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**Saints and Celibates:
Protestant Identity in the Irish Novels of
William Trevor.**

Gerard Dineen B.A., H.D.E., A.V.C.M.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of
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This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents, Molly and Jeremiah Dineen, both of whom died as this was being written.

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Summary.

This thesis focuses purely on Protestant identity in three Irish novels by William Trevor, namely: *Fools of Fortune*, *The Silence in the Garden* and *Reading Turgenev*. As well as these, some of his short stories and other writings are briefly referred to, whenever this is necessary.

The first section deals with Trevor's deliberately complicated presentation of Protestant identity in *Fools of Fortune*. Mrs Quinton, though English by birth and the mistress of Kilneagh House, outrightly repudiates her own culture, openly longing for the death of Anglo-Ireland. She does this by aligning herself with the Irish politics of Michael Collins, and, symbolically, by taking her own life. As well as this, her granddaughter, Imelda, becomes the embodiment of an even further complication of Protestant identity, mysteriously transforming into a living reflection of the Roman Catholic Saint Imelda of Bologna, thus transcending sectarian divisions to the point where she is, in effect, a Roman Catholic Protestant.

The Silence in the Garden dwells on Protestant guilt and how this damages and ultimately destroys the Rolleston family of Carriglas. The guilt experienced by this family has its initial source in an occurrence which the Rolleston children were responsible for some years before the novels is set. This incident, the chasing of a Roman Catholic child, with a gun, over a period of time during a particular summer, also represents the historical chasing of the native Irish from their land, by Cromwell and his army. Thus, the crime of the recent past *contains* the older transgression, its memory eventually eroding the Rolleston family to nothing; sterile or non-existent relationships becoming the norm for them, guilt begetting further guilt, but never children. As well as this internal, destructive factor there is also the external, but equally baneful presence of the new bridge on Carriglas island, named after a militant Republican, Cornelius Dowley, and serving as a metaphor for the new and vigorous might of Independent Ireland.

Reading Turgenev is a further development of the theme of Protestant sterility, of its inability to continue in a changed Ireland. In this novel the most intense relationship is that between Mary Louise and her dead cousin, the strongest desire being her wish to lie with him, when she is dead. Furthermore, the deterioration and gradual emptying out of some of the major Protestant institutions, such as the church, the school and the Y.M.C.A. hall are also portrayed in this novel, representing the imminent extinction of Protestant Ireland. Finally, in *Reading Turgenev*, Trevor illustrates the lives of non-Ascendancy Protestants by focussing on the impoverished and struggling Dallons and the Quarrys who merely own a drapery in the town. By depicting such Protestants Trevor manages to dispense with the tradition Yeatsian stereotype of a purely Ascendancy race, conveying a more realistic delineation of the multiple manifestations of Protestants as they have occupied Irish history, as well as the contemporary reality.

And so, from hour to hour we ripe and ripe,
And then from hour to hour we rot and rot,
And thereby hangs a tale.

William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*.

This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

T.S. Eliot, *The Hollow Men*.

Introduction:

William Trevor is, arguably, amongst the greatest writers in the English language at the moment.¹ He has been recognised as such by the sheer amount of prizes and honours which have been lavished on him. He has won the Hawthornden Prize for fiction, the Royal Society of Literature Award, the Heineman Award for fiction and the Whitbread Award twice. He has been awarded several honorary doctorates and, in 1977, was made a C.B.E. (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) in recognition of his valuable services to literature,² an honour which no other contemporary Irish writer has received. However, despite being a writer of such obvious distinction there has been a bewildering paucity of full-length studies of his work, although there *is* an extensive range of articles. To date there are only four such books. Gregory A. Schirmer, in *William Trevor: A Study of his Fiction*, argues that Trevor's fiction occupies a middle point between the Forsterian imperative to 'always connect' and T. S. Eliot's anguished conclusion that 'On Margate Sands./ I can connect/ Nothing with nothing.'³ In other words, Schirmer contends, Trevor is always highly conscious of the need for compassion in society, regardless of the potential obstacles of class, religion or race. However, running against this desire to connect is Eliot's equally powerful belief in our inability to do so, conceding that we inhabit a world in which we are always severed from those around us, that every man *is* an island because that is simply the way of things. Schirmer argues that Trevor's work shows abundant evidence of a tension between both impulses, that though his characters long for Forster's connection it is always denied them due to present circumstances or the history which precedes them.

Kristin Morrison's *William Trevor* is by far the most profound study of the writer's fiction to date. Morrison claims that there exists in Trevor's work an intricate 'system of correspondences', whereby the image of the garden becomes a metaphor for Ireland, shaping Trevor's entire body of fiction into a remarkable coherence. Morrison states

¹ Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt has recently described Trevor as "one of the century's finest fiction writers" in Alexander G. Gonzalez (Ed.), *Modern Irish Writers. A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*. (London: Aldwych Press, 1997), 411.

² Kristin Morrison, *William Trevor*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), ix-xi.

that this system is achieved by the use of several rhetorical strategies such as persistent visual images, implied puns, literalized metaphors, incremental references and significant names. Such a theory, Morrison asserts, is similar to E. M. W. Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture*,⁴ where, despite Eliot's pessimism, connections *are* made, though these links have more to do with events across time than any relationships between people.

Dolores MacKenna's *William Trevor: The Writer and his Work*, is the most recent substantial study of Trevor. It combines a biographical treatment of the author with an analysis of his work to date. As Suzanne Morrow Paulson's *William Trevor: A Study of the Short Fiction* deals solely with the short stories it does not have any direct bearing on this thesis, but *will* be used later on as it includes two interviews with the writer.

It is widely accepted that in order for an artist to produce fine art he must firstly be at a distance from what he creates, since too great an intimacy with the subject matter often results in a lack of objectivity at best, or an overwhelming and intrusive sentimentality at worst. William Trevor has utilised such artistic distance for his entire writing career to date. As an Irishman who had left Ireland to live in England he began to write about English people in English settings, observing this race with a sharpness of perspective that is normally only granted to the very perspicacious outsider. Still later, after he had settled in England, he turned his attention back to Ireland and started to write about his native country with the noticeable distance that only long exile affords. As well as convincingly representing two different countries and their people in his work, Trevor has also managed to depict characters from differing religious backgrounds.⁵ Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt has described Trevor as "a Protestant who writes convincingly about Catholics",⁶ yet the sheer diversity of Protestant characters in Trevor's work is indicative of his deep and lived knowledge of such a section of Irish society,

³ Gregory A. Schirmer, *William Trevor: A Study of his Fiction*. (London: Routledge, 1990), passim.

⁴ Morrison, op. cit., 10.

⁵ Gregory Schirmer commends Trevor's fiction for this quality as well:

"Indeed, it might be argued that no other contemporary writer concerned with Ireland has been better able to embrace both the country's Anglo-Irish Protestant heritage and its native Catholic tradition."

Schirmer, op. cit., 123.

demonstrating an insight which would certainly be denied to an outsider. Such characters range from the morally-blind Pulvertafts of 'The News from Ireland', the Republican Quintons of *Fools of Fortune*, the guilt-ridden Rollestons of *The Silence in the Garden*, the eccentrically anachronistic Middletons of 'The Distant Past' and the thoroughly provincial Dallons and Quarrys of *Reading Turgenev*.

The ambit of this thesis is three of Trevor's Irish novels, namely *Fools of Fortune*, *The Silence in the Garden* and *Reading Turgenev*, although passing reference is made to a number of his short stories, and some of his other writing, whenever this informs or substantiates the arguments being made in the thesis.

In our analysis of the above three novels we will endeavour to describe and discuss the variety of Protestants as they appear in these works, consequently establishing that there are certain patterns running through the portrayals of such a diverse company of characters. In particular we will argue that Trevor's ultimate diagnosis is that the Irish Protestant community, as it is presented in his novels, is an atrophying culture, his prophesy being that it is in danger of imminent extinction. Furthermore, we will show that his depiction of a minority, endogamous people who are unable to sustain themselves indefinitely becomes particularly evident in his descriptions of Protestant marriages, often childless, their sterility quietly presaging the eventual extinction of an entire community, frantically borrowing inwards to protect itself from the 'new Ireland' as it simultaneously digs its own grave.⁷ As well as this we will demonstrate that Trevor's portrayal of Big House Protestants often contradicts the conventional image of this class as he presents such individuals in a state of crisis, longing for their own personal and cultural obliteration, or forsaking their inherited identity and aligning themselves with another culture. Finally, we will argue that Trevor manages to escape the narrow representations of Irish Protestants as handed down by such authors as Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane as he succeeds in portraying such a section of

⁶ Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt, op. cit., 407.

⁷ Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* presents the motif of the endangered Protestant community and of a particular line which is about to be terminated through her portrayal of Lois Farquahar as the

society in far less affluent circumstances, far removed from the grandeur of the Big House.

orphaned daughter, frittering her time away with her aunt and uncle until the ultimate conflagration at Danielstown.

CHAPTER ONE

Fools of Fortune.

“our Protestant household”⁸

It is beyond any doubt that Kilneagh House is indeed an abode with a decidedly Protestant character. Although Fr. Kilgarriff is a defrocked Roman Catholic priest he continues to wear the garb of his former profession, and to be addressed by his sometime clerical title, despite the fact that he is now a lay man⁹: “He was unfrocked, but in our Protestant household he continued to wear the clerical black etc.” (FF, 11). It is as if Fr. Kilgarriff’s identity as a Roman Catholic is being potentially challenged in such a house and thus he responds by perhaps over-asserting his distinctness, dressing in an outfit that is no longer his to wear. However, the Quintons of Kilneagh House are, if anything, a rather peculiar Protestant family, managing to defy as many stereotypes as they simultaneously create new roles for their class.

Anna Quinton.

In ‘The News from Ireland’ the butler, Fogarty, towards the end of the story, mentions the sin which his employers, the Pulvertafts, are most guilty of: the denial of what was taking place outside their demesne walls during the Famine. He then claims that this was inadequately compensated for by the paltry sustenance and work which they offered to those starving to death around them:

‘A blind eye was turned, miss, you know that. The hunger was a plague: what use a few spoonfuls of soup, and a road that leads nowhere and

⁸ William Trevor, *Fools of Fortune*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 11.

All future references to this novel will be cited parenthetically, in the text itself, as, for example: (FF, 11).

only insults the pride of the men who built it? The hunger might have been halted, miss, you know that. The people were allowed to die: you said that to yourself (...)' ¹⁰

But perhaps even more disturbing is the prayer uttered in church each Sunday, led by the Reverend Poole: “they repeat the prayer that takes precedence over all other prayers: that God’s love should extend to the hungry at this time, that His wrath may be lifted.” (CS, 894). Anna Quinton, however, Willie’s great grandmother in *Fools of Fortune*, stands in every way opposed to the Pulvertafts’ position on the Famine. Not content to merely pray for the dying from the comfort of her pew or to spoon out token generosity, she travelled the neighbourhood, doing what she could for those who were hungry and dying (FF, 12), as well as becoming politically involved by imploring the officers of the local barracks to inform the London government of the suffering and death which was becoming normative across Ireland at the time. She then turned to her own family in Woodcombe Park, England, again to influence the authorities so that something might be done to alleviate the misery in Ireland: “November 15th, 1846 (...) For God’s sake, bring your persuasion to bear on this most monstrous of governments” (FF, 62)¹¹. Finally she paid the ultimate price for her thirst for justice when her family rejected her, viewing her as a traitor to her country of birth:

So passionate did she become in her condemnation of the authorities that in the end her letters were returned unopened. *You spread calumny over our name*, her irate father wrote. *Since you will not cease in your absurd charges against this country I have no choice but to disown you.* (FF, 30).

⁹ It is quite pertinent to note, for example, that, unlike the Quintons, Mr. Sweeney, a local publican, refers to the former priest solely by his surname: ““The motor’s for Kilgarriff to drive them about in. Have you heard tell of Kilgarriff maybe?”” (FF, 132).

¹⁰ William Trevor, *Collected Stories*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), 903.

All future references to this collection will be cited parenthetically, in the text itself, as, for example: (CS, 903).

