coded institutions, housing insecurity, and unequal access to possible futures. Michel de Certeau's account of everyday spatial practice is useful because it directs attention away from the city as an abstract plan and toward what characters do with streets, routes, buildings, and boundaries. Spatial memory supplements this approach by showing how movement through the present city reactivates earlier personal and political histories.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Belfast, division, and literary geography

The spatialisation of conflict in Belfast has been central to research across geography, planning, archaeology, memory studies, and literary criticism. Nagle (2009) describes Belfast as a divided city in which regeneration coexists with practices that reproduce segregation. Coyles (2017) likewise argues that the material legacy of conflict exceeds peace walls, drawing attention to roads, housing layouts, security planning, and apparently ordinary architectural arrangements that continue to carry conflict-era functions. Coyles et al. (2023) extend that argument by showing how everyday architecture and infrastructure can fragment communities without resembling conventional barriers. Such work matters for literary analysis because it shifts attention from iconic symbols of division to mundane environments: the street, estate, school route, workplace, and housing block.

Recent studies of the post-conflict city complicate any narrative of linear spatial reconciliation. McAttackney (2024) traces material continuities between conflict, redevelopment, segregation, and social injustice, emphasising both surviving traces and meaningful absences. Murtagh et al. (2024) argue that violence has been socially and spatially restructured rather than simply removed. Most directly relevant here, Atashi (2025) links spatial memory to socioeconomic exclusion, arguing that communities most affected by the Troubles have often been among those least able to participate in the economic and urban dividends of peace. These studies make it possible to read post-conflict space not as a neutral setting after violence but as one of the media through which the consequences of violence remain unevenly distributed.

Literary scholarship has also established the value of reading Northern Irish fiction spatially. Johnson (1999) and Stainer (2006) show how fictionalised Belfast contests stable cartographies of identity and violence. Mathuria's (2022) study of Anna Burns's *Milkman* brings de Certeau directly into this discussion, showing how walking negotiates surveillance and everyday borders without becoming uncomplicated liberation. His later study of Belfast City Centre (Mathuria, 2024) extends the argument beyond fiction by showing how walking and storytelling can produce mobile forms of memory in a redeveloped city where official memorialisation is uneven.

2.2 Post-Troubles fiction and retrospective distance

The temporal term "post-Troubles" has always required qualification. McCann (2020) and Legg (2020) both stress that fiction published after the Good Friday Agreement continues to return to the violence and unresolved inheritances of the conflict. *Trespasses* is a retrospective conflict novel written from within this later literary field. Teekell (2025) reads Kennedy's use of the love-across-the-divide plot in relation to Northern Irish romance conventions, but the novel also invites a spatial reading because Cushla and Michael's relationship is inseparable from roads, homes, pubs, barracks, neighbourhoods, and systems of observation.

The novel's retrospective position is not incidental. Kennedy's 2022 reconstruction of 1975 turns ordinary spatial detail into an act of cultural memory. Pubs, school corridors, military vehicles, domestic interiors, routes, and brand names collectively recreate a violent present that later readers already know as history. *Close to Home* is also retrospective, though its distance is shorter. Magee returns in 2023 to 2013, a moment close enough to retain the texture of recession and post-Agreement expectation, but distant enough for the futures promised to particular sites and people to be judged retrospectively. The comparison is therefore diachronic twice over: between 1975 and 2013, and between two different acts of looking back.

2.3 Telling, gendered mobility, and local legibility

A spatial analysis of *Trespasses* requires a specifically Northern Irish concept that de Certeau's general vocabulary cannot replace. Burton's *The Politics of Legitimacy* (1978) identifies the social conditions from which the practice later known as *telling* emerges. Finlay (1999) defines telling as the process by which strangers infer one another's religio-political identity from cues such as name, speech, appearance, school, and place. The practice makes ordinary biographical information politically legible. In a divided society, where a person lives or went to school can function as a communal coordinate.

