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Sara Ligarotti

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ao. Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Franz-Karl Wöhrer

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In memory of my Father

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1 Part I: Aspects of Theory and History

1.1 Introduction

Although William Trevor's impressive writing career of more than 40 years with dozens of works published including novels and novellas, short stories, children's books and nonfiction works, to date only a small number of scholars have written comprehensive studies about Trevor's life and his writings. On the shelves of the library in the English department at the University of Vienna there are 28 editions of William Trevor's works, including the novels, the short story collections, *Excursions in the Real World – Memoirs*, one of his two nonfiction books, and *The Oxford Book of Irish Stories*, which he edited. On the online database of the library only a few other articles quoting him are to be found, as well as some interviews he gave in the past with journalists from *The Guardian*, *The Paris Review* and the most recent one he gave on the occasion of the *2013 International Small Wonder Short Story Festival* when he received the inaugural Charleston-Chichester Award for a Lifetime's Excellence in Short Fiction.

As far as the current state of research is concerned, the most recent secondary literature on William Trevor mainly consists of articles and short reviews¹: "Writing aslant: putting chisel to paper - William Trevor's *A Bit on the Side*." (2014); "The subjective real in William Trevor's *Justina's Priest*." (2014); "The art of revision in the short stories of V. S. Pritchett and William Trevor." (2014). Furthermore, Heather Ingman's study *A History of the Irish Short Story* (2009) presents a biography and a summary of Trevor's works.

The most comprehensive works of secondary literature used as sources for this thesis were published between 1990 and 2003, two of them in 1993, not surprisingly after *The Collected Stories* was chosen by *The New York Times* as one of the best books of the

¹ Majola-Leblond, Claire.: "Writing aslant: putting chisel to paper - William Trevor's *A Bit on the Side*." *Journal of the Short Story in English/Les Cahiers de la nouvelle* (63) 2014, 241-56. (2014)
O'Brien, Eugene.: "The subjective real in William Trevor's *Justina's Priest*." *Journal of the Short Story in English/Les Cahiers de la nouvelle* (63) 2014, 195-210. (2014)
Bloom, Jonathan. "The art of revision in the short stories of V. S. Pritchett and William Trevor." *Études anglaises* (62:4) 2009, 504-6. (2009).

year. Each one of these works offers a critical analysis of Trevor's best known pieces of literature, the short stories and the novels. The main focuses are *The Story of Lucy Gault*, *Felicia's Journey* and *The Collected Stories*. Although these are Trevor's most renowned writings, they only represent a small proportion of his life's work. Other great works, such as *A Bit on the Side*, have been neglected and ultimately forgotten. The fact that the majority of secondary literature about William Trevor dates back to twelve years ago, may indicate that scholars of literature today perceive that the author has lost his relevance to an entirely new world. In reality, William Trevor, who was awarded with a Knighthood for services to literature in 2002, has continued to write, even after 2003. In 2004, *A Bit on the Side* was published and it was praised as one of the best books of 2004 by *The Washington Post*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Newsday*. In 2007, the short story collection *Cheating at Canasta* was published and it received very positive reviews from *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and the *BBC*. This shows that William Trevor still has something to say and this thesis aims to raise critical awareness.

William Trevor's works cannot be easily classified: this is the starting point for Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt in *William Trevor: Re-imagining Ireland (2003)*. In this book, which is also the most recent biography of the Irish author, Fitzgerald-Hoyt defends the work of William Trevor against all those who accuse him of being a melancholic writer of the past, and argues that his style of writing about themes of the past such as the miserable provincial Ireland, the "Troubles" or the decline of the Catholic Church, is intended to remind the readers of how Ireland used to be. But at the same time he asks them to re-imagine Ireland and the Irish, to avoid being entrapped in the melancholic image of the famine and the "Troubles". According to her, many scholars have neglected William Trevor because they could simply not classify and categorise his art. Trevor has certainly spent much of his career writing about "The Troubles", but Ireland has not always been his only focus. In his novels and short stories, especially those published at the beginning of his career, England and English people are also very frequent themes.

In the study *William Trevor*, published in 1990, Gregory A. Schirmer points out that the reason why the first works of Trevor are mainly focused on England and its people is because he did not want to write about the things he knew best, but about what he did

not know, which was England. For this reason, Schirmer considers Trevor to be an Anglo-Irish author, a classification that has been rejected by Trevor himself. As it will be shown later, the character of the outsider is a crucial motif in the stories of the collection. This may be connected to the fact that William Trevor was most of his life an outsider: first as a Protestant in a Catholic Irish town, and later as an Irish immigrant in England until today.

The point upon which several scholars seem to agree is Trevor's mastery of creating stories with powerful sets of relationships, in which everything has its correspondence. Just like in real life, everything is inevitably closely related, even things that may at first appear distant. Kristin Morrison refers to this in *William Trevor* (1993), in which she focuses on the system of correspondences in Trevor's work, starting with the metaphor for Ireland represented by the garden featured in *The Silence in the Garden* (1988) and in *The News from Ireland* (1986). In 1990, Schirmer had already compared Trevor's interrelated world with Edward Morgan Forster's belief in the need for connection to avoid the failure of society. Although Morrison's praise of Trevor's work and his understanding of people seems to be shared by Susanne Morrow Paulson's study, *William Trevor: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1993), the author also reports articles by some critics who consider him a "master of malevolence" (97) enjoying people's sufferance.

To conclude, another study that can help all those engaged in research on William Trevor is *William Trevor: The Writer and his Work* by Dolores MacKenna, published in 1999. Among the other works of secondary literature cited above, this is the only work that undertakes a detailed study on the persona of Trevor. Although her account of Trevor's family, which starts from the story of his great grandfather, might be perceived as somewhat pedantic at times, it certainly gives a comprehensive historical overview of the political and religious situation in Ireland and best explains Trevor's position as an outsider, even in Ireland. This will be the main focus of the second part of this thesis.

This very short overview aims to review the relevant secondary literature consulted for this thesis on William Trevor. The biographies and the interviews granted to *The Guardian* and *The Paris Review* will also be a valid aid to the research on *A Bit on the Side*. Furthermore, the introduction of *The Oxford Book of Irish Short Story* portraying

Trevor's own conception of the Irish short story will supply additional information and support to the arguments set out in this thesis.

1.2 The Short Story: Ireland's Most Popular Genre

The Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory edited by John Anthony Cuddon, offers – within a lengthy description - a concise definition of the short story. He states that:

[...] the term 'short story' has relatives in the shape of the French *conte* and *nouvelle*, the Spanish *novela*, the Italian *novella*, the German *Novelle* and *Kurzgeschichte*, the yarn, the sketch, the tale and the Russian *skaz.* (865)

Another authoritative literary terms dictionary, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, edited by Chris Baldick gives instead a more precise definition of the term and states that a short story is:

A fictional prose tale of no specified length, but too short to be published as a volume on its own, as novellas sometimes and novels usually are. A short story will normally concentrate on a single event with only one or two characters, more economically than a novel's sustained exploration of social background. (332)

As already clear from these first two definitions, it has always been difficult for writers and scholars to define the short story. Some tried to create one focusing on its most determining characteristics such as length, settings, number of characters, and applicability of Freytag's scheme. Edgar Allan Poe suggested that a short story is a kind of work that readers can read in one sitting. However, this definition is also vague. What is a "sitting"? How long is it? Is it something universally applicable? Things become even more complicated when trying to define the Irish short story. Beside the fact that everything concerning the Irish culture seems to always be particularly complicated, the Irish short story requires further thoughts. George A. Birmingham states in the introduction to the book *Irish Short Stories*:

What are Irish stories? Are they stories written by Irishmen, or stories written about Ireland? For instance, a great deal of George Moore's work doesn't deal with Ireland at all. Ought we to call these novels his Irish novels merely because George Moore is undoubtedly an Irishman? Or is the test to be the subject of a story? (10)

As far as short stories are concerned, the following few lines written by William Trevor in the introduction to the 1989 edition of *The Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories* perfectly fit the subject:

The modern short story may be defined as the distillation of an essence. [...] But art has its own way of defying both definitions and rules, and neither offer much help when examining, more particularly, the short stories of Ireland. (ix)

The modern short story can then be labelled, defined, structured and examined, but it is essentially art, and art has its strange ways of deconstructing and changing every kind of definitions or rules.

In the first approach to a literary genre typical of a certain culture or people, history must be the first thing to focus on. Through the study of history, the reasons why a genre developed and why it was so successful in a certain period and in a certain geographic area can be traced. The same principle can be applied to the Irish short story and Irish history. Why are Irish people the masters in this art? In the introduction of the *Oxford Book*, Trevor argues that in the Victorian Period, the time in which the novel spread in England, Ireland was not yet ready for it. Religious conflicts, two languages, misery and the fear of the famine: this was Ireland in the 19th Century. A very different situation from that rich, aristocratic society that fed the genre of the novel in England. This does not mean of course that there was no literature on Ireland. Stories were in fact still transmitted orally, a tradition going on for centuries, deeply rooted in the Gaelic culture and personified by the *seanchaí*, the old story-teller.

Ireland is famous as a nation of storytellers. Stories were a form of entertainment and hospitality too. Guests in a house were always welcomed by some narrative story, or an anecdote. The stories would change from time to time, place to place and person to person, similarly to what happens when children play. The veracity of the subject of the story did not matter, not as much as the manner of its telling. A particularity of these stories is that they were told in the Irish language and not in English. It is said that with the affirmation of Irish literature written in English, a lot of that charisma and entertainment contained in the Irish version of the stories has gone lost forever. Not only is the English language not as evocative and entertaining as the Irish one, but also the

medium of paper is a less effective means of transferring these stories. However, this was a necessary step that still allows us today to read about Fionn Mac Cumhaill, Oisín, Deirdre, Cu Chulainn and many others.

Stories were offered as a gift to an audience that became used to the length of the tales. Against this background, it is understandable why Ireland became the nation of the short story. If in some countries short stories are just the leftovers of a novel, in Ireland quite the opposite is true. The themes of the stories vary, but there is a line, almost a pattern that can be discerned: stories of violence and cruelty were just as loved as stories of gentle love, of tragic love, of brave heroes and of dynastic wars. In this sense, the largest sources to look at when talking about the origins of the themes of Irish literature, would be the three major books of ancient Gaelic literature: *An Rúraíocht*, *An Fhiannaíocht* and the Historical Cycle or the King Cycle.

1.3 Love, Solitude and Outsiders in the Celtic Sagas²

Ruráíocht, or the Ulster Cycle, is set around the 1st Century AD and deals with the battles between the Ulaid, prehistoric people from Northern Ireland and the Connachta, people from the west. The tales convey an image of Ireland in the pre-Christian era, in which wars, violence and magic are central in society. The hero of this saga is Cu Chulainn, protagonist of the most famous tale of the cycle: *Tain Bo Cuailnge*, “The Cattle Raid of Cooley”. At that time, Medb, a strong woman married to the King Ailill, is Queen of the Connachta. After having realised that the only thing that makes Ailill wealthier than herself is the magnificent bull Finnbehnnach, she is determined to borrow Donn Cuailnge from Cooley for one year, another extremely fertile bull, in order to equal the wealth of her husband’s. This causes a great battle between the Ulaid and the Connachta, and the only man ready to defend Ulster is the seventeen-year-old boy Cu Chulainn who, helped by supernatural powers, manages to stop Medb’s army, but dies on the field.

Another main character of this saga is Deirdre, one of the most famous heroines in Irish literature. Her story is sad and tragic, but also extremely violent. Since her birth, this beautiful woman has been destined to a life of sufferance and solitude which affected all

² *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*. Robert Welch, ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

the people around her. During her short life, her beloved Naoise and many other people die to defend her from Choncobar mac Nessa, king of Ulster, who wants her to be his spouse. When everyone she loves is dead, she is given to Choncobar, who after a year, gives her to the man who killed Naoise with the only aim of taunting her. One of the many versions of the story, ends up with Deirdre, who unable to cope with the situation, jumps off a chariot and dies. Other versions of the tale tell that she dies of grief.

Fiannaiocht or the Ossianic Cycle, deals with the mythical hero Fionn mac Cumhaill, his son Oisín and the members of the Fianna, a group of warriors who protect the king. Fionn mac Cumhaill and his men live outside society, lead a nomadic life and conduct raids. However, Fionn is a brave and strong druid and a man of great wisdom as well as a man of arts, a poet and a diviner. According to the legend, he burns his thumb while cooking the Salmon of Knowledge and therefore, simply by biting his thumb, he acquires great wisdom. His son Oisín is Fionn's partner in many adventures, until he is caught and remains captured for three hundred years in Tir na nÓg with his beloved Niamh. Although he falls in love with Niamh after three years in Tir na nÓg (300 Irish years) he feels homesick and decides to go home to see his father and all the members of the Fianna. Once home, he realises that all his friends and family have been dead for centuries now and only their legends remain. In trying to help some men on his path, he disobeys Niamh's instructions and falls off his horse; when he touches the ground he is turned into an old man. According to the legend, he spends the last moments of his life with St. Patrick.

Protagonists of the historical Cycle are kings, their supporters and enemies, and the subject is mainly their dynastic battles. These tales originated between the 10th and 12th Century AD and they deal with real historical events. The tales Cath Maige Rath and Cath Almaine recall the events of battles that took place between the 6th and 8th century. The third tale related to these two stories is *Buile Shuibne, or The Madness of Shuibne*, where it deals with kingship and battles but also with religion. Because of Shuibne's disrespect towards St. Ronan, who wanted to build a church on his territory, Shuibne is cursed with madness and to a death by spear, the same way he killed one of Ronan's monks. The most peculiar part of the tale is not only that Shuibne goes insane instantaneously when the battle of Mag Rath begins, but that he begins to fly like a bird.

After years of travelling throughout Ireland - and it is here that the motif of the outsider is a central issue - he finds shelter in a monastery and lives with its old abbot; there he is killed by a spear by the jealous husband of a parish woman. Shuibhne's story can be read as a metaphoric punishment for all those who spread innocent blood.

After having looked at the themes of the major Irish sagas, it is apparent that these myths strongly influenced Irish authors of the following centuries. The themes and motifs of love (especially star-crossed lovers and unrequited love), violence, religion and escape (voluntary or forced emigration, the motif of the outsider) are all inevitably part of an Irish heritage still present in contemporary Irish literature.

1.4 The Literary Tradition

The short story has always been regarded as a central genre in Irish fiction. Nevertheless, there are only a few comprehensive studies of the genre. *A History of the Irish Short Story* by Heather Ingman is the most recent and most exhaustive study about the Irish short story and thus constitutes a valuable aid to this thesis on William Trevor. The following chapter surveys the history of the Irish short story from its origins until the present day.

Although the Irish short story was initially transmitted orally and in the Irish language, its form slowly changed, during the time in which the oral tradition was abandoned in favour of the written word and the English language. The nineteenth century is a landmark for the genre: during this time, a large number of short stories emerged to deal with some of the most traumatic themes people were facing in Ireland back then. At that time, the country was going through a very intense period: The Act of Union (1800), Grattan's Parliament failure, the Catholic emancipation (1829), the Great Famine and the rebellion of 1848. Irish writers began to write short fiction in English about the most important Irish themes, especially those regarding national and cultural identity and transition. For this reason, the stories of that time were intrinsically linked to the rise of national consciousness. However, although dealing with Ireland, these narratives were published in England and mainly addressed to an English readership. At the end of the century, W.B. Yeats was still complaining about Irish people knowing too little of Irish

literature and the lack of book shops in the small towns of Ireland. The nineteenth-century short story writers (Anglo-Irish Protestants and middle-class Catholics) used their tales as a tool to convey several messages to their English readers:

Much of it was inspired by extra-literary considerations and propelled by anxiety: to record the beliefs and habits of Irish peasant life before they got lost for ever, to defend and explain the Irish to the English, to rectify the many and obvious faults in the Irish character. (Ingman 17)

For this reason, it can be said that at the time the didactic aspect of the stories was the main thing to be considered. In this context, Maria Edgeworth's children's tales also come to mind: *Moral Tales for Young People* (1801) and *Early Lessons* (1801-2).

From the 1830s there was a rise in indigenous literary publishing, mostly periodicals (Ingman 20), that succeeded in spreading the popularity of short narratives. This new kind of Irish publishing became highly influential (such as the *Dublin University Magazine*) and played an important role in the affirmation and success of many Irish writers and their short stories. William Carleton's *Traits and Stories* (1830) was one of the biggest success of that time.

Nineteenth-century Ireland was also the ideal setting for a new literary movement: the Gothic. The famines and poverty together with the Anglo-Irish decaying castles were the perfect setting for vampire stories such as Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (although set in Styria all the references make one think of Ireland) and of course the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, as well as his short fiction (*The Judge's House*).

With the spreading of indigenous Irish publishing, also the number of readers in Ireland was increasing and "between 1850 and 1900 the number of National Schools doubled." (Ingman 55). Furthermore, those were the years of the Irish Literary Revival: a movement founded by W.B Yeats that tried to lift up Ireland spirits after the depression of the nineteenth century caused by the famines and the British Rule. The twentieth century saw a rise of Irish nationalism, transmitted through Yeats's Irish Literary Revival:

Yeats and his colleagues in the revivalist movement were intent on reviving the Celtic past but also reshaping it to suit their own vision of Ireland in the future. (Ingman 56)

The writers of this movement such as Yeats, Lady Gregory, J.M. Synge and George Russell tried to rescue the Irish folk tale, and to encourage learning Irish and to collect oral material from Irish peasants. Although the Revival is mainly associated with poetry, this period was essential for the transition of Irish fiction and the development of modern short story. However, as Ingman points out, the modern Irish short story has not been inspired by the folk tradition only, on the contrary, it is indebted to many foreign influences notably by Russian, French and Scandinavian writers.

In that period, George Moore published *The Untilled Field*, a collection of short stories which deal with the tension between the present and the past, Ireland and the foreign and represents the beginning of the modern Irish short story. In the same period, Joyce's *Dubliners* provided a great innovation and a clear shift from the Gaelic tradition of storytelling. However, many years passed before other Irish writers fully understood the modernism of his collection. Furthermore, the sales of *Dubliners* clearly showed that the collection had been unpopular and neglected at that time. One obvious reason was the approaching of the War of Independence and later, the Civil War. The years after the the Easter Rising in 1916 can be considered as years of transition, in which foreign magazines and publishers were again essential for the career of Irish writers. Frank O'Connor and Seàn O'Faolàin's stories were published in the United Kingdom and the United States by the *London Mercury* and *Harper's Bazaar* as well as by *The Irish Statesman* in Ireland. The authors' alliance with foreign publishers allowed them to pursue their careers while Ireland was still struggling in a climate of depressed cultural and social life and stagnant economy. Furthermore, in that period a general reservation against the genre of short fiction prevailed and also played as an obstacle to the development of the genre in Ireland.

The themes of the post-revolution Irish short story are several. In general, in the 1920s and 1930s, the short story reflects the disillusion felt by the general public after the War of Independence. The stories mirrored the climate of repression and censorship typical of those years. Several stories tried to capture and portray the atmosphere of the War of Independence, among these are the *Tales of the R.I.C* (1922), which were addressed to an English readership and criticised the British government. These were nationalistic stories that dealt with men on the run, romantic love stories between Irish

freedom fighters and beautiful women, all set in a romanticised Irish landscape. In 1932, Yeats fights the anti-literary measures set up by the Catholic Church by founding the Irish Academy of Letters for young writers. The transition period ends in 1939, the year of the beginning of the Second World War.