¹¹ Where quotations appear in italics it is because that is how such a part of the text is printed in the novel itself, usually to denote a diary-entry.

Having suffered for her persistent fight against injustice during her time in Ireland, having actually died from famine fever during her ministrations to the starving, she seems to have been raised to the position of a saint after her death,¹² this is evident in what her husband later claimed to have seen, after the death of his spouse:

(...) looking from his bedroom window he saw her on a distant hill - an apparition like the Virgin Mary. She told him that he must give away the greater part of his estate to those who had suffered loss and deprivation during the famine, and in his continuing love of her he did so. (FF, 12).

Not only does she seem to tirelessly continue her earthly work after death, she also appears to have been beatified for what she once strove to achieve. Anna Quinton is not the only 'saint' in this novel, in fact she is the forerunner of a far more significant character, Imelda, who also demonstrates some of the qualities of saintliness and thus reveals an intriguing aspect of Trevor's characterisation of some Irish Protestants; Imelda will be dealt with later on in this chapter.

Anna Quinton's singular political stance, for her class, is continued by Willie's parents in their views on Irish history, their support for Home Rule¹³ and their remarkable friendship with Michael Collins, all of which made them and their ancestors appear as deserters of Anglo-Ireland, according to the surrounding gentry :

¹² Kristin Morrison claims that: "Anna's heroic efforts at famine relief and her consequent death make her a saint of sorts;"

Morrison, *op. cit.*, 107-8.

¹³ It is intriguing to note the 'Dorian Gray'-type gradual metamorphosis which the painting of Gladstone, the peaceful English proponent of Home Rule, undergoes during one part of the novel:

"Above a mantelpiece cluttered with ornaments and oddments the severe face of Gladstone was darkly framed, dominant between scenes of oxen working on a mountainside." (FF, 130).

"In the twilight of the gaunt sitting-room the whiskered countenance of William Gladstone would seem grimmer than it did by day," (FF, 155).

"The murky face of Gladstone looked unwell." (FF, 166).

The above three sentences symbolically illustrate the decline in esteem which a particular political figure is held in the Quinton family. In short, this represents Mrs. Quinton's and later Willie's disillusionment with pacifism and English politics in general, and their eventual turn towards the darker powers of Irish brute force.

(...) it is impossible to guess how my father's acquaintanceship with Collins had begun, though it must in some way have been related to the Quintons' longstanding identification with Irish Home Rule. For this we were seen by many as traitors to our class and to the Anglo-Irish tradition. (FF, 28).

In fact, the Quintons' sympathy for Irish politics can be traced back as far as the eighteenth century, when a Major Atkinson of the militia at Fermoy was angrily denied entry to Kilneagh as he had been responsible for the shooting of six men in Rathcormack immediately beforehand: "In the barracks at Fermoy that display of inhospitality had not been forgotten either." (FF, 28).

Whatever of Protestant self-perception in this novel it is incontrovertible that there is a distinctive Roman Catholic apprehension of their religious counterparts which vehemently, and sometimes derogatorily, accentuates a sectarian and class-boundary. Such a perception, in turn, enlarges any former stereotypes. Perhaps the most vitriolic example of such prejudice in the novel is Teresa Shea's unadulterated sectarianism towards Imelda at the convent-school:

'Heaven?' Teresa Shea had said. 'You'll not be going to heaven, Imelda Quinton. How could you?

(...) 'There's people says you shouldn't be at the convent, Imelda.'

'Don't be unpleasant, Teresa,' another girl said.

'I'm not being unpleasant.'

'Why shouldn't I be in the convent?' Imelda asked.

'Because you're not a Catholic. Imelda Quinton! God, the nerve of that!'

(FF, 156).

As well as this, there is a far milder example of a mistaken preconceived notion about Protestants before Josephine begins work at Kilneagh House. Her priest warns her of

the potential perils of working in a Protestant household; his fears quickly prove to be unfounded, however, as Josephine soon discovers:

Three weeks later, on the morning of her leaving home, her father talked to her for an hour and then sent her to see their priest, who told her to take care in a Protestant household. 'If there's no fish served on a Friday,' he said, 'see if they'd supply you with an egg.' But this predicament never arose because everyone in Kilneagh had fish on Fridays, that being the simplest arrangement: (FF, 26).¹⁴

It is apparent from the above that there are imagined barriers on one side of the cultural divide and then a reality which is manifestly incommensurable with such notions, thus leading to an obscuring of any rigid class or religious boundaries that were originally believed to exist; after all, this is a family which receives a delivery of the *Irish Times* and the *Cork Examiner* (FF, 153), and which listens to *both* national anthems (FF, 160). Such behaviour demonstrates a type of cultural ambidextrousness, where Anglo and Irish characteristics both subsist contentedly alongside each other.¹⁵ Mrs. Quinton is the another character who evinces characteristics and beliefs which persistently controvert any stereotypical beliefs about her particular class, her life, as well as her gradual decline, offering an alternative, often unexpected Protestant identity.

¹⁴ Friday in an Irish Protestant household is, sometimes, potentially bound to reveal a sectarian division when a mixture of religions sit down for a meal. An incident in Sam Hanna Bell's *December Bride* is an alternative depiction of eating arrangements in a Protestant household on this day. Sarah Gomartin is a servant of the Presbyterian Echlin family at Rathard on the Ards Peninsula, Co. Down during the early twentieth century. Bridie Dineen, who is helping to pick the potato crop, is given bacon, by Sarah, on a Friday. The latter is only roused to offer Bridie some fish after she is brusquely ordered to do so:

She sprang from her chair, and rushing round the table snatched the plate from before the embarrassed woman. 'I'll get ye a clean plate too' she said, girming in fury at her.

Sam Hanna Bell, *December Bride*. (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1974), 141.

¹⁵ Another example of this phenomenon appears in the short story 'Attracta'. The titular character is a teacher in a Protestant school, the classroom walls of which reveal another type of cultural ambidextrousness:

There were portraits of England's kings and queens around the walls, painted by some teacher in the past. There were other pictures, added at some later date, of Irish heroes: Niall of the Nine Hostages, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Wolfe Tone and Grattan. Maps of Europe and of Ireland and of England, Wales and Scotland hung side by side. (CS, 675).

Mrs Quinton.

‘You think I’m extravagant in my Irish fancies? Father Kilgarriff thinks so, and the others too. Yet I am part of all this now. I cannot help my fervour.’

(Mrs. Quinton, FF, 162).

Though Michael Collins is by no means a principal character in the novel he unquestionably dominates the background at certain points, representing the struggle for Irish independence at that time. Mrs Quinton’s initial bewilderment at her husband’s generous welcoming of Collins into their house (‘I’m honoured to meet you Mr. Collins’ (FF, 28)) soon changes to admiration when she discovers who he really is: “she didn’t know then that he was a revolutionary leader” (FF, 28). Although Mr. Quinton is prepared to offer financial assistance to Collins he stops short of allowing his land to be used as a training-ground for Collins’ men: “the best we can do is to give Collins money. There is no question whatsoever of drilling fellows at Kilneagh. Absolutely not.” (FF, 34). Mrs Quinton, however, has far more militant sentiments in mind. Though her initial encounter with Collins is obviously cool, in that she rather sternly asserts her English identity, her political aspirations are clear, even at this stage:

‘You are English, Mrs Quinton?’ (...)

‘Yes, I am English.’

My mother’s voice conveyed no note of apology. (...)

There was injustice in Ireland was what my mother maintained: you didn’t have to be Irish to wish to expunge it. (FF, 28-9).

Later on Willie recounts his mother’s unrestricted admiration of Collins and his actions, regardless of their consequences:

I remember being surprised to hear my mother saying she had liked Collins the first time she met him (...) If he ordered assassinations there was justice in what he ordered, for such death was an element in a war

that was little different from the war her own countrymen had been waging against the might of the Kaiser. More energetically than my father, she supported the revolutionary cause and it was she who made him contact Collins again after his initial visit to Kilneagh. (FF, 32).

The fact that Mrs Quinton compares the fight for Irish independence with the Great War openly suggests that she sees the former as being a just and necessary war, an essential, though regrettable, means of endeavouring to extirpate an evil force. At one stage she laments the failure of the Easter Rising to achieve anything as substantial as Irish independence (FF, 21) and she spends a considerable amount of time longing for the murder of Sergeant Rudkin, “The Devil incarnate” (FF, 67), the Black and Tan officer responsible for the deaths of so many of her family and the almost total destruction of their house:

‘It’s still surprising,’ my mother insisted, ‘that nobody shot Rudkin.’
(...) ‘I cannot understand why nobody shot him. I cannot understand that.’ (FF, 56).

Mrs Quinton’s passion for Irish politics and her virulent and uncompromising opposition to the English army of the Black and Tans, is, undeniably, a rejection of what one would have expected to be the politics of someone from her background. Such a rejection is finally symbolised by her grisly suicide at the end of the first section. Yet, even before this, her very way of life and even the house she moves to in Cork show the signs of slow but indubitable decline, as much her own degeneration as that of the her culture’s.

Willie’s thoughts while wandering through his new home present a clear picture of a dwelling that is undoubtedly second-best, a constant and painful reminder of former luxury:

Now and again I wandered into the dank sitting-room or dining room, both of them noticeably narrow, as everything about the house was. There was room for only one person at a time on the stairs, and you had to wait on a half-landing in order to permit someone else to pass (...) Incongruous on the stairway walls were the gilt-framed canvases that had been saved from the fire. In the narrow sitting-room and dining-room familiar furniture loomed awkwardly now, and on the landing outside my mother's room the tall oak cupboard that had held my sisters' dolls in the nursery took up almost all the space there was. (FF, 51).

In this house a dank sitting-room replaces what is now only the memory of a drawing-room, the narrowness of every part of the building being an incessant reminder of the generous spaciousness of a Big House, the paraphernalia of the latter truly haunting the new abode. A look back at the Kilneagh House that was is sufficient to accentuate the enormous chasm between both habitations:

(...) in a house that seemed enormous to her [Josephine]. Its landings and half-landings, front staircase and back one, the kitchen passages, the Chinese carpet in the scarlet drawing-room, the Waterford vases in the hall, endless porcelain figures in the morning-room, the silver pheasants, the rosewood trays: (FF, 26-7).

Thus, Mrs Quinton, Willie and Josephine move from a House which was comfortably upper-case to a house which is patently lower-case and, along with such a decline in fortunes comes an equally, if not more conspicuous deterioration in the owner herself. Willie notices that his mother demonstrates less affection towards him in their new surroundings: "She did not kiss me, as she had at Kilneagh." (FF, 52). As well as this she succeeds in secluding herself from the reality of the outside world when she refuses to open letters which are sent to her by her in-laws, eventually going to the extreme of attempting to prevent their arrival at her house: "I receive letters from my sisters-in-

law which I do not open. I have requested Mr. Derenzy to inform them that I do not wish to receive them.” (FF, 61). Her gradual but absolute descent into alcoholism is vividly presented to us when Willie makes a discovery in a cupboard outside his mother’s bedroom: “I opened it once and saw what appeared to be a hundred maps of Ireland: the trade-mark of Paddy Whiskey on a mass of labels, the bottles arrayed like an army on the shelves.” (FF, 51). Hence, Mrs Quinton undergoes a shocking transformation, from a respectable mistress of a Big House to a reckless inebriate in a dismal dwelling in Cork city.

Mrs. Quinton’s physical self-annihilation is anticipated by her acrimonious rejection, and hopes for the extinction, of her own culture: as she exults in the political battle against Anglo-Ireland she afterwards literally impels herself towards a sloppy but ultimate self-destruction. Thus Marianne’s penultimate diary-entry in the novel, as well as describing the misfortunes heaped on Willie and herself, also obliquely encapsulates Mrs Quinton’s suicide and what that symbolises in terms of the Ascendancy and their absorption and consequent disappearance into Independent Ireland: “*Truncated lives, creatures of the shadows. Fools of fortune, as his father would have said; ghosts we became.*” (FF, 187). The truncated lives have their counterpart in Mrs Quinton’s slashed wrists, the ghosts are as much Mrs Quinton, joining a dying culture, as much as they are the unhappy couple of the novel.

