

**An Examination of Female Characterisation in a Selection of the
Novels and Short Stories of William Trevor through the Lens of
Simone de Beauvoir**

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Ph.D. Thesis

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Submitted to Mary Immaculate College: _____

Abstract

This thesis aims to examine female characterisation in a selection of William Trevor's novels and short stories. The core argument in this thesis will be to demonstrate that Trevor, in his portrayal of women, presents a profoundly ethical dimension to his readers. A broad spectrum of his female characters, from a variety of narratives that span a period of nearly fifty years, will be analysed in order to demonstrate that Trevor, in his portrayal of women, conveys an enormous respect and understanding of how their lives are shaped.

To substantiate the ethical dimension in Trevor's fiction, the theoretical lens of Simone de Beauvoir will be employed. Trevor's claim that the two things that really interest him are life and people finds endless correlations in existential philosophy; a philosophy that is concerned primarily with the concept of what it is to exist in the world and with how to live a meaningful life. This thesis will offer a fecund examination of the lives of female characters that will reveal the implications of de Beauvoir's intensive examination of women's lives and will demonstrate the capability of Trevor to grasp the divergence of the female experience from the male experience.

Throughout the thesis, the breadth of Trevor's writerly curiosity will emerge repeatedly through endlessly diverse stories that transport the reader into an array of different fictional worlds. His narrative mastery facilitates compelling characters, situations and themes that demand engagement and reflection.

Declaration of Originality

Declaration: I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and does not contain the work of any other individual. All sources that have been consulted have been identified and acknowledged in the appropriate way.

Signature of Candidate:

Anne Nash

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank most sincerely my two Supervisors, Dr Eugene O'Brien and Dr Kathryn Laing for all the support, encouragement and time they have afforded me over the past number of years. Their edifying comments and suggestions have enhanced every part of this thesis, and for this, I am extremely grateful. I would like to thank my fellow Ph.D. colleagues that I have met along the way for their unstinting support and understanding. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support and encouragement throughout this process.

Dedication

For my parents, Eithne and Gerry Donlon, with love and gratitude

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Epigraph

‘Certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist. With respect to certain elements of human life, the terms of ordinary speech, or of abstract theoretical discourse, are blind, acute where they are obtuse, winged where they are dull and heavy’ (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 5).

Introduction

I write out of curiosity more than anything else. That's why I write about women, because I'm not a woman and I don't know what it's like. The excitement of it is to know more about something that I'm not and can't be. (Ni Anlaurin 2008, p. 248)

The main focus of this dissertation is an examination of female characterisation in a selection of novels and short stories in the fiction of William Trevor, through the lens of the writing and thought of Simone de Beauvoir. Trevor's oeuvre is prolific; to date he has produced fifteen novels, three novellas and eleven volumes of short stories, as well as plays, radio and television adaptations, film screenplays, a work of children's fiction and two non-fiction books. This immense canon demands a particular focus, and therefore I have chosen to concentrate on Trevor's treatment of, and attention to, his female characters. His remarkable insightfulness as a writer, and his endeavours to depict the 'other', are revealed throughout his work, I will argue, through the prominence he gives to his female characters. In this thesis, I will focus on a broad spectrum of some of his female characters from a variety of narratives that span a time-period of nearly fifty years, in order to demonstrate that Trevor, in his representation of women, conveys an enormous respect and understanding of how their lives are shaped. It will be argued that Trevor's own moral and ethical aesthetic is at its most evident in his exploration of the female consciousness, thus giving expression to female subjectivity, in all its forms.

Given the sheer volume of texts in the Trevor canon, this thesis necessarily has to be selective in terms of the texts studied. I will outline what stories and novels are studied at the end of this introduction. The selection criteria were predicated on choosing texts that highlight female characters, and more especially, that highlight the ethical and existential dilemmas of those female characters. I must admit that there are other texts that I would like to have included but for reasons of time, space and word count, was unable to do so. A less thematic but nonetheless germane reason for the choice of the texts that will be studied is that, on an aesthetic level, they spoke to me as a reader, and the women depicted in them assumed a reality for me as a reader. Trevor's texts, mainly from the 1970s and 1980s, dominate this thesis with one or two exceptions; Trevor's first recognised novel, *The Old Boys*, written in the mid-sixties, anticipates his continuing interest in the female perspective and remains consistent through to his last major publication, *Love in Summer*, in 2009.¹ To a great degree, the decision to choose the novel *Elizabeth Alone* as a signal point in the development of Trevor's *oeuvre*, dictated an almost chronological selection of female characters from in the rest of the thesis. The one exception to this is the analysis of a short story in the final chapter of this thesis, a story that appears in Trevor's last collection of short stories was published in 2007. The criteria for the choice of texts for this chapter dictated the reason for choosing this story and demonstrate his enduring engagement with young women, middle-aged women and elderly women.² Studying about these women was both an academic task, driven by my research question, but also an aesthetic pleasure.

This attention to female characterisation in this thesis, inaugurates a new addition to existing Trevor studies. This singular focus will highlight the scope of Trevor's capability to

¹ The short story, 'The Women', was published in *The New Yorker* on January 14, 2013.

² Trevor's short story, 'The Ballroom of Romance' is not discussed in this thesis. It is one of his most iconic stories and has received much critical attention. It highlights Trevor's ability to deeply engage with the compromised life of a thirty-six-year old Irish woman trapped by social hegemonies. For an enlightening and impressive analysis of this story, Tina O'Toole's essay, 'The Ballroom of Romance' is worth reading in *William Trevor Revaluations* (Delaney and Parker, 2013, p. 95-109).

articulate female consciousness that engages the reader in an array of stories that highlight a myriad of different lived-lives, in which happiness is never ubiquitous; in which tragedies occur; and yet somehow, in which people find the resilience to survive it all. I will further argue that Trevor, in his portrayal of women, and indeed in that of all of his characters, presents a profound ethical perspective to his readers. He has a chameleon-like ability to take on the colouration of people far removed from his own experience, and this is never more apparent than in his representation of women. This thesis will explore a diverse range of female characters, ranging in ages from young girls to middle-aged and elderly women, all inhabiting a miscellany of existences.

Trevor's desire to present the lives of his female characters is never more apparent than in his novel, *Elizabeth Alone* (1973), in which he audaciously sets his story in a gynaecological ward of a London hospital, wherein four very different women meet for specifically female medical procedures. Trevor offers a mosaic of the individual lives of these women that demonstrates how they have been constructed both socially and culturally. He evokes and exposes the countless injustices and biases that structure the lives of these female characters. He is acutely aware of the psychological implications of patriarchy and willingly exposes it at every opportunity. An in-depth analysis of this novel in Chapter Two, initiates the first full-length study of female characterisation, and will reveal Trevor's frank engagement with female existence throughout this thesis.

Despite the immense diversity within Trevor's fiction, there exists a consistent engagement with existentialist themes that explores the nature of existence, and the problems inherent in existence. This engagement is encapsulated in an observation he made in an interview for *The New Yorker* in 1977 when he said:

I don't believe in the black and white; I believe in the grey shadows and the murkiness: in the fact that you shouldn't say 'old spinster' or 'dirty old man'. In a way, I suppose, I writer to prove that theory. (Cited in *The Guardian* 2009 by Tim Adams)

His narratives display his remarkable talent for depicting the inner lives of his characters by giving them their own perspectives, and their own validity. No matter how reprehensible a character may be, Trevor, nevertheless presents their facticity, the intractable conditions of human existence, which shaped them. Critics have invariably commented on the ambiguity that surfaces in his narratives, and how there is rarely a hint of a judgemental stance or authorial judgement offered, or of blame apportioned. John Banville argues that ambiguity is the main characteristic of Trevor's writing: 'the way in which it so expertly and cunningly avoids any hint of the judgemental' (*The New York Review of Books* 1999, pp. 29-31). These aspects of Trevor's own understanding of the difficulties and intricacies that define existence; his sagacious refrain to judge; and his ability as a writer to temporarily suspend the reader's own response, created the need for a theoretical framework that would enhance an approach to reading his narratives.

Reading Trevor's narratives creates a hesitation that causes us to reflect and ponder, and this then generates an ethical dimension wherein an openness to hear the voice of the other within a social context is produced. In his narratives, Trevor gives us many instances of individual experiences of injustice and general injustice; of conflicts between personal duty and social duty; and of individual responsibility and public responsibility and between singular morality and general morality. Without knowing it, the reader becomes enmeshed in ethical thinking, albeit an ethics grounded in conflict amid a sea of suffering and desires in human relationships. This thesis will contend that Trevor's literary form corresponds to a philosophical tradition that concerns itself with the contribution of form to ethical thought. The ethical component of this thesis corresponds to the so-called ethical turn in literary criticism that attends more to the 'ethical rather than the socio-political facets of the work'

whilst not denying Trevor's cognisance and attentiveness to considerations of historical legacies, patriarchy and religion.³

The words 'ambiguity', 'existence', 'freedom', 'limitations', 'authenticity' and many others, together with the concept of 'otherness' and how women's lives have been defined by it, are central to the philosophical and literary deliberations of Simone de Beauvoir. The French writer, philosopher and feminist, articulated a philosophy of existentialist ethics that sought to embrace and understand the individual as a fundamentally ambiguous being.⁴ Her existential ethics clearly recognises the freedom of others, and it is this that makes it applicable to social and political situations. Her definition of the female as 'other' in *The Second Sex* (1949) radically changed how women understand themselves, their relationships, and the social implications and expectations of their gender. De Beauvoir's intense engagement with literature in particular, both as an author of fiction and philosophical texts, add an extra dimension to an analysis of Trevor's fiction. Her five novels allow her to explore and recount the struggles of individuals trapped in ambiguous social and personal relationships and are replete with the themes of freedom, responsibility and ambiguity. Similarly, Trevor recognises that his writer's imagination lends itself well to the artistic medium of fiction to explore his existentialist concerns, and this thesis will use her work as a lens through which to explore Trevor's ideas on the role and representation of women.

De Beauvoir's examination of women's lives and their inherent limitations is paralleled in Trevor's narratives in his enlightened, keen-sighted expositions of the realities of the constraints in the lives of his female characters. Her personal experience of living through World War Two led to her acknowledgement of the complexities of individual lived realities, and to how difficult the quest for certainty could be amongst the multiplicity,

³ For a fuller discussion on a change of focus from a socio-political reading of a text to an ethical reading, look at Heidi Hansson's chapter 'Character, community and critical nostalgia: *Love and Summer*' in *William Trevor: Revaluations* (2013), p. 198-210.