While most of Europe was fighting in the Second World War, Ireland lived in complete isolation, due to its neutrality. Although this isolation had the effect of producing short stories that portrayed Ireland as a place cut off from the rest of the world (for instance those by Elizabeth Bowen), it also allowed Irish arts in general to flourish. Because of wartime censorship, no foreign publications were allowed and the cultural life was flourishing. The period from the 1940s to 1950s was one period in which isolation and loneliness are key themes in the Irish short story. In these years, the author Frank O'Connor wrote an influential study on the short story: *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (1962). His conception of the short story has been taken by many as the ultimate definition of the genre. In his study, he identifies loneliness and alienation as central themes in the modern short story. O'Connor observed the modern Irish society around him and pointed out that the "restrictive social conditions prevailing in Ireland" (such as the influence of the Catholic Church, censorship and post-independence disillusionment) is responsible for an increasing number of lonely individuals. For this reason, he argued that the short story fits well in the Irish society of that time because "always in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society." (Ingman 156)

After the war, from the 60s onwards, Ireland experienced a period of economic revival, which also caused the growth of indigenous publishing. In that period, many writers were dealing with the themes of memory and imagination in their short stories. One of those was William Trevor, who wrote about the theme of imagination as a way of escaping the monotonous everyday life. Another main movement in this period is that of Irish women writers such as Edna O'Brien and Maeve Brennan. In 1970 the Irish Women's Movement was founded to press for equal rights for women. Naturally, this also caused the increase of a feminist presence in the short story in Ireland. O'Brien's stories such as *A Scandalous Woman* (1974) presented women who suffer from the views of a chauvinistic and patriarchal society. Other stories by O'Brien also dealt with the mother-

daughter relationship in which the memories of the Irish daughters of their mothers pull the women back into the past. The flourishing of Irish female writers culminated with the success of the 80s of the twentieth century of the Irish 'chick lit' novel. Furthermore, in their short fiction works of that time, women writers were also challenging the Irish Catholic view of the housewife and the limited role of women as stated in the Irish Constitution. In the collection *Dublin 4* (1982), Maeve Binchy exposes the truth behind the false liberalism of Dublin's professional classes. In the stories, she criticises traditional thinking and hypocritical attitude towards the female body and sexuality. Pregnancy, homosexuality, infidelity and alcoholism are hidden but present themes in Irish life, and are addressed in Binchy's fiction.

In general, in the last twenty years of the twentieth century there was a big increase of new short story writers in Ireland. The genre is not considered highly profitable by the publishers, but its length is suitable for newspapers, magazines and can even be aired on the radio. One main theme was of course that of the 'Troubles' and Northern Ireland. In the 1980s William Trevor, who had until then written mainly about England, began to write more about Ireland. The estrangement from his own country, according to him, has helped him with his writing about Ireland. Emigration allowed a certain artistic detachment:

To me England was an amazing and strange place. I'd never been outside of Ireland until I was twenty-two. When I now write about Ireland I'm doing a faintly similar thing, because I'm going back to a country which has become strange to me. Personally, I think that kind of thing is essential. (Ingman 234)

Similarly, as Gregory Schirmer reports, Trevor once said:

I disagree with that awful advice that's always given to children: 'Write about what you know.' I'd say the opposite, in a way: 'You mustn't write about what you know. You must use your imagination...' (2)

Other contemporary themes recurring in Irish short stories were gender identity and sexuality. Gender issues and Irish identity especially, have been increasingly dealt with and represented in various Irish short stories of the period. These stories mirror the radical changes Ireland was going through: transformations of society and of the classic

Irish family life. In the 1990s many stories dealt with returned emigrants who have failed to cope with the new changes of Irish society. The 1990s were a period of radical transformation for Ireland. Mary Robinson, a feminist and civil rights lawyer, became Ireland's first female president. With her, divorce, contraception and homosexuality became legal. Those are also the years of the economic boom also known as the Celtic Tiger. These new changes and the sudden wealth created a more divided and secularized society as illustrated by Eilis Ni Dhuibhne's *Wuff Wuff Wuff for de Valera!* (2001). In the story, the author portrays the difference between those who could really benefit from the Celtic Tiger and those who were excluded from its advantages. At the time, Irish society was made of some rich people and many marginalised ones.

Another significant change in Irish life of those years concerned religion. In the 1990s the scandals around the abuse of children in orphanages run by the Catholic Church and sexual abuse by Catholic priests came to light. After this, many authors began to write about the decline of the Catholic Church and the loss of faith in people and vocation of the priests. John McGahern's collection *High Ground* (1985) deals with the loss of faith and priests who fail to lead their country people to God. Similarly, some years later, William Trevor contributed with two different stories that deal with these topics: "Of the Cloth" (*The Hill Bachelors*, 2000) and "Justina's Priest" (*A Bit on the Side* 2004).

Today, Irish publishers continue to support the short story, and publications of short story collections are still fairly popular. Furthermore, even Irish writers have demonstrated their commitment to the genre and keep on introducing new ways to keep the genre alive by creating new styles and using new techniques. They do this, as Ingman points out, often against the demand of the great public. However, this is also a sign that, for the very same writers, the genre is not used as a mere preparation to approach the career of a novelist. On the contrary, many famous writers such as William Trevor, Colm Tòibìn and Anne Enright, turned back to the short story, after having reached success with novels. William Trevor has often commented on the importance of the short story to him:

I really feel it is the most demanding art form. It is so exciting, so intense... I'm a short story writer who writes a novel occasionally. (Ingman 259)

In this short overview of the main periods in the development of the Irish short story to its contemporary form, there is one main thread that links all the authors and movements mentioned. As Ingman points out, there are themes that are present to all the historical periods analysed:

Exile, dislocation, dreams, memory, time, spirituality, death, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, childhood, the family. In every period the Irish short story seems to perceive the inadequacy of quotidian reality. (Ingman 260)

1.5 Criticism of the Irish Cultural Heritage

Let us take a big step forward and look at the state of Irish literature many centuries after the adventures of Fionn Mac Cumhaill. Although it can be assumed that today works written in verse are less popular than prose³, the thematics covered by the Gaelic literature have been transmitted to the authors of modern and contemporary Irish literature. The works of highly renowned authors like James Joyce, William B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Seamus Heaney, Patrick Kavanagh or more recently Trevor, Claire Keegan, Colm Toibin, Eilis Ni Dhuibne certainly display characteristics that distinguish their works from one another and make them unique pieces of art. What they have in common is that they draw from the rich pool of Irish thematics that they have inherited from the Gaels, the Bards and the Seanchai and adapt the themes and motifs to contemporary times, be it the famine, the Troubles or the Celtic Tiger. In this way, although being inspired by a century long tradition, Irish poets and writers still can be very sensitive to the changing life of Irish society and thus fulfil their role as public commentators.

The previous paragraph serves as an introduction to the criticism that some scholars and writers (also Irish) have expressed towards this Irish heritage and consequently, to those instances of Irishness and typical Irish thematics that can be found in many works of contemporary Irish authors. These scholars and writers claim that Irishness is an aspect typical of an old fashioned literature criticism and that its themes are old and far away from normal people everyday reality. Throughout the Centuries, scholars of literature and men of letters from all over the world have tried to find a certain thread,

³ Considering the texts one may find on the bedside table of an average reader.

or pattern, in Irish culture and the behaviour of Irish people. Certain characteristics typical of many works of Irish literature and even more so Irish arts (such as film, theatre and music) are thought to be strongly connected with the nationality of the author/playwright/musician. These elements have been defined and grouped under the classification of *Irishness*. Irishness can be then defined as a particular quality that attempts to describe what it means to be Irish; what it means to live in a small town, hours away from Dublin and wondering what the outside world is like and how to escape from a humdrum life or even a hard one. At the same time experiencing feelings of patriotism and enormous internal struggles.

The meaning of the concept of *Irishness* has recently been examined by Julian Gough, Irish novelist and award-winning short story writer from Galway, who became famous or better, infamous, for criticising some of his Irish colleagues and the Irish literary canon. Already in 2010⁴, he stated that Irish authors of today should stop trying to imitate James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and Maeve Binchy, because that is not authentic writing, but just a repetition of the same old stories and themes and such an approach also fails to tackle the modern world. According to Gough, Irishness and the idea of Irish literature cannot and must not be reduced to “the priest, the pub, the family secret (usually child abuse) and a funeral in the rain”. Gough does not go easy on William Trevor either, accusing him of being one of those Irish authors of the canon, easy to get published and all about “well-told tales of incident and emotion”⁵. Gough has certainly a point when he accuses some Irish authors of being a “pompous, provincial literary community” who has “become a priestly caste, scribbling by candlelight, cut off from the electric current of the culture”. As Christina Hunt Mahony writes:

Novelists and other prose writers in Ireland today tend to favour traditional forms and genres associated with Irish writing in past eras. The modern Irish novel, with rare exceptions, is markedly non-innovative in structure. Irish writers, who have always found the short story a felicitous genre, continue to do so. (275)

⁴ On the 13th of November 2015, in occasion of a guest lecture at the University of Vienna with guest professor Eamonn O’Chiarda, Julian Gough reiterated this point even more strongly.

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/26/julian-gough-jude-london-review> 13.11.2015.

Although it might also be true that nowadays many Irish authors only write to win prizes and to win the attention of the greater public outside Ireland (which is something not uncommon in other nationalities), this is something that does not fit with William Trevor, who, as already stated in the introduction, is still one of the most underrated authors of his time. Moreover, as shown in Part II of this thesis, *A Bit on the Side* is not a nostalgic piece of work about a hypothetical Ireland of the past. On the contrary, it is about people and their universal stories of love and death. Such themes are without any doubt timeless and relevant for all of humankind. Christina Hunt Mahony states that:

Irish fiction, using traditional forms, and exploring well-worn tropes, has kept pace with modern Irish life. [...] In addition, a healthy publishing industry in Ireland has made possible a constant flow of Irish prose that need not conform to an outside view of Irish life. [...] Irish novelists, short story writers and memoirists can interrogate definitions of their own national identity unburdened by the internal strictures of the past or conflicting external preferences or requirements of what Irishness should be. (275-6)

Before concentrating on the thematic analysis of *A Bit on the Side*, some final theoretical aspects have to be considered. The next chapters will deal with definitions of the terms of ‘slice-of-life’ story and of themes and motifs.

1.6 The Realistic ‘Slice-of-Life’ Story

It has already been stated that *A Bit on the Side* is a short story collection, but a further classification of the genre can be undertaken: this chapter will focus on the question of whether these short stories can be classified as “realistic slice-of-life stories”.

The term “slice of life” is a “direct translation of the French phrase *tranche de vie* [...]. It suggests that a work presents life ‘in the raw’, factual, visceral and unadulterated by art.” (Cuddon 836)

Cuddon’s definition of slice-of-life story can be applied to all the stories of the collection, which deal with a particular time in the life of one or more characters (except for *Solitude*, which deals with the whole life of the protagonist, from her childhood until her last years of life) and tell of incidents and situations typical of everyday life in modern and

contemporary society. The situations are plausible and could happen to anyone, thus they are factual; they are also visceral because they are “based on a deep feeling and emotional reactions rather than on reason or thought”⁶ and of course unadulterated by art because William Trevor’s short stories are mosaic and their message reaches the reader's mind directly, without any detours.

In a slice-of-life story the author “opens a door for the reader, permits him to see and hear characters, and then closes the door without comment or observation. (Shaw, 348)

These two definitions leave no doubt that the stories in *A Bit on the Side* are all slice-of-life stories. Being able to classify them is important for their thematic analysis - in order to say *what* is said and *how* is said.

Another important aspect of theory that has to be considered is the existence of a tradition of literary themes and motifs. These concepts will be particularly important in the second part of this thesis entitled: A Thematic Analysis on *A Bit on the Side*.

1.7 Themes and Motifs

Let us begin with a concise definition of ‘theme’ taken from *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* edited by Chris Baldick:

A “theme” is “a salient abstract idea that emerges from a literary work’s treatment of its subject-matter; or a topic recurring in a number of literary works. [...] The theme of a work may be announced explicitly, but more often it emerges indirectly through the recurrence of motifs.” (Baldick 333-334)

We can also define a theme as an idea or a topic in the story. If the story is all about “what happens next?”, the theme could be seen as something that the story is trying to say to the reader, a piece of information that can make something out of life and convey some kind of wisdom to the reader. There is certain controversy among scholars when talking about themes in a story. As stated by Jeremy Hawthorn in the *Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, there is disagreement about the nature of a theme and whether it is an

⁶ <<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/visceral>> Web 02.03.2016.

idea which is expressed consciously or unconsciously by the author. Furthermore, some scholars like Prince, consider a *theme* to be a *frame* in a literary work or an *issue*, whereas the word *thematics* would be more appropriate to define a proposed idea or question and the relative answers (Hawthorn, 361). In this thesis, the term theme is used as defined by Baldick in *The Oxford Dictionary*. Regarding whether or not Trevor consciously wanted to tell his readers something with his stories, is a question that only Trevor himself is able to answer.

Continuing with the definition of themes, in Joyce's *Counterparts*, for example, there are many references to Irish popular culture. The story presents a typical day in the life of Farrington, a frustrated Irishman who works as copy clerk in a law firm at the beginning of the 20th Century. In the story, the references to the pubs, the streets of Dublin and situations of everyday life, contribute to the realism of the story. Furthermore, these references do a lot more: they serve as a stage to highlight the state of Irish nationalism at that time and by showing Farrington's frustration and anger against his boss and his English friends, the story mirrors the quest of the Irish people, who were searching for a national identity and independence from the British. Consequently, in *A Bit on the Side*, the ideas of failure, solitude and love carry a much wider meaning than it seems after a first reading. The stories can all be seen as a contemplation of the complexity of human nature in the 21st century.

Themes are abstract ideas and their formulation is usually made of nouns or a very short phrase that tries to describe a very complex concept. Motifs, on the other hand, are the concrete and factual situations through which a theme can express itself:

The term "motif" can be defined as "a situation, incident, idea, image, or character-type that is found in many different literary works, folktales or myths; or any element of a work that is elaborated into a more general theme" (Baldick 215-216).

There is a long tradition of defining of themes and their motifs. These can be divided into several areas such as motifs of settings, motifs of characters, motifs of plot, motifs of magic and folklore etc. The next chapter will give an overview of the themes of "Love", "Emigration", "Female Beauty", "Failure", "Solitude" and "Life in Ireland" and will discuss the motif-patterns supporting the themes in the stories discussed - this will mainly consist of motifs of settings, characters and plot.

2 The Narrative Technique

The term “narrative technique” can be defined as follows: the narrative technique is “the method of telling stories.” (Baldick 166) This chapter of the thesis will focus on the narrative situation as well as on the modes of presentation and the methods of characterization used in William Trevor’s *A Bit on the Side*.

2.1 The Narrative Situation

2.1.1 The Third Person Narrative Situation

A narrator is “one who tells, or is assumed to be telling, the story in a given narrative” (Baldick 166). The narrative situation can be defined as the “point of view” of the narrator, i.e. “the position or vantage-point from which the events of a story seem to be observed and presented to us” (Baldick 198) by the narrator. Before going into depth with regard to the narrative situation, it needs to be mentioned that narrators “should not be confused with authors” (Abbott 63): A narrator is “variously described as an instrument, a construction, or a device yielded by the author” (Abbott 63).

The narrative situation in almost all the stories of *A Bit on the Side* (made exception for “Solitude”) is a third person narrative situation. The following paragraphs will be dedicated to this narrative situation; “Solitude” will be analysed individually hereafter. Stanzel refers to the third person narrative situation as “authorial narrative situation”. According to Stanzel:

it is characteristic of the *authorial narrative situation* that the narrator is outside the world of the characters. The narrator’s world exists on a different level of being from that of the characters. Here the process of transmission originates from an external perspective [...]” (5).

Furthermore, the third person narrator in the short stories is an omniscient one, i.e.

an ‘all-knowing’ kind of narrator very commonly found in works of fiction written as third-person narratives. The omniscient narrator has a full knowledge of the

story's events and of the motives and unspoken thoughts of the various characters. He or she will also be capable of describing events happening simultaneously in different places – a capacity not normally available to the limited point of view of first person narratives. (Baldick 178)

Additionally, the third person omniscient narrator in the stories in *A Bit on the Side* can be regarded as a “non-intrusive” or “covert” narrator, i.e. “a narrator presenting situations and events with a minimum amount of narratorial mediation” (Chatman 17) as opposed to the “intrusive” or “overt” narrator who can be defined as “a (distancing or engaging, ironic or earnest) narrator commenting in his or her own voice on the situations and events presented, their presentation, or its context; a narrator relying on and characterized by commentarial excurses or intrusions” (Blin, Genette, Prince, Warhol 46-47). An intrusive narrator is a narrator that addresses the reader directly like „The reader will have noticed by now that...“ and above all, comments on the characters and the given situation. In the stories of *A Bit on the Side* this does not happen, although several of the characters in the stories have some negative qualities, the narrator never comments on them or their actions. The narrator applied in *A Bit on the Side* is rather detached and neutral. This type of narrator is also called self-effacing narrator.

To sum up, the narrator in the stories is a third person omniscient non-intrusive narrator: he is objective and knows everything with regard to place and time and furthermore is able to look into the characters' minds.

2.1.2 The First Person Narrative Situation

“Solitude” is the only story in which the narration is conveyed through a first person narrator protagonist, in this case Villana, the female protagonist. The first person narrator can be the protagonist of the story, and he or she reports the events using the pronoun ‘I’. Moreover, this kind of narrator can function as a witness, and does not have to be the protagonist. This narrative situation has been defined by Genette as “homodiegetic narrator”. When the first person narrator is also the protagonist of the story, Genette uses the term autodiegetic narrator.

In a first person narrative situation, space and time are also important. The narrator's experience of the events and the actual retelling of them is called “narrative distance” by Stanzel. In “Solitude”, the narrative distance is, at least for the first part of

the story, at least 40 years: „I am seven years old, waiting for my father to come downstairs (100)“. However, in the second part, the narrative distance is much shorter, probably 20 years:

I turn from the window and powder over the coral lipstick I have just applied. On my seventeenth birthday nothing of my reflection is different in an oval looking-glass (110)

However, in the third and final part of the story, the narrative distance seems to be even less, if not near zero:

I'm in my fifty-third year now, a woman who has settled down at last in the forgotten Italian seaside resort where they met. In nineteen forty-nine that was, I calculate. (117)

Furthermore, the first person narrator can convey the story either through the voice of the experiencing self, which enhances the sense of authenticity, or that of the narrating self, in which the narrator generally reflects on past events. See for instance:

I reach the lock by standing on the hall chair. I open the hall door and pull the chair back to the alcove. I comb my hair in the hallstand glass. I am seven years old, waiting for my father to come downstairs. (100)

These few sentences at the beginning of the story give the sense of authenticity and especially, activity. They are all verbs in the present tense which describe actions. These contrast with the following example:

I knew at once that my mother had paid Mrs Upsilla all these years. Charles too, I imagined. The rich's desperate bid for silence: I think of it as that... (118)

The verbs *to know*, *to imagine* and *to think* are all part of the technique of the narrating self and convey reflection rather than action.

Generally, the first person narration poses the question of the reliability of the narrator. A reliable narrator tells the truth and usually refrains from giving value judgements. However, generally, all first person narrators should be doubted, since the

reader does not know until which point the narrator will tell the truth. A third person omniscient narrator by contrast, is *usually* a reliable narrator. An unreliable narrator could purposely lie, or his/her unreliability could originate from a mental disease (think of the killer narrators in many of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories), a particular mental condition (drug or alcohol abuse) or his/her maturity (a child will see the world from the eyes of a child).

Although a first person narrator, and the protagonist of the story, for parts of it, Villana can be trusted and may thus be regarded as a reliable narrator. At the beginning of the story, when she talks about her imaginary childhood friends she explicitly admits that „Abigail and Davie aren't real, but most of the time they're there.” (103) However, since she is just a child, she cannot fully understand what is happening between her mother and „her friend“ as an adult would. So, in this case she just rendered the events through the eyes of a seven-year-old girl who does not know what cheating means. Later on, towards the end of the story, Villana, now a middle aged woman, tells of her encounter with Mr d'Arblay on the promenade of Bordighera:

‘Buona sera, signora.’