(Saint) Imelda.

Imelda Quinton’s wandering cogitations on the essential disparateness of being the only Protestant amongst her peers epitomize the concept of a rigorously distinct Protestant identity, the apparent inflexibility of which she eventually manages to mystically transcend as the novel progresses:

During prayers and Catechism she practised the piano or watched Sister Rowan making bread in the kitchen. Nobody except Teresa Shea minded that she was different because she wasn’t a Catholic.

She didn't mind being different herself, not having a First Communion dress, nor rosary beads, not being able to walk in the Corpus Christi procession in Fermoy. She asked forgiveness if she stepped on a snail because Sister Mulcahy had once explained that a snail was just as much God's creature as anything else was. But Imelda knew that a Protestant asking forgiveness, and never being required to say Hail Marys as a penance, was different also. 'Proddy-woddy green guts,' Teresa Shea had whispered on Imelda's first day at the convent (...) 'Heretics,' Teresa Shea muttered beneath her laugh. 'Crowd of bloody heretics.' (FF, 157).

During her time at the new convent in Lough Imelda takes part in the rhyme-craze which occurred there at one stage. On the inside of the cover of her transcription book she wrote the following words: "*Imelda Quinton is my name, Ireland is my nation. A burnt house is my dwelling place, Heaven's my destination.*" (FF, 155). These lines succinctly express what the child believes to be the most fundamental aspects of her character, that is: her name, her nationality, her damaged earthly home and her expected heavenly abode. It is the final belief which soon becomes the most significant facet of her personality in the novel, in turn complicating her identity as an Irish Protestant to a degree which unequivocally dwarfs any complexity in the identities of any member of her family or ancestors before her.

Father Kilgarriff begins to compare Imelda to an Italian saint¹⁶ who happens to be her namesake, who shares a birthday with her and who was also born a month prematurely, just as Imelda herself was:

¹⁶ Technically Imelda of Bologna's proper title is 'Blessed', meaning that, according to the Roman Catholic Church, she is just before that stage where she can formally be declared a saint. However, for the sake of convenience we will simply refer to her as a saint, since this does not alter her overall characterisation within the novel.

According to Father Kilgarriff, she shared the day with the Blessed Imelda Lambertini of Bologna, May 13th. She'd been born more than a month before she was expected and so apparently had the saintly child of Bologna. While not yet twelve years old the Blessed Imelda had experienced a Sacred Host hovering above her head while she knelt in prayer in a Dominican convent. And as that miracle occurred so had her death. (FF, 162).

Imelda quickly becomes obsessed with her saintly counterpart as she begins imaginatively to enter into the young saint's experience as recounted by Father Kilgarriff: "In the kitchen Imelda imagined the Host as a wispy outline, no more than a shred of mist." (FF, 162). The Host here is the typical Roman Catholic term for the bread consecrated at the Eucharist, the etymology of this word is significant for our purposes and is, briefly, as follows. 'Host' is a Middle English word derived from the Old French '(h)oiste', which had its ultimate origins in the Latin 'hostia', which translates as 'victim'.¹⁷ The Roman Catholic Church believes that the consecration of the Eucharistic elements becomes a real participation in Christ's sacrifice of Himself at Calvary, hence the meaning 'victim'. Therefore, Imelda is, perhaps unconsciously, deeply meditating on the mysteries of Roman Catholic Eucharistic theology, involving herself, to this extent at least, with the doctrines of a Church which she is necessarily alienated from, due to her own religious profession. Imelda's fascination for the Blessed Imelda's religious experience persists and soon becomes public:

She wondered what it had been like for the Blessed Imelda to experience the Sacred Host hovering above her while she knelt in prayer. She once asked Sister Rowan, who'd said that no ordinary mortal could know a thing like that. But it interested Imelda and she was curious. (FF, 169).

¹⁷ R. E. Allen (Ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 570.

All future references to the above dictionary will be cited parenthetically, in the text itself, as, for example: (C.O.D., 570).

Shortly afterwards Imelda starts to see static images beginning to move: “The gondola in the green picture of Venice seemed, just for an instant, to give the slightest of shivers, as if about to begin its journey.” (FF, 170), and: “Again it seemed to Imelda that the gondola moved very slightly and this time she could have sworn that one of the figures outside the church raised a hand.” (FF, 171). Such visions can be compared to the visionary experiences of so many of the saints, but in particular to that of the Blessed Imelda; though undoubtedly real for the individual in question, such apparitions are normally only manifest *to* that person. Imelda’s final thoughts on the saint’s vision of the Host are mentally voiced to her father as she imagines speaking to him about her obsession: “‘Imelda,’ he said. ‘What a lovely name!’ And she told him about the Blessed Imelda and how the Host had come to her.” (FF, 174). The final seven words of this quotation are full of a subtle though potent ambiguity. Imelda’s imaginary reference to seeing the Host does not clearly establish precisely *who* saw it, whether it was just the saint or both the latter *as well as* Imelda herself is not obvious. Such ambiguity concerning the character and behaviour of Imelda obtains for the remainder of the novel, her presence from henceforth always conveying an aura of saintliness, as much the possibility of madness. Shortly afterwards it rapidly becomes evident that Imelda is being tormented by her family’s past experiences:

Imelda pressed her face into the nettles and did not feel their stinging. She pressed her fists into her ears. She closed her eyes as tightly as she could.

But nothing went away.

The screaming of the children began, and the torment of the flames on their flesh. The dogs were laid out dead in the yard, and the body of the man in the teddy-bear dressing-gown lay smouldering on the stairs. The blood kept running on her hands, and was tacky in her hair. (FF, 174-5).

Again the child seems to demonstrate a mysterious and powerful connection with her family’s history, so much so that it impinges on her both mentally and physically. Soon

afterwards she publicly demonstrates the seriousness of her condition when she begins to show signs of acute psychological illness:

She asked for the blackboard to be cleaned and then, to her astonishment, she saw that Imelda Quinton had raised both her arms in front of her and was slowly moving away from the desk she shared with Lottie Reilly, as if walking in her sleep. With hesitant steps, occasionally stumbling, the child walked to a corner of the classroom. She huddled herself into it, crouching on the floor, pressed hard against the two walls that met there. She made a whimpering sound and then was silent. (FF, 175).

However, the apparently psychiatrically disturbed child is not definitively categorised as this at the end of the novel, instead she is believed, by the locals, to exude a sanctity and to possess the God-given powers of performing curative miracles:

Imelda is gifted, so the local people say, and bring the afflicted to her. A woman has been rid of dementia, a man cured of a cataract. Her happiness is like a shroud miraculously about her, its source mysterious except to her. (FF, 192)

As well as this, Josephine's last words are "'Imelda,' (...) 'The Blessed Imelda.'" (FF, 183), here again a vagueness characterises these words as we are unsure whether they refer exclusively to the Italian saint, Imelda Quinton, or both. If anything, we can at least be certain that Josephine's deathbed utterance is *possibly* a further affirmation of the locals' belief in the saintliness of the Quinton child.

In the end it is the observation of a nun in the hospital, where Josephine dies, which most satisfactorily elucidates the mystery of Imelda's transformation. Her words go far beyond a simple comment on the lives of the saints and manage to explain the purpose of Imelda's unique identity at the close of the novel:

‘If you study the lives of the saints,’ the nun in the hospital had said after Josephine had mentioned the Blessed Imelda, ‘you’ll find that it is horror and tragedy that makes them what they are. Reflecting the life of Our Lord.’ (FF, 184).

Thus, Imelda’s imaginative link with the burning of Kilneagh House, as well as with the murders committed there, has driven her past the edge of sanity, into an often painful state in which she is acknowledged by those around her to be elevated to the status of a living saint. It is vital here to note that the latter concept is an exclusively Roman Catholic one, all other Churches accepting only some Biblical and much earlier figures as saints.¹⁸ In this way, therefore, Imelda’s metamorphosis into a Blessed personage symbolically transcends any previously held or perceived notions of a non-negotiable line of demarcation between the two main faiths of Ireland.¹⁹ The mental anguish she suffers as a result of past atrocities accentuates her role as victim, hostia: the sacred bread elevated for the worship of the faithful, the Lamb of God Who suffered for many. Thus, her alleged Christ-like saintliness offers propitiation for the sins of her ancestors, collapsing class and religious barriers that were formerly erected on both sides of the cultural divide.

No one points out (...) that the name Kilneagh might possibly mean the place of the church, perhaps even a foundation of St. Fiach. No one suggests that the family name of Quinton must derive from St. Quentin, a name originally of Normandy. (FF, 10).

Kilneagh and the Quinton name, both founded by saints, each return to a contemporary child-saint for forgiveness and a new identity.

¹⁸ Though the Orthodox Church also has a strong tradition of saints this cannot be said to impinge on the dominant Protestant/Roman Catholic dichotomy of the Irish reality.

¹⁹ Kristin Morrison notes that “Blessed Imelda is prominent in Roman Catholic popular piety but not in the Church of Ireland, which in liturgy and devotion emphasizes its difference from the church of Rome.”

Morrison, *op. cit.*, 117.

Imelda Quinton's saintly pedestal is as lonely as it is lofty. Isolated inside an invisible shroud of happiness, she is thus forever alienated from the community and indeed anyone who might wish to reach her. In this way Imelda is most definitely the last in the Quinton line since she will never choose, or even be able to leave her present mystical state, which is, necessarily, sterile.²⁰ The extinction of a family line is not the focus of this particular novel, though it is evidently touched on in the brief references to the rather odd but most definitely asexual relationship between Mr Derenzy and Aunt Pansy:

Unlike the other men at the mill, Mr Derenzy was a Protestant, which allowed him to have pretensions in the direction of my aunt. But considering himself socially inferior, he had never thought it proper to propose marriage. (FF, 17).

Mr Derenzy continues to believe in the impropriety of a marriage proposal to Willie's aunt and thus another potential union, and the survival of the Quinton name, is precluded. The relationship has all the frozen qualities of the clandestine love-scene on the brass log-box which Willie remembers at the beginning of the novel (FF, 10); forever trapped in an unconsummated rigor mortis. The imminent quietus of a Protestant line becomes central in the next two novels which are discussed in this thesis.

Throughout *Fools of Fortune* Trevor succeeds in dashing the conventional images of the Anglo-Irish. Though Anna Quinton is remembered as a saintly figure after her death, her actions, during her lifetime, were so at variance with the prescribed norms of the Anglo-Irish ethos that she was eventually spurned by her own family and disdained

²⁰ As Dolores MacKenna asserts: "The saintly but mad Imelda is the last issue of the Quinton family." Dolores MacKenna, *William Trevor: The Writer and His Work*. (Dublin: New Island Books, 1999), 124.

as a traitor to her class. Mrs Quinton, Willie's mother, becomes the contemporary manifestation of Anna Quinton's rejection of English politics. A staunch supporter of Michael Collins, Mrs Quinton becomes progressively more bloodthirsty and is eventually the instigator of the savage murder of the Black and Tan Sergeant Rudkin. Later on her gradual decline and eventual demise are emblems for Anglo-Ireland on its deathbed. Finally, Imelda is the ultimate nullifier any typical representation of the Irish Protestant. As a result of her obsession with her saintly namesake she begins to exhibit some of the attributes of a strictly Roman Catholic saint, thus rupturing any previously established sectarian barriers and also acting as a living, Christ-like sacrifice for the sins of her ancestors as she *becomes* the Host (victim) which she once longed to venerate; the locals now flock to a child whose ancestors once appropriated land from them.

CHAPTER TWO

The Silence in the Garden.

The Silence in the Garden explores the untenable nature of Protestant Ireland's claim to native Ireland's land, and the consequent guilt involved in such a situation. It describes the gradual but undeniable decline of the Rolleston's Big House and its eventual ownership by the unfortunate pariah, Tom, the illegitimate Roman Catholic whose parents were both members of the housekeeping staff at Carriglas. Throughout the novel the building of the bridge, named after an Irish revolutionary, which will link the island to the mainland, overshadows proceedings at Carriglas, even that of Villana's wedding. Eventually we are made aware of a hideous family secret, a crime against Catholic Ireland, which finally succeeds in ruining the Rollestons and extirpating their line by a series of sterile or non-existent relationships.

