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Introduction

By DOUGLAS ARCHIBALD


Seamus Deane and Declan Kiberd are silent, except in their comprehensive literary histories, in which mention is unavoidable, and even then Kiberd is perfunctory:

Both [Brian] Moore and Trevor are rightly renowned for the cool, crafted clarity of their prose, their wry wistful ironies, and their use of telling detail; and each has won a substantial overseas readership for many other books of high quality which have nothing to do with Ireland. (584)

And Deane is condescending:

Trevor does have a sense of the evil that lives in dreariness and this element lends to his slightly musty prose an edge of danger and threat which is cumulatively disturbing. . . . [His stories have] a polite Anglican outdatedness which tends to disguise his very real apprehension of contemporary blights and disjunctions. (226)

“Musty” probably comes from Tom Paulin’s Encounter review (1979) of Lovers of Their Time, admiring and nuanced until:

... the prose style somehow manages to possess both a sparse simplicity and a superannuated drabness.... All too often Trevor settles for a decent, tolerant, middlebrow obviousness, a kind of synthetic mustiness. (44)

This seems true enough about the weakest parts of the English novels and some of the English stories, but not of the fictions about Ireland, especially not the seventies stories of Northern Ireland. The strange thing is that Irish critics would not claim and celebrate them. In the Field Day Anthology, John Wilson Foster includes Trevor on the list of living writers most noted for their nostalgia for Big House stability (III 939) and chooses as the Trevor selection...
“Beyond the Pale”—“perhaps an allegory of the original English colony in Ireland (the Pale), British hypocrisy about and ignorance of Ireland from then until the present, and the likelihood of British withdrawal after a crisis and of a British awakening to the reality of the island” (III 1007). But “Beyond the Pale” is “perhaps” Trevor’s least nuanced story of the conflict in Northern Ireland during the sixties and seventies, with loathsome, inhuman Brits (except for Cynthia, the demon-possessed and ostracized truth teller, a narrator and character type mastered by Trevor); hapless and hopeless immigrant (from Surrey) innkeepers trading in snobbery and exclusion;Picturesque, clueless Irish retainers; and Nationalist Catholic victims, including a dead IRA bomb-maker and her bereaved and deranged suicide lover. Why would Field Day select this nearly hysterical story, rather than, say, “Attracta”? “Attracta” fully acknowledges English crimes and Protestant Unionist vindictiveness but also Catholic Nationalist complicity. Its animating emotion is a desire for forgiveness and peace rather than for contempt and hatred. It is “Guest of the Nation” for the seventies; Gus Martin in volume II of Field Day says of O’Connor’s great story: “the tragedy of Ireland’s modern history has seldom been presented in fiction with such economy and power” (II 1192).

Even Denis Donoghue, not so much part of the Irish Studies establishment as one of his own, and a very smart reader, can’t get it right. His long review of Hill Bachelors in the New York Review of Books (2001) begins by quoting Trevor’s quotation, in Excursions in the Real World, of deValera’s famous/ notorious “dream of a land ‘bright with cosy homesteads ... ’” and says that “Trevor has never objected to deValera’s dream of Ireland.” It is true, I suppose, that he has never in his own person, in print, said “I hate it,” though Excursions comes close, and Felicia’s father and senile great-grandmother (who, Robert Tracy points out, is the Irish past) preserve and cherish the speech; but this is an astonishing remark to make about a writer who has dramatized in moving detail, in several novels and many stories, including the title story of the book under review and later discussed in that review, the terrible paucity of alternatives in Dev’s dream.

In another collocation of the autobiographical Excursions and a story, “The Time of Year,” Donoghue establishes that Professor Skully of the story is the TCD historian T.W. Moody (“the man is unmistakable”) and concludes: “I find Trevor’s raw cruelty in this story disturbing.” But “The Time of Year” is a story and not about Moody/Skully but about Valerie Upcott’s crisis at age fourteen and (perhaps—it is difficult to be sure) the beginnings of a recovery at age twenty, and the social observations are hers. The prolific and informed admirer of Eliot, Stevens, and James misunderstands narrative perspective and confuses teller and tale.

We don’t need Yeats on the “Emotion of Multitude” to understand Trevor as both realist and symbolist, and it seems a bit heavy to crank up that one paragraph essay of 1903 to explain a writer of his restraint. Henry James on the distinction between “the real” and “the romantic” is better, but “all” we really need is the recognition that Trevor, like his masters and his proper
company—Hardy, Turgenev, Chekov, Joyce—has it both ways; the present and circumstantial and the unseen and ineffable are equally objects of consciousness and creations of the imagination. That a reader as astute as Donoghue is either off or obvious suggests something of Trevor’s subtlety and his transparency.