Gender further complicates this legibility. Recent criticism of *Milkman* has shown that Troubles-era mobility cannot be understood solely through territorial division. Mathuria (2022) attends to surveillance and everyday borders, while Kondali and Vukotić (2024) describe Belfast as a gendered fearscape in which political violence and male scrutiny interact. Cushla's movement in *Trespasses* is similarly overdetermined. Her affair with Michael is politically risky because it crosses communal lines, but it is also socially risky because she is a young, unmarried woman involved with an older married man. Family, church, neighbours, and police do not read the same route in the same way when it is travelled by a woman.

2.4 De Certeau, walking, and spatial memory

Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) provides the principal theoretical framework. His distinction between institutional *strategies* and everyday *tactics* is particularly valuable for divided urban space. Strategies depend upon the capacity of institutions to define, organise, police, or represent a proper place. Tactics operate without comparable control over territory. They work through temporary appropriations, routes, detours, timings, and uses of environments structured by others.

De Certeau's treatment of walking is equally important. Walking is not merely locomotion through a stable city. It is one of the practices through which urban space acquires meaning. A planned street and a walked street are not equivalent: the latter is produced through selection, avoidance, repetition, memory, habit, and encounter. This distinction has proved fruitful beyond Belfast. Mueller (2021), writing on Teju Cole, links walking directly to spatial memory, while Yılmaz and Hıçsönmezler (2026) examine how embodied urban memory now interacts with digital archives, locative technologies, and Street View imagery. Spatial memory is used here as an analytical concept rather than a second totalising theory. It names the process through which places encountered in the present activate other temporal versions of themselves. A cemetery is simultaneously a workplace and a collection of remembered lives. A lay-by remains materially ordinary while becoming inseparable from a lost relationship. A former family home can be located digitally while remaining experientially unavailable. Fiction makes these temporal superimpositions formally visible.

3. Methodology

The paper uses comparative qualitative close reading. It treats *Trespasses* and *Close to Home* as historically distinct but formally comparable representations of Belfast and its surrounding social geography. The analysis concentrates on passages in which space is actively produced rather than merely described: walking, driving, crossing territorial boundaries, entering unfamiliar social environments, being watched, mapping streets digitally, losing access to housing, returning to remembered locations, and moving through memorial or abandoned sites.

The comparison is controlled in two ways. First, fictional space is not treated as a transparent sociological record of Belfast. Historical and urban scholarship contextualises the spatial conditions the novels mobilise, but the object of analysis remains literary representation. Second, the paper accounts for unequal retrospective distance. Kennedy's 2022 reconstruction of 1975 and Magee's 2023 reconstruction of 2013 are analysed as differently positioned acts of cultural memory rather than equivalent contemporaneous observations.

Close reading attends to spatial vocabulary, narrative perspective, bodily movement, social cues, and the temporal layering of place. Passages are grouped around five related concerns: mapping and surveillance; walking and crossing; memory attached to place; class and housing; and the unstable relation between home and belonging. De Certeau's strategies and tactics organise

the analysis of institutional and everyday spatial practice, while telling and gendered legibility specify local mechanisms that de Certeau alone does not name.

Table 1 shows how the five analytical sections address the three research questions.

Table 1. Research questions and analytical focus

Research question	Primary analytical sections
Q1: How are spatial divisions represented across conflict and post-conflict contexts?	4.1 Mapping and Legibility; 4.2 Walking and Regulation; 4.4 Uneven Peace
Q2: How do everyday spatial practices reproduce, negotiate, or cross boundaries?	4.1 Mapping and Legibility; 4.2 Walking and Regulation; 4.5 Home and Belonging
Q3: How does spatial memory transform visible conflict divisions into persistent post-conflict boundaries?	4.3 Mnemonic Landscape; 4.4 Uneven Peace; 4.5 Home and Belonging

The interpretive model used throughout is summarised in Figure 1. It does not propose a simple replacement of sectarian geography by class inequality. Rather, it describes a shift in emphasis from a conflict-era regime in which militarised and sectarian territoriality directly organises everyday movement to a post-conflict regime in which those structures persist unevenly and intersect more visibly with memory, housing, class, and opportunity.