Sarah Pollexfen, a poor relation of the Rollestons, is initially exposed to a quite emphatically Irish family when she first encounters the Rollestons as the new governess for their children. The family's enthusiasm for the Irish language is evident when the topic of place-names comes up in conversation:

' (...) Do you know if Bandon means the place of the pointed hills?'
(...) It's Banagher, I think,' his grandmother said, 'that has to do with pointed hills.'
(...) The conversation about places and their naming continued: Carriglas meant green rock, (...) Dunadry meant the place of the middle fort, Cork meant marsh.²¹

²¹ William Trevor, *The Silence in the Garden*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1989), 15. All future references to this novel will be cited parenthetically, in the text itself, as, for example: (SG, 15).

In fact, not only is there an obvious knowledge and respect for Irish culture in this household, there is also, perhaps to a greater extent, a strong perception of English people as an alien race, characterised by their strangeness more than anything else:

'Why corks?' Villana asked.

'A protection against cramp in the night. English people go in for measures like that. Mrs Trass was originally of Surrey.'

'One of the masters at school eats the shell of an egg,' John James said.

'On the grounds that it's good for his bones.'

'Does he come from Surrey?' Villana asked.

'Lincolnshire, I think. Harterblow he's called.'

'What a peculiar name!'

'English people often have peculiar names.' (SG, 16).

However, notwithstanding the Rollestons' strong identification with Ireland, they are, inescapably, members of a certain elite which is incontestably distinct from any other Irish class. They are, therefore, totally separate in their identity as an Anglo-Irish Protestant family, and, unlike the Quintons of the *Fools of Fortune*, they remain rigidly so, until they are dissolved back into the clay of Carriglas.

Contrary to what one might expect from the above comments on the English, John James and Lionel Rolleston are not educated in their native country, but instead are schooled in Shropshire, England (SG, 54). Thus, it is obvious that the family have maintained at least a tacit affinity for England. Also, this is an 'Irish Times' reading (SG, 18), croquet and tennis playing family (SG, 18); a family with army-connections who are sternly threatened because of their closeness to the local barracks (SG, 50); a family who once employed a butler²² and had several of the Viceroy's stay with them

²² In *Excursions in the Real World* Trevor mentions the social status of having a servant in one's house:

'Have they a maid?' was a question often asked, the answer supplying instant social status.

William Trevor, *Excursions in the Real World*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994), 16. (P.T.O.)

for considerable periods of time (SG, 91); a family who, in its heyday, had a regatta, just for the fun of it. All of this renders them not entirely Irish, when observed by those around them. Lady Rossboyne's accounts of her experiences of the Troubles, retailed at the wedding reception at Carriglas, more than bears out this perceived identity of the Protestant Irish as outsiders and ultimately as the enemy:

Instead she related how she herself had been fortunate to escape unharmed on an occasion during the Troubles, when a tar barrel had been set alight in the room beneath the one where she was sleeping. The neighbouring Buttevant Court, as no doubt was well known, had been razed to the ground.

'We were mercifully overlooked,' the Bishop murmured, (SG, 122).

However, of course, the barriers are not entirely those of native Ireland. Anglo-Ireland is shown, in the character of the Bishop of Killaloe, also present at Villana's wedding reception, to be quite adept at constructing its own social barricades, entrenched boundaries which allow no communication with those outside her own exclusive precincts:

The Bishop replied that he was not of the neighbourhood. He was not acquainted with the local people. He had noticed the man who'd driven the motor-car to and from the church, but he could not claim that he had in any way got to know him. He hadn't even spoken to him.

(...) 'I am not acquainted with Mr Corcoran either.'

'Are you acquainted with McGrath? Or Tobin?'

'I'm afraid not.'

(...) 'Look I really don't know any of these people.' (SG, 154).

All future references to the above work will be cited parenthetically, in the text itself as, for example: (ERW, 16).

Woolly Peaches, Rotten Cores:

The epitome of Anglo-Ireland, however, was not any one of her many human incarnations or their social snobberies, neither was it her victorious battles nor the many lavish parties. It was, in short, the Big House, that domestic and social centre which was simultaneously a symbol of conquest and dominion as it was a space for gracious living, where opulence was normative and frugality was shunned. Initially Carriglas is presented to us as an idyllic abode, resplendent in its luxuries. However, as the novel progresses we are gradually exposed to its incessant decline, a decline which may be construed as representing the terminal deterioration of its inhabitants due to internal and external factors, namely the overwhelming burden of a guilty personal and historical past, as well as the construction of an ‘anti-House’ structure in the form of the island’s new bridge.

The very first page of the novel presents Carriglas in a picturesque setting, swimming towards us with a blissful and balmy summer as its luscious backdrop:

Today Hugh returned after another summer on the island and described the walk from the pier to the white gates, the scent of honeysuckle that accompanies you. He described how you round the last curve of the avenue and there the grey house is, flanked by a monkey puzzle on one lawn and strawberry trees on the other. (SG, 9).

Sarah Pollexfen’s first impression of the House and its surroundings, as she is shown around by Villana, seem to wholly accord with her brother’s description of them:

We crossed the cobbled yard, Villana leading me to an ice-house and then through a shrubbery to the kitchen garden, where peaches ripened on brick-lined walls. We passed among apple trees to a secluded tennis court, (SG, 17).

In fact, the above references to flora such as honeysuckle, strawberry trees, apples and peaches is reminiscent of a particular section in Ben Jonson's 'To Penshurst' where he describes the voluptuous fruitfulness of the Sidney residence in Kent:

Then hath thy orchard fruit, thy garden flowers,
Fresh as the air, and new as are the hours.
The early cherry, with the later plum,
Fig, grape, and quince, each in his time doth come;
The blushing apricot and the woolly peach
Hang on thy walls, that every child may reach.²³

Thus, our initial notion of Carriglas approximates to Sidney's country manor, a House in every way exuding Renaissance perfection, bristling with plenteousness and with its door flung open to the entire community; and indeed, this particular sense of the House lasts, at least for a while. For example, the lavishly furnished interior of the House reflects the natural fruitfulness of its orchards and gardens:

In the drawing-room there were further family portraits, and inlaid cabinets, armchairs and sofas, a gold-faced clock in the centre of a marble mantelpiece, a grand piano, and two chandeliers. Tall French windows were open to the garden, where another lawn stretched grandly, bounded by long flowerbeds. Wistaria trailed along a wall, flagstones were set around a sundial. (SG, 13).

However, such magnificent opulence is quickly found to be limited as the House shows signs of unmistakable decay. Dunadry Rectory and the Misses Goodbody's School for Protestant Girls both evince varying degrees of deterioration (SG, 22 & 20), but Carriglas surpasses them by far due to the sheer magnitude of its decline. Again and again we are informed that Carriglas is more vulnerable than we were first led to believe, that there is something gradually corroding its very heart. Sarah's diary-entry

²³ Ian Donaldson (Ed.), *Ben Jonson*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 283.

for 1931 displays an entirely different kind of House, cruelly ravaged by some destructive force, it now bears little resemblance to what it once so haughtily was; once a formidable edifice which was brutally imposed on the landscape, it is now besieged by that very landscape:

The avenue gates are now so streaked with green and rust that a camouflage has been formed, drawing them into landscape they once stood palely alien in. Grass is high on the avenue itself; weeds flourish in two rich channels on either side of it. The lawns that flank the house are only roughly cut, and the white paintwork of the hall-door and the windows is as marked and dirtied as the gates. (...) water, penetrating the wall of the French windows, has left a brown stain on the wallpaper; and the room is dingy. So, with similar discolouration, is the circular hall, and the empty alcoves of the green staircase wall seem less elegant than they were. Paint flakes away from windowsills. The nursery-schoolroom smells of the sun-scorched butterflies that have accumulated on its boarded floor. (SG, 38).

Thus, the grounds are rank with weeds and the interior of the House is redolent with the stench of death and decay. Sarah, however, is not the only character to notice the very conspicuous decline of Carriglas; Haverty tells Tom about the erstwhile unbounded extravagance of the Rolleston's House as he is teaching the boy how to control the governess-car pony:

(...) Haverty lit a cigarette and told Tom about a regatta there had been, the last occasion when there'd been as much company at Carriglas as there would be on the wedding day. Yachts and sailing-boats had raced around the island; boats had come up from Dunmore East and Dungarvan; there'd been different coloured sails, and flags along the quaysides. (SG, 120).²⁴

²⁴ This passage concerning the regatta at Carriglas echoes of J.G. Farrell's elegiac opening to his *Troubles*, another novel which describes, in unflagging detail, the unremitting decline of the fateful hotel, 'The Majestic':

At that time there were probably yachts there too during the summer since the hotel held a regatta every July. These yachts would have been beached on one or other of the sandy crescents that curved out

A vivid reminiscence of such lavishness is designedly placed immediately before the description of a rather mediocre wedding, in relative terms, in order to accentuate the undeniable decline which the family has endured since those glorious pre-war years. Lady Rossboyne, also, is quick to point out the most salient feature of the House before she even reaches the avenue, on her way to Villana's wedding reception: "'Something's up with this place,' she commented as they approached the avenue gates. 'They've let it go.'" (SG, 119). As the visitors retire on the night of their arrival Villiers Hadnett pulls a bell in his bedroom for room-service, but to no avail (SG, 131) and Lady Rossboyne's mattress, once lain upon by the Viceroy, is uncomfortably lumpy: "'No better than turnips in a sack,'" (SG, 132). It is Sarah's 1947 diary-entry, however, that illuminates the symbolism of such decay as she focuses on the falling of a family portrait, capturing the drama of the moment, as well as its consequences, in a particularly unforgettable fashion:

Carriglas, March 9th, 1947. A portrait on the staircase wall fell in the night, splinters of glass everywhere. Both frame and canvas are damaged and John James says there is no one in the vicinity who could properly restore them. So we have taken the picture to one of the visitor's rooms, leaning it against the wall in the long cupboard. (SG, 193).

Such a portrait, and others like it, are the only items that connect the House with its long history. An unsalvageably damaged portrait, thus, represents a brokenness within the heart of the House itself, the rupturing of a precious continuity. And so the onslaught continues, damp spreads on what was Mrs Rolleston's bedroom-ceiling, a crack appears in the cast-iron of the kitchen range, a strawberry tree falls, the piano in the drawing-room goes out of tune (SG, 194), eventually sheep begin to graze the grass around the monkey puzzle and the strawberry trees (SG, 196). It might seem justifiable,

towards the hotel on each side of the peninsula. But now both pines and yachts have floated away (...)
As for the regatta, for some reason it was discontinued years ago,

J.G. Farrell, *Troubles*. (London: Flamingo, 1984), 9.

at first glance, to ascribe such unrelenting degeneration to that inherent quality which all Big Houses are cursed with, that inevitable, inexorable drive towards decay as described in so many Irish novels since Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*. Carriglas, however, begins to founder for more complex reasons. In fact, both its recent and distant history bedevil it to the point where it can simply exist no longer, as the following will demonstrate.

The drawers and cabinets of the solicitors Harbinson and Balt are a repository for a vast amount of information on the history of the Protestant families of the area. Among such data is an account of the Rollestons' shameful past, glaringly tyrannical as it appears, unvarnished and without justification, among the other papers which document the story of an entire community:

(...) the Rollestons, arriving in the wake of Oliver Cromwell, had dispossessed the Cantillons of their island and sent them on their way to the stony wilderness of Mayo. (SG, 41).

Nearer the end of the novel Sarah records, in her diary, Mrs Rolleston's far less neutral words about her family's bloody and guilty history: "*Time had tamed the Rollestons, who had come to the island with slaughter in their wake,*" (SG, 188). At the end of the novel Tom contemplates how "There'd always been talk of the Rollestons slaughtering their way to the island," (SG, 198). However, such are the facts of distant history, and, though indisputably true, the iniquity in question has obviously lost some impact over the intervening centuries. Nevertheless, the Rollestons continue to be haunted by a far more recent history, more ghastly than any Cromwellian butchery because of its temporal proximity to them. This is the story of a boy and it is the reason why Sarah is exhorted, by Mrs Rolleston, to write her diaries. It also constitutes the primary cause of the family's eventual downfall and disappearance, as well as echoing the original havoc which the Rollestons' ancestors brought about.