⁴ In Chapter One, the concept of ambiguity will be discussed more fully in relation to the movement known as Existentialism.

diversity, and contingency of human positions and purposes. Her lifelong engagement with the ethical parameters of the self-other relation, and her belief in the value of the recognition of the necessity of, and indebtedness to the Other, offers a perspective on feminism and ethics which lends itself to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Trevor's narratives. De Beauvoir's ethical perspective also led her to focus on the question of old age, and interestingly, Trevor too, engages with this topic and has done so from the beginning of his writing career. These intellectual and ethical connections that arise between these two writers, will be explored in greater depth in the following chapters. It will be argued that de Beauvoir's intellectual deliberations offer the perfect lens through which to analyse Trevor's existentialist narratives. A consideration of existentialism, and de Beauvoir's part in this philosophical movement, and its relevance to this thesis, will be comprehensively examined in the first chapter.

Trevor has remained strangely neglected by academia and literary critics, despite the international recognition of his work. This neglect may be due to the difficulties of categorising his work: he writes with ease about Catholics, Protestants, Big House culture, the divided populace of Northern Ireland, 'the Troubles', and rural southern Ireland, England and Europe. He also writes across a comparatively broad time-period, from the historical novels set in the 19th century up to his last publication in 2009. In fact, Trevor's literary reputation is generally undervalued, and one of the aims of this thesis is to contribute further to a now growing body of criticism that is beginning to challenge this undervaluation. To date, seven book length studies of his work have been published along with numerous academic essays. They include Gregory Schirmer's *William Trevor: A Study of His Fiction* (1990), Kristin Morrison's *William Trevor* (1993), Suzanne Morrow Paulson's *William Trevor: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1993), Dolores MacKenna's *William Trevor: The Writer and His Work* (1999), Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt's *William Trevor: Re-imagining Ireland*

(2003), and Hugh Ormsby-Lennon's *Fools of Fiction: Reading William Trevor's Stories* (2005). The most recent publication is *William Trevor: Revaluations* (2013), edited by Paul Delaney and Michael Parker. This very current publication mandates a re-appraisal of Trevor's distinguished reputation, and draws on the talents of a team of eminent, international scholars, to offer a comprehensive examination from a variety of perspectives that will bring it the critical attention it so clearly deserves. Similarly, this thesis will seek to enhance Trevor's reputation through focusing exclusively on his female portraiture, a portrayal that is endlessly diverse and complex. A brief look at what Trevor himself discloses about how he writes, as well as what critics and reviewers have been saying about him, will reveal and illuminate his concerns surrounding modern life. This résumé will serve to intensify the depth of his interest in the human condition and his significant interest in women's lives.⁵

Trevor has been accused by some of being a pessimistic writer with a bleak outlook on life but he refutes the notion that he is a melancholic:

I don't think you can write fiction unless you know something about happiness, melancholy – almost everything which human nature touches...I doubt that an overwhelmingly jolly, optimistic person has ever been an artist of any sort. (Stout 1989, p. 26)

Trevor's innate knowledge of the foibles of human nature, combined with his deep curiosity regarding experiences outside his own sphere, emphasise his suitability as a creator of ethically charged texts. In an interview with Morrow-Paulson, he reiterates the importance of curiosity to him as a writer, when the interviewer comments on his ability 'to write from the perspective of a young girl's initiation into womanhood, a barren wife, or from the perspective of an old woman worried about senility as in 'Broken Homes':

I think there are women like that everywhere. I write about women because I'm not a woman. I write about girls because I'm not a girl. The relationship between a boy and his

⁵ The term 'the human condition' relates fundamentally to issues of human existence. Literature offers the perfect receptacle for thematic concerns about human nature, human society and how we live our lives. It is a loose term describing the many and various human reactions to circumstances.

father doesn't fascinate me in the same way; I know too much about it. I was a boy who had a father. But at the same time, all fiction is rooted in autobiographical experience: the fiction writer is like a piece of litmus paper. He or she experiences pain, or distress, and that personal experience is his yardstick. I can't really know what another person's physical pain is, so I have to use my own. (Morrow- Paulson 1993, p. 117)

In an interview with Mira Stout, Trevor reflects on the part that time plays in his fiction, and on the importance of the past in his character's lives: he views time as both a destroyer and a preserver. In his thinking, it both heals and destroys, depending on the nature of the wound; it actually reveals the character. There is either bitterness or recovery:

Neither can take place without time. Time is most interesting thing to write about besides people – everything I write about has to do with it. Time is like air: it is there always, changing people and forming character. Memory also forms character – the way you remember things makes you who you are. People struggle to share a very private side of themselves with other people. It is that great difficulty that I often write about. (Stout 1989, pp. 17-18)

When asked about his ability to 'get inside such a varied cast of characters, regardless of their age, sex, or background', and how it seems somewhat 'diabolical' in how he enters 'these characters' thoughts', he responds: 'well, it does seem to me that the only way you can get there is through observation. I don't think there is any other route....it's just a very hard-working imagination' (Stout 1989, p. 22). These personal insights combine with numerous insights from various critics, and serve to intensify and illustrate the depth of respect and admiration that exists towards Trevor as a writer, from other writers.⁶

Solotaroff in a review of Trevor's *Beyond The Pale and Other Stories*, suggests that his skill lies in his ability 'to reach us at a deeper level than our assent', and quotes V.S. Pritchett as saying 'that nothing closes us off more from the world than a correct opinion

⁶ Delaney and Parker in their Introduction in *William Trevor: Revaluations* (2013) explain the contradictions around Trevor's reputation: '...he is that rare thing: a 'writer's writer', acclaimed by reviewers, and loved by generations of readers. Yet despite this distinguished reputation, his work has not received the critical attention it clearly deserves' (p. 1).

about it' (*New York Times* 1982, pp. 27-31). He claims that Trevor's realism gives 'the sense of gazing down through the lucid surface of a personality to the dark, ambiguous activity of the soul', and that herein lies the essence of Trevor's moral vision (*New York Times* 1982). Schirmer alludes to the sheer scope of the breadth and complexity of Trevor's moral vision across an enormous array of narratives, and believes that like his modernist fiction writing counterparts, Trevor always seeks to juxtapose and affirm 'the need for compassion and connection in contemporary society' with a 'qualifying recognition of the full strength of the forces ranged against those values' (Schirmer 1990, p. 2). Hansson argues that Trevor's fiction should be read, not just from a socio-political perspective, but also for its recognition of the 'importance of character depth and individuality', and that it is this perspective that lends his work an ethical dimension (Hansson 2013, p. 200). She applauds Trevor's ability to create characters who are 'seen from the inside', thus emphasising the importance of the individual (Hansson 2013, p. 200). It is clear that Trevor places the individual securely at the centre of his work as the origin and focus of meaning, distinguished from history, politics and society. Yet he does not deny the impact of history as well as society and culture in the formation of individual identity and subjectivity, but denies that such factors may be used to justify wilful irresponsibility or deliberate evasion of one's moral obligations.

Elmer Kennedy-Andrews suggests that Trevor, though writing in a classic liberal humanist fashion, does not fall into the trap of liberal humanism's 'so-called "universal values"', that may be tainted by the hegemonic control of particular social groups' (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 56). Instead, he views Trevor as having:

a powerful bias towards the individual, the concrete and specific destabilises fixed or preconceived notions of truth. There will be no 'messages', political or otherwise, because he refused to be the mouthpiece of any particular cause or class, and he is deeply suspicious of ideological abstractions, 'the big reasons'. Rather, his fiction calls for sensitivity to

particularity, nuance and ambiguity, a capacity to entertain imaginatively a variety of viewpoints and to exercise a balanced discrimination. (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 56)

Before taking a look at how Trevor achieves these effects through particular narrative strategies, a chronological consideration of what he has written will serve to demonstrate the breadth of his fictional output. This will help to reiterate the argument that his novels feature a persistent and relentless exploration of the human condition.

Trevor begins his writing career somewhere in the mid-fifties with the publication of his first novel, *A Standard of Behaviour* (1958), but it is with his second novel, *The Old Boys* (1964), that critics believe that he begins to find his unique voice. This novel centres round a group of old boys, from an English public school, all now in their seventies. Trevor wrote this novel when he was in his mid-thirties, and indicates his reasons for doing so in an interview with Stephen Schiff in *The New Yorker*, where he says:

When I first began to write, I wrote about the elderly, because I was not old. I really wanted to find out what it felt like to walk across a room when you were eighty-three, and where it hurt, and everything else (*The New Yorker* 1992)

His next novel, *The Boarding-House* (1965), manifests an expansion in his exploration of people and situations in circumstances far removed from his own experiences. His fourth novel, *The Love Department* (1966), begins an interest in writing about love and marriage that will feature throughout his fiction. Schirmer argues that for Trevor:

love and marriage are important barometers of human behaviour, and his view of contemporary society as characterised by alienation and disconnection finds no more powerful objective correlative throughout his work than that of broken marriage and failed love. (Schirmer 1990, p. 6)

Trevor's next three novels, *Mrs Eckdorf in O'Neill's Hotel* (1969), *Miss Gomez and the Brethern* (1971), and *Elizabeth Alone* (1973), are all written primarily from a woman's point of view, and are principally concerned with love and marriage. These early and middle

novels all compellingly contain the nucleus of Trevor's formidable ethical challenge to his readers. His willingness to *inhabit* the Other, especially woman as Other and elderly people as Other, become apparent in these novels. With the publication of *The Children of Dymmouth* (1976) and *Other People's Worlds* (1980), Trevor, once again, goes outside of his own experience and writes about dysfunctional teenagers, a delusional, alcoholic mother, and a dangerous, sociopath. Schirmer has argued these two novels powerfully display Trevor's ability to engage with social realism and to 'convey a coherent moral vision of contemporary man' (Schirmer 1990, p. 64). With the publication of *Fools of Fortune* (1983), Trevor writes his first full-length novel that deals directly with the political history of Ireland. From the early seventies, Trevor began to shift his focus from writing mainly about English life, to focusing on The Troubles in Northern Ireland and to the effects of colonisation on the island of Ireland as a whole. Though ostensibly a historicised Big House novel, *Fools of Fortune* contains all the nuclei of Trevor's complex moral vision, as he challenges the reader to engage in a critique of violence perpetrated in the name of political ideologies, and carried from generation to generation.