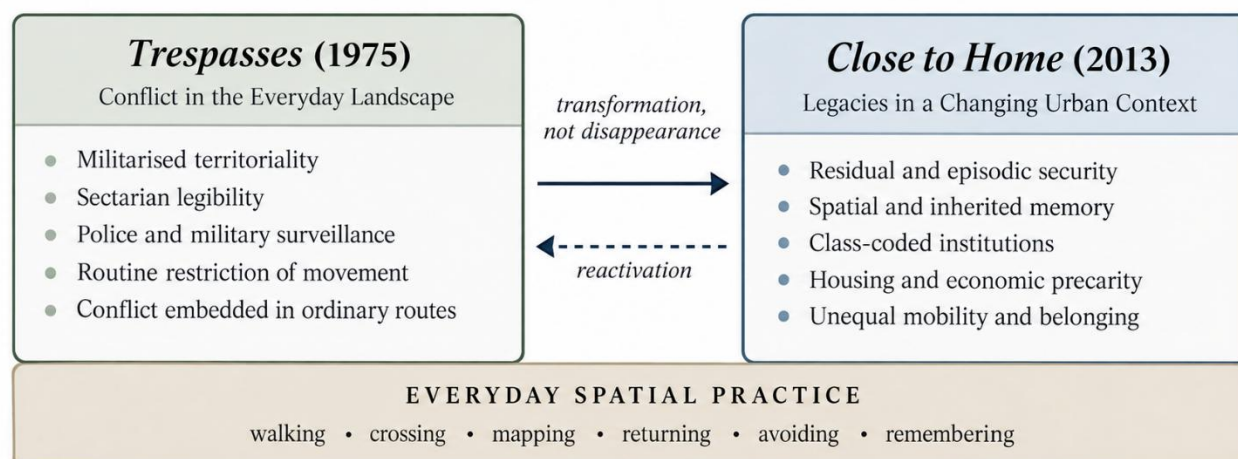


Figure 1. Transformation in the dominant spatial mechanism of division

Source: Author's synthesis.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Mapping, surveillance, and the legibility of Belfast

Across *Trespasses* and *Close to Home*, Belfast is not a neutral geographical container. Space is continually read, interpreted, and associated with identity. In Kennedy's novel, that legibility begins with telling. At a wedding, Cushla is asked her name, "which school she had gone to" and "where she lived" (Kennedy, 2022, p. 152). These appear to be routine questions, but within the sectarian environment of the novel they supply precisely the cues through which communal affiliation can be inferred. School and residence become social coordinates.

Kennedy also shows how telling can become bodily. On Ash Wednesday, Cushla is made to remove the cross of ash from her forehead before serving customers because it is one thing to drink in a Catholic-owned bar and another to be served by a woman marked with "papish warpaint" (Kennedy, 2022, p. 13). The insult is sectarian, but the scene also exposes a gendered body in public space. Religious identity becomes visible on a young woman whose appearance can be read, judged, and disciplined.

Informal social mapping coexists with institutional surveillance. Near the end of the novel Cushla tells her mother, "We were being followed," adding that the RUC has photographs "of me in his car" and "of us in his flat" (Kennedy, 2022, p. 223). A private route has become an evidentiary route. De Certeau's distinction between mapped place and practised space clarifies the limit of such surveillance. The photographs establish where Cushla has been, but they cannot contain what those movements mean to her: desire, fear, secrecy, shame, and tactical calculation.

Close to Home revisits the tension through a technology that appears politically neutral. Sean and Mairéad use Google Maps and Street View to inspect Belfast, and Mairéad observes, simply, "We're not on Google Maps" (Magee, 2023, p. 136). Street View offers visual access to the city street by street, yet their absence exposes the gap between cartographic visibility and lived presence. The map can reproduce a road without representing the network of memory and relationship through which the road matters.

Magee sharpens the point when a strange vehicle passes them and Sean asks about the apparatus on its roof. Mairéad identifies it: "It's the Google Street View car. We're gonna be on Google Maps" (Magee, 2023, p. 89). The parallel with *Trespasses* is formal rather than political. Commercial cartography is not the RUC. What connects the scenes is the conversion of movement into an external image. In both novels, an image records the fact of presence without exhausting its meaning.