The Secret.

Funny the way a thing like the other would afflict them, the way they couldn't come to terms with it.

(*Tom on the Rollestons' secret*, SG, 198).

'The wretched journey to a woman's bed, the empty marriage, guilt begetting guilt.

Sarah do you understand?'

(Mrs Rolleston, SG, 183).

At the end of chapter five Sarah indicates her awareness of a family secret that she believes will forever be kept from her: "*I am not worthy of whatever secret there is,*" (SG, 116). In fact, it eventually becomes apparent that the existence of her dairies is directly as a result of that very secret: "She said she wanted it written down. She wanted it in Sarah Pollexfen's diaries, so that the truth could be passed on. Or left behind, whichever way you looked at it." (SG, 183). Gradually the novel reveals the truly ghastly nature of the family secret. There is a glimpse of a red-haired boy hiding in a cave (SG, 85), a terrified boy being relentlessly chased for an entire summer, a child that is reduced to the status of an animal because he is pursued with a shotgun (SG, 183). Then, finally, Mrs Rolleston, in all her torment, explodes and lets loose the naked truth in all its ugliness: "*My grandchildren hunted a child, Sarah. My grandchildren and your brother. As of right, they hunted. They were the children of Carriglas.*" (SG, 184). It is the third sentence which is, by far, the most revealing in this frank outburst as it refers to an Ascendancy right to treat the native Irish entirely as they desired, even if that meant regarding them as inferior and on an equal level with animals. Thus, the single crime which the Rolleston children are guilty of symbolically contains the historical crimes which their ancestors were guilty of. In this way the heartless terrifying of a child merges with the terror perpetrated by Cromwell and his army, the recent past reflecting more distant times; as the Rolleston children chased

Cornelius Dowley, so too their ancestors chased the native Irish from their land.²⁵ The unprovoked persecution of the Dowley child is the tremendously heavy burden of Protestant guilt which the Rollestons suffer from and it is precisely this which eventually terminates their line: “‘(...) *a childhood cruelty has turned around and damned a household (...)*” (SG, 186). Mrs Rolleston is not comforted by Sarah’s attempt to confine the incident to the past and insists that this particular sin can never be absolved: “‘*Mrs Rolleston, do please try to rest. No matter how it was, it belongs to the past now.*’

‘The past has no belongings. The past does not obligingly absorb what is not wanted.’ (SG, 185).

Sarah is partially implicated in the deed as it was she who was in charge of the children during the summer in question. She reacts to the matter in an entirely different way than Mrs Rolleston does, though feelings of guilt are undeniably just below the surface here:

*I convinced myself again that children are wild and often primitive. I did not believe that there was some extra wickedness in the children of Carriglas, some harshness beneath the attractions of the surface. I did not think of the misdemeanour as ‘*hunting a child*’ and I don’t believe, at that time, Mrs Rolleston did either. The shadow of that summer faded beneath my insistence that it should; (SG, 188).*

Sarah Pollexfen’s attempt at minimising the matter is as feeble as it is racked with guilt. She vainly tries to ignore a cloud which, in the end, she only succeeds in partially suppressing, constantly aware, subconsciously at least, of the actual enormity of what took place so many summers ago. However, it would seem that this generation of the

²⁵ Kristin Morrison suggests that “The violence that marked the Rollestons’ arrival continues (...), culminating in the cruelty of Villana and her brothers toward redheaded Corny Dowley, replaying in their children’s games the persecution of Irish peasants by ascendant Anglo-Irish over the centuries. Morrison, op. cit., 112.

Also, another instance of a present situation reflecting a past crime is to be found in ‘The News from Ireland’. In that short story a peasant child is said to have the stigmata of Christ during the Famine. Kristin Morrison argues that this can be construed as a metaphor for the Ascendancy’s crucifixion of the native Irish in the past. (P.T.O.)

Rollestons have not been the only ones to suffer the burden of compunction. John and Catherine Rolleston, for example, also experienced such contrition during the time of the Famine, despite their genuine efforts to ease the suffering of those around them:

He [Finnamore Balt] spoke of another John Rolleston, who had married Catherine Esmond of Ninemilecross, the couple later known as the Famine Rollestons, because of their compassion at that time (...) but still some kind of guilt persisted in John and Catherine Rolleston (...) and it was then that the Rollestons waived their rents and their tithes in favour of the families who remained. John Rolleston was convinced that this reduction in the estate's income could somehow be made up in other ways. 'Unhappily,' Finnamore had reminded his listeners in the drawing-room, 'he was wrong.' (SG, 42-3).

Thus, the guilt experienced by the above couple is responsible for the loss of money which is never retrieved, and, eventually, the loss of title to the land itself (SG, 43). In this way the Famine Rollestons' loss of some of their property foreshadows the complete loss of both Carriglas House and all its land to an outsider by the end of the novel. Thus, the oppressiveness of guilt²⁶ is only finally quenched by the stillness of the grave, the extinction of a family and, consequently, an entire line.²⁷

I say we will have no more marriage.²⁸

The eponymous character in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* despises life. He does so to such an extent that he cannot accept Ophelia's love for him when she offers it and instead abruptly orders her to depart from him and take up residence inside the celibate walls of a convent, in order to preclude herself from bringing life into the world. It is at this

Morrison, op. cit., 12.

²⁶ Dolores MacKenna refers to "the circle of guilt which ultimately destroys the Rollestons."

MacKenna, op. cit., 131.

²⁷ Trevor's obsession with the theme of sterility and its consequences is evident in the very first page of his *Collected Stories*, where Mr Mileson, in 'A Meeting in Middle Age' is "Bachelor, childless, the end of the line," (CS, 1).

²⁸ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 150. All future references to the above text will be cited parenthetically, in the text itself, as, for example: (H, 150).

point that Hamlet utters his invective on marriage and wishes for the complete annihilation of the institution. However, Hamlet is effusive in his display of affection for Ophelia when both characters are separated by the gap of death, her corpse unleashing within Hamlet a rush of intensely hyperbolic pillow-talk: "I loved Ophelia, forty thousand brothers/ Could not, with all their quantity of love, / Make up my sum-" (H, 223). Thus, Hamlet's abhorrence of life allows him only to commit himself to the sterile love for a dead body, which he histrionically demonstrates at Ophelia's funeral, her grave being momentarily transformed into a bizarre marriage-bed. Relationships in Trevor's fiction, and in the three novels dealt with in this thesis especially, display a remarkably similar pattern, but in the context of a Protestant desire to terminate a family line, often due to a shameful or even atrocious past. As in *Hamlet*, only sterile relationships are possible if there are to be relationships at all, with the dominating characteristics of such 'unions' being frigidity and distance.

One of the most obviously common characteristics of all Mrs Rolleston's grandchildren's relationships is their absolute lack of warmth, of a true connectedness of any kind. The marriage between Villana and Fynamore Balt is almost grotesque due to the age-gap between the two; the fact that Fynamore's wife once sat on his knee as a child emphasises this beyond any doubt. At one point the ferryman asseverates: "'I would have stated one time, (...) that Mr Balt was the kind to have remained a bachelor also, but I am proved mistaken.'" (SG, 103). However, of course, though Balt is no longer a bachelor after his marriage to Villana, their relationship has all the coldness of a bizarre union between a bachelor and a spinster. For example, it seems that Balt's chief commitment, in terms of his marriage to Villana, is *not* to his new wife but to his overwhelming obsession with reclaiming the lost land of Carriglas: "'There is land that must be winkled back to the family. I, with knowledge of such matters, will perhaps devote my life to that.'" (SG, 127). In fact, at one stage it is implied that Fynamore is asexual if anything, his only libido being his lustful desire to reclaim the lost lands of Carriglas:

He had never found himself drawn towards the Protestant girls he met at parties in the neighbourhood, or the Catholic girls of the shops; he had been conscious of no desire (...) His dream (...) was that his own advice and expertise should be responsible for restoring the family fortunes of the Rollestons, and the Carriglas estate, to its former grandeur. (SG, 41).

Villana's attitude, on the other hand, is just as passionless; she quite clearly states her intentions regarding the marriage, partly to put the emotionally paralysed Balt at ease:

'I am not the marrying kind,' he honestly pointed out, knowing he was not. 'And yet you love me,' she replied. 'You have loved me for all my life nearly.' Never once had he guessed she knew. 'Marriage would not mean children,' she had softly promised, as if to reassure him. 'I do not wish for children, Finny.' (SG, 44).

Thus the relationship continues and remains as it first began, as a little girl sitting on an older man's paternal knee, children representing a kind of grotesque incest in such a context. In this way, Villana disallows the continuance of any further Rolleston blood, on her part at least. The reason for her bewildering attachment to such a man is as a direct result of her sudden break up with Hugh, which, in turn, was precipitated by the child-hunt which they both participated in. Thus, Villana, in her marriage to Balt, rather than to Hugh, whom she genuinely loved, is punishing herself for a past crime which she is still haunted by, due to her complicity in it; Gregory Schirmer claims that "Villana's marriage to Finnamore Balt is a crippled, reductive version of her love for Hugh;"²⁹ In this way she attempts to halt the blood-drenched narrative of a particular family, expressly vowing *not* to be a "breeder of sinners" (H, 140).

John James' affair with Mrs Moledy, as opposed to the above relationship, is emphatically sexual, though not much else besides. The relationship has an unmistakably ugly, mechanical character, which never grows beyond this due to

²⁹ Schirmer, op. cit., 160.

obvious religious and class impediments between both parties. It is, at its best, a series of sexual encounters, many of which begin with an awkward silence on John James' part, and end confrontationally.

The fact that John James views his visits to the Rose of Tralee boarding-house as nothing other than a means of sexual gratification is quite clear from the beginning. However, it is also true that he paradoxically loathes these encounters due to the unbridgeable social gap between Mrs Moledy and he. He is incessantly disturbed by memories of his father, imagining that he is betraying the faith which he had in him due to his present relationship:

Had his father, widowed all those years, visited a Catholic woman somewhere? Had he, too, experienced the torment of remorse and resolved never to return? It was hard to imagine his father suffering like that. It was hard to imagine his father in the company of such a woman, black hair sprouting from her armpits. His father had gone to his death thinking the world of him, the eldest of his children, and his inheritor: John James believed that. (SG, 52-3).

Clearly Mrs Moledy is portrayed as a kind of grotesque creature ("black hair sprouting from her armpits"), merely worthy of being treated as an occasional sex-object: "'You treat me like I'm a strumpet.' (SG, 72), 'You have no respect for me. You take what you can get.' '(...) D'you think I'm some type of jellyfish you have relations with? (...)'" (SG, 73). When the idea of marriage is suggested, by Mrs Moledy, John James clearly views the very concept as logically impossible: "Had she gone insane that she could mention marriage, that she could contemplate being the mistress of Carriglas?" (SG, 73). Such thoughts are eventually vocalised, remarkably bluntly, when Mrs Moledy's further suggestion of marriage is heard: "(...) unable to help himself he replied that it would be as suitable for him to marry one of the maids." (SG, 99). Thus, John James conceives of Mrs Moledy not only as *someone* else, beyond the pale of his own religious and class identity, but as merely *something* else, utterly unworthy of

marriage to him. Therefore, this relationship, like the marriage between Finnamore Balt and Villana, is as distant as it is barren.

The relationship between Lionel and Sarah Pollexfen is, similar to the above two, full of that which remains unspoken and undone. Sarah's desire for a real contact with Lionel is always denied her; among their most intimate moments is when she mends his clothes. Lionel's passions are elsewhere, daily channelled into the soil of Carriglas and its surrounding beauty: "He regretted the building of the bridge, but what concerned him more were the crops he sowed, and his animals, and the trees on the skyline. That was his life." (SG, 55).