Why? Even critics like Edna Longley and Gus Martin, from whom one would expect an interest in “the Protestant Legacy” (title of a Martin essay) skip Trevor. Are they right about the mustiness? Is he just too old-fashioned to be compelling? Maybe. But that means ignoring editors and reviewers from the Irish Times (John Banville), the New Yorker (William Maxwell, John Updike), TLS (Joyce Carol Oates), the New York Times (William Pritchard, Mary Gordon), the New York Review of Books (V.S. Pritchett), English and American prize committees, and virtually every MFA fiction program in North America. Pritchett takes on mustiness directly in his review of Lovers of Their Time:

In nearly all Trevor’s stories we are led on at first by plain unpretending words about things done to prosaic people; then comes this explosion of conscience, the assertion of will which in some cases may lead to hallucination and madness. In that disordered state the victim has his or her victory; these people are not oddities but figures crucified by the continuity of cruelty in human history, particularly the violent history of, say, the wars and cruelties of the last sixty years of this century. Theirs is a private moral revolt. (Paulson 142)

A more plausible explanation is that Trevor’s fiction is not amenable to the pleasures of Theory or pliable to its manipulations. At the age of sixteen, Thomas Hardy, son of a stone mason, was articled to a Dorset church architect. From 1955 until the early sixties, William Trevor Cox was a sculptor with commissions from churches: “I came down to the west country [of England] and set myself up, rather like Jude the Obscure, as a church sculptor and existed like that for seven years” (Stout 121). He dropped the Cox when he began a career as a writer, but he kept the eye:

Being a sculptor does help you to form things. There is a way in which you think as a sculptor. You see things in the round very much. You have to have an extra something; you have to go see around the back of somebody’s head, as it were. And I’ve found that I still think like that when I’m writing. I’m still obsessed by form and pattern—the actual shape of things, the shape of a novel or the shape of a short story. (Smith 80)

Both Hardy and Trevor are stone-mason writers, one piece after another, carefully placed, looked at, walked around, no unnecessary flourishes, no self-reflexive (or postmodern) high jinx, no fooling around. They do not invite teachers to be one up on students, nor critics on the general reader, nor theorists on empiricists. Sometimes it feels as though there is little to do but read and admire. They don’t work for Routledge’s new list or Duke dissertations. They don’t make it into Anomalous States, or Strange Country, or Transformations in Irish Culture.

Is it too bleak a vision of Mother Ireland? It is certainly spare and chastening, at times tragic. One of his most recent stories, “Sitting with the Dead” (New Yorker, July 30, 2001, 70-74), describes Emily and her just expired hus-
band of twenty-three years: “She could not grieve, she could not mourn; too little was left, too much destroyed.” Heroic couplets, Pope in prose, like Jane Austen but not light and bright and sparkling. “The Ballroom of Romance” (1972) is one of Trevor’s signature stories. Bridie is not given a last name, but she is given a crippled, widowed father for whom she is responsible and a mise en scene, the rural dance hall of the title, which is evoked in a prose so attentive that it combines love—for the object, the very thing—with irony. She is also provided with men: Patrick Grady whom she loved and lost, Dano Ryan who would do but she won’t get, and the bachelors from the hills who come down on Saturday nights smelling “of stout and sweat and whiskey.... The bachelors would never marry ... they were married already to stout and whiskey and laziness, to three old mothers somewhere up in the hills.... They came down from the hills like mountain goats, released from their mammies and from the smell of animals and soil” (193-97). And her epiphany is no less powerful than Eveline’s on the dock in Dubliners. It begins: “If the weight of circumstances hadn’t intervened she wouldn’t be standing in a wayside ballroom, mourning the marriage of a road-mender she didn’t love” (193-201; all citations from The Collected Stories unless otherwise specified).