Michael O'Neill, in his essay 'Moments and subtleties and shadows of grey': reflections on the narrative mode of *Fools of Fortune*', argues that Trevor's own 'art of the glimpse' 'is superbly in evidence throughout *Fools of Fortune*, a novel that "deals in moments and subtleties and shadows of grey", as it addresses large questions of choice and chance, violence and repression, and the longing for goodness, freedom and love' (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 123). Trevor's two other novels in the Big House genre, *The Silence in the Garden* (1988) and *The Story of Lucy Gault* (2002), both deal with the effects of colonialism in Ireland and demonstrate his concerns with how the political threatens the freedom, creativity and tolerance of the individual. Kennedy-Andrews suggests that Trevor's Protestant Irish background together with him now having lived most of his life in England,

allows him to write ‘paradoxically as both insider and outsider’ and that ‘his liminality has proved imaginatively beneficial’ with ‘his simultaneous understanding of Irish tradition and distance from it allows for an open, non-exclusivist, clear-eyed attitude unburdened by obligation to tribe or place or past’ (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 57). The novella *Nights at the Alexandra* (1987), maintains Trevor’s abiding interest in such things as memory and impending mortality, and underscores the power of his imagination to enter the head of a fifteen-year old boy, a beautiful, glamorous English woman and her much older German husband, and to journey with all of them to the point where the boy is now a fifty-eight year old man.

Continuing with the theme of memory and the imagination, Trevor published jointly a volume, *Two Lives* (1991), which comprises two novels, *Reading Turgenev* and *My House in Umbria*. Both novels have female protagonists, and though inhabiting very different worlds, nevertheless demonstrate Trevor’s breadth of imagination in rendering the lives of two very different women, one in 1950s Ireland and one in 1980’s Italy. In spite of horrendous events in both novels, their primary focus is on fate, and on how these two women survive their individual fates. This powerful belief in the ability of the human capacity to survive is echoed again in *Felicia’s Journey* (1994), in the character of Felicia who, against all the odds, survives her ordeal. Michael Parker in his essay ‘The Power of Withholding: Politics, Gender and Narrative Technique in *Felicia’s Journey*’, denies that *Felicia’s Journey* is primarily concerned with a postcolonial perspective, and instead argues ‘that this novel transcends such simplistic paradigms and embraces a much broader picture of humanity and inhumanity’ (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 146). Ellen McWilliams argues that *Felicia’s Journey* is one of Trevor’s:

most significant explorations of the injustice that women in Irish society have been made to suffer as the novel goes to particular lengths to highlight the social and cultural conditions that entrap the main character. (McWilliams 2013, p. 129)

Interestingly, she alludes to de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* with its likening of work in the home to the trials of Sisyphus, and sees Trevor's description of Felicia's entrapment within her family, as emulating this (McWilliams 2013, p. 130).

Death in Summer (1998), sees Trevor once again examining the question of evil perpetrated against children as he did in *Other People's Worlds* and *The Children of Dynmouth*. In fact, all of his novels contain elements of parents who through varying degrees of carelessness endanger the lives of their children both emotionally and physically. *Death in Summer*, though visiting the darker facets of human nature, also facilitates the belief that goodness can triumph even in the midst of evil. *Love and Summer* (2009), is Trevor's last full-length novel. It is set in the small Irish town of Rathmoye where life is depicted by Trevor as an intermingling of daily trivialities and emotional turbulences. It is a novel less about the effects of ideological substructures, and more about the representation of the psychological and emotional concerns between characters, whose individual experiences and choices cause them to behave in certain ways. Sebastian Barry describes the novel as being 'not about freedom from self, but the necessity to bring the self to the place where it can go free' (cited in *The Guardian* 2009 by Tim Adams). Despite the immense diversity within Trevor's novels, evident in this brief summary of the fiction and its critical responses, fundamentally they all engage with existentialist themes, exploring the nature of existence.

Dolores MacKenna considers how Trevor manoeuvres his characters throughout his fiction to 'draw strength from each other' and how they 'find an answer to their existentialist questions' (MacKenna 1999, p. 103). Heidi Hannsson suggests that his fiction is 'mood driven rather than plot-driven', and that it might be more fruitful to explore his works as aesthetic, emotional and ethically charged constructs (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 10). Another dimension to Trevor's breadth as a writer is the recognition of his willingness to write about black people in England in the 1950s and 1960s. C L Innes in an essay

‘Compassion thrown to the winds’: William Trevor and Postcolonial London’, notes that ‘nearly all of William Trevor’s fiction set in England acknowledges the diversity of race and culture in post-war Britain’, as is only one of two writers during this period who acknowledge and welcome the presence of black people (Delaney and Parker 2013, pp. 43-44). She acclaims his ability ‘to portray “outsiders” who are vulnerable because of gender or race or disfigurement, victims of personal and national histories, people whose vulnerability contributed to their becoming either exploiters or exploited’ (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 45). An overview of his short fiction will develop and heighten Trevor’s appeal as a writer with exceptional insight into the human condition.

Trevor’s first collection of short stories, *The Day We Got Drunk on Cake* (1967), began an intense engagement with the form of the short story, and one that has earned Trevor unstinting praise across a timespan fifty years. *The Ballroom of Romance* (1972), *Angels at the Ritz* (1975), *Lovers of Their Time* (1978), *Beyond the Pale* (1981), *The News from Ireland* (1986), *Family Sins* (1990), *After Rain* (1996), *The Hill Bachelors* (2000), *A Bit on the Side* (2004) and *Cheating at Canasta* (2007) all offer a wealth of diverging places and situations enmeshed in Trevor’s characteristically nuanced perspectives that refuses a straightforward analysis. Trevor has shared his thoughts on the writing process involved in the creation of the short story. In his *Paris Review* interview in 1989, he deems the short story to be ‘the art of the glimpse’, and that it ‘should be an explosion of truth. Its strength lies in what it leaves out just as much as what it puts in, if not more’ (*Paris Review* 1989). Paul Delaney considers the italicisation of the word ‘should’ in this interview and judges it to connote that Trevor firmly leaves interpretation to the judgement of the reader who may or may not reach a ‘heightened understanding’ of the intended ‘point’ of the story (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 181). Solotaroff applauds Trevor’s ability to ‘welcome the homely, the banal, the meagre life that writers of Trevor’s sophistication tend to pass by’, and also applauds his genius that

allows him 'to get the surface details and tonalities just right' and how this 'involves a perfect eye and ear and an exceptional degree of empathy: the ability, as Auden put it, to 'be just with the just, filthy with the filthy too' (*The New York Times* 1982).

Trevor's short stories, for the most part, offer a darker vision of life. These stories have, by the very nature of their compression, an intensity and complexity that almost always confirms the alienation and disconnection characters experience in their lives. The redeeming feature, in many of them, is Trevor's use of the comedic and his specific use of comedy is Beckettian in its profundity. It can be argued that Trevor and Beckett both employ tragicomedy to allow their readers to laugh at their characters' foibles; however, it is not the laughter of derision, but the *diabolic* laughter that laughs about human unhappiness, 'the laugh about the highest joke of it all: that ultimately there is no discernible purpose behind human existence' (Calder 1986, p. 16). Schirmer concedes that Trevor, like Frank O'Connor, employs the short story as the perfect vehicle in which to expose the alienation of the twentieth century, and quotes O'Connor who once said that the short story, at its most characteristic, has in it 'something not often found in the novel – an intense awareness of human loneliness' (Schirmer 1990, p. 121).

Trevor's short stories offer innumerable encounters with the themes of alienation, loneliness, evil, oppression, sexual deviancy, guilt, vulnerability, indifference and all the vicissitudes that pertain to existence, but by setting them out, he is invariably seeking to salvage some sort of equilibrium in an abrasive world of chance and change. Ultimately, he is trying to fathom the great conundrum that is life, whilst at the same time offering his readers an opportunity to partake in this exploration with him, one that will initiate a reflective response in their moral imagination. An examination of his narrative technique, and what the different critics have said about it, will deepen the belief that Trevor is above all, a supremely ethical writer who forces the reader to engage in ethical reflection.

In one sense, Trevor is no different to any other author and logically speaking, all authors are omniscient in that each author writes the story. However, as Mullan argues, ‘but not all narrators are omniscient’ and this will become apparent when his narrative technique is explored (Mullan 2008, p. 64). Hugh Ormsby-Lennon believes that Trevor’s most significant achievement as a writer is his ability to allow his characters to tell their own stories: ‘his primary means of achieving this objective – except when he chooses to write in the first person as an unreliable narrator – is the literary device of “free indirect style” or “narrated monologue”’ (Ormsby-Lennon 2005, p. xii). This is reiterated by Michael Parker who deems Trevor’s narrative technique masterly in how he:

selects his diction; creates settings; presents, pairs and contrasts characters; shifts the viewpoint, giving access to the character’s conscious and unconscious thoughts; deploys imagery and irony; manages discontinuities in plot structure by means of flashbacks, and through acts of withholding, generates suspense and shock. (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 146)

Schirmer credits the modernist and post-modernist departure from conventional fiction with their attendant mistrust of narrative omniscience as being central to Trevor’s narrative technique (Schirmer 1990, p. 9). He judges ‘the use of multiple centres of consciousness’ as the most salient of these techniques, and one that results in ‘a mosaic of different points of view, relying heavily on juxtaposition and parallelism’ (Schirmer 1990, p. 9). Schirmer considers the influence of modernist writers like Conrad, Woolf, James, and Joyce ‘for whom limited points of view embodied in formal terms a philosophical scepticism’, and argues that Trevor’s use of multiple centres of consciousness allows him ‘to shift back and forth between an interior view of a character and various exterior views, and therefore to negotiate between sympathy and irony, intimacy and distance, and, in larger terms, affirmation and qualification’ (Schirmer 1990, p. 9).