The austere aridity of the Rollestons' relationships echoes very strongly the Malcolmsons' attitude to marriage in Trevor's play *Scenes from an Album*. In the latter work the Malcolmsons of 1919, like the Rollestons, are plagued by the memory of their violent history in Ireland. For this reason, as well as due to more recent events, the Malcolmson sisters petition their brother to refrain from marrying, as they believe that this would unnecessarily continue a cruelty that their ancestors were initially responsible for, and which they are duty-bound to cease:

Eustace: Of course I'm going to marry Dotty.

Annie: So that this family may continue? So that you may drain the land that is not ours, and live in a house that would be better as a ruin?

(...) Honoria: Let this family go, Eustace. We are the last of the Malcolmsons. We have withered away: we have no cousins, and only far-distant relatives. Take that as a sign that destiny is nudging you.

(...) Honoria: (...) further children in this family should not be born.³⁰

Annie verbalises the guilt which is consuming her family when she points out the nature of the Malcolmsons' first arrival in Ireland:

³⁰ William Trevor, *Scenes from an Album*. (Dublin: Co-op Books, 1981), 22.
All future references to this play will be cited parenthetically, in the text itself, as, for example: (SA, 22).

Annie: This family was planted here, as trees are planted, Dotty, with roots that stretch under the land as they seize possession of it. To make way for this family other families were cleared away, as useless weeds are cleared. They were dispossessed and expelled; and told to take themselves to hell if they could find no better place. (SA, 24).

The play ends with the two spinster-sisters, their widowed mother and their bachelor-brother, Eustace, all frozen into a tableau of inertia. Their only desire is to abolish the violent cycle of their own history by conclusively closing their own chapters, to finish the Malcolmson line “Rather than perpetuate /The barbarous cycle.”³¹ Thus the Malcolmsons and the Rollestons exhibit a self-destructive desire; the former by their intentions, while the latter, in the end, “(...) *have returned Carriglas to its clay.*” (SG, 204). Dolores MacKenna’s thoughts on the Malcolmsons could be directly applied to the Rollestons of *The Silence in the Garden*: “The Malcolmsons began in Ireland as history makers; they have become its casualties, some of them wiped out by the violence they brought with them, others scarcely more fortunate – ridiculous, impotent survivors.”³² As Kristin Morrison asserts:

None of those who as children hunted Cornelius Dowley themselves
have any children: (...) The victimizers remain childless, (...) This

³¹ Derek Mahon’s ‘The Last of the Fire Kings’ reverberates profoundly of the Malcolmsons’ desire for their own cultural self-destruction:

Either way, I am
Through with history-
Who lives by the sword

Dies by the sword.
Last of the fire kings, I shall
Break with tradition and

Die by my own hand
Rather than perpetuate
The barbarous cycle.

Derek Mahon, *Selected Poems*. (London, Penguin, 1993), 58.

³² MacKenna, *op. cit.*, 120.

postlapsarian, festering, wounded garden is one in which there can be no children at all anymore. Physical sterility is the fitting emblem of moral evil and its mutilating, rotting effects.³³

As well as the destructive, internal power of guilt as a means of slowly eradicating the Rolleston family in *The Silence in the Garden*, there is also the external force of Independent Ireland to contend with. This new power is represented by the bridge that is being built during the novel, which is to connect the island with the mainland, and also by Tom's eventual ownership of Carriglas, after the last Rolleston has died.

The Bridge.

Steps and pillars introduced a dwelling that was solidly matter of fact, with a defiantly uncompromising note about it as though some point was being established about the durability of its stone. (SG, 12).

Initially Carriglas gives the impression of being arrogantly confident about the permanence of its position on Irish soil. There is another construction, however, which quickly begins to dominate the minds of the Rollestons and eventually establishes its own uncompromising shadow over their abode and way of life. That construction is the bridge, which represents the new order of things in post-colonial Ireland, characterised by an equal if not more virulent arrogance than its cultural predecessor:

Honeysuckle again scented the dusty road, the fuchsia hedges reddened. Villana and her grandmother had tea beneath the strawberry trees, Tom went on his usual errands. By July the iron supports of the bridge had been set in concrete, twelve on the mainland, twelve on the island. Alien, perfectly upright, the line of their height on either side sloping to meet the level of the land, their graceless presence was only ugly (...) The place of the bridge had already acquired a personality that

³³ Morrison, op. cit., 70-1.

had not been there before, a fleeting spirit of its own, imposed by labourers. (SG, 69).³⁴

It is clear that the stones of Carriglas will be no match for the iron and cement of the new bridge. As well as the very threatening potency of the bridge itself, its very position demonstrates a contempt for the Rolleston family due to the fact that it has been built at an inconvenient distance from them (SG, 154). However, the most unkindest cut of all is the name which the bridge is to be given, it will be named after Cornelius Dowley, the man responsible for the killing of the Rolleston's butler. It is evident that there is a certain amount of resentment and bruised feelings, on the Rollestons part, when it becomes known to whose memory the bridge will be dedicated. John James, for instance, had hoped that it would commemorate his family, and thus Anglo-Ireland, instead of militant Irish Republicanism:

(...) he had even imagined permission being sought for his father's name to be carved on a stone. The Rollestons were the island family; they had been humane at the time of the potato blight; they had given generously, seeking no reward. Words on the bridge might have remembered that, through a memorial to one of them. (SG, 74).

However, the bridge, in reality, becomes an emblem for all that was ugly about the new Ireland, in all its bloody savagery; Cornelius Dowley's most lauded feat was the killing of nineteen Black and Tan soldiers (SG, 76). As well as this it becomes a symbol for the shameful secret of the Rolleston's, for the bridge is named after the child who was chased by the Rolleston children so many years ago. Thus, the bridge is as much Yeats's "filthy modern tide"³⁵ as it is Anglo-Ireland's former trespasses and the

³⁴ The alien nature of the bridge, which is at variance with that of Anglo-Irish Carriglas, is later accentuated in chapter six when a diary-entry by Sarah Pollexfen notes this, as well as Lady Rossboyne's reaction to it:

Steel pillars rose strangely from the water (...) Lady Rossboyne's shrill ejaculation was heard, deploring the spoiling of the landscape. (SG, 134) (Underlining mine).

³⁵ W.B. Yeats, *The Poems*. Edited by Daniel Albright. (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1990), 'The Statues', 385.

resulting guilt. Therefore, whenever the topic of the bridge arises it elicits nothing but silence and a forced acceptance of the matter: “*At dinner tonight there was talk of the bridge, though the subject of the memorial inscription was not touched upon.*” (SG, 115). In this way Protestant Ireland is compelled, as a result of guilt for its past wrongs, to acquiesce to the new order of things, even if they are in every way repugnant to them. Tom is the gentle human incarnation of the bridge. His eventual sole ownership of Carriglas and its lands symbolises Independent Ireland finally but decisively turning the tables on its former ruler.

Tom.

Throughout the novel Tom is rejected and despised by those around him because of his illegitimacy. Mrs Rolleston, however, is the only character who unconditionally accepts him, disregarding the circumstances of his birth and demonstrating, quite overtly and dramatically at one point, that he is loved by her as much, if not more than any of her own grandchildren. The dramatic impact of the following excerpt can only be appreciated if one takes into consideration that Tom is shied away from by most of the other characters in the novel. Mr Coyne considers him unfit to enter his house and play with his children; Sister Conheady is utterly disconcerted when he asks her to touch him, even his own grandmother, during a clandestine meeting, is unable to contact him for fear of being ‘contaminated’. Thus, because of how other characters have already behaved towards Tom, Mrs Rolleston’s deliberate and intense acceptance of the child is crammed with significance:

‘Tom,’ she said again, and to his astonishment she held her arms out, wanting him to come closer to her. She repeated his name, and then he felt the wrinkled skin of her face on his cheek, and her lips kissing him, as softly and as warmly as his mother did when she said goodnight. Her hands held on his shoulders, her grasp tightened around him. (SG, 181).

Such a physical embrace is suggestive of Mrs Quinton's total acceptance of Michael Collins and what he represented in relation to her culture in *Fools of Fortune*; in relation to this point Max Deen Larsen proposes that "Mrs Rolleston's kiss of moral adoption betokens Tom's inheritance of the estate."³⁶ Therefore, Mrs Rolleston's categorical approval of Tom, and his consequent ownership of Carriglas, represent a willed self-annihilation on behalf of the Rolleston's grandmother, a cultural suicide that is somewhere between Mrs Quinton's outright rejection of her culture and her eventual death by her own hands: "Only the gate-lodge child mattered now, she said. Only he was important, since he was their inheritor." (SG, 173). Thus, a shameful family-secret and its intricate connection with the Rolleston's forced acceptance of modern Ireland both succeed in toppling a once great House from its position of power and privilege. Tom's succession is that of the half-door finally overshadowing the hall-door, the gate-lodge child and bastard son of the servants legitimately taking up residence in an Anglo-Irish House that once represented nothing other than the invincible enemy to his people.

Dolores MacKenna's analysis of the symbolic significance of *The Silence in the Garden* also relates the plight of the Rollestons to the ultimate decline of Anglo-Ireland:

The demise of the Rolleston family, like that of the Quintons, the Malcolmsons and the Pulvertafts, symbolises the extinction of the Anglo-Irish class in Ireland. They came as conquerors and introduced a dissonance which reverberated through history. But violence ends in self-destruction and Carriglas which once represented an alien civilisation will eventually return 'to its clay'. (SG 203) The Big House will become a monument to the past, evoking another age in the way that the ruin of the island's abbey and its ancient burial mound already

³⁶ Max Deen Larsen, 'Saints of the Ascendancy: William Trevor's Big-House Novels' in Otto Rauchbauer (Ed.), *Ancestral Voices: The Big House in Anglo-Irish Literature*. (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1992), 275.

do. In 1931 a bridge is built (...) A new order holds sway in Ireland and the epoch of the Big House is at an end. By 1971 the last vestiges of colonisation have disappeared; at Carriglas the death of Sarah Pollexfen brings the era to a close. Her diaries are read, their story noted, then they are burnt.³⁷

The Silence in the Garden, unlike *Fools of Fortune*, is not as concerned with the destruction of Protestant stereotypes as it is with the effect of guilt on an Anglo-Irish family. The portrayal of a declining House at Carriglas silently expresses the rottenness at the heart of the Rolleston family due to a secret which slowly obliterates every last one of them. The secret itself points towards the confiscation of lands which the original Rollestons were responsible for, the recent crime linking the present Rollestons to their bloody ancestors. The monstrous guilt which the Rolleston children experience results in a powerful desire to conclusively extirpate their own line, forever ceasing the hideousness of their presence on the island. This desire manifests itself in their sterile relationships with others as they are determined *not* to continue themselves through children. As well as the internal factor of guilt the Rollestons are also threatened by the external factor of the Cornelius Dowley bridge, a metaphor for an Independent Ireland which will soon hold sway. Tom's eventual ownership of Carriglas House is the final blow to the Rolleston family, and to Anglo-Ireland in general, with all land being finally returned to its rightful owners.

³⁷ MacKenna, op. cit., 131-2.

CHAPTER THREE

Reading Turgenev.

In *Old School Ties* Trevor makes a distinction between Protestants from different economic and social backgrounds when he states that the first boarding-school he attended was the Tate School in Wexford, a small grammar school for “poor Protestants as opposed to Anglo-Irish or horse Protestants”.³⁸ Such a contrast is also conveyed in one of Trevor’s masterpieces, *Reading Turgenev*,³⁹ when Mrs Dallon is present at the auctioning of Colonel Esdaile’s property:

When she was seven or eight her mother had taken Letty and herself to the auction there’d been when old Colonel Esdaile died, three weeks after his wife had gone. She remembered a white marble statue in the garden, a draped woman. ‘Not another like it in Ireland,’ the auctioneer had bellowed. ‘Every detail in place, down to the toenails.’ And he was right: the toenails were delicately incised, she and Letty had gone to look. Mrs Dallon had hoped to bid for a job lot that consisted of a clothes line, scrubbing brushes and a bucket, but unfortunately the auctioneer, running out of time, placed it beyond her reach by throwing it in with two other selections of household items.⁴⁰

The above passage contains the sole reference to the gentry in the novel. As well as this it manages to succinctly but vividly encapsulate the chasm between two essentially disparate types of Protestants: the Ascendancy and what Trevor elsewhere referred to as the “lace curtain Protestant”.⁴¹ Colonel Esdaile’s death represents the mere memory of

³⁸ William Trevor, *Old School Ties*. (London: Lemon Tree Press, 1976), 18.