The distinction becomes more consequential when Sean later uses digital mapping to locate his father's former home. The screen identifies coordinates and present-day surfaces, while memory restores the clay ground, sheds, garage, trees, and childhood routines that the image cannot recover. The digital map establishes where the house is; memory reconstructs what the place had been. Yilmaz and Hiçsönmezler's (2026) account of digitally mediated urban memory is useful here because it treats archived imagery as a mnemonic trigger rather than a substitute for embodied memory.

The movement from *Trespasses* to *Close to Home* is therefore not from a mapped to an unmapped Belfast. Both cities are densely represented. What changes is the dominant technology and political meaning of legibility. Kennedy's characters inhabit a world in which social and state systems of reading can expose people to danger. Magee's characters inhabit a city apparently opened by digital representation, yet the map remains unable to contain the memory, class experience, and intimate histories through which its streets acquire meaning.

4.2 Walking, crossing, and the regulation of movement

If telling concerns how people and places become readable, mobility concerns what that knowledge permits. Kennedy establishes the conflict city with brutal economy: "They lived in a garrison town" (Kennedy, 2022, p. 15). Military presence is not confined to spectacular violence. Soldiers enter pubs, barracks interrupt residential streets, armoured vehicles appear on ordinary routes, and children absorb the vocabulary of bombs and patrols as everyday knowledge.

The strategic organisation of space becomes explicit when "the police had made a Control Zone of High Street and it was desolate" (Kennedy, 2022, p. 18). A street normally produced through circulation and commerce is redefined through institutional control. De Certeau's concept of strategy is precise here because the authorities possess the power to designate the street, regulate access, and alter its permissible uses.

Yet the more pervasive boundary does not always require a formal checkpoint. Kennedy repeatedly shows territory becoming readable through flags, bunting, murals, housing, and communal reputation. Trying later to return toward Short Strand, Cushla finds "the flags and bunting on one side" too conspicuous and "the walls on the other too oppressive"; she turns the car around as panic returns (Kennedy, 2022, p. 222). No officer stops her and no wall blocks the road. The boundary operates through learned anticipation.

Cushla's tactical repertoire is also gendered. Her relationship with Michael means that movement through space generates forms of exposure unavailable to him in the same way. Michael can circulate between professional life, home, pubs, social gatherings, and the affair with considerable social privilege. Cushla moves through a denser field of readers: family, neighbours, colleagues, clergy, police, and acquaintances capable of interpreting the movements of a young, unmarried woman. The RUC photographs are political evidence, but they also document intimate conduct. The same route can therefore be read simultaneously through sectarian suspicion and sexual respectability.

This is where comparison with *Milkman* becomes useful. Mathuria (2022) shows how walking can become tactical under surveillance without becoming emancipatory, while Kondali and Vukotić (2024) describe Belfast as a gendered fearscape in which political violence and male scrutiny interact. Cushla's movement belongs to a related literary geography. Her crossings do not transcend the structures that make them dangerous; they expose how those structures converge on a gendered body.

Close to Home alters the rhythm of spatial control. Sean can cross Belfast by foot, bus, taxi, and train without treating every neighbourhood boundary as a potential sectarian confrontation. That difference is historically meaningful. Yet Magee refuses to turn increased mobility into a story of completed peace. A later pipe-bomb incident produces a roadblock, redirected traffic, and helicopter surveillance. The older security geography has not vanished. It has become less continuous and more episodic.

The distinction between the novels is therefore one of frequency and dominance, not absolute presence and absence. In *Trespasses*, territorial and militarised calculation accompanies ordinary mobility as a routine competence. In *Close to Home*, movement is considerably less organised by those structures, but the city retains the capacity to reactivate them. Crossing a

boundary does not necessarily defeat it; it can instead reveal the political, gendered, or institutional conditions under which movement becomes possible.