Anna Snaith captures the essence of the use of free indirect discourse as a narrative strategy when she explores Virginia Woolf's use of this technique, and concludes that it allows her to combine or separate 'her textual voices' and 'rather than relinquishing either authority or subjectivity, free indirect discourse allows Woolf to combine and move between the two' (Snaith 2000, p. 64). Snaith illuminatingly discloses the element of ambiguity that arises from free indirect discourse and its inherent hesitation 'in order to decipher whose mind has been entered', and she contends that free indirect discourse allows the narrator to 'move the focus swiftly and smoothly from voice to voice' (Snaith 2000, p. 71). She argues that 'this shifting of perspective allows Woolf to undercut the dominance of the narrator without replacing it by what she saw as the tyranny of the first person monologue' (Snaith 2000, p. 71).

Similarly, Trevor utilises this narrative strategy to deny and deflect omniscient narration, as well as surreptitiously creating indeterminacy, which then creates ambiguity. Delaney discusses the elements of uncertainty and ambiguity that arise in Trevor's narratives, and argues that 'free indirect speech allows the third-person narrative to bleed intermittently into the idiom of the characters represented' (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 183). An example of free indirect discourse in *Elizabeth Alone* allows access to Elizabeth's innermost thoughts, thoughts that will remain unspoken:

dwelling now on her past, with its friends and incidents and the beginnings of this and that, Elizabeth could make little sense of her life as so far it had been. She saw mistakes, mainly, made by herself. She saw her life as something that was scattered untidily about, without a pattern, without rhyme or reason. (Trevor 1973, pp. 8-9)

This intimate access to Elizabeth's thoughts reveals her despondency about her life, and indicates that she is suffering some sort of mental aberration. John Mullan, in his book, *How Novels Work* (2008), argues that Trevor's employment of free indirect discourse or free indirect style is used 'with considerable subtlety', and that 'free indirect style gets us

immediately close to Trevor's characters while keeping their deepest thoughts or fears unspoken. It is a means of concealment as much as disclosure' (Mullan 2008, p. 77). Reading Trevor's fiction, one tends to forget authorial presence and instead, one enters a communal space that seems entirely made up of characters' points of view, both of themselves and of others. Mullan succinctly captures this when he contends that:

a novel can marry the narrator's superior knowledge to the characters' distinctive viewpoint: free indirect speech. This new yet mysterious development in the history of choice between, on the one hand, knowing everything, while seeing their characters from outside, and, on the other hand, letting us inhabit their character's minds, while knowing events only as partially as they do. (Mullan 2008, p. 44)

Another distinctive narrative strategy that Trevor employs is also worth a brief mention. Throughout his fiction, Trevor comically employs names and naming that warrant a smile, or suggests the feeling of suitability, to a particular character or place. These names are never really foregrounded, but they do have a subliminal effect on the reading process and on the creation of the atmosphere of the story. Examples of these will appear throughout this thesis such as the ironic use of Paradise Lounge in the short story, 'The Paradise Lounge', with its connotations of cheerlessness and boredom, as well as a suggestion of Paradise Lost, with all the associations of a happiness that was nearly achieved, but ultimately lost. Mr Featherson in *The Children of Dynmouth*, who is deliberately called 'Mr Feather' by the fifteen-year-old protagonist, and the implied suggestion is that he may indeed be a 'lightweight'.⁷ Trevor's deployment of literary allusions to the type of literature that his female characters read is visible in some of the narratives throughout this thesis.⁸ Finally, an outline of the chapters will offer an overview of the structure of this thesis.

⁷ Kristin Morrison's *William Trevor* (1993), carries an in-depth chapter on Trevor's rhetorical strategies and offers an extensive overview of his employment of names and naming (p. 113-123).

⁸ Hermione Lee in an essay, 'Learnt by Heart: William Trevor and Reading' (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 15-27), offers an in-depth analysis of how Trevor's allusions to books and other media print, shed light onto characters.

Chapter 1: Simone de Beauvoir

As previously stated, Chapter One demonstrates the suitability of choosing de Beauvoir as the theoretical lens through which to enhance the close analysis of Trevor's novels and short stories in this thesis. It will present a consideration of the themes of existentialism, and will show how these connect thematically to Trevor's narratives. These themes will provide a focus for each chapter throughout the thesis, and it will become apparent that de Beauvoir's attention to the complexities of existence across a wide range of fiction and non-fiction, offers a powerful critical and philosophical framework from which Trevor's fiction can be evaluated.

Chapter 2: *Elizabeth Alone* – A Veritable Female Sanctum

Chapter Two will offer an in-depth analysis of Trevor's novel, *Elizabeth Alone*, as it is arguably the first novel that demonstrates the richness of Trevor's understanding of women, and also his willingness to explore their lives. His inclusion of two symbolic devices throughout this novel, the autobiography of Lady Augusta Haptree, the foundress of a woman's hospital, and the nameless lady who parades up and down outside the hospital, seven days a week, with a banner containing the words *Liberation Now*, serve to illuminate Trevor's knowledge and utilisation of the history of feminism that will emerge in the analysis. This novel will reveal the depth of Trevor's engagement with broken marriages, dysfunctional families, incomplete families, religious fanaticism, exploitation and petty crime. It will explore the existentialist themes of loneliness, alienation and failure, but it will also take the reader into the affirmative realm of human connection and reciprocity. De Beauvoir's critique of the treatment of women as Other, and her views of the societal institutions that have suppressed women, together with the consequences of this, will be

engaged with here. Overall, this chapter will highlight this novel's unusual scope and breadth of its articulation of the human condition, and why it merits a re-appraisal.

Chapter 3: The Perils Inherent in Female Passivity

Chapter Three offers a selection of Trevor's short stories from three different collections: 'The Grass Widows' and 'O Fat White Woman' from the collection *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories* (1972); 'The Bedroom Eyes of Vansittart' from *Beyond the Pale and Other Stories* (1981); and 'Lunch in Winter' from *The News From Ireland and Other Stories* (1986). These stories have been deliberately chosen, as they each contain a female protagonist that offers highly specific examples of female compliance and complicity, both to the detriment of themselves, and to others. The behaviours of all these female protagonists find many correlations in de Beauvoir's analysis of the ruses women employ to justify their lack of integrity and irresponsibility. It may seem contradictory to give a focus to these blameworthy female characters in a thesis that purports to demonstrate Trevor's elevation of them, however, this exposition reveals the breadth of Trevor's impetus to explore the female condition, and in doing so exposes the reasons and consequences of unethical behaviour.

Chapter 4: Oppression and Evil in three of William Trevor's Novels: *The Children of Dymouth*, *Other People's Worlds* and *Felicia's Journey*

Chapter Four explores an even darker vein of human behaviour in three of Trevor's novels: *The Children of Dymouth* (1976), *Other People's Worlds* (1980) and *Felicia's Journey* (1994). Unlike the female characters in the previous chapter, a very different representation of female endeavour becomes the focus in this chapter. These novels bear all the hallmarks of Trevor's probing exploration of the human condition, and witness his concerns with the nature and ordinariness of evil, as well as his explorations of how damaged children may

evolve into monsters. All three novels have elements of the thriller genre, but this is destabilised through the demonstration of the ethical behaviour of the female characters. *The Children of Dymouth* portrays a fifteen-year old male protagonist, Timothy Gedge, a dysfunctional, disturbing teenager whom nobody wants. Trevor creates a narrative that interrogates all our prejudices around a figure for whom the word ‘outsider’ is apt. That Trevor chooses to grant a female character called Lavinia to tentatively attempt to help this malfunctioning boy, against her better instincts, advances a powerful discourse on the notion of obligation and responsibility to the Other. *Other People’s Worlds* has a male protagonist who is fully-fledged, dangerous sociopath, one who causes havoc in other people’s lives. His latest victims, the middle-aged, upper class Julia and her elderly mother, Mrs Anstey, become embroiled in his murky world. His departure halfway through the novel instigates an existentialist crisis for Julia, but one that sees her facing challenges that she had never envisioned.

Like Lavinia in *Other People’s Worlds*, she discovers a new *modus vivendi* that gives her a renewed purpose in life. The third novel in this chapter, *Felicia’s Journey*, continues with the theme of good versus evil and offers an unexpected *denouement* that challenges the reader’s response. Though fulfilling many aspects of the thriller genre, this novel is especially cognisant of the life of a young, vulnerable Irish girl, one who has never been valued by anybody in her young life. *Felicia’s Journey* is a disturbing tale of both male exploitation and society’s inability to value all of its people equally. These novels may be seen as cautionary tales that strongly suggest the maxim that to understand is to forgive. De Beauvoir’s reflections on evil and oppression in our society, and her view that only existentialism could offer a code of ethics, offer a particularly useful angle to this analysis.

Chapter 5: The Pleasure and the Perils of Ageing in Trevor's Elderly Female Characters

Chapter Five will examine Trevor's representation of elderly female characters across his fiction. Again, it will reiterate his abiding interest in the human condition, and an interest in every stage of an individual's life. This chapter will begin by looking at Trevor's earliest, acknowledged novel, *The Old Boys* (1964). Though concerned mainly with the lives of a group of old boys in their seventies, it is his portrayal of the elderly Mrs Jaraby that is relevant here. For a young writer, Trevor visibly captures the frustrations and anger of this elderly lady who has spent the majority of her life married to a particularly obnoxious individual. This dark, tragicomedy gleefully identifies with Mrs Jaraby's newfound rebelliousness, and Trevor's rendering of this makes it a suitable choice with which to begin this analysis. Two other elderly characters from novels being analysed in this thesis will be used: Mrs Orpen in *Elizabeth Alone* and Mrs Anstey in *Other People's Worlds*. Other characters discussed include the elderly Mrs Rolleston in *The Silence in the Garden*; Attracta in the short story 'Attracta'; Miss Doheny in the short story, 'The Paradise Lounge'; Mollie in the short story 'At Olivehill'; Mrs Malby in the short story 'Broken Homes'; and Miss Efoss in the short story 'In at the Birth'. Each of these characters offers a particular perspective on the lived reality of their old age.

De Beauvoir's intense engagement with the question of old age resulted in her monumental study of it when she published *The Coming of Age* in 1970. In it, she sets out to examine the phenomenon of old age, and of how it is perceived culturally. She argued that old age may be viewed from two perspectives – seen from the point of view of an outsider, or from within the aged person themselves. Drawing on de Beauvoir, this chapter will argue that Trevor achieves this double perspective in his portrayal of his elderly female characters. Trevor's version of old age is complex, nuanced, and individual and, above all, ethical. He writes compassionately and with enormous understanding of what it is to be an aged person.