It is not an unusual courtesy for people to address one another on this promenade, even for a man who is not familiar to her to address a woman. But still this unexpected voice surprises me, and perhaps I seem a little startled. [...] His voice is soft, pleasant to hear, his eyes quite startling blue. He is tall, in a pale linen suit, thin and fair-haired, his forehead freckled, the blue of his eyes repeated in the tie that's knotted into a blue-striped shirt. (122)

Later on, she reports the conversations she had with him, about books, films and eventually about her past and the death of her mother's lover by her hand:

‘It is natural too, ‘ Mr d'Arblay replied while we walked, ‘to find the truth in the agony of distress. The innocent cannot be evil: this was what, during that sleepless night, they came to know.’ [...] ‘Theirs was the guilt,’ Mr d'Arblay says again, ‘his that he did not know her well enough, hers that she made the most of his not knowing. Theirs was the shame, yet their spirit is gentle in our conversation: guilt is not always terrible, nor shame unworthy.’ (126-7)

At the end of the story, however, the reader understands that Mr d'Arblay does not exist and therefore, has to regard Villana as an unreliable narrator. Furthermore, the last paragraph of the story is the only one that is rendered by a narrated interior monologue related in the third person by the protagonist. This technique increases the sense of immediacy of the story:

How can they know that in the dining-room where royalty has dined she is not alone among the tattered drapes and chandeliers abandoned to their grime? They cannot know, they cannot guess, that in the old hotel, and when she walks by the sea, there is Mr d'Arblay, as in another solitude there were her childhood friends. (126)

Arguably, considering Villana's sense of guilt for having killed her mother's lover and for having caused the family's departure from London to embrace a life made of solitude in big hotels throughout Europe, the fact that she imagines a Mr d'Arblay to tell her that the guilt is not hers but of their parents, is her way of getting some sort of relief and closure on the sad events of her childhood.

2.1.3 The Figural Narrative Situation

In some parts of the stories, the narrator shifts from an "external perspective" that represents the world outside the characters' minds, in which the narrator looks at events from the outside, to an "internal perspective", which means that the reader "perceives objects of the outer world" (Stanzel 58) through the eyes of one or more characters, thus from inside their consciousness. When the narrator focalizes on a character, this character is called „focalizer“ or „reflector character.“ When this technique prevails in a story, then the narrative situation is called figural narrative situation:

In the *figural narrative situation* the mediating narrator is replaced by a reflector: a character in the novel who thinks, feels and perceives, but does not speak to the reader like a narrator. (Stanzel 54)

According to Jahn, focalization is:

[...] a means of selecting and restricting narrative information, of seeing events and states of affairs from somebody's point of view, of foregrounding the focalizing agent, and of creating an empathetical or ironical view on the focalizer.

The use of internal focalization in the history of English literature has been documented for the first time in the 1880s in novels by Henry James. This also marked the beginning of the „stream-of-consciousness technique. Before that, thoughts and feelings of the characters were conveyed through an external prospective.

Here is an example of an omniscient narrator taken from the story “Sitting with the Dead”:

Downstairs, she placed the boots ready for him at the back door. She brought his cap and muffler to him with his overcoat. A stitch was needed where the left sleeve met shoulder, she noticed. She hadn't before and knew he wouldn't wait while she repaired it now. (1)

In this extract, the omniscient narrator shifts to the reflector figure, which is, in this case, Emily, the wife. The sentence „she knew he wouldn't wait while she repaired it now “reveals the thoughts of the character rendered in 'free indirect discourse'. Hence we are provided with a narrated interior monologue by the protagonist.

In more complex works of fiction there can be various focalizers and the story can be told by means of shifting perspective from the consciousness of the several characters. Although the omniscient narrator remains, his presence is reduced to a minimum, only to introduce the characters, the setting and the situation. One example of this complex figural narrative situation can be found in the story “Traditions”. In the story, both the point of views of Bella and Oliver are rendered. Here are a few examples:

With this suggestion Olivier was dismissed. In the great stone-paved hall beyond the study and the drawing-room he forgot at once all that had been said and returned to the subject of the slaughtered birds. Again he reached the conclusion he had reached already: that the culprit was not another boy. (23-24)

The first sentence is again the description of the place by the narrator, who then switches to an internal perspective and narrates Olivier's thoughts about the incident of the birds. A few pages later, however, Olivier is not the focalizer anymore. This time, the narrator renders Bella's memories of her past.

Someone leaving the Railwayman called after her, saying good night, and she called back. She could have had any of them; she still could, for all she knew. My God, she thought, the stifled life it would have been with any one of them! (36)

2.2 The Modes of Presentation

With regard to the modes of presentation, a distinction between “showing” and “telling” can be made: In F.K. Stanzel’s *A Theory of Narrative*, he distinguishes between “[...] specifically narrative forms (report, description, comment)” (65), which refer to the mode of “telling”, and “non-narrative or dramatic forms (speech, dramatized scene)” (65), which refer to the mode of “showing”.

Therefore, “dialogue constitutes a good example of showing” (Chatman, Genette, James, Lubbock 89), whereas “narratized discourse constitutes a good example of telling.” (Chatman, Genette, James, Lubbock 98). At that point, the term “narratized discourse” needs to be defined as well: “narratized discourse” is

a type of discourse whereby a character’s utterances or verbal thoughts are represented, in words that are a narrator’s, as acts among other acts; [...] For example, should a given character have said at one point: ‘Well! that’s [sic] settled then! I’ll meet you at the station!’ narratized discourse might render it as ‘She made an appointment to meet her’. (Genette 65)

There are several dialogues that occur in all the short stories. These give the reader the opportunity to infer traits of the characters and their behaviours.

‘Better to wait all the same,’ he said. ‘It’s not long.’
‘I don’t want you to come.’
‘You don’t love me, Fina?’
‘I don’t know,’ she said. (190)

Or:

‘I had to make my confession.’
‘Oh, for heaven’s sake!’
‘What’s up, Maeve?’ (43)

These are clear examples of showing, rather than telling. However, the stories are also characterised by a great number of descriptions by the narrator: these are often combined with the direct speeches and give a comprehensive characterization of the characters:

‘We only heard of your trouble Tuesday,’ the thinner and smaller of the two apologized. ‘It does happen the occasional time we wouldn’t hear.’
The other woman, more robust and older, allowed herself jewellery and make-up and took more care with her clothes. But it was her quiet, sharp-featured sister who took the lead. (3)

2.2.1 Direct, Indirect and Free Indirect Speech

The previous chapter has shown how often direct speech has been used in the stories of the collection. However, also indirect and free indirect speech are used. The main difference between these two forms of speech is that in the free indirect speech there is no “he said” or “she asked”. The narrator’s interference is in this case non-existent. Furthermore, according to Genette, in the free indirect speech: “the narrator takes on the speech of the character, or, if one prefers, the character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the two instances then are *merged*.” (32)

See an example occurring in the story “Sacred Statues”, when Nuala thinks about whether it is right or not to try to sell her soon-to-be-born to save the rest of the family:

Unhooking her shopping bags from the handlebars when she reached the house, she asked herself the same questions again, her voice loud now in the stillness. If Corry did well with Mrs. Falloway there wouldn’t be a need to wonder if it would be wrong. There wouldn’t even be a need – when years had gone by and they looked back to the bad time there’d been – to mention to Corry what had come into her mind. *If Mrs. Falloway came up trumps you’d make yourself forget it, which was something that could be done if you tried.* (my italics, 136)

In the first part of the paragraph, the narrator describes Nuala’s movements and thoughts from an external perspective. In the last sentence, the use of stream-of-consciousness can be noticed. Nuala is talking addressing herself with “you”. The character speaks directly, without the interference of the narrator. The difference of this technique compared to an example of normal indirect speech can be found in the story “Sitting with the Dead”:

They said all that, and then were silent for a while before *Kathleen made her final comment: that what they had heard had been all the more terrible to listen to with a man dead in an upstairs room.* (my italics, 17)

It is clear how the use of the free indirect discourse enhances the authenticity and the realism of the story and eliminates the gap between the characters and the readers.

2.3 The Methods of Characterization

With regard to characterization, two methods of representing characters can be distinguished: the representation of characters may include “direct methods like the attribution of qualities in description or commentary” (Baldick 37) or “indirect (or ‘dramatic’) methods inviting readers to infer qualities from characters’ actions” (Baldick 37). The method of indirect characterization is used: the character traits are revealed by the characters’ behaviour. For instance, in “An Evening Out”, the fact that Jeffrey has a bad character and can also be considered as a cheater and a profiteer is never explicitly stated by the narrator. On the contrary, the reader is required to infer everything by reading the dialogues with Evelyn and from the inferences by the third person omniscient narrator that uses Jeffrey as a focalizer.

He sought no more than a car-owner who would transport him and his photographic equipment from one chosen area of London to another, someone who – as privately he put it to himself -would be drawn into his work. He imagined a quiet person, capable after instruction of unfolding and setting up a tripod, of using a simple light-meter, of making notes and keeping a record, who would enjoy becoming part of things. He naturally had not revealed any of these detail on the Bryanston Square application form he had completed eighteen months ago, believing that it would be unwise to do so. (69-70)

3 Style

The style of writing can be defined as:

any specific way of using language, which is characteristic of an author, school, period or genre. Particular styles may be defined by their diction, syntax, imagery, rhythm, and use of figures, or by any other linguistic feature. (Baldick 247)

Furthermore, as Cuddon points out, style often rejects systematic analysis:

[the analysis of style involves the examination of] every conceivable aspect of his language and the way in which he uses it. Style defies complete analysis or definition (Remy de Gourmont put the matter tersely when he said that defining style was like trying to put a sack of flour in a thimble) because it's the tone and 'voice' of the writer himself; as peculiar to him as his laugh, his walk, his handwriting and the expressions on his face. (872)

As already mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, William Trevor's style is often conversational, concise and direct. The reader can easily infer the meaning (or the meanings) of the stories without being overwhelmed by too many detailed descriptions of people, facts and settings. The style of the stories is highly colloquial, articulate and sometimes even chatty: the language aims at reporting the facts in the most realistic way possible:

It was on a Saturday evening little different from this one that he had first read the legend on Breda Maguire's T-shirt, bold yellow letters on black, simple and straightforward: *Fuck Me*. (55)

The many conversational speeches help maintain the story's realism and make it easy to read, like in this example taken from "Justina's Priest":

'I wanted a word about Justina.'
'She's being a nuisance to you?'
'Ah no, no.'
'She lives in that church.'
'Justina's welcome, Maeve. No, it's only she was mentioning Breda Maguire. I'm concerned in case Justina might try to make her way to Dublin.' (53)

Furthermore, there is no use of complex intertextuality: almost all literary references or allusions in the text deal with typical or familiar features of Irish culture such as history, food, songs, books and newspapers.

Deploring the fall in sheep prices, two men settled themselves at the bar. The sleek-haired youth returned to serve them, and then an older man came in, with a white greyhound on a leash. The youth poured Smithwick's for him and said the Evening

Herald hadn't been dropped off the bus yet. 'Shocking,' the old man grumbled, hunching himself over the Tullamore Tribune instead. (92)

Other examples of references to Irish culture can be found in the story "Big Bucks", in which Fina mentions a wake⁷: "the widow dancing at Martin Shaul's wake (179)". Later on, also the coffin ships and the 1992 Morrison's Visa Program are mentioned.

Another indication that the style is highly colloquial is the use of contractions and sentences that echo oral speech, rather than formal written language:

Fair-haired he'd been, not at all like the present one, whose name she did not know. (37)

Several parts are good examples of descriptive writing in which the author uses the narrator to visualize the situation, describe the location and, since it is an omniscient third person narrator, to report the feelings and the thoughts of the characters:

In the Japanese café he helped her off with her coat and took it to the line of hooks beneath the sign that absolved the management of responsibility for its safety. They weren't the first in the café, although it was early, ten past eight. The taxi driver who came in most mornings was reading the Daily Mail in his usual corner. Two of the music students had arrived. (228)

What can also be noticed in this excerpt from "A Bit on the Side" is that the stories are generally slow-paced. They begin slowly and slowly come to an end. However, many of the stories present some final twist at the very last paragraph; in this way, Trevor manages to surprise the readers and leave them with many thoughts after the story finishes.

The fact that Trevor's style is not particularly avant garde has been admitted by the author himself. William Trevor in fact once defined himself as "the least experimental of writers"⁸ adding that the Irish writing tradition is probably the least experimental of all, if compared to American or continental fiction. However, according to Gregory Schirmer, Trevor has in reality absorbed a number of techniques that can be linked to modernist and post-modernist fiction:

⁷ "The traditional **Irish Wake** was commonplace around Ireland up until about the 1970's. This was the process of laying out the body of a departed relative in the house where they lived and /or died. All of the family and quite a few of the deceased ones neighbours and friends would gather at the house." http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~irlcar2/An_Irish_Wake.htm Web 31.05.2016.

⁸ Schirmer, Gregory A. *William Trevor, a Study of His Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

In large part, these techniques have in common a distrust of narrative omniscience, and so are crucial to the expression of Trevor's moral vision – one that constantly needs to qualify even its most tentative affirmations of compassion and connection with the recognition that the contemporary world is hostile ground for such values.
(9)

This can be seen in all the stories of the collection, in which everything is questionable and questioned, the narrator's words often do not fill in the gap between the characters and the reader, who has to infer a lot himself about the real meaning of the story and about a story's open ending.

4 Part II - *A Bit on the Side*: A Thematic Analysis

The following chapters will deal with the most important themes of the collection - solitude, love, beauty, failure, Irish life, emigration and the motifs through which they are specified. Although all these themes and motifs are related in some way to the Irish cultural heritage as presented in the first chapters of this thesis, and can thus be seen as instances of *Irishness*, the aim of this thesis is to engage provide a comprehensive analysis of the themes without reducing them just to aspects of *Irishness*. As stated earlier, the goal is to show that William Trevor is not an old-fashioned Irish author who exclusively writes about an idyllic far away past, but an author who is also a public commentator of our times.

4.1 Major Themes

4.1.1 Solitude

Solitude is the first theme to be analysed because it can be considered as the central theme in this collection. All the protagonists of the stories are in fact alone - their loneliness is caused by various factors, which will also be discussed in the next chapters. However, even though all these characters share a very similar destiny, Trevor shows the reader how people react individually to loneliness, and how different these reactions can be, thus creating extremely realistic situations and people of common life. The particularity about the theme of solitude is that it is “characterized by its exceptional capacity to establish associations with figures, motifs, and other themes.” (Daemmrich 167) For this reason, it can be said that all the themes and motifs in the collection are in some way bound to the theme of ‘solitude’.

In “Sitting with the Dead”, Emily has just lost her husband because of an unspecified illness. She sits alone in her dining room, the body of her husband is still in their bedroom upstairs. When the two old sisters Norah and Kathleen visit her home to pay their respects and give her some comfort, Emily reflects on her marriage with her husband, a very stubborn man. As Emily retells the story of her life and her marriage with a man who never really showed any interest in her, Emily realises that he probably never

loved her, but married her for her properties instead. She, at the time a young Protestant girl, was “greedy for what marriage might be” (11), signifying that at the time she was probably just an immature girl who wanted to move on new experiences in her life. Like in many of the sad and, unfortunately realistic, marriages narrated by Trevor, the honeymoon feeling does not last for long. Emily’s husband is obsessed with race horses and when he realises he cannot achieve his dream of making a fortune out of his beloved horses, he withdraws himself to his house, reluctant to meet anyone else and thus imposing on himself and Emily a life of solitude and anger (theme of ‘voluntary withdrawal’ according to Daemmrich). No family or friends are allowed into the house, neither the postman, nor anyone else from the small town. The only thing the woman can do is to plead to God for the deliverance of a man “who had wronged her for so long” (16). Emily stops talking about her husband and the two sisters finally leave - a bit shocked by the anger and lack of mourning in Emily’s words. Sitting in the car, Norah and Kathleen reflect on how strange their visit to the widow turned out to be and Norah comments that “what they had heard had been all the more terrible to listen to with a man dead in an upstairs room”. To this Kathleen responds “I’d say, myself, it was the dead we were sitting with” (17). This can be considered as the most revealing sentence of the story. Solitude can be caused by the very same people who are supposed to bring joy in someone’s life. Furthermore, in this case the “deliverance” - as the protagonist calls it - is not even remotely enough to bring back her lost joy and serenity. Ironically, it is Emily who in reality is dead, because her husband is at last at peace.

In “Sitting with the Dead” solitude is the cause of relationships falling apart, in “Traditions”, by contrast, solitude is what draws two lonely people together. Bella is a middle aged woman who works as a maid in a boarding school for boys. Described as once being beautiful, she is now a lonely woman, who is said to have had many affairs with several students and with also powerful men, but eventually none of these liaisons resulted in a long and stable relationship.

Stacpoole used to come to her on Wednesday mornings, the only one who ever had, the only one who in all the years had ever managed to have a free period then, eleven to a quarter to twelve. She remembered Stacpoole returning to the school long afterwards with a woman they said would be his wife, pointing out to her this place or that. She remembered wondering if she’d been pointed out herself. (25)

Bella lives her life in a monotonous way; even though she has Saturday evenings off, she goes to work anyway, not even wanting to get paid. She has been abandoned by men and by her beauty and, probably out of frustration and need for attention, she causes various incidents to happen in the school but is never caught. Olivier, a young student, is the only one who seems to have found the link between her and these incidents, the death of some birds being the most recent one. Olivier comes across as a lonely teenage boy. In the boarding school there is no place for people like him, without ambition or particular qualities and of a weak character. Presented from both points of view (one of the two stories of the collection in which Trevor uses two focalizers), the story is about the nostalgic and almost platonic love between the boy and the maid. The maid also reflects on the men of her past, men who always chose someone other than her, someone more attractive to be seen in public with. Although she dreams about a hypothetical life in France with one of them, she does not regret being alone and appreciates not having to live a “stifled life” (36) with any of them.

With Trevor, solitude is not always something negative, but rather a normal condition that may accompany humans throughout their whole lives. Like Bella in “Traditions”, also the protagonists of “An Evening Out”, prefer genuine solitude rather than having to deal with superficial and forced relationships. In “An Evening Out”, a man and a woman meet for what should be a romantic date organised by a dating agency. Their night out gives them the opportunity to break their routine of solitude. However, neither of them shows an interest in reversing their situation and in finding a stable partner. This is the will of two people who have lost hope in humankind and who have resigned to their habitual loneliness:

What she sought was companionship. Sometimes, when she made her way to the Downs or the coast she experienced the weight of solitude; often in the cinema or the theatre she would have liked to turn to someone else and say what she'd thought of this interpretation or that. (65-6)

At the end of the story they depart from each other happily, having realised that how “they'd made use of one another was a dignity compared with what should have been”

(83), signifying that they are happy the way their lives are, without having to live 'stifled lives' with people they do not really love.