4.3 Walking through memory: Belfast as mnemonic landscape

As the continuous regulation of movement recedes, memory assumes greater importance in explaining how division persists. Neither novel treats memory as purely interior recollection. It adheres to roads, graves, buildings, screens, family houses, and former sites of violence. Movement through the present repeatedly activates another temporal version of the same place. In *Close to Home*, Sean's community service in a cemetery makes this relation unusually concrete. He first encounters the cemetery as imposed labour: trimming grass, clearing debris, and moving between headstones. Gradually, particular graves acquire biographies. A memorial card shows a young man, and Sean realises that "he was born the same year as me" and "he died when he was seventeen" (Magee, 2023, p. 173). The comparison collapses historical distance into bodily proximity. The dead man becomes a measure against Sean's continuing life.

De Certeau helps clarify why this matters. Sean learns the cemetery by moving through it. Its meanings are not given all at once by its institutional function as a burial ground; they emerge through repeated bodily practice, stories, pauses, and encounters. Mueller's (2021) account of walking and spatial memory is useful here because it shows how movement can bring distinct temporal layers of a city into contact.

Kennedy constructs a related layering in Cushla's journeys. One route passes the cemetery where her father is buried and then the army barracks with high fences and barbed wire. Private bereavement and militarised public history occupy the same journey. Later, after Michael's death, roads and stopping places associated with their relationship become affectively transformed. The physical site remains ordinary while the remembered version of the site changes what it can mean. The retrospective form of *Trespases* extends this spatial memory beyond the characters. Kennedy is not simply depicting people who remember places; the 2022 novel reconstructs an entire conflict-era urban world from nearly fifty years' distance. Its accumulation of school corridors, pubs, military vehicles, domestic interiors, roads, and routines gives mnemonic density to a period often remembered through spectacular political violence. The ordinary is precisely where that violence becomes most disturbing.

Close to Home is also retrospective, though the distance is shorter. Sean's digital return to his father's former home makes the structure visible within the narrative. The image shows the present coordinates; memory restores the vanished experiential landscape. Recognition occurs through difference between what the site now displays and what Sean remembers. Yilmaz and Hiçsönmezler (2026) help explain this hybrid configuration of embodied memory and archived spatial imagery.

The narrative asymmetry therefore qualifies the historical comparison rather than undermining it. Some of the contrast between the novels belongs to the difference between 1975 and 2013. Some belongs to the different positions from which those dates are narrated. *Trespases* performs spatial memory by reconstructing a conflict-era everyday world after decades of cultural remembrance. *Close to Home* returns to 2013 from a shorter interval in which the promises attached to redevelopment and post-conflict mobility can already be judged. Spatial memory operates both inside the novels and at the level of narration.

4.4 Class, housing, and the geography of uneven peace

The strongest difference between the novels emerges when memory is placed beside class and material security. *Trespases* already shows class intersecting with sectarianism, but *Close to Home* makes socioeconomic inequality one of the principal ways through which post-conflict Belfast is experienced. The shift is therefore not from sectarianism to class. It is a change in the relative prominence and articulation of overlapping structures.

Magee makes the relation between conflict history and present inequality explicit at an art exhibition concerned with mental health. Sean hears that communities most affected by the Troubles, including West Belfast, are also "poorer than everywhere else, even now, twenty years into the peace process" (Magee, 2023, p. 137). The passage does not reduce poverty to a single historical cause. It does, however, force past violence and present geography into the same frame. Atashi's (2025) account of spatial memory and exclusion provides an important empirical analogue: the peace dividend has not been distributed evenly across neighbourhoods that bore unequal burdens of conflict.

The phrase uneven peace is useful here only if its prior use is acknowledged. Carey et al. (2022) employ it to describe divergent experiences of postwar peace in Sri Lanka, where improved physical security does not translate into equally positive experiences of other dimensions of peace. Belfast is a different case, but the conceptual premise is transferable with care. In this paper, uneven peace names a literary-spatial condition in which reduced political violence and greater freedom of movement coexist with unequal access to housing, cultural capital, security, work, and the possibility of departure.

Sean's encounters with university and art-world milieus make that inequality experiential. He can enter the room, but speech, clothing, education, references, and social ease make him aware that physical access does not equal social belonging. The boundary is no longer a checkpoint. It may be an accent, a qualification, a cultural reference, or the confidence to treat Belfast as one location among many.