Chapter One: Simone de Beauvoir, William Trevor and Ambiguity

It is doubtless impossible to approach any human problem with a mind free from bias. The way in which questions are put, the points of view assumed, presuppose a relativity of interest; all characteristics imply values, and every objective description, so called, implies an ethical background. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 16)

This Chapter demonstrates why the work and thought of Simone de Beauvoir has been chosen to augment the claim of this thesis that Trevor's female characterisation in his novels and short stories, presents a nuanced, ethical dimension to his readers. De Beauvoir has been chosen for a number of reasons, but the essential and elemental correlation that connects her to Trevor is to be found in the word 'ambiguity'. As previously stated, Trevor's narratives deny and circumvent closure in their enunciation, and instead proffer a notion of ambiguity, where finality and resolution are somehow sidestepped, and where reflection becomes the prerequisite. The identification of this characteristic in Trevor's writing underscores its ethical dimension, and de Beauvoir is a theorist who reflects and validates the notion that ambiguity may be an essential constituent of ethics. De Beauvoir emerged as a compelling and authentic voice, one that had delved deeply into the question of what it is to exist as a human being, and had sought to explicate this concept in a diverse and rich corpus of writings including works on ethics, feminism, fiction, autobiography, literary theory and politics.

This Chapter will offer an exposition of the scope of her philosophical interests, and her place in the movement in philosophy known as existentialism, as a way of establishing and developing a critical and philosophical framework for reading Trevor's fiction. The relevant philosophical essays and treatises that constitute her repertoire on feminism, ethics,

politics, evil, relationships between self and Other, and on old age, will be set out in order to establish how these themes intersect with Trevor's prevailing concerns. These will help provide a structure for the overall thesis, and they will be drawn upon where relevant in the forthcoming detailed discussions of Trevor's texts. In setting out these themes, an explication of the terms employed by de Beauvoir will be included together with a detailed examination of her writings on literature. Many references will be made, throughout this thesis, to her prolific analysis of women's lives in *The Second Sex*, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, *The Coming of Age* and the numerous essays pertaining to her literary theory. All of these will be instrumental in substantiating the view that Trevor, in his portrayal of his female characters, reflects and explicates further his ethical practice. The primary focus of this chapter will be largely about de Beauvoir and will endeavour to copper-fasten the aptness of juxtaposing these two unique writers.

Simone De Beauvoir

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) is primarily remembered for the pivotal place that *The Second Sex* (1949) has earned in contemporary feminism, but this legacy attenuates the enormous range of her intellectual thought. Historically, de Beauvoir has been somewhat relegated as Jean-Paul Sartre's disciple but thankfully this *faux pas* is being rectified by current scholarship on her work. She considered herself primarily a writer, both of fiction and non-fiction, but chose literature as her favoured means of expression, and her novels are replete with philosophical ideas. It is, however, her enduring preoccupation with ethics and her view that only existentialism could provide the basis for an ethics that justifies her as a suitable theorist to substantiate the claim that Trevor's writing comprises a strong sense of ethical responsibility. It is necessary at this stage to revisit the tenets of the movement in philosophy known as Existentialism.

Existentialism

Existentialism as a philosophical movement is usually traced back to the nineteenth century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. Existentialism represented a certain attitude particularly relevant to modern mass society, with existentialists having a shared concern for the individual and the question of personal responsibility in an increasingly urban and mechanised socio-cultural sphere. Twentieth-century existentialism has also been greatly influenced by Martin Heidegger whose philosophy centred on 'Dasein' or what it is to-be-in-the world. De Beauvoir, along with Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, would all have been influenced by Heidegger. Existentialism as an overall movement is in some respects difficult to define; it is as much a literary phenomenon as a philosophical one. More than a philosophy, it describes an attitude towards life. Various thinkers categorised as existentialists disagree on such profound philosophical 'truths' as the existence of God and the meaning of death. In spite of these differences, however, existentialism focuses collectively on the individual, and on the individual's role in providing meaning to life; it charges the individual with the responsibility of choosing a set of values through his or her actions, and it emphasises the freedom of the individual. Existentialists deny an *a priori* concept of human nature as being pre-determined, especially the notion that if one's nature is determined, then one's power to choose, to create one's own destiny or meaning each moment, is ineffective. Sartre's slogan, 'existence precedes essence', radically charges that meaning is decided in and through existing itself.

According to Steven Crowell, 'the fundamental contribution of existential thought lies in the idea that one's identity is constituted neither by nature nor by culture, since to 'exist' is precisely to constitute such an identity' (Crowell 2010, p. 6). Existence, however, is not an abstract concept and existential philosophers define it through the concepts of 'facticity'

(namely that every individual has particular individual circumstances), and of ‘transcendence’ (the belief that it is possible to overcome these individual circumstances), and these are crucial terms in de Beauvoir’s thought. In fact, it is de Beauvoir’s recognition of these concepts that reveals her distinctive thinking on the ethical implications of existentialism, and that elevates her position within the existentialist movement. These terms will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter. Current de Beauvoir scholarship argues that her philosophical work has more to offer contemporary thinkers than that of Sartre.

Sartre, as the leading advocate of existentialism, had at the heart of his philosophy a powerful notion of freedom and an uncompromising sense of personal responsibility. In the oppressive conditions of the Nazi occupation, and during the embattled years following the Second World War, Sartre insisted that people make themselves in terms of subjectivity and identity, no matter what the conditions, even in war. Thirty years later, Sartre stated in an interview a few years before his death that he never ceased to believe that ‘in the end one is always responsible for what is made of one’, a slight revision of his earlier, brasher slogan, ‘man makes himself’ (Mautner 2005, p. 549). Similarly, Sartre’s concept of *bad faith*, the notion that an individual practices self-deception by denying the possibility of transcending whatever limitation is impeding his freedom, is a much more nuanced concept for de Beauvoir.⁹ Le Doeuff argues that for de Beauvoir:

the *Second Sex* seems to be saying that once a crack has opened in the wall, it is the duty of the woman who benefits from it to use it to the maximum to establish herself as a subject condemned to be free. (Le Doeuff 2007, p. 131)

⁹ In Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1943), the term bad faith signifies: A lie to oneself within the unity of a single consciousness. Through bad faith a person seeks to escape the responsible freedom of Being-for-itself. Bad faith rests on a vacillation between transcendence and facticity, which refuses to recognize either one for what it really is or to synthesize them (p. 629).

De Beauvoir, for most of her life, was concerned with the ethical responsibility that the individual has to him or herself, to other individuals and to oppressed groups. In fact her earliest treatise, 'Pyrrhus et Cineás' (1944), predates Sartre's attempt at developing an existentialist ethics. This essay follows a conversation between Pyrrhus, the ancient king of Epirus, and his chief advisor, Cineás, and it is framed as an investigation into the motives of action. De Beauvoir fuses Sartre's notion of 'absolute freedom' with a notion of freedom as 'situated', and contends that the situation within which the individual finds him or herself may limit his or her ability for transcendence.

De Beauvoir goes further than Sartre in that she engages with the question of oppression that is largely absent in his early work. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), de Beauvoir continues with the themes first developed in 'Pyrrhus et Cineás', and in this work she asserts a much stronger sense of social connectedness. She begins this work by asserting the tragic condition of the human situation which experiences its freedom as a spontaneous internal drive that is crushed by the external weight of the world: 'he asserts himself as a pure internality against which no external power can take hold, and he also experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 7). She argues that human existence is always a fusion of the internal freedom to transcend the given conditions of the world, and the weight of the world, which imposes itself on us in a manner outside of our control and not of our choosing. There are many instances of such dilemmas that arise from this conflictual impasse throughout Trevor's fiction. Each individual situation is ambiguous and indeterminate, and necessitates an ethics that identifies its ambiguity. Therefore, in order to live ethically, we must assume this ambiguity and embrace it. It is necessary at this stage to look closely at the word 'ambiguity' and to get a sense of its importance to de Beauvoir's philosophy.

Ambiguity

Much disagreement has existed in philosophical circles regarding the word ‘ambiguity’. ‘Ambiguity’ is often a term of criticism or derogation as is perceived as a flaw that interferes with clarity. Its connotations of indeterminacy, doubt and uncertainty, all denote negativity and disavow the belief that truth is inextricably linked to certainty and moral virtue. Existentialist thinkers could be said to have reclaimed its affirmative qualities through the exposition of a phenomenological account of what it means to exist. De Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty in particular, revitalise and reorient ambiguity in order to re-present it as a quality that reflects the complexity and irreducible indeterminacy that characterise our existence (Langer 2003, p. 90). According to Lorraine Code, de Beauvoir transforms Husserl’s indeterminacy into a ‘fundamental feature of human existence’, of human situations as such, with the consequence that for de Beauvoir an:

irreducible ambiguity...characterises human existence...which demands a response through concrete human actions....that can in no way dispel or diminish the ambiguity, but which allow us to live this ambiguity in meaningful ways. (Code 2006, p. 225-226)

In a sense, ambiguity becomes a term that reflects the complexity of lived experience in all its different issues and indicates the difficulties, perhaps the impossibility of, determining truth. It is in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that de Beauvoir lays out her defence of existentialism and its implications for ethics. At the very beginning of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, de Beauvoir critiques traditional philosophy for its failure to acknowledge ambiguity:

As long as there have been men and they have lived they have all felt this tragic ambiguity of their condition, but as long as there have been philosophers and they have thought, most of them have tried to mask it. They have striven to reduce mind to matter, or to reabsorb matter into mind, or to merge them within a single substance. (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 8)

Claudia Card perceives de Beauvoir’s use of the concept of ambiguity in ethics as shifting the traditional focus in moral philosophy from right versus wrong, and blame versus excuse, and

instead as focusing on enabling society to create a better world, ‘a world where people will endeavour to comprehend the struggles of others’ (Card 2003, p. 21). De Beauvoir turned to literature to convey this complexity, and in this thesis it will be argued that Trevor’s narratives generate a similar sense of ambiguity; intimating that only in examples of how people are inextricably situated with others, and responsible for them, can a genuine possibility for ethics exist. It will be one of the contentions of this thesis that for both de Beauvoir and Trevor, all human situations are complex and multi-faceted, and that each situation can only be examined through its own terms of reference, whatever they may be.