³⁹ MacKenna describes *Reading Turgenev* as “one of Trevor’s most acclaimed novels,” MacKenna, *op. cit.*, 152.

⁴⁰ William Trevor, *Two Lives*. (London: Viking, 1991), 162.

Reading Turgenev is one of two novels included in the above collection. All future references to *Reading Turgenev* will be cited parenthetically, in the text itself, as, for example: (RT, 162).

⁴¹ The phrase was used in a 1989 interview with Mira Stout: (P.T.O.)

the Ascendancy during the period in which the novel is set, that is, the latter half of this century. Mrs Dallon's and Letty's wonder at the marble statue is a sign of contemporary Protestant reality, as it is presented in this novel: spectators at the selling of the remnants of an opulent and elegant past which they can claim no connection with, too impoverished to even purchase the utensils of a maid. This is precisely the class that Trevor writes about in *Excursions in the Real World* when he remembers his own background:

I was born into a minority that all my life has seemed in danger of withering away. This was smalltime Protestant stock, far removed from the well-to-do Ascendancy of the recent past yet without much of a place in de Valera's new Catholic Ireland. (ERW, xiii).

Trevor's solicitude for the survival of such a community, never a preoccupation in the works of Elizabeth Bowen or Molly Keane, is clearly evident in *Reading Turgenev* as the novel chronicles the slow decline and inevitable demise of two such families, both of which demonstrate their inability to continue themselves into a future generation.⁴²

I didn't belong to the new, post-1923 Catholic society, and I also didn't belong to the Irish Ascendancy. I'm a small-town Irish Protestant, a "lace-curtain" Protestant. Poor Protestants in Ireland are a sliver of people caught between the past – Georgian Ireland with its great houses and all the rest of it – and the new, bustling, Catholic state.

Interview reprinted in: Suzanne Morrow Paulson, *William Trevor: A Study of the Short Fiction*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 123.

⁴² As well as *Reading Turgenev*, the novella *Nights at the Alexandra* offers another glimpse of a Protestant family within this category, though this is not the primary concern of the work. The following extracts give an indication of the type of family in question:

We were a Protestant family of the servant class which had come up in the world, my father now the proprietor of the timberyard where he had once been employed. (...) My mother's hands were swollen and red from washing clothes and floors and dishes;

He [the narrator's father] had worked in the yard as a child of ten; his own father had run around the town barefoot, the only Protestant child for twenty nine miles so ill-clad.

William Trevor, *Nights at the Alexandra*. (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 3 & 23.

All future references to this work will be cited parenthetically, in the text itself, as, for example: (NA, 3). (P.T.O.)

From the outset of the novel it is manifest that though the Quarryys and the Dallons both occupy Trevor's category of "smalltime Protestant stock" they are unequivocally separated from each other, even within that specific grouping:

The three Quarry children – Elmer and his sisters – came of a family that for many decades had been important in the town. The Dallons – out at Culleen – had struggled for as long to keep their heads above water.

In later years Miss Mullover observed from a distance the vicissitudes and worries that governed the family life of the Dallons, and the changeless nature of the Quarryys' domestic and mercantile routine. (RT, 4-5).

Thus, the comfortably middle-class Quarryys⁴³ are at a considerable social and economic distance from the barely subsistent farmers from Culleen. The Dallons' house offers an accurate indication of the family's precarious financial condition:

The Dallons' roadside farmhouse in the townland of Culleen had never been more than modest, and in 1955 even that modesty was considerably eroded: the whitewash rendering was here and there fallen away, slates that had slipped out of place or cracked in half had not been replaced, a pane in an upstairs window was broken. Within the farmhouse, rooms were in need of redecoration; paint had chipped, damp loosened the

The oppressive dreariness of Harry's home is constantly contrasted with the idyllic and extensive nature of the Messingers' House at Cloverhill, what was formerly a general's residence. Again, the division between Protestants from different socio-economic backgrounds is apparent.

Also, Fogarty and his sister, servants to the Pulvertafts in 'The News from Ireland' inhabit the same social rank as Harry and his family in *Nights at the Alexandria*:

Poor Protestants as they were, he and his sister belonged neither outside the estate gates with the people who had starved nor with a family as renowned as the Pulvertafts. They were servants in their very bones. (CS, 904-5).

⁴³ It is apposite to note here that at one stage the Quarryys employed a maid (RT, 199). See note 22 for the social significance of such a fact.

tattered wallpaper of the stairway, the unused dining-room smelt of must and soot. (RT, 5)⁴⁴

Thus, the family has earned the reputation, in Elmer Quarry's mind, of being "poor Protestants for donkey's years" (RT, 146), while "in 1955 Elmer Quarry was (...) the only well-to-do Protestant for miles around." (RT, 5). As well as being relatively affluent, however, Elmer, at this point in the novel, is still unmarried and becomes gradually anxious about the fact. His primary reason for wishing to marry, however, has nothing to do with love, it has, in fact, as other see it at least, more to do with the inheritance of his business after his death. Elmer's sisters evidently believe this when their shockingly crude thoughts on Elmer's eventual marriage to Mary Louise Dallon are made clear: "He'd married her to breed with. He'd married her because of his sentimental notion that the name should continue above the shop." (RT, 68). Furthermore, Gerry, the barman at Hogan's Hotel, proclaims: "'The Quarrys marry to get a baby,'" (RT, 136) and Bridget, the manageress of the hotel is also aware of the fact. Indeed, Miss Mullover's reflections at the beginning of the novel seem to intimate that Elmer's marriage to Mary Louise is part of a pattern that has characterised the Quarry family for over a hundred years:

In each generation for more than a century the inheritor of Quarry's drapery had married late in life, establishing himself in the business before he turned his thoughts to the securing of the line: the old house

⁴⁴ This passage is reminiscent of a particular description of the first House to deteriorate in Anglo-Irish literature, i.e. Castle Rackrent:

There was a great silence in Castle Rackrent, and I went moping from room to room, hearing the doors clap for want of right locks, and the wind through the broken windows that the glazier never would come to mend, and the rain coming through the roof and best ceilings all over the house, for want of the slater whose bill was not paid; besides our having no slates or shingles for that part of the old building which was shingled, and burnt where the chimney took fire, and had been open to the weather ever since.

Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 61.

Both houses occupy two ends of a spectrum, from the prodigal Rackrent landlords to the impoverished Dallons on their twenty-seven acres of land. Neither family have anything in common other than a Protestant house that is gradually falling asunder.

above the shop in Bridge Street had seen more than its share of young wives made widows before their time. (RT, 5).

However, the wedding takes place and the marriage is in every way the unmitigated disaster that one would have expected it to be. Elmer is dressed in his Sunday outfit for the occasion (RT, 25), and a mechanic in overalls drives them to the railway junction (RT, 30-1) from where they eventually arrive at their destination: a boarding-house in which they spend just over a week. Afterwards they return to the drapery in which Elmer's sisters, Rose and Matilda, continually endeavour to criticise and ostracise Mary Louise. The marriage is never consummated because Elmer is impotent; "It might have been worse" (RT, 8) Mrs Dallon says to her husband on the topic of Elmer's courtship of their daughter, but there is very little to suggest that the overall outcome could have been much worse.

As a means of escape from the unadulterated misery of her marriage and the venomous atmosphere which pervades the drapery, Mary Louise regularly takes bicycle trips into the countryside, serendipitously rediscovering her aunt Emmeline's house, the abode of her invalid cousin, Robert. The pair very quickly form an emotional bond in which Robert shares his interests in toy soldiers and Russian novels with Mary Louise. The intimacy of the relationship is a constant counterpoint to Mary Louise's marriage, constantly stressing its extreme unhappiness and barrenness. After several visits Robert reveals that he is still in love with Mary Louise, since his childhood (RT, 102), and they part after some moments of intense yet innocent intimacy (RT, 104-5). Fate, however, cruelly intervenes and during a dream of intimacy with his cousin Robert dies and thus a savagely abrupt end is brought to the only relationship in the novel which indicated the potential of blossoming into something fruitful:

That night, a few minutes before midnight, Robert dreamed that it was he who accompanied his cousin on her honeymoon to the seaside. (...)

He put his arms around his cousin's waist and as they walked on the strand they talked about his father. In that moment Robert died. (RT, 107).

After the sudden death of Robert, Mary Louise retreats more and more inwards, alienating herself from her husband, sisters-in-law and her own family. She begins to recreate the relationship with her late cousin by converting the attic into a shrine in his memory. Thus, the intensity of the relationship has increased after the death of one of the partners, again stressing the sterility of such a situation. The final line of the novel reveals that her wish to be buried with her cousin has been granted: "There is the funeral, and then the lovers lie together." (RT, 222). The ironic ambiguity of the phrase 'lie together' is, yet again, a reminder of *Hamlet*, when Gertrude links Ophelia's grave with the young girl's bride-bed, as the Queen had hoped it might have been:

Sweets to the sweet, farewell. [Scattering flowers]
I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife.
I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid,
And not t'have strewed thy grave. (H, 222).

Therefore, the eventual burial of Mary Louise with Robert is the only union that is possible between the two characters by the end of the novel. This ultimate reunion is shot through with all the characteristics that we have become accustomed to expecting of Trevor's relationships, particularly his Protestant ones, that is: sterility and distance, as, in the end, the only consummation of this relationship is the close proximity of two corpses under a mound of earth.

Joan of Arc.

(...) Miss Mullover found herself recalling Mary Louise's childhood fascination with Joan of Arc. Had she been wrong, she wondered now, not to find more significance in it than she had?
(RT, 208).

Like Imelda in *Fools of Fortune*, Mary Louise demonstrates an intense engrossment in the life of a particular saint, in this case Joan of Arc. Miss Mullover recalls that Mary Louise developed a sudden fascination for the saint at the age of ten (RT, 4), and even as she is incarcerated in the mental asylum her thoughts often revert to her childhood hero (RT, 20), as well as at several other intervals during the novel (RT, 78,115). Mary Louise's unprovoked persecution by both her sisters-in-law, her enforced celibacy and her creation of a hermitage in the attic of the drapery certainly resemble the suffering and austerity of the lives of many of the saints. As well as this, however, her insanity, even if this is only a characteristic that she feigns in order to escape from a cruel world, also links her to the saints, according to the narrator in the final pages of *Fools of Fortune*: "(...) in Ireland it happens sometimes that the insane are taken to be saints of a kind." (FF, 184). Furthermore, one point in the text reveals that her thoughts on the martyrdom of Joan of Arc possibly represent something which simultaneously includes and goes beyond herself:

When Mary Louise first heard the story of Joan of Arc she imagined the peasant girl kneeling on the ploughed earth, hearing the voices. She imagined her waiting, tied to the stake, watching the building of the fire that was to burn her. Sometimes the boys from the Christian Brothers' shouted abuse when the three Dallon children rode by, calling them heretics, reminding them that they would burn in hell. (RT, 140).

The fact that the memory of the taunts concerning hellfire immediately follows the description of Joan of Arc's burning at the stake seems not to be accidental. Thus, the humiliated saint whose life is threatened bears a resemblance to the condition of the Protestant community in the novel, increasingly threatened by an evermore powerful Catholic Ireland. The ultimate disappearance of this class seems to be nothing less than a foregone conclusion; the voices of Joan of Arc's murderers are, at the same time, the voices of the street-boys who will eventually run the country.

Though Mary Louise's marriage remains childless to the end of the novel her siblings *do* manage to have fruitful marriages, though these are replete with their own problems, as the following section will establish.

Marriages.