Twenty-eight years later Trevor published his ninth separate volume of short stories (the 1,261-page Collected Stories is the tenth), The Hill Bachelors. The title story answers “The Ballroom of Romance,” and the two stories provide bookends to a large portion of Trevor’s career. Both begin in farmhouse kitchens in the remote hills, Bridie with her crippled father and Paulie returning to his mother and the boreen above Drunlbeg on the death of his father. He joins “the hill bachelors: by now you could count them—one man, some of them kept company by a mother or a sister—on the slopes of Coumpeebra, on Sleivenacoush, on Knockrea, on Luirc, on Clydagh.” Bridie, the thirty-six-year old girl, has lost Patrick Grady and Dano Ryan and is stuck with the bachelors from the hills—Eyes Horgan, Tim Daly, Bowser Egan—presented satirically, near grotesque definitions of Bridie’s situation. Paulie lost Maureen Caslin a while ago, to a man from Tralee, and, more recently and painfully, Patsy Finucane from the midlands town from which he drives a lorry, because she will not consider life in a remote farmhouse. He quickly loses Aileen Caslin, Maureen’s sister, to a newsagent and confectioner’s in Tralee, Maeve (the pay-out girl at Conlon’s supermarket) to something or someone else, and Annie, the last Caslin girl, to the fertilizer factory in Drumbeg, parallel to the cement factory which, say the men of the Ballroom, promises prosperity to Kilmalough.

Gender, perspective, and sympathy have been reversed. Girls won’t come to the farm. Paulie, first seen as “a dark-haired young man of twenty-nine, slightly made, pink cheeks and a certain chubbiness about his features giving him a genial, easygoing air,” is in danger of becoming “hard, as his father had been, and as grasping as [their only neighbor] Hartigan.” Paulie does not undergo the stations of his cross from religious faith, nor from respect for his
father by whom he was ignored, nor from agreement with the almost silent conspiracy of his siblings, who have lives of their own, nor even from love for his mother. It is from the hills themselves, an elemental force that matches Bridie’s weight of circumstances. Point of view has alternated between Paulie and his mother; the voice now becomes the narrator’s, merging with Trevor’s:

Guilt was misplaced, goodness hardly came into it. Her widowng and the mood of capricious time were not of consequence, no more than a flicker in the scheme of things that had always been there. Enduring, unchanging, the hills had waited for him, claiming one of their own. (245)

It is bleak and somber, the school of The Return of the Native, the “bleak splendour” Denis Sampson explores. But there are two things to note. There is a deep and steady narrative sympathy for victims of circumstance and nature. Reading Trevor’s grotesque and sinister tales—The Children of Dymouth, Felicia’s Journey—we sometimes worry that to understand all is to forgive all. Christine St. Peter’s deft mutual interpretation of Felicia in fiction and film illustrates the sympathy and compassion, as well as the moral evaluation, beneath the macabre surface. In “The Ballroom of Romance” and “The Hill Bachelors,” as in “The Property of Colette Nervi” and other Irish stories, to understand is to accept shared humanity and to give whatever credit and tenderness we can manage to muddling through, carrying on, just as Trevor does, in Excursions, for his parents sticking out their difficult marriage. And—back to Irish Studies—what’s wrong with bleak? At TCD they name buildings for Beckett.

The main reason for the neglect and undervaluation is that Trevor—to the extent that he is an historical as well as an anecdotal writer, a category more significant to his Irish than his English writing—does not tell the expected story. His task and his triumph is his version of Conrad’s: to make you remember the truth for which you have forgotten to ask. He revises the several received metanarratives: the Ascendancy/Yeatsian; the Catholic triumphalist; the deValera exceptionalist; the romantic nationalist; the Celtic Tiger boosterish; and the postmodern, postcolonial versions of all five.

Revising does not mean Hibernophobia or Imperial apologetics. This should not need saying but probably does. In “Beyond the Pale,” the monsters are arrogant and stupid Brits. In “Attracta” they are IRA rapists and murderers, though the Orange paranoid demonizer is despicable enough. In “Lost Ground” murderous ideology attaches to a Protestant paramilitary hard man who kills his younger brother for having visions of peace and reconciliation. This is too crudely schematic an accounting, as elements of abomination, indifference, and culpability from all sides exist in most of the political narratives, but it suggests an evenhandedness that matches the characteristic narrative tone and cannot be accidental.

Another, less somber way to make the point about revisionism is to note Trevor’s unusually acute eye for Catholic creepiness—“The Death of Peggy Meehan”—and Catholic kitch, “Honeymoon in Tramore” or “Teresa’s Wedding,” where both the décor and the admiration for the heroine’s pluckiness suggest a kind of rural, soft-spoken Roddy Doyle:
The remains of the wedding cake were on top of the piano in Swanton’s lounge-bar, beneath a framed advertisement for Power’s whiskey. Chas Flynn, the best man, had opened two packets of confetti: it lay thickly on the remains of the wedding-cake, on the surface of the bar and the piano, on the table and the two small chairs that the lounge-bar contained, and on the tattered green and red linoleum. (430)

“Of the Cloth,” first published in the New Yorker in 1997 and then in The Hill Bachelors (2000), is an instance of Trevor’s sly and gentle revisionism. Grattan Fitzmaurice

... was out of touch, and often felt it: out of touch with the times and what was happening in them, out of touch with two generations of change, with his own country and what it had become....