Code argues that de Beauvoir’s ethics of ambiguity is linked to the ancient Greek scepticism of Pyrrho and Sextus Empiricus, and that this ‘sceptical stance affirms the near impossibility of absolute, once-and-for-all certainty, the wisdom of withholding definitive judgement, the value of an ongoing readiness to reconsider, and a wariness of hasty conclusions’ (Code 2006, p. 223). Code’s understanding of de Beauvoir’s scepticism segues with Trevor’s assertion that:

I don’t believe in the black and white; I believe in the grey shadows and the murkiness: in the fact that you shouldn’t say ‘old spinster’ or ‘dirty old man’. In a way, I suppose, I write to prove that theory. (cited by Tim Adams in *The Guardian* 2009)

This powerful and compelling conviction is a *leitmotif* throughout the thesis, one that finds its essential premise in the concept of ambiguity. It will become evident in the ensuing chapters, when a selection of Trevor’s narratives are analysed in great detail, that what emerges most profoundly, is a subtle and nuanced revelation of the complex interrelations that give expression to the multiple meanings that a reader may take from his or her interpretation of these texts; in other words, that ambiguity becomes the barometer of how each narrative is unravelled and deciphered. The concept of ambiguity that is fundamental to de Beauvoir’s thought is evident throughout the many essays she wrote concerning the writing of literature,

and these writings will form an essential adjunct to de Beauvoir's theoretical framework in this thesis. A brief examination of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* will serve to emphasise de Beauvoir's critical engagement with the question of what it is to be an ethical person. This treatise illustrates the depth of her engagement with the question of how to live an authentic, responsible life in an indeterminate world. Trevor's fiction offer scenarios that highlight the achievement of authenticity but also highlight what happens when this is circumvented.

The Ethics of Ambiguity (1947)

De Beauvoir begins this work by asserting the tragic condition of the human situation, which experiences its freedom as a spontaneous internal drive that is crushed by the external weight of the world. She argues that existence is always ambiguous because of this divergence between our desire to transcend the given conditions of the world, and the weight, or facticity, which that world imposes on us in a manner outside of our control and not of our choosing. She is critical of the denial of this ambiguity that is intrinsic to our existence, an existence that is replete with contradictions.

She believes that traditional ethics, for example Christian ethics or normative ethics, advance meaning for the individual through external sources of morality and rationality and argues that only existentialist ethics requires the individual to create meaning for him or herself. The denial of existence as ambiguous has lead, she believes, to Armageddon:

Men of today seem to feel more acutely than ever the paradox of their condition. They know themselves to be the supreme end to which all action should be subordinated, but the exigencies of action force them to treat one another as instruments or obstacles, as means. The more widespread their master of the world, the more they find themselves crushed by uncontrollable forces. Though they are masters of the atomic bomb, yet it is created only to destroy them. Each one has the incomparable taste in his mouth of his own life, and yet each feels himself more insignificant than an insect within the immense collectivity whose

limits are one with the earth's. Perhaps in no other age have they manifested their grandeur more brilliantly, and in no other age has this grandeur been so horribly flouted. In spite of so many stubborn lies, at every moment, at every opportunity, the truth comes to light, the truth of life and death, of my solitude and my bond with the world, of my freedom and my servitude, of the insignificance and the sovereign importance of each man and all men. There was Stalingrad and there was Buchenwald, and neither of the two wipes out the other. Since we do not succeed in fleeing it, let us therefore try to look the truth in the face. Let us try to assume our fundamental ambiguity. It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our life that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting. (de Beauvoir 1948, pp. 8-9)

She derides appeals to a utopian destiny that distorts our relationship to time, insisting on the ethical concerns our existence as temporal, intersubjective beings who need to affirm the value of those who exist today (Bergoffen 2014, p. 7). *The Ethics of Ambiguity* emphasises the importance of social connectedness and addresses the question of solidarity when she asks 'how could men, originally separated, get together' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 18). To demonstrate the complexity of the freedom that is inherent in every individual, de Beauvoir begins her discussion with an analysis of childhood in which she argues that the will, or freedom, is developed over time, and she believes that the child is not considered moral because he or she does not have a connection to a past or future and where values are imposed, not chosen (Bergoffen 2014, p 7-8).

When childhood ends, there emerges a demand on the individual to become a responsible adult, one who is required to make moral decisions: 'the misfortune which comes to a man as a result of the fact that he was a child is that his freedom was first concealed from him and that all his life he will be nostalgic for the time when he did not know its exigencies' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 40). De Beauvoir believes that some will evade their responsibilities of freedom by choosing to remain children by submitting to the authority of others. However, this is a complex area where material conditions like exploitation and terror deny any real notion of freedom. De Beauvoir argues, however, that

in most cases we are accountable for our response to the experience of freedom, and that we cannot use the anxieties of freedom as an excuse for either our active participation in or our passive acceptance of the exploitation of others. Hiding behind the authority of others, or establishing ourselves as authorities over others, however, are culpable offenses (Bergoffen 2014, p. 7). Chapters Three, in particular, will illustrate the dangers of female infantilisation, and offers a number of examples of female characters not taking responsibility for their lives, and choosing instead to remain in immanence.¹⁰

In the second half of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, de Beauvoir attempts to articulate her concept of a character ethics. Character ethics is the systematic study of the virtues and vices, and of the kinds of people in whom these same virtues and vices are found. It is here that de Beauvoir begins her exploration on the lives of women, which will be developed further in *The Second Sex* two years later. In this intensely philosophical essay, she discusses, sequentially, the journey from childhood to adulthood. She quotes Descartes' dictum that man's 'unhappiness is due to his having first been a child', and that he lives in a world where 'he is allowed to play, to expend his existence freely' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 35).

However, she argues, this situation changes because 'the fact is that it is very rare for the infantile world to maintain itself beyond adolescence' and when this happens it heralds the discovery of one's subjectivity and hence the subjectivity of others (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 39). She then discusses the situation of women, and relates their situation to that of slaves by showing how they live in an infantile world 'having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 37). She argues that:

Even today in western countries, among women who have not had in their work an apprenticeship of freedom, there are still many who take shelter in the shadow of men; they adopt without discussion the opinions and values recognised by their husband or their lover,

¹⁰ De Beauvoir argues that human existence is an ambiguous interplay between transcendence and immanence but that men have been privileged with expressing transcendence through projects, whereas women have been confined to the realm of the repetitive and uncreative.

and that allows them to develop childish qualities which are forbidden to adults because they are based on a feeling of irresponsibility. (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 37)

This argument will have particular significance in Chapter Three, when the themes of complicity and compliance will be explored in relation to some of Trevor's fictional female characters.

Following on from her analysis of children and women, de Beauvoir compiles a list of personality types such as the 'sub-man', the 'serious man', the 'nihilist', the 'adventurer', and the 'passionate man'. All of these character types, in one way or another fail to assume their freedom. She argues that the 'sub-man' describes the type of person who becomes easily manipulated, and who may become a member of the mindless mob. Essentially, he is trapped in his facticity, the intractable conditions of human existence that have shaped him, and he is unable to rise above this. Ultimately, his life is shaped by nameless fears:

Weighted down by present events, he is bewildered before the darkness of the future which is haunted by frightful spectres, war, sickness, revolution, fascism, bolshevism. The more indistinct these dangers are, the more fearful they become. The sub-man is not very clear about what he has to lose, since he has nothing, but this very uncertainty re-enforces his terror. Indeed, what he fears is that the shock of the unforeseen may remind him of the agonising consciousness of himself. (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 45)

Her definition of the 'serious man' is one who, at some level, embraces freedom, but who is still enslaved through the choices he makes. She asserts that the attitude of the 'serious man' is the most widespread, because 'he dissimulates his subjectivity' by enslaving himself to a world of ready-made values and institutions, so that 'he is no longer a man, but a father, a boss, a member of the Christian Church or the Communist Party' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 48). She deems the serious man to be dangerous in that he 'puts nothing into question', and that he may 'not hesitate to sacrifice man himself', and inevitably he 'makes himself a tyrant' and this will invariably lead to a loss of empathy and lack of respect for the Other (de Beauvoir

1948, p. 49). De Beauvoir's critique of the 'serious man' offers an acute analysis of human behaviour, and provides a salutary lesson regarding the fickle values of the external world, values that are transitory in nature.

Comparable to the 'serious man' is the 'nihilist', who is in fact a 'disappointed' serious man who has not encountered 'feeling the joy of existence' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 52). It is with this attitude that man encounters his implicit ambiguity, namely the fact that he is both subject and object, immanent and transcendent. Since this individual lives in a world surrounded by people, he nevertheless denies the necessity of the other, and sees existence as a lack in himself. The origins of his negativity may have arisen in his adolescence but he has allowed himself to become defined by it. She refutes this and argues that 'it is up to him to justify the world and to make himself exist validly' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 57). The 'adventurer', unlike the nihilist, embraces living but is also paradoxically detached from it:

The adventurer does not propose to be; he deliberately makes himself a lack of being; he aims expressly at existence; though engaged in his undertaking, he is at the same time detached from the goal. Whether he succeeds or fails, he goes right ahead throwing himself into a new enterprise to which he will give himself with the same indifferent ardour. (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 59)

Though ostensibly fulfilling the existentialist concept of engagement with the world, de Beauvoir believes that 'the adventurer's attitude is not always pure', and masks an indifference to the freedom of others. They are obsessed by self-interest that impels them to seek 'fortune and glory' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 59).

Similarly, the 'passionate man' exhibits his engagement with life, but de Beauvoir warns that the passionate thread a very fine line through the desire to possess. Whatever the object is that the passionate man desires, he will diminish everything that stands in his way of achieving it and she cautions:

If the object of his passion concerns the world in general, this tyranny becomes fanaticism. In all fanatical movements there exists an element of the serious. The values invented by certain men in a passion of hatred, fear, or faith are thought and willed by others as given realities. (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 66)

She sees fanaticism as always possessing a ‘passional base’, and suggests that it may lead to ‘forms of separation which disunites freedoms’ and consequently ‘to struggle and oppression’ (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 66). De Beauvoir’s exposition of the different personality types that constitute human action is employed by her to illuminate and illustrate the dangers of living an inauthentic life. Likewise, Trevor’s fiction offers many such examples of inauthentic lives and the repercussions that arise from this level of inauthenticity. De Beauvoir’s exposition allows her to create an alternative way of living, one that advocates and demands that an individual lives an ethical life. The ethical man, de Beauvoir believes, though driven by a passion for life, must combine this passion with generosity, specifically the generosity of recognising the other’s difference, and protecting the other from becoming an object of another’s will (Bergoffen 2014, p. 9).