Near the beginning of the novel we are informed of the willingness of the Protestant community to integrate themselves fully into the new Ireland that was all around them and which could no longer be ignored behind demesne walls:

In 1955 they recognised that their survival lay in making themselves part of the scheme of things, as it was now well established. While they still believed in the Protestants they were, they hung together less than they had in the past. (RT, 16).

Mary Louise's sister, Letty, is proof of this readiness to become an intrinsic part of the new order of things, marrying outside her religion. Unlike her sister, she *does* seem to find happiness in her marriage to Dennehy, though the relationship is also fraught with difficulty, for her parents and others at least:

A veterinary surgeon began to take Letty out. (...) a Catholic called Dennehy. 'It's the way things are,' Mr Dallon remarked to his wife in the privacy of their bedroom. Both of them hoped that nothing would come of the relationship. (RT, 69).

Later Aunt Emmeline discusses the potential hazards of such a marriage with Mary Louise, suggesting the possible outcome, as she sees it:

'It's always kept quiet for a while, news of a mixed marriage. Dennehy's priest will be having a go at Letty.
'Letty would never turn.'

‘The priest’ll want the children though.’

(...) ‘The priests always have a go for the children,’ her aunt said. (RT, 121-2).

Matilda and Rose are more openly sectarian in their attitude to Dennehy, implying that Letty would not only be marrying someone of a different faith, but of another species entirely, barbaric by its very nature:

‘I hear your sister’s chummed up with Dennehy,’ Matilda said.

(...) ‘Funny that.’

(...) ‘Does your mother mind?’ Matilda asked.

‘Mind?’

‘A person like Dennehy.’

(...) ‘RC of course?’

(...) ‘I’d have thought Mrs Dallon would be concerned.’

(...) ‘Rough,’ Rose said,

(...) ‘Surprising your mother could accept Dennehy’s roughness, Rose said. ‘Surprising, that.’ (RT, 80, 81 & 82).⁴⁵

Anxiety increases and becomes acute, at Letty’s wedding party, when Mrs Dallon descries a wedding gift given to the newly married couple which she finds grossly offensive:

(...) bowls, jugs, baking dishes and a framed picture of the Virgin Mary, incorporating the Sacred Heart. This last offended Mrs Dallon. It had come from someone who was unaware of Letty’s religion, or else from someone who considered the reproduction a necessity in the household

⁴⁵ Another instance of a similar Protestant attitude to Roman Catholics is evident in *Nights at the Alexandra*, when Harry’s mother reacts to the information that Herr Messinger is Roman Catholic:

‘That man’s not rough enough to be a Catholic,’ (NA, 36).

that was being set up. Letty wouldn't hang it up, she'd surely put it behind something.

'Ah, yes,' Mrs Dennehy said hastily, noticing that Mrs Dallon's attention had been caught by the picture. 'That's difficult certainly.'

'Some lovely stuff here.' Mrs Dallon was determined not to reveal her displeasure. There were bound to be awkwardnesses. There were areas that had to settle down in any mixed marriage, no good pretending.

(...) On a corner shelf on the landing there was a statue of a saint and downstairs there was a picture like the one Letty had been given, with a red light flickering below it. All of a sudden Mrs Dallon found herself wondering whom James would marry. (RT, 155-6).

Elmer Quarry privately suspects, at the wedding party, that any potential children of the marriage between Dennehy and Mary Louise will *not* be brought up Protestant:

'We're pleased about it, Mrs Dennehy,' Mr Dallon said, but Elmer doubted it: poor Protestants for donkey's years, why would they be pleased to see their grandchildren brought up holy Romans? (RT, 146).

Though the religion of the first child of this marriage is never explicitly stated, it is evident that the name he is given marks him off as unmistakably Dennehy 'property': "Kevin Aloysius the child was called, Aloysius being a Dennehy family name." (RT, 186). Later it becomes apparent that such a name has alienated at least one member of the Dallon family from the child: 'They're funny names,' Mary Louise said. 'Funny names for Letty to choose. Kevin Aloysius.' (RT, 205).

Even the children of James Dallon's marriage to Angela Eddery prove to be unsatisfactory to their parents. James' desire to pass the farm onto his sons, to continue what he inherited from his father, is not possible as "none of them wants it" (RT, 213). In this way the two main Protestant businesses in the novel display all the signs of their inevitable demise. The Dallons' farm and the Quarrys' shop will soon slip out of their

owners' hands, the latter doing so near the end of the novel: "The shop has gone and with it their standing in the town." (RT, 212). Along with these there are other indications of the gradual decay of Protestant Ireland, as the following will show.

Disappearance.

A Protestant institution which actually comes to an end *within* the novel is Miss Mullover's school, its closure being an indication of what would eventually become of other such establishments:

The schoolroom next to the church, in which Miss Mullover had taught from 1906 until 1950, closed on her retirement. Arrangements had since been made for the Protestant children of the town and the neighbourhood, either to be driven to a school fifteen miles away or to attend the convent or the Christian Brothers'. (RT, 69).

After the Big House the Protestant church is, arguably, the most potent symbol of Protestant power in general, a decidedly Protestant sacred space as opposed to the secular space of the House. There is no mention of a Big House anywhere in *Reading Turgenev*, but there is a description of a particularly enfeebled church, showing all the signs of its end both in terms of its very appearance and its congregation: "The gaunt grey steeple of the Protestant church rose from a boundary of yew trees that isolated it from its surroundings." (RT, 6).⁴⁶ Its deathly appearance is further emphasised by the

⁴⁶ An equally ominous description of a Protestant church appears in *Nights at the Alexandra*. Delicate and emaciated, this building also seems to be covered by a deathly shadow:

(...) at the end of St Alnoth Street the slender spindle of the Protestant church of St Alnoth was dark against the sky. (NA, 6).

In a further extract from the 1989 interview with Mira Stout Trevor's comments on the differences, as he sees them, between the Church of England and the Church of Ireland are highly revealing and would certainly appear to be reflected in his literary descriptions of the Church of Ireland, in terms of its congregations and buildings. His preference for an emasculated Irish Church rather than the intimidatingly powerful English Church is especially intriguing: (P.T.O.)

fact that it is surrounded by a circle of death: the yew tress; as well as being a symbol of sadness, they are also literally poisonous. Inside the church the situation appears equally depressing, the Dallons make up almost a quarter of the congregation (RT, 5), the numbers not even reaching forty for the biggest services of the year (RT, 5 & 6). One of the most powerful symbols in the novel, in terms of the demise of Protestant Ireland, is the presence of so many spinsters, especially evident inside St Giles's church:

Alone in their pews in the church of St Giles were the Protestant spinsters of the parish, there to be observed week after week, added to at Christmas and Easter by Elmer Quarry's sisters and others besides. (RT, 30).⁴⁷

Even the Y.M.C.A. hall, another bastion of Protestant exclusivity, is empty except for its caretaker or when Elmer Quarry visits it: "It puzzled Elmer that hardly anyone but himself came in for a game of billiards or an exchange of views by the fire." (RT, 17).

This novel is by far Trevor's most pessimistic work regarding the state of Protestant Ireland. By the second chapter the narrator depicts a decidedly dismal situation, in the bleakest terms possible:

I don't like the Church of England. (...) I always feel that Protestantism in England is strangely connected with the military. All the cathedrals here are full of military honors. It's part of an establishment with the armed forces, tombs, rolls of honor, that sort of thing. It's a strange combination. The Protestant Church of Ireland is a shrunken, withered little church that I'm quite attracted by.

Paulson, op. cit., 124.

⁴⁷ George Moore's *A Drama in Muslin* also conveys the concept of a languishing class by the spinsters which appear in the novel, most notably the Brennan sisters. Gladys Brennan, for example, has rejected Mr Blake's marriage proposal and Mrs Barton is quick to point out the negative outcome of such a decision:

"(...) he would have made her an excellent husband; kept a carriage for her, and a house in London: whereas you see she has remained Miss Brennan, goes up every year to the Shelbourne Hotel to buy dresses, and gets older and more withered every day." (P.T.O.)

Families everywhere were affected by emigration, and the Protestant fraction of the population increasingly looked as if it would never recover. There was no fat on the bones of this shrinking community; there were no reserves of strength. Its very life was eroded by the bleak economy of the times. (RT, 14).

Even Elmer's hardened sisters are shown to concede that they, as well as their shop are facing imminent extinction:

Quarry's would sustain the three of them during their lifetime, withering, then dying, with the Protestants of the neighbourhood. Neither Rose nor Matilda was the kind to avoid facing the facts: already Quarry's was a relic from another age. If the line came to an end the business would pass to distant cousins in Athy, who would probably sell it. (RT, 7).

In *Reading Turgenev* Trevor depicts the slow but relentless fading-away of a section of Protestant society which has, for the most part, gone unnoticed in Anglo-Irish literature, that is, the 'lace-curtain' Protestants. However, though the provincial Quarrys and Dallons are socially and economically far removed from the Rollestons of *The Silence in the Garden*, they are unable, like their Ascendancy counterparts, to continue themselves beyond their own generation. The marriage between Mary Louise and Elmer is sterile, as is the former's post-mortem 'relationship' with her cousin. The inability of Protestant individuals to procreate is reflected in the decline of many of the typical Protestant institutions of the novel, including the church, the school and the Y.M.C.A. hall. Thus, *Reading Turgenev* brings to a close Trevor's analysis of the precarious position of the Irish Protestant, without the will or ability to survive, the lace-curtain Protestants are as damned to doom as their fellow horse-riders.

George Moore, *A Drama in Muslin*. (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1992), 106.

Conclusion:

As has been shown, *Fools of Fortune* is especially concerned with collapsing the conventional depiction of the Anglo-Irish as an elite removed from the politics and faith of native Ireland. Anna Quinton was rejected by her family for condemning the British politics of the day in its reaction to the Irish Famine. The generosity which she extended towards the starving, which eventually led to her death, was a practical expression of her political stance against her cultural background. Mrs Quinton takes her predecessor's position to a further extreme when she wholly endorses the politics Michael Collins and is indirectly responsible for the brutal murder of the Black and Tan Sergeant Rudkin. She then begins to symbolise Anglo-Ireland in its death throes, willing its own annihilation, as she terminates her own life. However, Mrs Quinton's grandchild, Imelda, possibly more than any other character in all of Trevor's literature, succeeds in divesting herself of her Protestant identity to the point where the locals eventually gather round her as a contemporary incarnation of the Roman Catholic St. Imelda of Bologna. Trevor's exploration of Protestant identity in this novel is so revolutionary that he initially weakens and then eliminates any previously erected barriers between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

The Silence in the Garden continues with Anglo-Irish characters and the backdrop of the Big House, but the focus shifts from the ending of sectarian divisions to the deliberate ending of a family's own line. In this novel Anglo-Ireland is seen to be consumed by its guilty historical past and consequently is self-hating to the point where it no longer deems it appropriate to continue itself into future generations. Thus, sterility becomes one of the most dominant motifs in the novel, being a metaphor for the self-destructive impulse of Anglo-Ireland, imploding in on itself until only a vacuum and silence remain. *The Silence in the Garden* also deals with Independent Ireland's eventual repossession of its land; Tom's sole ownership of Carriglas House, as a direct result of Mrs Rolleston's wishes, being emblematic of Anglo-Ireland handing back and folding up for good.

Reading Turgenev departs from the above two novels as it deals exclusively with what Trevor once described as 'lace-curtain Protestants', as distinct from the gentry of the Big House. Trevor's representation of such a social group within Protestant society is a powerful riposte to the dominant portrayals of Irish Protestants as rendered by such twentieth century Irish fiction writers as Elizabeth Bowen, Molly Keane and Jennifer Johnston. However, though the novel differs substantially from the other two works in this respect it shares with them the theme of sterility which seems to so fascinate the author. *Reading Turgenev*, however, rather than describing the loss of ancestral mansions and their accompanying lands, dwells on the poignant disappearance of the local Protestant school, the silence in the Y.M.C.A. hall and the withering congregation of the Church of Ireland church.

In these novels Trevor has chronicled the slow but relentless decline and ultimate disappearance of a certain group within Irish society; all three combining to record the eerie sound of a dying culture, the death-rattle of Irish Protestantism.

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