It has already been mentioned that solitude in these stories affects all of humankind, including Father Clohessy, protagonist of "Justina's Priest", who wants to maintain a relationship that could save him from a life of loneliness. Unlike the protagonists of "An Evening Out", the priest tries anything to avoid losing his only company. In "Justina's Priest", solitude intersects with the decline of the Catholic Church in Ireland and its effects on Father Clohessy and Justina's mental problems. Justina is a girl with learning difficulties and a pure heart; she regularly visits the church and even carries out chores for Father Clohessy, who slowly becomes attached to her. Justina, like all teenagers, also dreams of seeing Dublin and thus talks about visiting her friend in the city. This generates a strong fear in the priest that he might lose the only person around him who really cares about him and the Church. As a consequence, he decides to stand up and talks to Maeve, Justina's sister and tutor, to be sure that Justina will not get on the bus to Dublin. Father Clohessy's behaviour appears to be driven by the good cause of saving an innocent girl from the dangers of the big city and to keep her close to God. However, from the very last sentences of the story another interpretation is suggested:

Justina Casey would stay in the town [...] In the confined space of the confessional there would again be the unnecessary confessions, again the granting of absolution. Then happiness would break in the face that saw God in his own. (58)

It can be argued that Father Clohessy's primary intention is not that of saving a girl from the dangers of Dublin, but that of keeping close to him probably the only person who cares about him and most importantly, who respects him. In light of these sentences, Father Clohessy's behaviour is highly egoistic, since he is perfectly aware of his influence over Justina and what he represents to her. Justina's presence is more important to Father Clohessy than he wants to admit: it is in fact her presence in the Church that still brings meaning to his own life.

The last story of this section dedicated to the theme of solitude, naturally, has to be "Solitude", one of the most piercing stories of the collection. A nostalgic and psychological nuance is what often makes Trevor's stories so sad and moving; and this is what the reader feels when reading this particular story. So that in *Solitude*, the reader is

presented with the world of a little girl who suffers from an absentee father and a cheating mother, until she becomes a lonely adult who travels the world in search for company. The protagonist's mother is a wealthy woman and the wealth of the family could have possibly played an important role in these people's destiny. It is a common saying that wealth does not bring happiness. As this story shows, money arguably brings even more loneliness. Villana, who at the beginning of the story is only seven, lives in a beautiful mansion in London, with the servants, her mother, and Davie and Abigail, two imaginary friends. Her days are spent waiting for her father to come back from some expedition in Egypt, where he hopes to discover something new and become a famous egyptologist. The main character's solitude appears clearly from her remembrance, as she only talks about herself, the members of the family, her mother's "friend" and her imaginary friends. After some years the family leaves England to protect Villana - "they took me from England because that was best. I never went to school again." Villana is a teenager who lives a utopian life, living in hotels throughout Europe and without any contact with people of her age.

Her family has been torn apart by the lies of her mother and the lack of communication between them. The life they live is a fake, an artefact:

[...] that is how we live, our conversations incomplete, or never begun at all. They have between them created an artefact within which our existence lies, an artefact as scrupulously completed as a masterpiece on a mosaicist's table (114).

"Solitude" is not only a story of loneliness and lack of communication between family members; it is also a story in which its main character realises her own meaning of life which is to live and to pass on her own story to other people: "for Mrs Upsilla would die too, and Charles would, and I myself in time: who then, in all the world, would be aware of the story that might be told?" (119) Villana is now a middle aged woman who has settled down at last in Bordighera, on the Ligurian Riviera. There, the dining-room waiters, the servants and the porters are her friends. And when the reader thinks that she finally met someone, a fascinating Mr d'Arblay, with whom she has interesting conversations and walks on the beach, Trevor brings us back to the melancholic reality:

They cannot know, they cannot guess, that in the old hotel, and when she walks by the sea, there is Mr d'Arblay, as in another solitude there were her childhood friends.
(127)

With these stories, Trevor seems to tell the reader that either voluntary caused or as a result of an ill fate, solitude is a universal condition to humankind and, most importantly, that sometimes the only escape to it is death.

4.1.2 Religion

Before analysing the theme of religion in the collection, a brief excursus about the importance and the meaning of religion in Ireland and Catholicism in particular, has to be given.

It was in the year 432 AD that Saint Patrick, a Roman British missionary, was first captured and enslaved in Ireland. After he was released he went back to Britain, where he experienced a deep religious insight. After that he went back to Ireland where he established the Roman model of a centralized Church. With him, many monasteries were founded, together with Catholic schools (Killeen 10). These became vital to preserve the values of Christianity. After him, many more Irish missionaries left Ireland to spread Christianity across the continent.

In 1171, when Henry II came over to Ireland to accept the submission of the Norman colonists and the Gaelic kings, the English conquest of Ireland began. This led to religious conflicts from the time of the Reformation onward, which became an integral part of Irish history. Although both Catholics and Anglicans share some similar views (they both believe that the establishment of their churches began with Saint Patrick⁹), with the establishment of the Church of Ireland as the official state church, Catholics were severely persecuted and penalised in social life. In the early seventeenth century Catholics were forced to attend the Anglican Church service, otherwise they would have been fined. Catholic priests were forced to escape the country or hide. They had to secretly worship at the so called Mass Rocks. In 1695, after the Williamite Wars, the penal laws were introduced: these prohibited Catholics from voting, sitting in parliament and possessing land. It was not until 1829 when the efforts of Daniel O'Connell succeeded in granting

⁹See Law, Gary. *The Cultural Traditions Dictionary*. Belfast: The Black Staff Press, 1998.

full civil and political rights to the Catholics (Killeen 20). Unfortunately, the conflicts did not stop with the Catholic Emancipation Act. Although the Troubles were primarily a political and an ethnic conflict, they were to some extent a religious conflict as well, since they saw the Protestant Unionists against the Catholic Republicans fighting over Northern Ireland.

4.1.2.1 Protestants vs Catholics

If a person was a Catholic, it invariably meant he was of old Gaelic stock... And if he were a Protestant, it also meant that he was a foreigner, a persecutor, a privileged person, an enemy. (Peadar Livingstone, *Monaghan Story*)¹⁰

There is a common saying in the Irish language, as well as among Catholics and nationalists: Protestants were privileged and foreign. Although part of the Catholic thinking for centuries, the very same Protestants also knew this, sharing the self-belief that: “Protestants... were on top because they were better, and they were better because they were Protestants.” (Elliot 110) The fact that they were privileged was, for them, another factor of the superiority of Protestantism over Roman Catholicism. These stereotypes are associated with the Church of Ireland (Protestant) because of its role as the established Church until 1871, its position as “a virtual department of state” and the monopoly over the properties of land. Furthermore, many conversions of Catholics to Protestants happened because at the time poverty was often synonymous with popery. Protestantism would bring relief to poverty and was often the only way for poor people to benefit from the services of charitable institutions. However, the belief that all Protestants were wealthy was, naturally, an incorrect assumption. Protestants were seen by Catholics as those with “the smell of soap, the ‘posh’ accents, the upright stance”, however, there were also many Protestants who were poor and this resulted in a higher likelihood of succumbing to attacks by Catholics than richer Protestants. Most members of the Church of Ireland were in fact farmers and part of the urban working class. Despite this, they were still seen as extremely privileged.

10 Elliott, Marianne. *When God Took Sides: Religion and Identity in Ireland: Unfinished History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

The reason why Catholics viewed Protestants with so much hatred was because the 'Protestant ascendancy' did not only refer to the higher classes of the Protestant community: even artisans and other lower classes could hold any kind of minor offices. This strong link between Protestantism and the state meant that every Protestant was in fact "custodian" of the Penal Laws, thus representing a veritable source of friction throughout the centuries. However, when the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland took place in 1871, after a series of reforms that took place in London from the 1830s, it came as a shock for the Protestant community in Ireland. All of a sudden its representatives felt isolated and turned against the British parliament. In 1999, Bishop Clarke wrote that since the Church of Ireland was disestablished, a link was broken, and the relationship with the Church of England has never been the same since then.

After the disestablishment, a less privileged church took shape and an evangelical revival took place. Evangelicalism fought to remove the similarities to the Roman churches with the Church of Ireland, such as the term 'priest', crosses, processions and the use of the names of saints. Also the way churches were built and its decorations were problematic. There were protests against ornamentations in the churches, as well as statues portraying the characters of the Bible. In this sense, what Trevor writes in *Sacred Statues*, is a realistic description of the state of the church after 1871:

Being, as she put it, a black Protestant from England, who had never, until then, entered an Irish Catholic church, she had not before been exposed to such a profusion of plaster statues as at that funeral Mass. [...] How refreshing it would be, she enthused to Bishop Walshe when eventually she visited him, to see the art of the great high crosses of Ireland brought into the modern Church, to see nativities and annunciations in stained glass, to have old lecterns and altar furniture replaced with contemporary forms. [...] to numerous priests and bishops she explained that what was necessary was to bring wealth and talent together; but for the most part she met with opposition and indifference. (140-1)

4.1.2.2 Influences of Faith and Religion on Irish Life

The influence of the Catholic Church in Irish life has naturally led to a series of stereotypes about the Irish people. These can be summed up in:

- The God fearing Irishman/woman
- Spiritually minded
- Rigorous religious life (especially inside the patriarchal family)
- Belief in religious practices such as harsh pilgrimages

Although these features are of course oversimplifications of the Irish people, still in 2001 according to Eagleton: “twice as many Irish people believe in the resurrection and a blissful life after death (“heaven“), the existence of purgatory and hell and the reality of the devil than people in any other European country.” (Eagleton 71)

Still in the 1990s „one of the most notable features of the church is the high level of attendance, particularly in rural areas (Law 23)“. However, as stated in *The Catholic Church in Ireland Today*, there is no doubt that the Catholic Church in contemporary Ireland is facing a deep crisis:

Once a powerful force, often for good it should be pointed out, it has now been reduced to the level of other Irish elitist groupings such as the politicians, the banks, and the legal profession that failed to justify the faith that was invested in them. (3)

Despite the process of secularization from the beginning of the 1980s that interested Europe in its entirety and the scandals around paedophile priests that shocked the country in the 1990s, Ireland still has a great ongoing tradition concerning missionaries and nuns, who are actively engaged in spreading the word of the Bible across the World.

The fact that religion is a fundamental factor in Irish life can be easily confirmed by referring to the Irish Constitution. After the presidential elections, the chosen president has to enter his office by reciting Article 8 of the Constitution¹¹:

The President shall enter upon his office by taking and subscribing publicly, in the presence of members of both Houses of Parliament, of Judges of the Supreme Court and of the High Court, and other public personages, the following declaration: „In the presence of Almighty God I do solemnly and sincerely promise and declare that I will maintain the Constitution of Ireland and uphold its laws, that I will fulfil my duties faithfully and conscientiously in accordance with the Constitution and the

¹¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/concon/constitutions/ireland.htm> Web 29.06.2016.

law, and that I will dedicate my abilities to the service and welfare of the people of Ireland. May God direct and sustain me.’

Irish Constitution – (amendment of 1995)

After the 1990s several Irish writers have confronted the “dark side” of the Catholic Church in their works of fiction. The stories of this period portray the trauma, the confusion and the loss of faith derived from these terrible events. Colm Tòibìn’s story “A Priest in the Family” (*Mothers and Sons*) deals with the misfortunes of a priest who in the past was respected and admired and then falls into disgrace. Similarly, Conlon’s *The Last Confession* criticises the hypocrisy around the sex lives of priests, recalling a true story that happened in 1992 when Bishop Eamonn Casey was found to be a father¹².

Religion, although a theme not addressed on all the stories in this collection, is an aspect that has to be taken into account when trying to interpret William Trevor’s stories. Trevor is not new to stories about religion: “Of the Cloth”, from the collection *The Hill Bachelors* (2000) deals with the declining power of the Catholic Church’s influence in Ireland. In the story, the Reverend Grattan Fitzmaurice feels like an outsider in modern Ireland. However, the twist is given by the arrival of Father Leahy, who is shocked by the news about paedophile Catholic priests and has turned to the Reverend to ask advice on how to survive as a minority Church in Ireland.

As shown in the next chapters, “Justina’s Priest” and “Sacred Statues” both deal with the theme of religion to some extent. In Justina’s Priest, Father Clohessy’s influence over his parish is non-existent. The only person in town who still admires him and considers him God is the simple minded Justina, a girl with learning difficulties. Similarly, Corry, the male protagonist of “Sacred Statues”, is confronted with the harsh reality that he is an outsider and that not even the church cares about a sculptor of statues of saints. Both stories show not only the decline of the church caused by the loss of faith of common people, but also the decline of the priests, who seem no longer to be sure of their vocation. However, as shown by both stories, William Trevor is always sympathetic to his Catholic characters. Although he is a Protestant himself, in his works he never criticizes or portrays the Catholic Church negatively. Furthermore, as an outsider growing up in a Catholic

¹² Cf. Ingman, Heather, 246.

community, he arguably had a critical eye for their behaviours and habits, adding a unique viewpoint to his stories.

In “Sitting with the Dead”, Emily says: “I was a Protestant girl that got passed by until he made a bid for me and I thought it was romantic, like he did himself... (11)”. This sentence aptly explains the life of the minority Protestant community in Ireland. Not only would a Protestant avoid marrying a Catholic, but the opposite was also true. As D.H. Akenson suggests:

From the mid-nineteenth century they were being beaten from their privileged positions by the rising Catholic majority, with its long memory of insult and repression. The narrow-mindedness, suspicion, and ethnic snobbery of the Anglo-Irish and of their churchmen prevented their making any of the ecclesiastical and economic adjustments and concessions that might have won [them]. . . more acceptable accommodations in the new Ireland that was emerging (Elliott 116-117)

On one side there was the “long memory of insult and repression” of the Catholics, who used their new privileged positions to exclude the Protestant Community and make them pay for the Centuries of conflicts. On the other side, the Protestants, although losing their power, were still narrow-minded, suspicious and “ethnic snobs” towards the Catholics. This can explain why it was so difficult for a Protestant woman to find a suitable partner.

However, it can be argued that religion has shaped the lives and the minds of Irish people in every respect, thus, it would be reductive to consider only stories in which priests or nuns are characters as those influenced by religion. Although Graillis does not talk about religion, in “Graillis’s Legacy” the male character implies that not only he does not want to, but he *cannot* take the money that his mistress has left him, although that would have been his right. The fact that the money has been left from someone who was not his wife renders the exchange unacceptable from a moral point of view. Furthermore, and this is another motif that often occurs in the stories, the fear of being seen by other people in town (which then can lead to mean gossip) is the main reason why Graillis has to go to an attorney an hour’s drive from the town he lived to refuse the legacy.

Arguably, religion has shaped the minds of the country so deeply that it affects other aspects of life. Although not directly related to religious themes, characteristics such as narrow-mindedness, stubbornness, strictness and rigor, repression of feelings as well

as sexuality, difficulties in communication (especially when an unwanted truth has to be revealed), can all be traced back to some religious education. For this reason, it can be said that religion, although not explicitly present in all the stories of the collection, is a subtle theme in all the stories in *A Bit on the Side*, because it is an essential characteristic of Irish (and also English) culture.

4.1.3 Tradition and Change

Today there is much debate in Ireland concerning the rapid social change (Foster 24). Despite the new affluence and prosperity gained during the ‘Celtic Tiger’ years, the strong recession that derived from it produced even more poverty and social exclusion. In many ways, the Celtic Tiger has torn the country apart even more. Emigration, a tradition that has characterized Ireland for the last hundred and fifty years seems to have reversed: many emigrants are coming back, and new ones are arriving. This, however, seems to be provoking anxiety and further stress to the Irish people. At the same time, an institution once glorious and almighty such as the Catholic Church, is now in a deep crisis. People are turning their backs on it, rejecting its moral authority. Not only normal people, but also priests show a decline in faith and loss of vocation.

As already shown in the chapter “The Literary Tradition”, the last thirty years of the twentieth century represented a period in which Irish history moved into a fast-forward phase. First of all, the economic boom, also known as the Celtic Tiger, was changing the lives of the Irish people: “Between 1987 and 2001 the annual growth rates of Gross National Product exceeded 7 percent and sometimes touched double figures.” (7) However, other changes accompanied the boom.

R.F. Foster uses the word ‘Conversion’ as a metaphor to indicate a period which spans from 1970 to 2000. He does not only refer to the religious changes in Ireland, but to a real conversion that interested many areas such as sexual mores, cultural production and national and international politics. Ireland saw in those thirty years a radical transformation of cultural values, starting with the rejection of two authoritarian institutes: the patriarchal family and the Catholic Church. During these years, as also shown by the genre of the short story, Ireland and Irish authors were focusing on breaking down the boundaries of the notion of Irishness. This expanded also to politics through new

movements such as globalization and feminization. All this caused dramatic changes in economics, politics and religion. Some of the biggest changes that went on in that period were related to sexuality and divorce. Although abortion is still not legal in Ireland, in 1992 a constitutional amendment recognized the right for the pregnant woman to travel and to ask for information about abortion. Divorce was initially recognized in Gaelic Irish law and permitted both parties to remarry. This was naturally unacceptable to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation churches. For this reason, by the late 17th century divorce became illegal¹³. Although statistics of that time show that informal separations were still possible, legal divorce was only possible for the rich. Divorce became possible in England in 1857 and in 1939 in Northern Ireland, following partition. In 1937, in the Constitution of the Irish Free State divorce was still banned until 1995, when the law was repealed by referendum.

Despite divorce and the sale of contraceptives having become legal, in many recent Irish short stories the authors still talk about stories in which women are rejected by their families because of being pregnant and unmarried, or men and women having extra marital affairs who cannot however divorce from their partners because of the social restraints. Examples of this are stories like “Quare Name for a Boy” (2007) by Clare Keegan, “Flesh and Blood” (2004) by Marita Conlon-McKenna, “At Sally Gap” (2000) by Eilis Ni Dhuibhne and most recently, “Lila” (2013) by the author Billy O’Callaghan. All of these stories deal with those elements typical of the Irish cultural tradition. Emigration, the role of women, unwanted pregnancy and violent families are at the core of the stories. In the collection *The Things We Lose, The Things We Leave Behind and Other Stories* (2013), Billy O’Callaghan tells the stories of many characters trapped in this struggle between tradition and change: rape, search for love, broken and/or violent families, prodigal fathers, women trapped in their secret and unbearable pain, the disillusionment of the American Dream but also ancient Celtic concepts such as that of the soul mate constitute the main themes of the collection. These stories have been written in contemporary times, but they seem to recall the past and in some ways try to come to terms with it and leave it behind. Arguably, this may indicate that the modernization of

¹³ Cf. Connoly, 125.

Ireland has perhaps been too rapid for many people and for this reason still not completely accepted by everyone.

Patriarchal family is another institution that saw a decline in recent years. The term patriarchal family refers to the composition of the family based on the authority and power of the father, or other male members. The importance of the family and the roles attributed to the men and women in it are clearly described in the Irish constitution, article 41:

The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.

The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State.

In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack. ¹⁴

In the last thirty years of the twentieth century, Irish women began to undermine their stereotyped images of housewives and mothers. Although it can be said that today even in Ireland the patriarchal family is not as strong an institution as it was before, as well as marriage, in Ireland the family still has a very profound meaning and plays a fundamental role in society. The value of the family and the value of children in Ireland can be seen in European statistics which still place Ireland among the nations with the highest rate of families with children at 41.5% ¹⁵. This is naturally helped by the fact that still today, in most circumstances, abortion is not permitted in Ireland, one of the few countries in Europe in which abortion is illegal.

This struggle between the past and the present, between tradition and change, is reflected in the stories of the collection *A Bit on the Side*, as well as in many other stories by William Trevor. In these stories, characters who yearn for the joy and the happiness of

¹⁴http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/the_irish_education_system/constitution_and_education.html Web 28.06.2016.

¹⁵http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Household_composition_statistics Web 18.05.2016.

the past often clash with internal struggles of those who would like to embrace the changes but still cannot liberate themselves from the morals that have been taught to them and thus are overwhelmed by the social restraints. In *Traditions*, for example, the internal struggle can be noticed inside Bella, the school maid. Once young and beautiful, she has lost her beauty and at the same time she stopped being interesting for the boys in the dining hall. The environment also plays a crucial role. The school is in fact a school of long traditions, and its Headmaster tries to confirm these traditions every day during his speeches in the dining hall in front of all the young boys:

He told a parable of his own invention: how a man, repeating every day of his life a certain pattern of behaviour, made the pattern richer. He told of how, in a dream, this man had deviated once from his chosen way and been harshly judged by God, and punished with failure where all his life there had been success before. (32-33)

The Headmaster's philosophy is that of accepting tradition, with its time-worn customs, and rejecting change and everything that is different from what is "tried and true". Arguably, this is what leads Bella to some sort of rebellion, which brings her to carry out strange activities in the school. Perhaps the school maid thought that her beauty and youth would never abandon her, and that all the men in her life would always be there for her. But after a while reality hit hard, and Bella cannot accept the change, she cannot accept that she was once a tradition for the boys and she is now just an old lady. Furthermore, she understands that Olivier has an interest in her, but at the same time she is aware that a relationship between the two is not possible because of social restraints. In a traditional Catholic school like the one in the story, a middle aged woman cannot "deviate" the mind of a pure young boy like Olivier.