The Rev. Grattan Fitzmaurice, Ennismolach Rectory; his letters were addressed, the nearest town and county following. His three Church of Ireland parishes, amalgamated over the years, were in a valley of pasture land in the mountains, three small churches marking them, one of them now unattended, each of them remote, as his rectory was, as his life was.

... Change had come before his birth, and the family was still close to revolution and civil war. The once impregnable estates had fallen back into the clay, their people gone away, burnt out houses their memorial stones....

His father had died in 1957, his mother in that year also. By then the congregation of Ennismolach church had dwindled, the chapel of ease near Fenit bridge hadn’t been made use of for years, and melancholy characterized other far-flung parishes in the county. The big houses, which had supported them, tumbling further into ruin; the families who had fled did not return; and from farm and fields, from townlands everywhere, emigration took a toll. ‘It’ll get worse,’ Grattan’s father said a few weeks before he died. ‘You realize it’ll get worse?’ It wasn’t unexpected, he said, that the upheaval should bring further, quieter upheaval. The designation of the Protestant foundation he served, the ‘Church of Ireland,’ had long ago begun to seem too imposing a title, ludicrous almost in its claim. ‘We are a remnant,’ Grattan’s father said. (21-23)

It is almost a skit on the old Yeatsian lament. Names can have the effect of sight gags; Grattan and his loyal dog Oisin are a name gag. Here are a few notorious lines from Yeats’s 1925 Divorce Speech:

... this is a matter of very great seriousness. I think it is tragic that within three years of this country gaining its independence we should be discussing a measure which a minority of this nation considers to be grossly oppressive. I am proud to consider myself a typical man of that minority. We against whom you have done this thing are no petty people. We are one of the great stocks of Europe. We are the people of Burke; we are the people of Grattan; we are the people of Swift, the people of Emmet, the people of Parnell. We have created the most of the modern literature of this country. We have created the best of its political intelligence. Yet I do not altogether regret what has happened. I shall be able to find out, if not I, my children will be able to find out whether we have lost our stamina or not. You have defined our position and given us a popular following. If we have not lost our stamina then your victory will be brief, and your defeat final, and when it comes this nation may be transformed. (98-99)

Well, Trevor implies and Grattan enacts, we have. The C of I minister is old, tired, and redundant. He notes Catholic ascendancy with restraint and some equanimity:

He did not in any way resent the fact that, while his own small churches fell into disrepair, the wayside Church of the Holy Assumption, with its Virgin’s grotto and its slope of new graves, was alive and bustling, that long lines of cars were parked on the verges and in gateways for its Sunday Masses, that there was Father MacPartlan as well as Father Leahy, that large sums were gathered for missions to the African heathen. Father MacPartlan and Father Leahy praised and rejoiced and celebrated, gave absolution, gave thanks. The simplicity of total belief, of belonging
One summer day in 1997 Con Tonan dies. About thirty years before he had lost an arm in a tractor accident and, when he could not find other work, Grattan hired him as gardener for the Rectory, a part-time job that he learned and did for twenty-eight years until his recent retirement. Grattan attends the funeral and is touched to learn from Con’s widow how central the garden and Rectory had been to his life. That evening he is surprised when Father Leahy arrives for a visit, the first ever by a Catholic priest, and Grattan with unsuccessful stealth turns over the day’s Irish Times with its headline: “Paedophile Priest is Extradited.” “Of the Cloth’s” gesture to recent, highly publicized scandals:

He wondered if his gesture with the paper had been noticed. He had meant it as a courtesy, but a courtesy could be offensive. Long way from the world or not, it was impossible not to be aware of the Norbertine priest’s twenty-year long persecution of children in Belfast. One sentence already served in Magilligan Prison in County Derry, he was now on his way to face seventy-four similar charges in Dublin. All day yesterday the News had been full of it...