Housing gives the argument material weight. Early in the novel a woman tells Sean that “the property is to be taken and closed off at the end of October” and asks whether he has somewhere else to go (Magee, 2023, p. 94). He and Ryan do not. Later, repossession reduces domestic belonging to the possessions Sean can physically carry away. The contrast with the freedom suggested by walking is stark: he can circulate through Belfast while lacking secure possession of a place within it. The novel repeatedly associates geographical escape with this instability. After the court case Sean tells Mairéad, “I should’ve just stayed in Liverpool” (Magee, 2023, p. 90). The line does not make Liverpool an uncomplicated alternative. It registers the recurrent fantasy that another geography might have produced another self. Travel, Berlin, further study, and work elsewhere circulate as possibilities, but the capacity to act on them depends upon money, networks, education, and cultural confidence. The contrast with *Trespasses* must be made carefully. Kennedy already shows sharp material inequality within and across communal lines. The later novel does not replace sectarian geography with class geography. It foregrounds how inherited political division becomes entangled with a post-recession city in which economic and cultural opportunities remain uneven. Greater physical mobility is real. Equal mobility is not.

4.5 Home, ruins, and unstable belonging

The final spatial problem is home. Both novels resist the assumption that home is a stable endpoint to movement. It can signify attachment, surveillance, family obligation, danger, economic insecurity, or a place one repeatedly imagines leaving. In *Trespasses*, Gerry condenses the conflict-era relation between place and possibility when he tells Cushla, “We live here, Lavery. There are things we can’t do” (Kennedy, 2022, p. 169). Living “here” is not a neutral statement of residence. It names the practical limits imposed by local knowledge and conflict.

The McGeown children provide the novel’s most painful version of unstable dwelling. Their family’s vulnerability becomes displacement, and Davy and Mandy face uncertainty about where they will live and whether their belongings can be recovered. Housing insecurity is therefore not invented by the post-conflict novel. What changes is the configuration through which insecurity is understood.

In *Close to Home*, Casement Park brings together community identity, redevelopment, memory, and the unfinished promises of peace. Sean and Mairéad approach the stadium and note that neither of them has seen its gates open since it was “closed off for a redevelopment project that had gone tits up” (Magee, 2023, p. 125). They slip through barriers and walk the empty stands. Their entry is a de Certeau tactic: a temporary appropriation of a site whose official use has been suspended. Yet the novel refuses to romanticise the trespass. Looking over the derelict structure, Sean asks, “Doesn’t feel right, does it?” and Mairéad agrees: “It really doesn’t” (Magee, 2023, p. 126).

The historical specificity makes the scene stronger. Casement Park, the GAA’s provincial stadium project in West Belfast on the Andersonstown Road, hosted its last game in June 2013, the same year in which Magee sets the novel (RTÉ, 2019; Ulster GAA, 2013). The redevelopment was intended to contribute to West Belfast’s regeneration, but the project became the delayed element of Northern Ireland’s three-stadium regional programme. Planning permission granted in 2013 was overturned after judicial review in 2014; Kingspan Stadium was completed in 2015 and Windsor Park in 2016 while Casement remained stalled for years (Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2023).

Chronology matters. Sean and Mairéad do not stand inside the stadium in 2013 knowing the decade of delay that will follow. Magee, writing for publication in 2023, does. The scene therefore carries retrospective irony. In Sean’s present, Casement is a recently interrupted community space oriented toward redevelopment. From the novel’s publication horizon, it has become an emblem of an unrealised future. This is uneven peace in one building: a culturally significant West Belfast site promised regeneration but suspended between collective memory and deferred completion.

The stadium also clarifies the limits of tactics. Sean and Mairéad’s walk does not change ownership, planning, finance, or the timetable of redevelopment. Their movement creates a temporary use without abolishing the strategic structures that define the site. The same logic applies elsewhere in the novel. Sean can enter cultural spaces without acquiring their social capital, return to Belfast without securing a home, and move across the city without obtaining equal access to the futures it appears to offer. The distinction between the novels can therefore be phrased as a change in the question space asks of its inhabitants. In *Trespasses*, the recurring question is: *Where can I safely go, and what will my movement reveal about me?* In *Close to Home*, the question increasingly becomes: *What kind of life becomes possible once I get there?* The historical movement is not from confinement to freedom but from one configuration of spatial constraint to another, less continuously militarised but still unevenly lived.