The story "Traditions" shows how society manages to overpower the single individual. Similarly, in "Sacred Statues", although Etty Rynne strives to have a baby, after having strived for a long time with her husband, she has to refuse Nuala's offer of taking her soon-to-be-born child and passing it off as her own. Interestingly, Etty always refers to God, to her husband and to the morals of society to explain why she cannot take the child from Nuala:

'I couldn't do what you're saying, Nuala.'
'Is it the money?'
'It's everything, Nuala. It's what people'd say. He'd blow his head off if he knew what you're after suggesting. IT would bring down the business, he'd say. Nobody'd come near us.' (148)

What can be noticed is how in fact, Etty seems somehow fascinated by Nuala's offer, especially when she thinks with melancholy of the times in which she was showing off the room she had herself prepared for her future child. Now she does not show it anymore, a sign that she must have lost hope, and in this context, Nuala's offer would be perfectly acceptable, almost as a gift. However, traditions, people and the morals created by a rigorous Catholic society do not leave space for people to think individually and Etty has to reject Nuala's offer and thus let the dream of having a child be lost forever.

'What people say' is often taken as a law by people inside a society. Perhaps more powerful than God, the neighbours' word can cause uneasiness in many people. This is the case of the female protagonist in "An Evening Out". Evelyn is a good looking middle aged woman who seeks companionship through a dating agency. While in the modern world this is acceptable for many people, the struggle between tradition and change can be once again observed inside Evelyn's mind. This time, the occasion is given by a dinner she is having with Jeffrey, a younger man. The two sit at the table of a fancy restaurant and Evelyn feels uneasy when she discovers that a couple of tables further, two of her neighbours are having dinner:

They smiled at her, at Jeffrey too. Mr Pasmore inclined his head; his wife gave a little wave with her fingers. They would gossip about this to the residents of the other flats if they considered it worthwhile to do so: the solitary woman in the flat below theirs had something going with a younger man. (81)

In "Big Bucks", the tradition is represented by the managing of the half-and-half owned by Fina's family and the life in John Michael's farm in the countryside. The change is represented by the dream life in America.

4.1.4 Love

Love, according to Daemmrigh's *Themes and Motifs*;

provides the impulse for an individual figure to break out of the shell of his self-centeredness as well as the bounds set by his family or society, to perceive his own feelings and to share them with another, to grow, contribute to society, and finally to find union with God. (172)

Although love is one of the central themes of this collection, the kind of love that characterises *A Bit on the Side* is at times quite different from the classic definition. In this collection, there is never a 'fairy tale love'. On the contrary, love is often portrayed as a war of the sexes in which nobody wins. Regarding Irish love, George A. Birmingham points out that a lack of sentimentality is typical of Irish works of literature, a quality that persists in the English and Scottish ones:

"The bright love story", so much desired by magazine editors, is the work either of Englishmen or Scotsmen. You never get a story of this sort from an Irish writer. (13)

Just like the love story of the heroine Deirdre, love liaisons in Trevor are doomed to be characterised by suffering, solitude, despair and anger. The phrase "the fragility of love", used by Trevor himself in one of his stories, seems to be the main thread that serves as a link between the stories of the collection. There are three main motifs that represent the theme of love in *A Bit on the Side*: star-crossed lovers, unrequited love and another motif-pattern which is linked to the latter and could be called "marriage of convenience", which is a recurrent situation among the couples portrayed by Trevor.

4.1.4.1 Instances of Star-crossed Lovers

The phrase 'star-crossed lovers' or 'ill-fated lovers' defines a very ancient motif that - as far as Irish literature is concerned - draws its origins from the Irish cultural heritage deriving from the Gaels. The phrase 'star-crossed' was coined by William Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet* and illustrates the ill fate of a couple whose destiny is at the mercy of the malign stars. In a modern interpretation of the phrase, it could be said it describes a situation in which a couple's love is obstructed by outside forces. The first instance of star-crossed lovers can be found in the story "A Bit of the Side", not accidentally the last story of the collection. The tale deals with the closure of an affair

between a divorced woman and a married man. Their love has always been kept as a secret in the offices, in the stairs of the buildings and then in the cafés and the streets where they use to meet before and after work. Theirs is a gentle love and manages to break their monotonous routine. The relationship gives life back to the female character, who succeeds in asking divorce from her husband. Unfortunately, and perhaps as a cause of the woman's decision, the married man realises that he is not as strong as she is and cannot make the decision to divorce his wife. This creates an internal struggle within the male lover, who decides to end the affair, even though he still loves her. In this case, the "malign star", or the outside force that dooms the couple's union is actually represented by an internal psychological force in the male lover's mind. He cannot deal with his conscience and with the looks of the people on the streets:

In Chiltern Street it was what the bagwoman he gave alms to saw, and the taxi-driver in the Japanese cafe, and their waitress there, and the sleepy attendants of the picture gallery, and people who glanced at them in the Gardens. In all the places of their love affair - here too - it was what people saw. She was his bit on the side. (241)

She is his bit on the side. A shadow that follows him and will never be anything more than that. In this story, the protagonist is torn apart by an internal struggle between love and the realisation that he is wasting the woman's life, knowing that he will never be able to leave his wife and transform their relationship into something more than a special friendship. If we take *Irishness* into account, another interpretation could be seen plausible. If we consider that this is a typical Irish story, the fact that the married male lover does not want to divorce his wife could be symptomatic of a religious idea that could represent that "outside force".

With "A Bit on the Side", Trevor shows that impediments and obstacles often come from both inside and outside, as part of the psychological spectrum of a person, and not as one might deduce from the phrase 'star-crossed', from the outside alone. This reminds every reader that sometimes we are our biggest enemies.

Another ill-fated couple, even although technically *not* a real couple, is that of Bella and Olivier in "Traditions". Bella, a middle-aged woman abandoned by beauty and love, and him, a quiet boy with no particular skills, get closer through silences and highly signifying looks. They never talk and they never touch each other, however, the reader

feels that a sort of chemistry has established between the two. Trevor achieves this effect thanks to a shifting point-of-view, i.e. he uses two focalizers and the perspective switches between them throughout the story. In the first part, through Olivier's eyes, the reader gets to know the incident of the killing of the jackdaws, the setting, Olivier's problems at school and the group of main characters - the other boys and 'the girl'. Olivier suspects Bella to be behind the unusual incidents that happen regularly at school, and although he is sure it is her, he does not feel disturbed by it, but rather interested in that mysterious character:

He was skilled at breaking into privacies without the knowledge of the person observed; he prided himself on that, but twice, or even three times, he suddenly had to drop his scrutiny, taken unawares by having his gaze returned. (29)

The reader is aware that a sort of connection has established between the two. The confirmation of this awareness comes in the most natural way, when there is a switch of the focalizers and the reader is provided with the perspective from Bella's point-of-view:

His image filled her consciousness as she walked on, his voice the voice of boys who had long ago tenderly spoken her name. He knew, as she had guessed he would be the one to know, because he was the kind. She'd always known the kind. (34)

The woman's life is a life of constant repetition. Another of Trevor's characters that is trapped in everyday routine. Her thoughts are spent on the men in her life, the young, the important men who never chose her, but always another woman. She thinks of a man especially, a powerful one that one had been, and she imagines travelling with him and speaking French. However, she adds then: "Fair-headed he'd been, not at all like the present one, whose name she did not know (37)". Hence, also in Bella's mind there is someone, a 'present one', which suggests to the reader that this present one is probably Olivier. Although the two are not in a relationship and do not talk to each other, it can be said that these two individuals are actually two potential lovers, who cannot be together because of various external obstacles. The reasons could arguably be listed as: the age difference, the social status and the presence of a hostile environment with traditional moral values and hierarchical roles. The story, again characteristic of Trevor's writing, concludes with an enigmatic open ending that could change the whole interpretation of

the story. Trevor creates a parallelism between the end of the first section and the end of the story. At the beginning of the story, Olivier imagines the maid in her everyday clothes:

In his mind's eye he saw her as once or twice he had when he'd been out and about at this time himself: in her navy-blue coat, the belt tied loosely, a headscarf with horses on it (35).

At the end of the story the reader can feel a change from the almost Platonic love (which constitutes another motif), which was born as a consequence of the intense looks, to a sexual love:

Conjecturing again, he saw her in a different coat, without a headscarf, hair blown about. He saw her uniform laid out, starched and ready on an ironing board [...]. He saw her stockinged feet and laughter in her eyes, and then her nakedness (38-37).

Trevor leaves an open ending (which is typical of short stories in general) and it is left to the reader's imagination, whether the two will go against social restrictions and start an affair or if their love/attraction will be confined to a mere dream in their minds.

The last instance of star-crossed lovers can be found in the story "An Evening Out". Jeffrey and Evelyn are drinking at the theatre bar, talking about their private lives. Their date has been organised by a dating agency, but neither of them is really looking for love. The reader comes to know about a previous relationship Evelyn had more than twenty years earlier, with an unknown man:

Why should anyone be interested in her rejection more than twenty years ago of someone she had loved? Why should anyone be interested in knowing that she had done so, it seemed now, for no good reason beyond the shadow of doubt there'd been? (71)

Evelyn's reasons for rejecting a person she loved are left to the reader's imagination. However, this is another instance of an 'outside force', in this case the doubt that "played tricks in love's confusion." (72)

The following chapter deals with stories in which the relationships are not based on, or do not mirror love on both sides.

4.1.4.2 Instances of Unrequited Love

A recurrent motif in *A Bit on the Side* is unrequited love. This motif is a common trait of Irish literature, but it can also be found in works of literatures from all over the world. Shakespeare arguably wrote the ultimate comedy of love, *Twelfth Night*, in which the motif of unrequited love plays a crucial role. Although in *Twelfth Night*, the instances of unrequited love are in the end “sorted out” to give the main (and good-hearted) characters a happy ending, there are stories in which unrequited love is insurmountable and thus, does not lead to a romantic happy ending. This is the case in the love stories of *A Bit on the Side*, in which the rejected lovers are left with sadness and solitude.

It has previously been mentioned that the main characters of “Solitude” fail to communicate with each other, thus leading to a self-inflicted isolation and sadness. Another main motif of the story is the betrayal of the woman, who had an extramarital affair. This also constitutes a motif of unrequited love. As already stated in this thesis, one of Trevor’s characteristics is to subvert what could be a normal story and transform it into something intriguing and new. Also in this case, the story of betrayal and rejected love does not come from one of the protagonists involved in the love triangle. On the contrary, it is the young daughter who, using a language suitable to her age and consisting of conversations with her imaginary friends, tells the reader the story of her mother’s “friend”:

Abigail and Davie aren’t real, but most of the time they’re there. They were that day, when the door opened and my mother and her friend came into the drawing-room. ‘It’s all right’, my mother said. ‘She’s not here.’ And Davie giggled and Abigail did too and I made them be quiet. (103)

Although the girl never refers directly to her lover, the reader perceives this to be the situation, without many allusions. It is likely that the girl understands this too, since she wishes him dead and eventually causes his death by pushing him down the stairs. Although the family moves out of England to protect the child, even years later the betrayal of the mother seems to haunt the relationships among the members of the family. Even though the parents have decided to stay together, this is only for the sake of their daughter, and arguably there is no love left between them. Also their daughter, now an

adult, knows it to be true and recognizes the effort her parents have made for her: “[...] the waking hours of my solitude are nagged by the compulsion to make known the goodness of two people.” (119)

Similarly, in “Rose Wept”, the story of a wife’s betrayal is retold through the words of a third party. Rose is a curious teenage girl, who discovers that her tutor, Mr Bouverie (and here Trevor non casually refers to Madame Bovary) is an unfortunate betrayed husband, who just like the father in “Solitude”, seems to accept his wife’s unfaithfulness. Every time she goes to Mr Bouverie’s house for an hour of tutoring, Mrs Bouverie can seize the opportunity to amuse herself with her lover upstairs. The story takes place at Rose’s house, where her family has invited Mr Bouverie to thank him for his great achievement in advancing Rose’s education. Rose is torn apart when she sees Mr Bouverie’s “weary eyes or watch him being polite, listening with inclined head to her mother, smiling at her father’s bonhomie (153-4)” when she is perfectly aware of the deep sufferance and solitude the man feels. Like many other characters of Trevor, Rose and Mr Bouverie live an internal struggle, and at the same time must adhere to the conventions of society and put on a polite mask, and pretend to enjoy the beauty of everyday life and its pleasures. The characters around them are flat and naive backdrops who only highlight the protagonists’ sufferance. Especially Rose’s mother, with her petty conversations and remarks: “How nice all this is!”, “How I adore the asparagus season!”, offers a great contrast to her daughter’s alert and insightful state of mind.

Her guilt, this evening, silenced her, and her smile came fleetingly and not often.
[...] She felt awkward and unpretty at the dinner table, sick of herself. (155)

Rose’s guilt comes not only from the knowledge that Mr Bouverie’s wife has a lover and that he is aware of it, but is also caused by Rose’s awareness that she has used the story as a way of entertaining her girlfriends at the café:

‘I do mind, as a matter of fact’ he had said, as if he knew all about the Box Tree Café and the audience of five crowding the same green-topped corner table, as if he had listened to every word. Guilt had come then, beginning in that moment. (164)

At the end, Rose cannot restrain her feelings and bursts into tears. Her liberating cry is for Mr Bouverie and for all stories of unrequited love, betrayal, unfaithfulness and the *modus vivendi* of a society which seems to praise shallowness, instead of true feelings.

4.1.4.3 Marriage of Convenience

“Graillis’s Legacy”, “Big Bucks”, “Sitting with the Dead”, “On the Streets” and “Sacred Statues” all tell the stories of unfortunate star-crossed lovers and/or situations of unrequited love. However, there is also another motif that links these stories which is the concept of a relationship based on financial gain and material motives, rather than on love between people. This is different from the examples of unrequited love because these stories deal with a ‘seemingly requited love’, and can thus confuse the reader on the nature of the relationships represented.

Several of the couples presented in the stories are bound together by marriage. On the motif of marriage, *The Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs* edited by Jean-Charles Seigneuret states that:

In general, twentieth-century marriage is expected to provide, simultaneously, romantic love, companionship, and the practical framework within which individual happiness and success can be pursued and children reared. Its inevitable failure to provide all these things at once leads very often to a satirical, cynical treatment of the institution [...] derived from the failure of unrealistically high and diverse expectations. (825)

The title of this section could also be rephrased as “she had married into that”: a phrase that has been inspired by a line in “Graillis’s Legacy”: a story of betrayal, death and an undeniable sense of guilt in the male protagonist, who reflects on his marriage and his lover after both women are dead. The girl who he once married is now dead, and only speaks through the memories of her husband Graillis, a disillusioned banker who abandons everything to follow his passion for books and decides to work in a library:

‘But why on earth?’ The girl he’d married cried out in bewilderment and disappointment. His safe employment had been taken for granted; in time promotion would mean occupancy of a squat grey landmark in the town, the house above the bank, with railings and a grained hall door. She had married into that. (95)

This comes as a shock to his wife, who literally married into her husband's safe employment and all the advantages that a position like that can bring. This is a particular situation in which the relationship is seemingly based on love and none of the characters directly admit it. However, the reactions and the conversations between them convey a covert characterization of the protagonists and reveal the true nature of their relationship.

Fina is another woman seemingly in love with John Michael. Their relationship begins when the two are just children and it grows, fed by their desire to live the American Dream. After the death of John Michael's mother, the couple sees the concrete opportunity to move to the United States and begin a new life there, like many other countrymen and women have already done. John Michael is the first to leave to seek for fortune there, and once he has found it, he was to call Fina to follow him. Although the plan was solid in their minds, they did not expect it to take such a great detour. Once away, John Michael is confronted with the harsh reality of the American Dream, which has until now only been transmitted through the TV in Fina's family's half-and-half and Bat Quinn's exaggerated yarns. Fina is the first one to realise this, in her lonely life in the little town:

But America lived for both of them on the screen high up above the bar of the half-and-half or the one in John Micheal's kitchen. [...] They watched America, they heard its voices. (178)

“Big Bucks” is not only a story of fragility of love, but also the story of Fina's quest for identity and personal development, which leads to the final realisation that she does not love John Michael and was in fact in love with an idea, rather than the person. Their long companionship was kept alive thanks to their love for America:

It was America they had loved, and loved too much. It was America that had enlivened love's fantasies, America that had enriched their delight in one another. (191)

Fina remains alone in the small town, happy enough to realise that, in some, way she feels less alone now, finally honest to herself, than when she was with John Michael. From the passive woman she was at the beginning of the story, seemingly dependent on her fiancé, Fina becomes a strong and wise woman, a rounded and complex character.

Fina is the only woman of the collection who goes through such a development. She is the only one who decides not to marry her suitor. By contrast, Cheryl, the protagonist of *On the Streets*, marries her suitor, only to regret it one year later and divorce him. Again, like in “*Graillis’s Legacy*”, this is arguably a marriage of convenience. The marriage between Graillis and his wife was motivated on his steady employment and the advantages that derive from it; whereas the convenience of the marriage between Cheryl, a cleaning lady, and Arthur, a breakfast waiter, is that of breaking their solitude, unbearable for both of them:

Lonely, she supposed, missing what death had taken from her, she had seen the man differently; it had felt natural, saying yes. (203)

“*On the Streets*”, similarly to “*Justina’s Priest*”, also deals with a character with mental disabilities, who in fact, seems to react in a very similar way to her perfectly healthy peers. For Justina, Breda’s letter offers the opportunity to break her routine in the little town; for Arthur, the divorce and the falling back into a lonely life causes an outburst of repressed anger, which he lets off by committing crimes and vagabonding on the streets. Cheryl is a middle-aged widow, another of Trevor’s “lost beauties” (another main theme of the collection) and out of loneliness she decides to marry Arthur, who, from the beginning, showed signs of obsessive compulsive disorder. Although she knows that in a marriage ‘a baggage’ of the other person has to be taken on, she suddenly realises that Arthur’s baggage was somewhat too heavy and decides to divorce him, finally accepting her lonely nature, which was what drew her to him in the first place:

She had never said she knew it was her nature that had drawn her to go for walks with him and to accept his reticent embrace, that her pity was his nourishment (212-3).

Another woman whose nature has drawn her to the wrong man is Emily, the widow of “*Sitting with the Death*”. Again, another marriage of convenience, this time based on economic values:

‘He married me for the forty acres,’ Emily said, compelled again to say what she didn’t want to. ‘I was a Protestant girl that got passed by until he made a bid for me and I thought it was romantic (...)’ (11)

In this case, faith and religion plays a big role in their relationship. Emily was quite wealthy but a Protestant girl, which in a Catholic country like the Republic of Ireland, means the chances to find a husband were definitely less than those of a Catholic girl. It could be argued then, that the marriage was convenient for both of them: for him, as he could acquire a large property, and for her as she was “greedy for what marriage might be (11)” and probably could not have aspired to anyone better, given her religious denomination.