The funeral service had impressed him. There’d been confidence in its ceremony and its ritual, in the solemn voice of Father MacPartlan, in Father Leahy’s, in the responses of the congregation. It was there again in the two priests’ gestures, hands raised to give the blessing, in the long line of communicants and the coffin borne away, the graveside exhortations. Founded on a rock, Grattan had thought: you felt that here. The varnished pews were ugly, the figure in the Stations of the Cross lifeless, but you still felt the confidence and the rock. (30)

As polite conversation—indirect and incomplete—runs out with the evening light, Grattan realizes that Father Leahy had not been sent over in an act of understanding and pity for his diminished condition, but come in genuine admiration for the generosity of spirit that had employed Con and in a surprising (to Grattan) expression of solidarity and hope for sympathetic understanding:

Why did it seem he was being told that the confidence the priests possessed was a surface that lingered beyond its day? Why, listening, did he receive that intimation? Why did it seem he was being told there was an illusion, somewhere, in the solemn voices, hands raised in blessing, the holy water, the cross made in the air?...

‘I often think of those monks on the islands,’ Father Leahy said, ‘Any acre they’d spot out on the sea they would row off to to see could they start a community there.’

‘They would.’

‘Cowled against the wind. Or cowled against what’s left behind. Afraid, Father MacPartlan says, When Father MacPartlan comes in to breakfast you can see the rims of his eyes red....’

For a few more minutes Grattan remained outside, a trace of tobacco smoke still in the garden, the distant hum of the curate’s car not quite gone. The future was frightening for Father Leahy, as it had been for the monks who rowed away.... The golden age of the bishops was vanishing in a drama that was as violent as the burning of the houses and the fleeing of the families, and old priests like Father MacPartlan were made melancholy by their loss and passed their melancholy on.... Small gestures mattered now, and the statements in the dark were a way to keep the faith, as the monks had kept it in an Ireland that was different too.

This is Trevor’s version of Yeats’s program to bring the Anglo-Irish “back into the tapestry” (Essays and Introductions, 517) of Irish life. But it is not Yeats’s lords and ladies and heroic company—those appalling and invigorat-
ing figures from “The Tower” and “Blood and the Moon”—but the “small-time Protestant stock” (Excursions, xiii) and the “shrunken, withered little church” (Stout 33) from which he comes and which are treated affectionately in his few autobiographical statements. Trevor does the Big House too (Fools of Fortune, Silence in the Garden, and stories, especially “The News from Ireland”), but with irony, sympathy, and a recognition of Ascendancy fecklessness and complicity rather than with Yeats’s equestrian assurance.

As MacNeice noted (123), Yeats wants to docket the universe. Trevor provides a capsule of his eschatology in response to an interviewer’s question about fate, chance, and “fortune’s randomness”: “What can I say? I don’t think one has any sort of feeling of controlling one’s destiny. Nobody’s in charge of anything; you’re doled out time, from beginning to end. That’s your given” (Myers 45). Yeats writes, as he said of Swift, as if he had been appointed to guard a position (Explorations 334). Trevor writes from his perch on the margins. He is the consummate outsider, the poor Protestant in DeValera’s Ireland, the boy from Mitchelstown who might have been brought around to fetch tennis balls at Bowen’s Court (Excursions 2), the Irishman in England, the international success who feels “more at home in Italy, I think, than I feel anywhere else. I don’t speak Italian, which helps” (Smith 81). The margin is a moral and aesthetic location and his place on it a moral and aesthetic stance. Distance and detachment can be resources—“I think I see Ireland more clearly through the wrong end of a telescope” (Stout 130; Murphy 224)—and contribute to Trevor’s habit of eavesdropping, his curiosity, and his empathy, his fascination with what it feels like to be somebody different.

He is, as Denis Sampson demonstrates, the artist of the mundane and of memory, the cagey autobiographer who proceeds by indirection, gives us hints and guesses rather than apologia, and vanishes into his narrative just when we think we are about to pin him down. He often, Richard Bonoccorso shows, conducts moral evaluation by reticence, through an absent but abiding ghostly presence which shadows the buried life of the protagonist’s conscience. He may live in Devon and Italy, but, as Eammon Grennan has said, he walks into a village in Ireland, picks up a stone, turns it over, and knows everything. The sculptor’s respect for things, for their weight and their heft, also animates the writer.