The ethical person embraces critical thinking, and this is a key component of existentialist ethics. In this treatise of ethics, de Beauvoir reflects not just on ethical action, but also on the distinct ethical position of the artist-writer. She asserts that the artist-writer embodies the ethical ideal in several ways. The ethical artist-writer goes on challenging and exposing the material and political complexities of human situations that alienate people from their freedom. The ethical artist-writer is always concerned with the implication of art:

it should reveal existence as a reason for existing; that is really why Plato, who wanted to wrest man away from the earth and assign him to the heaven of Ideas, condemned the poets; that is why every humanism on the other hand, crowns them with laurels. Art reveals the transitory as an absolute; and as the transitory existence is perpetuated through the centuries, art too, through the centuries, must perpetuate this never-to-be-finished revelation. Thus, the constructive activities of man take on a valid meaning only when they are assumed as a movement toward freedom; and reciprocally, one sees that such a

movement is concrete: discoveries, inventions, industries, culture, paintings, and books people the world concretely and open concrete possibilities to men. (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 80-81)

This early affirmation of the value of art, and especially literary fiction, will feature in greater detail in the next section, which examines de Beauvoir's reflections on literature. In the final chapter of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, de Beauvoir asks the question 'is this kind of ethics individualistic or not?' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 156). She affirms that it is individualistic in that 'it accords the individual an absolute value and that it recognises in him alone the power of laying the foundations of his own existence' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 156). She is keen to clarify that it is not solipsistic 'since the individual is defied only by his relationship to the world and to other individuals' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 156). She calls for each individual to 'assume his freedom and not flee from it', and adds that it can only be assumed by a 'constructive movement' that 'one does not exist without doing something' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 157).

Existentialism, then, is a powerful demand on each person to empower themselves because 'its ethics is experienced in the truth of life and it then appears as the only proposition of salvation which one can address to men' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 159). Claudia Card suggests that:

De Beauvoir's centering of the concept of ambiguity in ethics changes the traditional focus in moral philosophy from right versus wrong and blame versus excuse to a focus instead on enhancing agency in a world where agency is always limited, never perfect. Centering ambiguity also tempers the analytical demand for clarity and definition. (Card 2003, p. 21)

Card applauds de Beauvoir for introducing the concept of 'generosity in attempting to comprehend the struggles of others, as well as a certain realism and optimism' (Card 2003, p. 21).

As has become apparent throughout this chapter, de Beauvoir's attention to the complexities of existence across a wide range of non-fiction and fiction offers a powerful critical and philosophical framework through which Trevor's fiction can be evaluated. It will be demonstrated how her overriding belief that ambiguity is embedded in the human condition connects indissolubly to the theme of ambiguity that is so apparent in Trevor's narratives and sheds significant light on his texts. She firmly believed that there is no perfect solution to human problems, because all human projects have elements of success and failure built into them. True morality does not consist in scrupulously following moral rules, rather moral evaluation must proceed on the basis that the Other is to be treated *as a freedom whose own end is freedom [italics original]* (Mahon 1997, p. 66). She advocates an ethics of responsibility and compromise and believes that we must create our own moral values. When we do this, we acknowledge our freedom and embrace responsibility for ourselves and others. She quotes Dostoevsky to illustrate this: 'each of us is responsible for everything and to every human being' (de Beauvoir 1945, p. 109).

De Beauvoir's Reflections on Literature

This thesis will contend that de Beauvoir's literary theoretical approach finds echoes throughout Trevor's fiction. It will be argued that what de Beauvoir claims literature can do is actually achieved by Trevor. The following in-depth consideration of her views on literature will substantiate this belief in the upcoming chapters. A virtual re-assessment of de Beauvoir's oeuvre has emerged in the years since her death in 1986, and this has created a new feminist interpretive paradigm of her work. Margaret Simons, in an essay entitled 'Confronting an Impasse: Reflections on the Past and Future of Beauvoir Scholarship', applauds the revaluation of de Beauvoir's reputation, and refers to the 2008 Paris conference celebrating de Beauvoir's 100th birthday organised and hosted by Julia Kristeva (Simons

2010, p. 910). Simons specifically calls attention to Kristeva's admiration of de Beauvoir's 'courageous definition of transcendence as freedom...we owe – all of us, men and women – our freedom to be to the genius of that rebellious woman: to her books, to her action' (Simons 2010, p. 910).

A very exciting dimension to de Beauvoir studies has emerged with the publication in 2011 of *'The Useless Mouths' and Other Literary Writings*, edited by Margaret A Simons and Marybeth Timmermann. In this book, Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, the adopted daughter of de Beauvoir, has made available for the first time a whole series of de Beauvoir's writings which had remained 'dispersed throughout time and space, in diverse editions, diverse newspapers or reviews', and are now presented as a whole collection (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. x). De Beauvoir's engagement with literature and philosophy is examined in depth in the work of a number of scholars, and all accentuate the magnitude of her ethical concerns regarding literature. In this book, Elizabeth Fallaize argues that de Beauvoir had given significant thought to how literature could communicate a meaning to the reader based on the real world and for this meaning to be credible (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 93). In an essay entitled 'The Novel and the Theatre', written in 1945, de Beauvoir described the novelist as having 'considerable freedom to manipulate time, space and place, to base the plot on an individual or a group, to describe the characters from the outside or from the inside, and to make considerable demands on the reader' (Fallaize 2011, p. 93). Fallaize suggests that:

In the novel, the issue of whether characters are seen from the inside or the outside was one which particularly interested Beauvoir since it mirrors her concept of the ambiguity of our existence. Seen from the outside we are captured in our being-for others. Seen from the inside, the reader follows the movements of being-for-itself, freely constituting its own meanings in the world. (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 93)

She contends that de Beauvoir had demonstrated this in the two novels she had written at this stage, *She Came to Stay* (1943) and *The Blood of Others* (1945). In this essay, 'The Novel and the Theatre', de Beauvoir demonstrates her interest in the psychological aspect of the novel and points to the novels of Kafka, Stendhal, Poe and Dostoevsky as exemplifying this and that an author:

if he wants to be convincing...must not copy the real world like the naturalists wanted to but rely upon it for support. Its presence must be suggested in such a way that the fiction, be it heroic, poetic, or even fantastic, unfolds against the backdrop of a world. This is why the plot will seek to imitate the contingency of lived events; the language will imitate the hesitations and incoherencies of the spoken language, and the behaviours and feelings of the heroes will be based in psychology. (Simons and Timmermann, 2011, p. 105)

In another essay, 'An American Renaissance in France', written in 1947, de Beauvoir credits the influence of American writers like Dos Passos, Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck and Caldwell as being extremely fruitful:

What struck us in the great American novelists was their effort to bring into their books life that was still throbbing; to describe it, they employed a living language, and they invented daring and flexible techniques to preserve the freshness of the events they described. (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 109)

This ability to express reality was especially relevant to French people who had lived through the dark period of World War Two, and who needed to articulate their multiple experiences: 'the young people who came back from the war, from the Maquis, from prison and concentration camps, like to express their experience nakedly...have felt the need to express the immediate truth of human adventures' (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 109). She decries the tradition of *Princesse de Cleves* and of Valery as being too far removed from the reality of contemporary France, and instead sees that a writer like Dashiell Hammett:

serves them better...for in his books, as in the "hardboiled" novels which we are rash enough to enjoy, there is an art of narration adapted to the vicissitudes of action...one of the

most difficult tasks one can set oneself in literature is that of depicting an action: this requires much technical skill. (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 109)

De Beauvoir finishes this essay with an acknowledgment of these American writers' ability 'to describe in dramatic form the relationship of the individual to the world in which he stakes his freedom' (Simons and Timmermann, p. 110). She acclaims both Steinbeck and Wright for their ability to portray reality that 'is invested with the concreteness of an experience in which an individual consciousness and an individual liberty have been staked; the struggle of a man against the resistances of the world is depicted' (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 110).

Toril Moi, in an essay entitled 'What Can Literature Do? Simone de Beauvoir as a Literary Theorist', draws attention to de Beauvoir's contribution to a debate entitled '*Que peut la littérature?*' that took place in Paris in December 1964 (Moi 2009, p. 189). This essay reiterates her on-going interest in, and commitment to, the value of literature. Moi cites Michele Le Doeuff who sees de Beauvoir as a 'formidably hidden' literary theorist, and who admires the 'unpretentiousness' and the clarity of the examples that she brings into play in this essay (Moi 2009, p. 189). This particular essay has only recently been translated, and is now being recognised by literary critics as having immense value. Laura Hengehold reiterates the idea that:

literature was Beauvoir's preferred means for carrying out the philosophical task of disclosing being in a communicable, communicative way...and that her literature is better equipped to present the qualitative complexity, ambiguity, and multisidedness of being than many kinds of philosophical argumentation...(Simons and Timmermann 2011, pp. 191-192)

In this essay 'What Can Literature Do', de Beauvoir discusses the relationship between literature and information. She takes a sociological study carried out by an American sociologist in the slums of Mexico, and praises it for its portrayal of the multi-dimensional

aspects, over an eight-year period, of a particular family. She wonders that, if there were more of these narratives available, would they provide us ‘with the secrets of cities, environments, and different sections of the world’, and asks the question ‘would literature still have a role to play’ (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 198). Though enormously impressed by this ‘highly novelistic’ narrative, de Beauvoir nevertheless claims that it is not literature. Essentially, what she is saying is that this sociological study, however well written, cannot penetrate the psyche of the reader in the way good literature can:

When I read *The Children of Sanchez*, I remain at home, in my room, in the time when I live, with my age, with Paris all around me; and Mexico is far away with its slums and with the children who live there. And I am interested in them; I annex them to my universe but I do not change universes. (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 201)

She then contrasts this experience with the experience of reading Kafka, Balzac, and Robbe-Grillet, where they:

invite me and convince me to settle down, at least for a moment, in the heart of another world...and that is the miracle of literature and what distinguished it from information. A truth that is other becomes mine without ceasing to be an ‘other’. I abdicate my ‘I’ in favour of he who is speaking, and yet I remain myself. (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 201)

She believes that reading this type of literature is:

the only form of communication capable of giving me the incommunicable – capable of giving me the taste of another life. I do not annex it to myself; it remains separated from mine and yet it exists for me. And it exists for others who are also separated from it and with whom I communicate, through books, in their deepest intimacy....that is why Proust was right to think that literature is the privileged place of intersubjectivity. (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 201)

She goes on to discuss what a writer is, and concludes that all literary works are ‘essentially a search’ and by this she means a search for meaning in ‘a world that is not given’, and that

‘must be discovered’ and she quotes the Hungarian Marxist philosopher and literary critic, Georg Lukács, who said ‘that the fictional hero was a problematic being in search of his values’ (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 202). She believes that every writer ‘was brought to literature by very different paths...that none would write if he hadn’t, in one way or another, suffered from separation, and if he wasn’t searching, in one way or another, to shatter it’; that she herself would never have written if she had not experienced this psychic ‘split’ or separation (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 204).