The last couple to be analysed in this chapter are Nuala and Corry, the protagonists of “Sacred Statues”. Similar to Fina and John Michael, they have known each other from childhood - a seemingly normal occurrence, although in this collection Trevor seems to suggest that sometimes a long companionship does not necessarily mean love, that sometimes people decide to spend the rest of their lives together only as the result of comfort, convenience and habit. Although there are no signs that show instances of unrequited love, or even that theirs is a marriage of convenience, Nuala, reflecting on the big financial crisis their family is currently in, wonders about their relationship, leaving to the reader how to interpret Nuala’s doubts:

Nuala often took pride in her husband’s gift; and in the quiet of his workshop she wondered how it would have been between them if he did not possess it, how she would feel about him if he’d been the master in a school or a counter-hand in one of the shops in Carrick, or permanently on a farm (130).

4.1.5 Adultery

The theme of adultery can be seen as opposed to, and in some way related to, the theme of love. It is a very popular and attractive theme in literature, probably because it deals with a taboo and can be linked to such issues as adventure, excitement and moral transgression. Adultery as a phenomenon, as Tony Tanner points out, existed already in literature from the earliest times, in the works of Homer, in the chivalric literature and it also became a major theme in Shakespeare’s last plays like *Cymbeline* (1611), *Othello* (1603) and *The Winter’s Tale* (1623). In his study *Adultery in the Novel* (1979), Tanner claims that adultery is connected to the problem of transgressing the marriage contract. This: “introduces an agonizing and irresolvable category confusion into the individual and

thence into society itself. (12)”, which basically means that adultery produces chaos in the society. Interestingly, many of the late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels that now constitute the literary canon (see for example *Anna Karenina*, *Madame Bovary* or *The Scarlet Letter*) centre their plots on the theme of adultery.

In his preceding works, William Trevor often dealt with the betrayal and the disappointment of love and marriage. *The Love Department* (1966), *Ballroom of Romance* (1972) and *Office Romances* all deal with lives of characters trapped in loveless and failed marriages.

In *A Bit on the Side*, adultery can also be connected to death and murder, as shown in the story “Solitude”. In three stories of the collection, adultery is a central theme and the characters behave in function of it. In “Solitude”, the betrayal of the protagonist's mother causes in the little child such a deep hate in the mother's lover, that the girl, only 7 at that time, pushes the man down the stairs and kills him.

My fingertips are on the dark cloth of his sleeve and I can feel his arm beneath, and everything is different then.

There is his tumbling down, there is the splintered banister. There is the thud, and then another and another. There is the stillness, and Mrs Upsilla looking up at me. (109-10)

Not only death is caused by adultery, but also emigration, since the family decides as a consequence to leave England and live at various places in Europe.

There are arguably several reasons why a person decides to commit adultery, however, one main reason could be the desire to escape the rules of the “socially sanctioned institution of marriage” (Daemmrich 9) and thus to reach self-fulfilment against social, moral and religious restraints. However, it is because of the constraints of society that one of the protagonists decides to end his liaison. In the story that gives the name to the collection, “A Bit on the Side”, the male lover puts an end to an office-romance with a divorced woman. The reason is that he fears a public scandal if people saw them together, aware of the fact that he is married and she is merely 'his bit on the side' by the public.

In all the places of their love affair – here too – it was what people saw. She was his bit on the side.

'I can't bear it that they think that.' (241)

In one particular story, “Graillis's Legacy”, adultery produces guilt, another central theme of the story. In this story, guilt is also connected to the theme of death: both Graillis's wife and lover are dead, and now the male lover discovers that his mistress has left him a considerable sum of money:

He was bewildered by the resurrection of a guilt that long ago had softened away to nothing. In that other time no pain had been caused, no hurt; he had managed the distortions that created falsity, the lies of silence; what he had been forgiven for was not seeming to be himself for a while. (92)

Similarly, in “Rose Wept”, adultery produces devastating effects not only on the betrayed partner but also on the adulteress, and it moreover corrupts the rest of the family and social relations. Because of Mrs Bouverie's adultery, Rose loses faith in the moral standards of the society and bursts into tears, embarrassed and concerned about “other betrayals (167)” that she has seen in her young life, and those she will see in the years to come.

She wept for the *modus vivendi* that was left in the house no pupil or lover would visit again, for the glimpse she had had of it, enough to allow her a betrayal. She wept for her friends – for the unfaithful when things turned stale, and for the accident-prone; for the romantic, who gave too much, and the mistrustful. (166)

4.1.6 Female Beauty

Another main theme present in the collection is that of ‘beauty’ and more specifically, ‘female beauty’. Some of Trevor’s female protagonists are young, like Fina in “Big Bucks”, or Nuala in “Sacred Statues”. In these stories, Trevor does not focus on the looks of the female characters, but rather on the psychological aspects and the development of their personalities. These girls develop from flat and sometimes passive characters, into self-assured women. By contrast, the rest of the female characters in the other stories are middle-aged women, who are often divorced, or widows or are single. In

the stories, like “Traditions”, “An Evening Out”, “Solitude” and “The Dancing-Master’s Music”, the female characters are said to have some traces of their past beauty, or even an ‘ancient beauty’. All of them wear the signs of a past that seems to haunt them. For this reason, this chapter deals with the motif of ‘lost beauty’ and analyses the effects that this has on the female characters.

Bella, the mysterious maid and protagonist of “Tradition”, is the first example of a woman featuring as a lost beauty. Already her name, Bella, implies that the main feature of her character is beauty, or in her case, the trace of a foregone beauty:

She was a girl in name only, a designation that carried from the past. [...]It honoured a celebrity she had enjoyed, when her fresh beauty had time and again inspired passion in the dining hall. (30)

What can be noted is the contrast between the beauty of the past, that ‘fresh’ beauty that made Bella popular among the boys, and the present beauty, all of which seems to have abandoned her, as the boys have:

She was a woman in late middle age now, tall, with grey hair tied back behind her cap, her features still touched with a trace of the beauty other boys had known. (31)

In the story, Olivier is sure that Bella is behind a series of strange events that have happened in the school in the past few years, like the killing of the birds and the disappearance of a Renoir portrait. It can be argued, although never specified in the story, that Bella might be acting out of revenge. The following lines support this interpretation:

Of course, the Headmaster did not know - as authority before him had not known - that the dining-hall maid had in her girlhood been, herself, a fragment of tradition, supplying to boys who now were men a service that had entered the unofficial annals. (33-4)

Bella seems to have lost her beauty and the attention of the boys, who one by one, have become adults and married other women. She is now old and lonely, and has never been praised for the ‘special role’ she has had in the development of the young men of the school. All of them have left her, over time. Her presence has become a tradition, nothing more than a ‘compulsory step’ for the young boys to take in their adolescence before

leaving as soon as better opportunities are found. For this reason, the mysterious events happening in the school could be explained as acts of revenge by an abandoned woman.

Evelyn, the protagonist of “An Evening Out”, and Cheryl, the main female character in “On the Streets”, are both middle-aged women with remains of past beauty. In Evelyn:

The remains of beauty strikingly lit her features, seeming to be there less casually, less incidentally, than beauty might have been earlier in her life. (60)

Whereas Cheryl is described as:

[...] a thin, smallish woman, grey in her hair now, lines gathering around her eyes and lips. She had been once and still retained more than a vestige of those looks at fifty-one. (196)

Both characters are described as mature women with signs of a 'less casual' beauty that lights their features. Despite their beauty, they share a common life filled with sadness and a lack of companionship. Evelyn, after having rejected the love of her life twenty years earlier, has to look for companionship and a love through a dating agency. When she rejected the man in the past, she refused to marry anyone else and, just like many other characters featuring in the stories of the collection, she willingly withdrew herself from society. Cheryl, on the other hand, was married, but after the death of her husband, she felt the need for company. Not having many choices, she eventually marries Arthur, only to realise – on the same day of the marriage – that she has made a mistake.

The nostalgic feeling towards the past that these characters feel, can be associated with the *ubisunt* motif. The *ubisunt* motif, literally ‘where are they?’, is typical of a number of medieval literature poems that deal with “the transitory nature of life and beauty.” (Cuddon 952) The phrase is often to be found as the opening line of such poems, in which the speaker asks “what has become of various heroes and beautiful ladies.” (Baldick 267) Although not in the same form as in the medieval poetry, this motif recurs often in the stories in *A Bit on the Side*, in which all the characters yearn for the lost joys and hopes of the past and struggle to face the present.

There is an obvious parallelism among all the characters described as beautiful when young or having remains of beauty in old age. They all seem to share the same

destiny victims of personal failure, humiliation, isolation and the moral, social and religious constraints imposed by Irish society.

4.1.7 Failure

Failure as part of human nature plays a role in several stories. Failure in finding a job, failure in keeping beloved ones close, failure in communicating and being part of the society. Failure comes in different forms and in Trevor's works seems to be a situation his characters cannot avoid, even those who are considered otherwise successful. As Christina Hunt Mahony points out in *Contemporary Irish Literature: Transforming Tradition*, "One of Trevor's recurring interests as a writer is to portray the varied ways in which ordinary people deal with the loss of youthful dreams." (202-3)

For instance, the mother of the protagonist in "Solitude" is a rich woman with a family, who has everything in life. Nevertheless, she decides to betray her husband and thus doom the family to solitude. Her money does not give them the life they expected. Her husband has also failed in life: he spends his time trying to become a respected archaeologist. His frequent trips to archaeological sites give his wife the occasion of having extramarital affairs. At the beginning of the story, the protagonist is a small child of seven, and at the end a middle-aged woman, who fails to fit into society and to build herself a family. She moves alone from country to country, hoping someday to find some "real" company other than the ghosts of her past.

Another failed man is Emily's deceased husband in "Sitting with the Dead". During his life he was obsessed with horse races to such an extent that he did not realise the kind of man he was turning into. Emily has to abandon her hopes for a romantic, loving marriage to merely live in his shadow.

Similarly, Graillis, the protagonist of "Graillis' Legacy", is a failed man in several fields. He abandoned his steady job to risk in the management of the local library, thus disappointing his wife, whom he repeatedly cheated on with a regular of the library. Furthermore, since his wife's death, whiskey seems to be his only companion, since not even his children bother to call him.

4.1.7.1 The Outsider

In these stories, the theme of 'failure' is often linked to the motif of the 'outsider'. Although the motif is also associated with the theme of 'solitude', it can be noted how in Trevor's works the outsider is always connected to the theme of failure. For this reason, the motif will be considered in this section of the paper.

The term outsider indicates "a person (especially a creative artist) who is, in some respects, above and 'outside' the society in which he or she lives and perhaps even superior to it." (Cuddon 626) Outsiders can be found in any society, anywhere in the world: they can be people with a higher IQ, some sort of super humans, or simply unconventional or eccentric people. This view is, naturally, a discourse created by those who are neither geniuses or unconventional - in this sense, artists like William Trevor, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett can also be defined as outsiders in a society that never really understood them. These authors wrote about 'outsiders' as characters in their works; using again the example of the story "Counterparts" from Joyce's *The Dubliners*, it can be argued that Farrington is a) an outsider - his English boss and English friends patronize him (and the fact that these people are patronising him in his own country makes him an outsider); and b) a failed man - firstly, he is rejected by a beautiful woman, and secondly, he cannot take revenge on people of his age and can only let out his frustration by beating his young son. A similar behavioural pattern can be observed with various characters in *A Bit on the Side*.

As previously mentioned, the deceased husband in the story "Sitting with the Dead" is a failed man and also an outsider in town. Although he has willingly isolated himself, not wanting anyone to trespass on his property, in his voice, full with "articulated anger", and in his piercing looks, Emily can feel a "power coming from him, festering and then released, his denial of his failure (9)". His self-inflicted loneliness, caused by the denial of his failure, creates a vicious circle from which he can only escape with death. A more 'positive' example of an outsider is Corry, the protagonist of "Sacred Statues". Corry is a man who fights until the end to follow his dreams and become a renowned sculptor:

You were meant for other times, Corry,' a priest had remarked to him once, but not unkindly or dismissively, as if recognizing that even if the present times were different from those he spoke of, Corry would persevere. A waste of himself it would be otherwise, a waste of the person he was. (129-30)

Although eventually Corry has to take the job on the streets - despite all the efforts the couple makes, from begging for money, to trying to sell their soon-to-be-born child to a sterile couple, he still remains one of the most positive characters of the collection. Corry's failure is naturally linked to the decline of the Catholic Church, which can also be seen as a failure. As Fitzgerald writes in his review of *A Bit on the Side*: "the beleaguered Catholic church, with its plummeting attendance, has little interest in statues of the saints" (Fitzgerald 118), Corry's 'fault', so to say, is that he lives in an era in which even the Church does not care for its saints anymore. This naturally leads to another story in the collection, in which the theme of failure is closely connected to the decline of the church. Father Clohessy is himself a failure as a priest, who feels "foolish even, that he failed to understand something that as a priest he should have (39)" and especially, abandoned from his town people, except for Justina. The grandeur of his Church is gone, and even his faith is weaker than ever.

4.1.7.2 The Con-Man

Another motif that can be associated with the theme of 'Failure' is that of the Con Artist or Con-Man. Although this motif can also be linked to theme of 'Deception', in *A Bit on the Side*, the con men are also inevitably failed men. The Con-Man, short for Confidence man or Confidence Artist, is a colloquialism for "a person who perpetrates a confidence trick or fraud; a con man or swindler."¹⁶ The term was introduced to the jargon of literature in 1857 with the publication of Herman Melville's novel *The Confidence Man*. As David Maurer states in his study, *The American Confidence Man*, the principles of the con tricks are essentially American. Maurer also defines the Con Man as an 'aristocratic' criminal:

¹⁶ <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/38006?redirectedFrom=con+artist#eid21684694> (18.04.2016).

Of all the grifters, the confidence man is the aristocrat. Although he is sometimes classed with professional thieves, he is not really a thief at all because he does not do actual stealing. The trusting victim literally thrusts a fat bankroll into his hands. It is a point of pride with him that he does not have to steal. (3)

The character of the Con-Man can be found in many parts of the Western world. The Con- Man and, naturally, the Con-Woman, is also a recurrent motif in Irish folklore. Although not necessarily linked to con-games, such as card games on the streets, the Irish con artist is usually someone who persuades other people to believe something that is not true. In *A Bit on the Side*, two male characters can be defined as con artists: Bat Quinn in “Big Bucks” and Jeffrey in “An Evening Out”.

The first con man to be looked at is Bat Quinn, the half-and-half regular in “Big Bucks”:

Bat Quinn had been a fisherman himself, going out with the boats for more than fifty years. He'd never worn a collar or tie in his life, he shaved himself once a week and had never had the need of a wife; he washed his clothes when they required it. (174)

The former fisherman Bat Quinn is an extremely talkative regular of the half-and-half where Fina works. He, who “had more talk in him than anyone (174)” is also in some way responsible, together with TV shows and films, for having insinuated the idea of the American Dream in the couple. As the narrator states many times, his stories about the 'big bucks' are only exaggerated yarns and based on the stories he heard from other people. The main thing that makes Bat Quinn a cheat, a Con-Man, is the fact that he has never left Ireland and thus has never seen the United States himself:

He had stayed at home when the others went, but even so he insisted that Boston's long, straight streets were a wonder when the evening sun shone down them. (174)

Furthermore, between the lines, the narrator seems to tell the reader that Bat Quinn deeply regrets not having left Ireland. For this reason, Bat Quinn's story can be related to all those stories of failure found in *A Bit on the Side*:

Bat Quinn – who had stayed – had a way of regretfully pointing over the sea to the horizon beyond the two rocks that were islands in the bay. (169)

With his stories, Bat Quinn tries to elevate himself to the level of those who were brave enough to leave Ireland to seek fortune abroad. Like a con man, he tries to persuade the other regulars of the half-and-half that his stories are true and hopes to gain the respect among the audience. Similarly, Jeffrey's lies in "An Evening Out", aim at gaining the interest of women who can invite him for dinner and help him with his work:

He sought no more than a car-owner who would transport him and his photographic equipment from one chosen area of London to another, someone who – as privately he put it to himself – would be drawn into his work. (69)

As previously stated, Jeffrey does not aim at finding a life partner, but rather a person serving him as a practical and financial help. His lifetime's project is to photograph the whole city of London under different lights. However, because of financial issues, he has to take pictures of cooked food for a living. Jeffrey is a rather cynical character, and when he discovers that Evelyn does not have a car he struggles not to show his disappointment:

'It's just I wondered', he said in the theatre bar, 'if you possessed a car?'
He watched her shaking her head.
He didn't let his crossness show, but disappointment felt like a weight within him.
[...] All that wasted effort, this time again; he might as well just walk away, he thought. (70)

He is also a frustrated, angry and failed man. He spends his night out with Evelyn thinking of how to take revenge on other people, making scenes at the bar that is closing or swearing because he lost a pound in a broken vending machine in the bar's toilet. Although the disappointment at the fact that Evelyn has not got a car, he seems to reconcile with her and for the first time on a date with someone, he tells her the truth about his life, his failure as a photographer and his need of someone who could give him a lift and pay for dinner. It could be argued that at this moment of the story, the two characters recognize themselves as outsiders and failed people in society. For this reasons, they can tell the truth, because they do not matter to each other:

He'd told her about the photographs he was ashamed of because she didn't matter; without resentment she realized that. And witnessing her excursion into foolishness, he had not mattered either. (83)

4.1.8 Emigration

In Irish history and Irish literature, the word ‘emigration’ is linked to a set of connotations and articulated meanings that are very different from the rest of European history and literature. The word *per se* indicates the situation of people who leave a country to move into another one; together with the word immigration, emigration is part of a larger phenomenon of migration that indicates the totality of the human movement from one region or country to another. However, while the history of many other countries has seen periods of emigration and of immigration, in Irish history immigration has never been prevalent. Even though in the history of Europe large migratory movements have happened in similar times, Irish consider migration as something typical Irish, belonging to the history and cultural background of the country. Ireland experienced periods of mass emigration between the beginning of the 19th Century and the beginning of the first World War. From 1801 and 1921, 8 million of Irish men, women and children left the country to go to Canada, USA and thereafter Great Britain¹⁷.

In literature, emigration, or as later termed ‘Irish Diaspora’, is treated as something tragic and irreversible. Even though the choice of leaving Ireland is made to improve someone’s life, leaving one’s native country is experienced as something shameful, and once abroad, emigrants still experience feelings of an excruciating nostalgia for Ireland. All the major Irish authors have confronted themselves with the theme of emigration. Naturally, William Trevor is also a writer of emigration: as an outsider in his own country, he left Ireland to seek his fortune in England, where he started his writing career. In *A Bit on the Side* there are two stories that have emigration as their main theme: “Solitude” and “Big Bucks”. All the other stories are either set in England or in the Irish countryside (stories in which the characters strive to leave or move to the city).

Although the protagonist family of “Solitude” is arguably an English family (they live in England, but other references to their nationality are not given), they are forced to emigrate after the terrible tragedy that caused the death of the mother’s lover in their house in

¹⁷ *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*. S.J. Connolly, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 80.

London. Emigration in this story is different from the 'Irish emigration': the family does not emigrate because of money, or to seek job opportunities abroad. They just leave because "that was best" (Trevor, 113) and live in hotels throughout Europe, simply living day by day without making any plans. Although this might sound like a relatively care-free life, the daughter suffers from the forced emigration from London and keeps regretting the loss of their beautiful house. She, once accompanied by her imaginary childhood friends, admits to have lost them:

Do they [the parents] regret the loss of the house in London, as I do? [...] They may even wonder, as I do, if the chill of the past is in that house, if the ghosts of my childhood companions haunt its rooms, for since leaving England I have never been able to bring them to life again. (115)

The last line can arguably indicate a passage from childhood to adulthood in the character, perhaps a forced maturity, thus causing some sort of trauma in the protagonist, who lives now a very isolated life with her parents, without any friend, not even imaginary ones. Although "Solitude" is not a story of Irish emigration *per se*, and the theme is not expressed through typical Irish motifs such as a difficult financial situation or violence in the family, as well as death of a beloved person, the story still links the theme of emigration to that of solitude and the quest for identity that the main character has to go through.