The Rev. Grattan Fitzmaurice and Frs. Leahy and MacPartlan are Trevor’s postcolonial clergy. Like Father Clohessy of a recently published story, “Justina’s Priest” (New Yorker, Jan. 14, 2002, 74-79), they are “... aware of an emptiness, of something taken from [them]...” They exist after the War of Independence and Civil War, after the hegemony of the Church and of Catholic Nationalism, after the fall. They make do. They understand “that truth could flourish in the dark, that in the dark communication was easier” (35). Both the old C of I minister and the young curate love their country, but it is not the Ireland of their youthful expectations:

They loved it in different ways: unspoken in the dark, that was another intimation. For Grattan
there was history’s tale, regrets and sorrows and distress, the voices of unconquered men, the spirit of women as proud as empresses. For Grattan there were the rivers he knew, the mountains he had never climbed, wild fuchsia by a seashore and the swallows that came back, turf smoke on the air of little towns, the quiet in long glens. The sound, the look, the shape of Ireland, and Ireland’s rain and Ireland’s sunshine, and Ireland’s living and Ireland’s dead: all that.

On Sundays, when Mass was said and had been said again, Father Leahy stood in a crowd watching the men of Kildare and Kerry, of Offaly and Meath, yelling out encouragement, deploring some lack of skill. And afterwards he took his pint as any man might, talking the game through. For Father Leahy there was the memory of the cars going by, his bare feet on the cobbles of the yard, the sacrifice he had made, and his faithful coming to him, the cross emblazoned on a holy robe. Good Catholic Ireland, a golden age. (37)

Sentiment suspended in a tissue of irony. By now, this should be OK. “This” being a skepticism about master narratives, a soft-spoken acceptance of others and Otherness, tolerance and inclusiveness. That it is a gentle and even whimsical nationalism (John Butler Yeats, the last nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish gentleman, not his son William) rather than an aggressive and programmatic one, is OK too. After all, it is compatible with Fanon’s third stage of colonial and postcolonial culture, at least as interpreted and applied to Ireland by Edward Said: democratic and egalitarian values, a “generous and pluralistic vision of the world” (230). On the other hand—way on the other hand—the managers and beneficiaries of the new economy are bringing Anglo-Ireland back into the tapestry in most material ways, retrofitting the Big Houses as hotels, galleries, museums, and golf centers, with insouciant indifference to postcolonial resentments. To the extent that Trevor is a political (including cultural politics) writer he stands with the various programs for peace and reconciliation, for multicultural inclusiveness as a force against sectarian murderousness. He stands, too, with the poets of Northern Ireland, from MacNeice to Longley and Heaney. His indirect meditations on nationhood and citizenship are not as rich, complex, self-conscious, and language centered as, say, _The Redress of Poetry_ (1995), but the impulse to identity through inclusion and reconciliation is similar. With Trevor that impulse is not a project or a program but instinctive and incidental to story-telling.

But storytelling is everything, or almost everything. Robert Tracy shows how Trevor’s writing is a meditation on fiction—its making, its makers, its victims and losses, its consolations and triumphs. Narrative not only revises history: it shapes, contains, and in some ways and on some occasions trumps reality. Yeats is characteristically extravagant: “The world knows nothing because it has made nothing; we know everything because we have made everything” (Essays and Introductions 510). Trevor is characteristically restrained: “My fiction may, now and again, illuminate aspects of the human condition, but I do not consciously set out to do so: I am a storyteller” (Dust jacket, _After Rain_; Murphy 239).

Fictions create realities. Some characters—Timothy in _The Children of Dynmouth_, Francis Tyte in _Other People’s World_—fabricate their own realities. Some—Bridget Lacy in “Being Stolen From” or Dawne and Keith in “A Trinity”—suffer a weakness of will that allows their stories to be taken from them or imposed upon them by others; they are, in the phrase given new life...
Trevor, in a career of forty years and still going, has created enough people's worlds, with enough density and humanity, to satisfy most readers. Trevor is too reticent in interviews and personal statements, modest in voice, and traditional in technique to encourage the invocation of postmodern theories that everything is discourse, that there is no reality apart from representation, or representation without language. Still, life follows art and both life and art are symbols we share and stories we tell to make sense of our experience. To be is to be perceived ... and shaped and told. That is applied Berkeley. Other, more recent theoretical support for narrative as epistemology/fiction as history/stories as reality comes from everywhere: Collingwood on history from the inside; Benjamin on chronicle/history; Hayden White on metahistory; Clifford Geertz on culture. The essays in this special issue of Colby Quarterly—on shadowed autobiography, on making fictions and making history, on ghostly presences, and novels and film—show that William Trevor, in a career of forty years and still going, has created enough other people's worlds, with enough density and humanity, to satisfy most readers.

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