5. Conclusion

Reading *Trespasses* and *Close to Home* together reveals neither a stable divided city nor a straightforward post-conflict successor. The novels instead show how mechanisms of division change their spatial form. Kennedy’s conflict-era Belfast is organised through sectarian telling, territorial signs, military presence, policing, surveillance, and the anticipation of violence. Magee’s post-conflict Belfast is more physically traversable but not spatially reconciled. Older security practices can reappear,

while memory, housing insecurity, class-coded institutions, and unequal mobility become increasingly prominent ways in which urban difference is lived.

The first research question asked how the novels represent division across conflict and post-conflict contexts. *Trespasses* makes political affiliation immediately legible and consequential. Burton's concept of telling helps specify a practice that de Certeau alone cannot explain: names, schools, addresses, appearance, and other cues situate characters within a communal order before any explicit political declaration is made. *Close to Home* depicts a less continuously militarised city, but the reduction of direct territorial control does not dissolve the spatial consequences of conflict.

The second question concerned everyday spatial practice. De Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactics remains valuable, but the comparison demonstrates why tactical movement should not be romanticised. Cushla's crossings do not free her from the structures that make them dangerous; they expose her to them. Her tactical possibilities are also gendered. As a young Catholic woman conducting an affair with an older married Protestant man, she moves through a field of scrutiny produced simultaneously by politics, patriarchy, religion, neighbourhood, and state surveillance. Sean possesses greater physical mobility, yet his movement repeatedly exposes another boundary: entering a room is not the same as belonging there, and returning home is not the same as securing a home.

The third question concerned spatial memory. Both novels demonstrate that memory is organised through place rather than carried only as private recollection. Cemeteries, roads, family homes, barracks, digital maps, and derelict buildings bring past and present into contact. The novels themselves also participate in this process. *Trespasses* reconstructs 1975 from nearly five decades' distance, while *Close to Home* reconstructs 2013 from a decade's distance. Some of the historical contrast is therefore also a contrast in retrospective narration. Kennedy's reconstruction makes conflict-era ordinary space mnemonic; Magee's shorter retrospect allows later knowledge to shadow spaces whose futures remain open to Sean.

Casement Park concentrates that temporal structure. In Sean's 2013 world it is a recently interrupted community space awaiting redevelopment. By the novel's 2023 publication, it also signifies a decade of stalled regeneration. The site makes visible what retrospective fiction can do with place: represent a location at one historical moment while allowing readers to experience it through what it subsequently became.

The paper's use of uneven peace should therefore be understood as an adaptation rather than a coinage. Carey et al. (2022) use the phrase to describe differentiated experiences of postwar peace; here the concept is applied to literary spatial practice in Belfast. Peace is uneven because the decline of organised political violence does not distribute security, dwelling, cultural access, or future possibility equally. This formulation also avoids the false claim that class replaces sectarianism. The novels represent overlapping historical structures: class already shapes the conflict-era city, while sectarian geography remains meaningful in the post-conflict one.

The most significant transition is from a city in which political division routinely regulates movement from the outside to one in which expanded physical movement coexists with persistent material, mnemonic, and social limits. In *Trespasses*, the question of space repeatedly concerns danger, identification, and surveillance. In *Close to Home*, it increasingly concerns whether mobility can be converted into stability, opportunity, or belonging. Peace changes the routes available to Belfast's inhabitants. It does not make those routes equally capable of leading somewhere.

The argument remains bounded. Two novels cannot represent the full diversity of Belfast, and literary space should not be treated as a substitute for urban sociology. The value of the comparison lies elsewhere: by following bodies rather than boundaries alone, Kennedy and Magee show how political history persists in routes, hesitations, houses, screens, memories, and aspirations. Their fiction makes visible not the disappearance of division but the uneven remaking of the city through everyday practice.

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