"Solitude" is the story of the traumatic development of a young woman who needs to face the ghosts of her childhood to find herself and the nature of her human experience. Similarly, "Big Bucks" deals with the quest for identity of the female character, Fina, her development and her thoughts about emigration; this time, real 'Irish emigration'. Fina and her boyfriend John Michael reject the quiet, dull and unexciting life in the small fishing town where they are from, they reject all the possible future opportunities that the town can offer them such as the life on the old farm and the work in the half-and-half. They dream about what America can be and all the big opportunities it can offer them. They have cultivated this idea since their childhood and founded their relationship on it. Fina and John Michael, however, do not realize that their dream is a mere utopia and an illusion. As the narrator reports:

Fina liked it when the doormen greeted the yellow cabs, and the quick talk in the skyscraper lifts, and Christmas in the stores. She liked the lone driver on the highway, music on his radio, the wayside gas station he drew up at, its attendant swatting flies. (178)

Fina's idea of America is, naturally, a cliché created by films and TV shows. An idealised view of the country, based on the utopian idea of the American Dream. Not only the media, but also the character of Bat Quinn and his tales about America are responsible for the couple's view of America:

The world of America, which she and John Michael had talked about and wondered about for so long, was spiced with the yarns of Bat Quinn, his exaggeration and fantasy steadied by facts remembered from the day when Mr Horan unrolled the map of the continent and hung it on the blackboard. (177)

Bat Quinn, an old regular of the half-and-half, tells them stories of people who had left Ireland to seek fortune in the States and allegedly came back with great wealth. Bat Quinn has never left Ireland himself, and perpetuating the stereotype of the Irish story teller and also the Con Man, Bat manages to 'spice up' Fina's and John Michael's minds with questionable second hand information, which has great influence on the young man, who decides to leave.

I got work in a laundry, the next letter said, slow in coming. Bat Quinn wagged his head in admiration when he heard. There were big bucks in the laundry business, no doubt about it. The President's shirts would have to go to a laundry, and Bat Quinn twisted round on his barstool, exclaiming loudly that John Michael Gallagher was in charge of the shirts of the President of the United States. (178-9)

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, misery and deprivation always play big roles in stories of Irish emigration:

Chance had always played a part, ever since the Famine years, that first great exodus from the land, the ships called coffin ships. As often as the good side of it was there, so were misfortune and desperation and failure. (183)

The coffin ships are a very famous motif in literature, based on historical fact, i.e. a tragedy in Irish emigration history. During the Great Famine, the so called coffin ships, in reality trade vessels, were the only chance for people to escape and migrate to North America. These ships were of course unfit for passenger trade, most of the time rotten

and leaking and the people who embarked were reduced to a mere mass of bodies. Furthermore, these ships were the perfect environment for diseases to explode and spread to all the passengers, particularly Typhus, and given the amount of deaths during the voyages, the ships became the coffins for those miserable people who were looking for a better life¹⁸. Another element of realism in the story is given by the mention of Morrison's Visa Program of 1992¹⁹. This information also enables the reader to locate the story in a particular time:

'They gave an amnesty a while back,' Fina's father said. He remembered a figure, something like a hundred and twenty thousand Irish immigrants outside the system in New York. But it could be while before there'd be an amnesty again. (184)

The theme of Emigration is usually linked to various motifs of settings. Trevor relates the settings to the feelings of the protagonists of his stories. The following chapter deals with this relationship.

4.1.8.1 Life in Small Towns vs. Urban Centres

Before concentrating on the lives in small towns and big cities portrayed by William Trevor, the motif of the 'landscape' must be introduced. The landscape represents, in fact, an essential motif of setting in literature, with very important literary functions. According to Daemmrich, since antiquity, specific landscapes were associated with specific scenes like love scenes, tragedy or adventure. After the 16th c., in which the term 'landscape' was used by English painters, the term started to indicate "appealing scenes in literature (Daemmrich 160)". The motif is important for a better understanding of the scenes in the stories of the collection, since landscape may:

(1) frame the action, (2) provide the setting, (3) reflect emotions of characters, (4) create moods, (5) serve as an ornamental element, (6) characterize events, (7) contrasts as a spatial element with other textual units, and (8) motivate behaviour.

¹⁸ *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History, 1845-52*. R.Dudley Edwards, T. Desmond Williams, Eds. Dublin: The Lilliput Press Ltd, 1994.

¹⁹ In 1992, Congressman Bruce Morrison was the author of a major immigration bill that aimed to increase legal immigration to the United States. The law would give amnesty to all those who were living in the States illegally and would be classified as skilled workers. Immigrants from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland were given 16,000 out of the 40,000 of the visas available. Source <<http://irishamerica.com/2013/03/bruce-morrison/>> (13.04.2016).

Consequently, the author's intent determines what specific details are included or omitted. (Daemmrich 160)

With this information in mind, an interpretation of the motifs of 'life in a small town' (wilderness/life at original form) and 'life in a big city' (harsh life/no control over it) can be given.

In almost all the stories of *A Bit on the Side*, Trevor portrays the different lives of people living in the city and those living in small towns, sometimes in England, Ireland or Italy (like the protagonist of "Solitude", who lives in the gracious and quiet Bordighera). Some of the main characters who live in small towns strive to abandon their remote surroundings and move to the city, or at least to the next bigger centre.

In "Sitting with the Dead", the two sisters Norah and Kathleen try to convince Emily to sell her 'remote' house after her husband's death and to come and join them in Carra, and thus become part of a greater community and avoid solitude. In "Justina's Priest", Justina, despite her learning problems, is well aware of the state of things in her little town and wants to follow her childhood friend Breda to Dublin. It is in this last story, "Justina's Priest", that Trevor juxtaposes two of the main faces of Ireland: the quiet life in a small village, with its gossiping, its small shops, the church and the beautiful flowers to embellish the houses; and the hectic life on the streets of Dublin. Justina's everyday routine is made of visits to the 'Today Tonight' shop, where she occasionally buys something and exchanges some words with the owner: "I have apples in. Will you tell them up in the house I have apples in?" (41), and with other town people. Another part of her day is spent in the local parish of Father Clohessy, where she confesses every day to futile and innocent things she believes are sins. The story then focuses on Father Clohessy, who also lives a very quiet routine, made up of short and superficial conversations with the town people (wittingly asking himself whether he had seen them at Mass the Sunday before) and his conversations with Justina. The town is associated with a sense of calm but also loss and deprivation for its inhabitants, who, especially the main characters of the story, all seem to be trapped in a never ending routine, like Maeve, Justina's sister:

Maeve considered that she'd been caught: when their mother had died there had been only she to look after Justina, [...] And Maeve had been caught again when her

father-in-law, miserable with the ailments of old age, had to be taken in; and again in not realizing before her marriage that Micksie had to be kept out of the pubs. (42)

A small town, the decline of the Catholic Church, joy and hope in a life trapped in a constant, frustrating routine from which one cannot easily escape, misery and alcoholism are, in summary, the main themes connected to the motif of life in a small town. When Breda, Justina's bold childhood friend, writes Justina a letter from Dublin, the reader perceives a big difference in the life she is carrying there, consisting of hotels, racing crowds and men. Although the reader and even Mr Gilfoyle, who reads the letter to Justina, understand that the girl is in big danger alone on the streets of Dublin, Justina is completely fascinated by her stories and strives to take the bus that goes to Dublin, disobeying Father Clohessy and her sister.

Also in another story of the collection, "Big Bucks", Trevor confronts his characters with the quietness and the boredom of life in a small town and the dream of better and the more entertaining life in the big American cities. Fina and John Michael reject their life in the half-and-half in the Irish countryside and aim at experiencing the alluring life of the American Dream. John Michael is the first one to leave for the States, thus leaving time to Fina to reflect on their lives so far in town. At the end of the story, she is more conscious and mature than at the beginning, understanding the fragility of their love, but also that the carefree life in a big city they had dreamt of, does not exist. Just like in the other stories, Trevor seems to underline the similarities between lives in the two different settings. In both places, the characters are unable to escape from universal conditions such as solitude, death and failure.

This is also shown in one of the more melancholic stories of the collection: "The Dancing-Master's Music". The main themes of this story are the decline and deterioration that characterize the life in a small town close to Cork. Brigid's reality is the life of the servants of the rich Skenakilla House: the work at the sculleries and later on in the house, the quiet conversations with the other servants and the solitude of the walks from Glenmore over Skenakilla Hill, the quest for romantic love. The only significant event in her life, the memory of which will keep her alive for the rest of her years, is the performance of the dancing-master; an Italian music teacher who comes to the house to teach the young girls of the family how to dance to classical music. Brigid's life is another

example of a life determined by the hope for love that never comes, from her early years, until she does not have the strength to walk over Skenakilla Hill anymore. The mansion that used to be her glorious working place is neglected and abandoned in the end:

With great sadness, Brigid witnessed the spread of this deterioration, the house gone quiet in its distress, the family broken. But as if nothing had happened, as if no change had occurred, the dancing-master's music did not cease. (226)

Although life in a big city is often different, Trevor also shows the characteristics shared by inhabitants of the countryside and big cities. He particularly focuses on the fact that although living in a place where millions of people live, one can still be tremendously lonely and alienated. He writes about London in "An Evening Out":

People gathered at the crossing lights, seeming to lose something of themselves in each small multitude while obediently they waited to move forward when the signal came. (60-1)

In this short quote three things can be noticed: 1) the city as something that has assumed independent life and that has turned on its creators, its inhabitants; 2) the city is seen as a never ending flood and 3) the 'cage motif' (Daemmrich 66), i.e. the individuals feeling of being trapped and alienated by the big city.

"On the Streets" is probably the most explanatory example of this sense of loneliness and alienation caused by the frantic life in a big city. The female character is a lonely widow who decides to marry a man obviously suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder. Although at the beginning not aware of it, she marries him anyway, in order to overcome her loneliness. However, she is unable to do so because solitude can also be caused by those around you. Trevor's description of the big city, with its restaurants, noisy crowds and gloomy neon lights, serves as a background to highlight the protagonists' loneliness.

He would not, tonight, be offended by the glare of neon beneath which she now walked herself. Nor by the cars that loitered in their search for what the night had to offer. Nor by the voices of the couples pressed close to one another as they went by. Her tears, tonight, allowed him peace. (212)

“An Evening Out” shows how gossiping and loneliness can be part of life in a big city like London. Evelyn realises that truth is not an important factor in the world of the big city:

What was more difficult to come to terms with, and always had been, was the uneasy sense that the truth seemed to matter less than it should, both in the agency itself and in the encounters it provided. (67)

The female character, perfectly aware that she does not have any interest in beginning a relationship with her date, is keen on being seen smiling and laughing with the young man by her neighbours:

They would gossip about this to the residents of the other flats if they considered it worthwhile to do so: the solitary woman in the flat below theirs had something going with a younger man. No emotion stirred in Jeffrey, neither sympathy nor pity, for he was not given to such feelings. (81)

Although life in a small town and in a big city is not quite the same, Trevor seems eager to demonstrate to the reader that no matter where one goes, the difficulties of life will follow. Emigrating is unlikely to change one’s situation when the source of the problem is inside.

4.2 The Impact of the Settings on the Psyche of the Characters

This section of the thesis focuses on a different aspect found in the collection. In the previous chapters, the themes of the collection *A Bit on the Side* were discussed. This has been approached by analysing the text, “what” is said and “how” it is said. This approach has resulted in a detailed analysis about the twelve short stories. However, not much attention has been paid to the role of the settings and of the climate and why these two factors seem to be so important to better understand the characters in these narratives. For this reason, this chapter aims at examining in depth the impact of the settings on the characters, as touched on in the previous chapter about emigration, but, in addition, with the help of several psychological studies carried out in the last 20 years.

In the previous chapter, it has been mentioned that William Trevor seems to tell the reader that his characters, although they decide to emigrate, cannot escape the feelings

of depression, solitude and failure present in their lives. The conclusion pointed out that this must mean that these feelings are intrinsic features of the characters.

As already mentioned in the previous chapter „Emigration and Life in Small Towns vs. Urban Centres “, settings have always played a major role in defining the characters. As early as ancient literature, characters were strictly bound to their surroundings. Certain settings were, for example, always associated with love scenes (*locus amoenus*), adventures or conflicts (Daemmrich 160). The settings of a story, such as cities, towns and houses (also including the weather), influence the characters, of which they mirror the feelings and thoughts. Consequently, settings are never randomly chosen by the author, whose intent determines what to include and what to avoid in the story. In the past, authors like Goethe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe among others, managed to set the landscape in motion. This was made possible by descriptions „in which the space begins to breathe a spirit that either affects persons and contributes to their characteristics or reveals their sentiments.” (Daemmrich 161) This view has also been endorsed by several psychological studies: settings and weather have contingent effects on mood and cognition of real human beings and thus it is not something that can only be applied to fictional characters.

Environmental psychology is a modern branch of psychology that analyses the relationship between humans and their surroundings. According to this field of study, problematic environments such as crowded cities and what derives from them (low quality of life, decadent urban areas, noise and pollution) have significant effects on stress levels and thus, on the mental health of its inhabitants. A correlation between space and identity has been proven by several social psychological studies during recent decades²⁰. According to the “place-identity theory”, not only do people influence places, but places create identities:

When attachment to place grows, we start to identify ourselves with these places, both at a larger scale (nation, city, etc.) and at a smaller scale (neighborhood, workplaces, homes, rooms; Giuliani, 2003). This results in self-concepts that are based in part on place. For example, people may refer to themselves by describing

²⁰ For more information about the relationship between space and identity see: Seamon (1979), Buttner and Seamon (1980), Hart (1979), Canter (1977) and Proshansky et al. (1978, 1983, 1987) and Altman and Low (1992).

what country they live in, what city or town they come from, or if they are a "country" or a "city person." These are more than social references; they refer to physical places where people live. The places in which people have lived also influence their environmental preferences and affect the kind of environment they may seek out or prefer. (Hauge 1)

Bearing this in mind, a further interpretation of several passages of the stories can take place:

In Trafalgar Square the traffic was clogged, a crawl of lumbering red buses and patient taxis, a cyclist now and again weaving through. [...] he entered the Salisbury in St Martin's Lane and ordered a Bell's, and then called out that it had better be a double. He needed it. Truth to tell, he needed a second... (61)

In "An Evening Out", the city is seen as something inhuman, in which humans cannot easily find room for self-expression and development, on the contrary, they only experience isolation, indifference and confinement (Daemmrich 65). Furthermore, the alienating life in the city (be it London or Dublin) is always associated with various crimes and sins. In the paragraph above, Jeffrey is in fact described as "in need of alcohol". His dependence can thus be associated with the oppressing life in the big city. Similarly, in "Justina's Priest", after having read Breda's letter about her new life in Dublin, it can be inferred that the girl is working as a prostitute around the quays of the city.

The lonely provincial Irish town as well constitutes a motive of psychological distress:

Eleven miles away, beyond the town of Kinard – which had a minimarket, a draper's, five public houses, a hardware, and Power's Medical Hall – the farmhouse was remote, built without foundations according to John Michael. Slated and whitewashed, it was solitary where it stood except for the yard sheds. The mountain had no name, John Michael said, or if it had it was forgotten now, and there wasn't a gate that swung. Old bedsteads blocked the holes in the hedges, there was a taste of turf on the water you drank. Damp brought on mildew in the rooms. (172)

In this paragraph, the description of the old farm owned by John Michael's uncle can be said to represent Ireland. The young couple rejects a life in a lonely, deserted and forgotten place, in which everything is stale and decaying, the opposite of the shiny American boulevards.

A similar example can be found in the story “Graillis’ Legacy”:

A few miles out on the Old Fort road, devoured by rust, the entrance gates had sagged into undergrowth. There had been talk of everything falling into disrepair, not that there hadn’t been signs of this before, the paint of the windows flaking, the garden neglected. (84)

In this excerpt it is interesting to see how the character, without any explicable reason, seems to be attracted by the ruins of a house that has nothing to do with him in a small village one hour away from where he actually lives. The description of the wrecked house and the neglected garden all symbolize the human experience. The garden is clearly identified as a sphere that reflects human activity. The garden “is cultivated, enclosed, protected (Daemmrich 124)” For this reason, the image of a neglected garden strongly evokes the image of an abandoned human being, of someone struggling with life. As the reader discovers, Graillis is in fact abandoned, neglected by his children and lonely in his empty house after the death of his wife. Even the landscape around him reflect his condition: “He drove slowly through flat, unchanging landscape.” (88)

Another fundamental factor in the lives of most human beings and it seems, also in the characters of the collection, is the weather. There is in fact a significant relationship between weather and mood, which has been documented by several psychological studies²¹. In particular, the way in which temperatures, humidity and exposure to sunlight can affect mood and cognition. As early as 1980²², an experiment including 286 people showed how the climatic situation typical of Arctic and northern areas have dramatically increased the cases of schizophrenia, reactive depression, alcoholism, anxiety, personality deficiency and manic depression. At the same time, all these people suffering from psychological disturbances have shown signs of recovery during spring or when exposed to sunlight, even if artificial. Therefore, it is not an isolated case that in literature studies motif patterns such as darkness, night, cold, dawn and light have been used since antiquity. Furthermore, this might explain why these motifs recur so often in Irish literature: the cold, rainy and cloudy Irish weather is the perfect background for the stories of solitude, human failure and unrequited love that we find among Trevor’s works. A

²¹ See Molin et al. (1995), Keller et al. (2004), Spasova (2011).

²² Large and Johnson (1980).

good example of how the climate influences and mirrors the feelings of the characters can be seen in the following paragraphs taken from the story “Sitting with the Dead”:

The conversation took place entirely at the hall door. Dusk was becoming dark, but over the white-washed wall of the small front garden Emily still could see a car drawn up in the road. It was cold, the wind gone round to the east. (3)

Darkness, cold and the wind blowing are the main elements in this description given by the narrator. Emily has just lost her husband and is visited by the Geraghty sisters, two Catholic women famous for their acts of charity and their support to the church. As already mentioned in the chapters “Solitude” and “Love”, Emily is a lonely widow whose joy of life has been taken away by her stubborn husband, who forced her to live a rigorous life of anger and sufferance. The weather outside, when she receives the visit mirrors her feelings. Darkness and bad weather arguably signify death, melancholy and imprisonment. The wind blowing can also be associated with anger and frustration. Darkness in general, is the opposite of the motif of light, which is often associated with spirituality, purity and several other positive meanings. In her meeting with the two sisters, Emily speaks ill of the dead and then stops, blaming herself for doing it while the body of her dead husband was still in their bedroom upstairs. However, what follows next is another good example of the link between the psyche and its surroundings:

‘Thank you’ she said, holding open the hall door. The wind that had been slight and then had got up wasn’t there anymore. The air was fresh and clean. She said she’d be all right. (16)

The wind is not blowing anymore, the air is not cold like before, but fresh and clean. Arguably, this can be seen as a way of describing Emily’s feelings. By opening up to the two women about her failed marriage, the years of psychological terror imposed by a man who was like a stranger to her, the lack of love and his obsession with the horse races, Emily has calmed herself down and can now plead “for the deliverance of the husband who had wronged her for so long (16)”.

Similarly, in some of the stories the characters have striking ideas or moments of insight according to the weather. In “Big Bucks” for instance, Fina “woke up in the middle of

one night feeling afraid. In the dark she knew she didn't love John Michael (189)". Similarly, Nuala seems to struggle with her financial troubles especially at night: "The fresh, cool air was sharp on her face and for a moment, in spite of the trouble, she was happy." (131) However, later on that day the same problem seems to have grown "in the night she had struggled with that." (132)

However, the night is not always associated with negative connotations. This way of using the night as a literary motif prevailed until the 18th century. Until then, the night was associated with death and the devil. Pre-romantic literature considered night as a positive motif since it "encouraged poets in particular to fill the immensity of nocturnal space and its silence with their thoughts, feelings, fantasies, and reveries (Daemmrich 196)". In the following quotation, the use of night (brightened by the stars) as a positive element to represent the joyful feelings of the character in "The Dancing-Master's Music" can be seen:

That February night on the stony hillside track there was frost in the air and the sky was blazing with stars that seemed to Brigid to be a further celebration of the music she'd heard, of beauty and of feeling in herself. (223)

From that day in which the dancing master played wonderful melodies, many years passed, until a time comes in which Brigid is an old woman, close to her death. The cycle of life is reflected in her surroundings as well:

A time came later when the fortunes of the family declined. The trees were felled for timber. Slates blown from the roof were left where they lay. In forgotten rooms cobwebs gathered; doors were closed on must and mildew. (226)

5 Conclusion

William Trevor has often given hints at his own life in his works. People, places, books and art, these are all autobiographical elements that often recur in his writings. If we ought to look for an alter ego of the author in *A Bit on the Side*, this would be the sculptor Corry in "Sacred Statues". Trevor in fact began his working life as a sculptor in Ireland, a Country in which he has always been an outsider. In the story, the priest tells

Corry that he was meant for different times. The same could be said of William Trevor, who is continuously criticised for his “lambent depth, beauty and tenderness” of his writing and above all for those melancholic descriptions of Ireland that make the reader feel like they are watching an old melancholic portrait of the country trapped in a snowball. The risk of neglect, as suggested by Hermione Lee in her book review for *The Guardian*, has become reality, in a society that prefers looking at the future without being faced to the mistakes of the past.

This thesis began with an introduction that states that William Trevor, although a very prolific author, is one of the most underrated authors of his time. As early as 1988 the editor of the *Modern Irish Literature* stated that:

For his labors, [William Trevor] has garnered several literary awards and consistently favorable reviews on both sides of the Atlantic, though thus far he has eluded extensive critical examination. Given the extent of his canon and the encomia of the reviews, however, it seems only a matter of time before he is accorded the kinds of critical attention that will test the work against standards that may be more rigorous than the reviewers.’ (662)

Although it only “seemed matter of time” before this author was prized with more critical attention, the current state of research still shows large gaps in knowledge as far as Trevor’s bibliography is concerned. This is the sign that literary criticism has failed to keep up with Trevor’s production.

The aim of this thesis was to raise critical awareness towards one of the latest collections by William Trevor, *A Bit on the Side*. In the previous chapters, various patterns and interrelationships between the 12 short stories have been found and analysed, focusing on the themes of love, guilt, solitude, failure and emigration.

Part I of the work dealt with several aspects of theory, such as the concepts of short story and slice-of-life short story, themes & motifs, *Irishness* and the criticism of the idea of the Irish cultural heritage. Furthermore, a brief excursus of the oral and written tradition of the Irish short story was given. This section revealed that the 12 short stories in the collection can all be considered realistic slice-of-life stories and that they all contain themes and motifs that constitute part of an Irish cultural heritage that dates back to the ancient Celtic folklore.

Part II analysed the narrative techniques and the style of the short stories. In many of the stories the narrator is a third person omniscient narrator who, non-intrusively, describes settings, locations and situations and also reports the feelings and the thoughts of the characters. "Solitude" represents an exception to this, since Villana constitutes the autodiegetic first person narrator of the story. Her reliability as narrator has been also analysed and has given new hints to interpret the story. The rest of the stories are characterised by a figural narrative situation in which the narrator tells the story through the voice of a focalizer, this increases the sense of intimacy in the stories. As far as the style is concerned, although it can be said that the stories in *A Bit on the Side* are rather slow-paced, the final twist and/or revelation that often comes at the very end manages to keep the attention of the reader high, and most importantly, it definitely gives the reader food for thought.

Part III consisted of a comprehensive thematic analysis of the short stories in the collection. The aim was to consider the stories not limiting the analysis to their degree of *Irishness*, but providing a complete portrayal of the themes and motifs in the stories. William Trevor's oeuvre displays characters who live their lives trapped in a monotonous routine, often alienated from the world. Central to his work is the character of the outsider, a failed man who (often willingly) withdrew from society to pursue a lonely life, often characterised by anger and regrets. Women are often unfortunate characters: their harsh lives lead to their development from passive and flat characters to mature women. They wear the signs of the hardships of life in their faces and bodies, their former beauty has abandoned them, as have the men of their lives. Love is almost always unrequited or ill-fated, it is never romanticised and often does not come at all, leaving the characters wasting their entire lives waiting for it. Religion is also a crucial theme of the collection. A chapter of this thesis has been dedicated to the analysis of the importance of religion in Ireland. Historical events such as the bloody religious conflicts have been considered, the way Protestants and Catholics see each other's communities, as well as the enormous changes that have happened in the country in the last twenty years of the twentieth century. This excursus showed that although religion is facing a deep crisis in contemporary Ireland, people are still very much influenced by it. This causes a powerful struggle inside the individuals who are torn apart between the rigid and rigorous traditions and the liberal

and modern changes. As shown by William Trevor's characters, this struggle can cause serious psychological distress, which can turn into misbehaviour and more in general wrong choices that make everyone suffer. William Trevor masterfully inserts these realistic life stories in real modern life settings: the backstreets of London, the hectic streets of Dublin, the quiet nature around Cork and the beaches of Italy. His settings are strongly linked to his characters. They mirror their feelings and emotions.

In contrast to those critics who claimed that William Trevor belongs to that category of authors who depict a utopic world, portraying stories lost in time and space, this thesis has attempted to argue the opposite. The stories in *A Bit on the Side* reflect many of those changes that have occurred to the Western World in the last decades. The changes in sexual morality, approach to the other sex and the establishment and consolidation of relationships are disseminated throughout the whole collection. This thesis shows how William Trevor still manages to be a public commentator of our time.

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8 Appendix

8.1 The Plots

This chapter will briefly introduce the plot outlines of the twelve short stories for the convenience of the reader of this MA thesis who may not (yet) have read all the stories contained in *A Bit on the Side*.

8.1.1 "Sitting with the Dead"

When her stubborn husband dies, Emily, a Protestant middle-aged woman, receives a visit from the two sisters Kathleen and Norah, who come to give their condolences and try to give Emily some comfort. Much to their surprise, Emily does not mourn the death of her husband: he has been a cold-hearted man, obsessed with horse races. There is no love between the couple and Emily tells the two sisters how her husband has mistreated and terrorised her. When he realises he cannot make a fortune out of his horses, as he has dreamt for so long, he withdraws from society, forcing Emily to a life of solitude and sadness. Although the hostile man is now dead, Emily cannot enjoy her freedom. She seems to be haunted by his ghost and cannot find peace. As Norah points out in the end, when the two sisters leave, Emily seems to be the dead one, not her husband.

8.1.2 "Traditions"

The story takes place in a boarding school for young boys. A group of boys discovers that the birds they have kept secretly in the school are dead. Someone has killed them. The only one who knows who has done it is Olivier, a lonesome student of the school. Although he does not have any evidence to accuse the suspect, he is sure that Bella, the kitchen maid, is behind the incident of the birds. Bella is a middle-aged woman who has been working in the school since she was a young girl herself. Her beauty is famous among the boys, who, in turn, become her lovers. Time passes by and Bella is more and more abandoned by the boys – who often become powerful men with wives – and by her beauty. Aware of the fact that this is not the first incident happening in the

school, Olivier does not want to accuse Bella, on the contrary, he is fascinated by her and dreams of her past beauty. Bella, on the other hand, seems to have noticed the boy and also imagines being together with him, like she has been with many other boys at school. Although the two never talk to each other, their solitude seems to bring them together.

8.1.3 "Justina's Priest"

Justina is a girl with learning difficulties who lives in a small town in the Irish countryside with her sister Maeve, Maeve's husband Micksie and his father Mr Gilfoyle. Justina's life is spent in the quiet town, between visits to the *Today Tonight Shop* and to the church. The latter has a special place in Justina's life: she confesses every morning to Father Clohessy and carries out chores for him in the church. Father Clohessy is particularly attached to the girl, since she is the only one in town who, beside him, cares about the church and God. Their quiet lives seem to be shaken by the arrival of a letter from Dublin by Breda, Justina's childhood friend. Breda is a problematic girl who has left the town to move to Dublin and has adopted a hectic life style. In the letter, Breda asks Justina to come and visit her in Dublin. Justina confesses to Father Clohessy that she has the intention of getting on the bus and visit her friend, thus disobeying her sister Maeve. Father Clohessy is frightened of the idea of Justina leaving the town alone and decides to talk to Maeve to make sure that Justina does not take the bus to Dublin.

8.1.4 "An Evening Out"

Evelyn waits for her date in a theatre bar in London. She is a middle-aged woman with signs of past beauty. She has had a lover, but has refused him because of doubts about him. Since that time, Evelyn has rejected all other men and withdrawn from society. To break her solitude, she seeks companionship through a dating agency. This time she has a date with Jeffrey, a photographer. Jeffrey reveals himself to be a very cynical character: he is not looking for a partner, on the contrary, he only needs someone who can lend him a car and help him financially. Their date is a disaster: Jeffrey gets angry when he discovers that Evelyn does not possess a car and Evelyn feels embarrassed when she is seen in a restaurant with Jeffrey by some of her neighbours. Despite the awkward time

spent together, Evelyn and Jeffrey depart from each other happily. They have both been sincere to each other and not pretended to be interested in a relationship just for the sake of it. They have made use of each other for one night and this has helped them to overcome their monotonous routine for a few hours.

8.1.5 "Graillis's Legacy"

Graillis is a widower who used to manage the local library in town. Many years earlier, he has been a frustrated banker who decided to change his life and follow his literary vocation: against his wife's will he quits his steady job at the bank to become a librarian. In the library, he slowly becomes close to one of the regular customers, and after some time the two start a liaison. In the meantime, Graillis's wife falls victim to a car accident and dies, and Graillis and his lover decide to stop their relationship, since they are attracting the attention of the gossipers of the town. Years later, Graillis's ex-lover dies and the man is shocked to discover that the woman has left him a considerable amount of money in her will. This is for Graillis a big source of concern and embarrassment: taking the legacy would mean the betrayal of his wife again. For this reason, he goes to a lawyer in a nearby town (to avoid raising suspicion) and rejects the woman's legacy.

8.1.6 "Solitude"

"Solitude" opens with the memories of Villana when she is a child. At that time, she and her family live in a big house in London. Her mother has become wealthy thanks to a conspicuous inheritance and her father is working to become a famous Egyptologist. Because of her father's long work-trips to Egypt, her mother begins an affair with another man, who is often to be seen in the house. One day, on the occasion of a party, the child, at the time only seven years of age, pushes the man down the stairs, causing his death. From that moment on, the lives of the family members change radically: they move out of the house in London and start living in hotels throughout Europe, home schooling Villana. The girl grows into a woman who cannot be reconciled with the ghosts of her past. Even after her parents' death, she continues travelling, until she takes up residence

in a small town in Italy, where her parents have met for the first time. There, her only friends are the waiters in the hotel and the invisible friends evoked by her imagination.

8.1.7 "Sacred Statues"

Nuala and Corry are a young married couple who go through a period of severe financial problems. Nuala stays home to take care of their child and is pregnant with the second one. Corry is a skilled sculptor who has specialised in making statues of saints. However, despite his talent, Corry is unemployed. There is a chance of working in the stone yard, but to do so he must first work for one year as an apprentice without any wages to learn the skills needed. Given their bad finances, the couple cannot afford this. Corry visits Mrs Falloway, who has lent them money previously, to ask her for another loan. Unfortunately, Mrs Falloway's finances are not good either and she cannot help Corry. Nuala, in a desperate gesture, tries to sell her soon-to-be-born child to a sterile couple that she knows. The other woman is shocked by the offer and refuses. The last resort for Corry is to take on the job on the streets.

8.1.8 "Rose Wept"

The story takes place in Rose's house, on the occasion of a celebratory dinner with her parents and Mr Bouverie, Rose's tutor. Mr Bouverie has helped Rose for one year, allowing Rose to achieve good results at school. For one year, the girl has spent one hour every week in the tutor's house. During this time, Rose discovers that her tutoring lessons are used by Mrs Bouverie to amuse herself upstairs with her lover. At first, Rose uses the information to spice up her conversations with her school friends. However, during the dinner, Rose feels guilty of having talked about Mr Bouverie's marriage problems and she can clearly see that he is suffering because of his wife's betrayal. She is sure that also on that night during the dinner, Mrs Bouverie is at home with her lover, ready to take advantage from the last occasion the two can be together, since Mr Bouverie has decided to retire from tutoring. At the end of the dinner, Rose bursts into tears, thinking of Mrs Bouverie's betrayal and all the betrayals in the world.

8.1.9 "Big Bucks"

After John Michael's mother's death, John and his girlfriend Fina think they can finally fulfil their dream of leaving the Irish countryside and go to the United States to start a new life. The two reject the idea of working their whole lives in Fina's family's half-and-half or on the farm of John Michael's uncle. The two grow up with the idea of the American Dream, like many other fellow Irish citizens intending to emigrate. They are excited to begin their new life together. John Michael is the first one to leave for the States: the plan is to find a job and then Fina would follow him to get married and live together. Unfortunately, life in the USA is not easy and John Michael cannot find a decent job. Despite Bat Quinn's (a regular of Fina's half-and-half) yarns about the chance of making "big bucks" in America, the couple has to postpone the wedding date, until John Michael has found a better paid job. In the meantime, Fina realises that she is not really in love with John Michael anymore and that she probably never has been. She has been in love with the idea of America, its glamour and its boulevards. For these reasons, Fina breaks the engagement with John Michael in a letter and then on the telephone and decides to go on working in her family's half-and-half in the Irish countryside.

8.1.10 "On the Streets"

In this story, Arthur is a man with an obsessive-compulsive disorder who lives a lonely life on the streets of London. He has been left by Cheryl, his ex-wife, and now follows her wherever she goes. Despite this, Cheryl is not afraid of Arthur, she is aware of his illness. Even though she does not love him, she is too lonely to refuse to have a coffee with him. When the two sit together at the bar, Arthur reveals to Cheryl that he has committed a crime: he has managed to break into a house, has hurt (and probably killed) a woman and grabbed what he has been able to find inside the house. Cheryl does not seem to be shocked by this revelation and leaves the bar, feeling pity for Arthur and even more for herself, having been so lonely and desperate to have married him.

8.1.11 "The Dancing-Master's Music"

Brigit is a young girl who works in the mansion of a rich family near Cork, Ireland. She lives with the rest of the servants and nothing particularly exciting ever happens in her life. Also the great love she dreams of never materialises, and the girl grows old in the mansion, now neglected and decayed. The only important and also unforgettable event that ever happens in her life is the arrival of a dancing master, an Italian music teacher who arrives to the house to teach the girls of the family how to dance properly to classical music. The marvellous music of the master echoes throughout Brigit's life and gives her hope for the rest of her years.

8.1.12 "A Bit on the Side"

In the story that gives the title to the collection, two lovers have to end their illicit relationship because of concerns at what people may think of them. It is the male lover, a married man, who decides to end the love relationship: he cannot bear the thought that he is wasting his lover's life, a middle-aged divorced woman. He knows that he cannot leave his wife, and at the same time he cannot cope with the looks of the people around them, who consider that his mistress is but "his bit on the side". Although he still loves her, the male protagonist cannot escape the rigid moral restraints imposed by the Catholic Irish society and decides to terminate the sinful relationship.

8.2 Concise Biography of William Trevor

William Trevor was born in Mitchelstown, County Cork, in 1928. Due his father's job as a bank manager, he spent his childhood in many different towns in provincial Ireland, where he also attended various schools, some of which were Catholic. He could study under the famous artist and sculptor named Oisín Kelly. His family was Protestant and this has arguably helped Trevor with his later writing: "it began the process of being

an outsider - which I think all writers have to be"²³. After school he attended Dublin's Trinity College, from which he graduated in 1950 with a degree in history.

Thanks to his studies with Kelly, Trevor became a skilled sculptor and his works have been exhibited in several art exhibitions throughout the UK and Ireland. In 1954 he moved to England, a move he is thankful of: „I hated leaving Ireland. I was very bitter at the time. But, had it not happened, I think I might never have written at all." In 1958 his first novel *A Standard Behavior* was published, but it did not receive much critical awareness. In 1960 he abandoned sculpting because he felt that his work had become too abstract and took a copywriting job in an advertising agency in London, a job which brought him closer to writing.

In 1964 and 1965 two collections of his short stories were published: *The Old Boys* and *The Boarding House*. Both of them won the Hawthornden Prize for Literature. After his initial success, Trevor was able to leave his job in the agency and dedicate himself fully to the writing of fiction. Since then, William Trevor's works have won several prizes. Among his best known books are: *Mrs. Eckdorf in O'Neill's Hotel* (1970), *The Children of Dynmouth* (1976), *Fools of Fortune* (198); *Two Lives* (1991); *The Collected Stories* (1992); *Felicia's Journey* (1994) (which was made into a motion picture); *After Rain* (1996) and *Death in Summer* (1998). He is known to the greater public thanks to his novel *The Story of Lucy Gault* (2002), which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. Furthermore, several of his stories have appeared in *The New Yorker* and other influential magazines. In 1977, William Trevor was awarded with the prestigious award of Honorary Commander of the British Empire for his services to literature. His most recent collections of short stories are *A Bit on the Side* (2004) and *Cheating at Canasta* (2007). He currently lives with his wife in Devon, England.

²³ <http://www.foliosociety.com/author/william-trevor> web 27.05.2016.

9 Abstract in English

William Trevor is arguably one of the best short stories writers in contemporary Irish literature. However, he is paradoxically also one of the most underrated authors of his time. *A Bit on the Side*, a collection of twelve short stories published in 2004, has been named one of the best books of its year. However, since then there has been hardly any critical response to this brilliant collection. This thesis aims at providing a critical assessment of the individual narratives and William Trevor's gorgeous writing skills. In particular, the thesis will focus on the major themes addressed in the twelve short stories: melancholy, unrequited love, difficult lives, tenderness in old married couples, misery, suffering and solitude in provincial Ireland. Although all these topics inevitably reflect also aspects of Irishness, Trevor does not easily fall into any classification, and this is probably the reason why his fiction has often been neglected by critics. Some scholars have even accused him of writing about an imaginary Ireland. The analysis of *A Bit on the Side* undertaken in this thesis will try to revise received critical opinion and demonstrate that Trevor's characters are often entrapped between tradition and modern urban life in Ireland and that these stories also address up-to-date themes such as adoption or online dating. Thus it will be shown that Trevor is not one of those nostalgic writers who only write about the past, but that he has remained very sensitive about the ongoing changes in Irish life and Irish society up to the 21st century.

10 Abstract in German

Diese Masterarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der thematischen Analyse von der Sammlung von Erzählungen *A Bit on the Side* (2004) des irischen Schriftstellers William Trevor. Obwohl Trevors Sammlung als eins der besten Bücher des Jahres 2004 ausgezeichnet wurde, gab

es seitdem kaum kritische Anerkennung. Deswegen ist das Ziel dieser Arbeit kritisches Bewusstsein für die Sammlung zu schärfen. Die Arbeit gliedert sich in vier Teile. Der erste Teil widmet sich der terminologischen Klärung und Geschichte der irischen Erzählungen. Dann werden technische Aspekte der Narratologie sowie der Stil des Schreibens analysiert. Im vierten Teil werden die wichtigsten Themen und Motive der Kollektion diskutiert wie Einsamkeit, Liebe und Ehebruch, Leiden, schwieriges Leben, Misserfolg, und Auswanderung.