Likewise, a writer experiencing total despair could not produce ‘despairing literature’ if he did not believe that by writing about this despair he still believes in communication, and therefore in men, and their fraternity’ (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 205). Her defence here of so-called nihilistic literature is beautifully rendered when she says:

If literature seeks to surpass separation at the point where it seems most unsurpassable, it must speak of anguish, solitude, and death, because those are precisely the situations that enclose us most radically in our singularity. We need to know and to feel that these experiences are also those of all other men...language reintegrates us into the human community; a hardship that finds words to express itself is no longer a radical exclusion and becomes less intolerable. We must speak of failure, abomination, and death, not to drive our readers to despair, but on the contrary, to try to save them from despair. Each man is made of all men, and he only understands himself through them. He only understands them through what they reveal of themselves, and through himself clarified by them...and I think that is what literature can and should give. It should render us transparent to one another in what is most opaque about us. I believe that literature’s task is to safeguard what is human in man from technocrats and bureaucrats, and to reveal the world in its human dimension, that is to say it is disclosed to individuals at once connected and separated. And I believe that this is the task of literature and what makes literature irreplaceable. (Simons and Timmermann 2011, pp. 205-206)

From this heartfelt affirmation of the power of literature, there emerges a profoundly ethical dimension which is a necessary aspect of any literature that fulfils what de Beauvoir sees as its *raison d’être*. Throughout the following chapters in this thesis, it will be demonstrated

how Trevor explores numerous instances of these existentialist tribulations that de Beauvoir discusses: ‘anguish, solitude, death, failure, despair and abomination’ (Simons and Timmermann 2011, pp. 305-206).

Both Eleanore Holveck and Elizabeth Fallaize point to de Beauvoir’s employment of the novel to communicate meaning which relates to the real world, as a primary function of literature (Fallaize 1990, p. 3). In fact, de Beauvoir’s thinking on literature connects indissolubly to what is now seen as a veritable renaissance in ethical theory.¹¹ Toril Moi finds de Beauvoir’s work to be the most far-ranging of the contributors (Moi 2009, p. 190). Moi applauds de Beauvoir’s pragmatic evaluation of the differences between literature and other kinds of writing, and summarises her theory in de Beauvoir’s direct quotation from this debate:

That is the miracle of literature, which distinguishes it from information: ‘that another truth becomes mine without ceasing to be other. I renounce my own “I” in favour of the speaker; and yet I remain myself. It is an intermingling ceaselessly begun and ceaselessly undone, and it is the only kind of communication capable of giving me that which cannot be communicated, capable of giving me the taste of another life. (Moi 2009, p. 193)

The whole question of otherness is brought into relief by de Beauvoir, and she suggests that literature is a means of reconciling the self/other, subject/object dichotomy. Literature, for de Beauvoir, allows us to see the world as another human being sees it. In an essay entitled ‘My Experience as a Writer’, delivered in a lecture given in Japan on September 27, 1966, de Beauvoir focuses on her own experience both as a writer of fiction and autobiography and in it emphasises the action of writing as a living free choice to communicate (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 309).

¹¹ The past thirty years has seen a revival in the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir. Barbara Klaw, in an essay, ‘Update on Simone de Beauvoir’ (2001), offers an evaluation of a host of studies, which show a renewed interest in her scholarship. Heidi Hannsson discusses the ethical aspects of Trevor’s novel *Love and Summer* in *William Trevor: Revaluations* (2013), p. 198-210). See also Michael Eskin’s ‘On Literature and Ethics’ *Poetics Today* 25.4 (2004): 573-594. *Project MUSE*.

Fallaize understands de Beauvoir's argument in this essay as arguing that the task of the writer is use an individual experience in order to reveal a universal dimension, and also that that the writer must convey the meaning of lived experience in the world, while at the same time conveying the universal dimension of that experience in a way that we cannot perceive simultaneously in life (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 278). De Beauvoir explicates this in the essay by employing the concept of 'detotalisation', as used by Sartre, namely that it is impossible to live all aspects of our experience at the same time:

I suffer, but my way of suffering is already a way of putting myself outside of my suffering. For joy it is the same. I am always at a certain distance from what I am experiencing. I am always in the future and consequently there is never a total plenitude of the moments I am in the process of living. (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 285)

For de Beauvoir 'the novel can, on the contrary, render the meaning which is on the horizon', and takes the example of the Algerian War to illustrate this. During this time, she became, on several occasions, both mesmerised and horrified, by descriptions of 'particularly dreadful episodes' that seemed to entirely engulf her consciousness. Nevertheless, she states that these incidents receded during the ordinary course of her day, when life's demands intruded and lessened the intensity of these earlier, heartfelt happenings. Yet for her their horror never went away, but stayed on the 'horizon' and to articulate this she uses the Proustian phrase 'intermittences of the heart' to explicate the capriciousness of these feelings that move in and out of one's consciousness:

And yet the horror was always there. One did not take walks in the same way, the sky was not the same blue it would have been if not for this war. It was on the horizon even when I did not realize it in its horror...whether it be in private life or in public life, one encounters these intermittences: realities that are in some ways not present are nevertheless present on the horizon of our experience. There are intermittences and also contradictions. I am and have always been very sensitive to these contradictions because I have a great love for life, and often a great joy in living. But at the same time I have a very keen sense of the tragedy

of the human condition, of its horror in certain cases and of the fact that death will come one day for me and for the people I hold dear. But it is almost impossible to have both these thoughts at once. When I am really overtaken by the love for life and feeling very happy, I do not think either of death or of the tragedies which exist for others. If, on the contrary, I am filled with a tragic feeling, either personally or out of sympathy with others, my *joie de vivre*, at that moment, does not exist. I cannot hold both of these attitudes at once; it is absolutely impossible....on the contrary, if I am writing a novel I can very well sustain these two themes at the same time,....that is the advantage of the novel: one can put forth two opposing points of view, keeping them in balance in this silent whole which is the finished novel. It says neither 'act' nor 'do not act'. It says nothing but rather shows a whole set of difficulties, ambiguities and contradictions which constitute the lived meaning of an existence. (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 286)

She believes that a novel should never be a *roman a clef* – a novel that represents historical events and characters under the guise of fiction. While agreeing that it must begin with the author's singularity, 'which is of necessity at the root of creation', it must also:

find the universality of a situation; therefore no character, no episode should be simply anecdotal. One must recast, recreate. That is the task of the novelist. He begins with concrete, singular, separate, scattered experiences in order to recreate an imaginary world in which a meaning is disclosed (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 287)

For de Beauvoir, then, writing a work of fiction allows her to delve into other people's worlds, just as it does for Trevor, worlds that are not hers, but that have infiltrated her consciousness through her engagement with the world around her and who for some reason have triggered an interest and curiosity in her psyche. Trevor similarly deals with political and historical events in the wider world that have influenced individual lives, and chooses to expose the consequences of them.

Chapter Five touches on Trevor's treatment of both historical and political events, and how these affect the lives of his elderly female characters. She deems this as a 'mediation between her and the universe and uses the example of her novel, *All Men Are Mortal*, to illustrate this concept. Just as Virginia Woolf did in her fantastical novel *Orlando* that saw

the character Orlando live through a period of five hundred years of English history, so does de Beauvoir employ the device of immortality and the mythical to survey six centuries of European history from a single point of view (Fallaise 1990, p. 68). Essentially, de Beauvoir, in a manner similar to Woolf, offers a linear account of historical events and with it, a blistering critique of political and economic catastrophes that have shaped the world. The point being made here is that the writer's imagination is free to transgress the limits of linear time and to explore other people's worlds and thus make possible a literary work that goes beyond the singularity of the author's 'I' and allows a narrative to encompass 'a concrete and singularised universal' (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 292): in other words, a structure which takes account of facticity and transcendence. Though Woolf's *Orlando* and de Beauvoir's *All Men Are Mortal* may be extreme examples of this, they nevertheless illustrate the broad perimeters of the imagination to write of things outside of one's own immediate world. De Beauvoir's singularity is thus expressed by the interest she shows in the problems of her characters, and believes that this is an essential requirement for all writers of literary fiction who must:

to present together the contradictions difficulties and ambiguities at the heart of an object which does not speak, a silent object,...that one must construct a novel which will truly be a multifaceted object that can never be summed up, which does not put forth any definitive word. (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 289)

Ambiguity as a concept infiltrates the writing of a work of fiction and once again, de Beauvoir will employ it to further enhance her existentialist thought and highlight the incidence of it across a range of perspectives.

De Beauvoir in her essay, 'My Experience as a Writer', puts forward the notion that literature is the privileged space of intersubjectivity:

that is to say that it is the place where consciousnesses communicate with one another, inasmuch as they are separated from one another. That is a very important thing because the

ambiguity of our condition is that we are linked precisely by that which separates us. I mean that I am *I* for myself alone. But each of you is *I* for yourself alone. It is our shared condition that we are radically separated from one another as subjects....our life has a flavour which is only ours; but this is true for everyone; it is true for each one of us. We are alone to die our death. No one will die for us. But this is true for everyone. There is therefore a generality in what is the most singular in us. I think that one of the writer's tasks is to break down the separation at this point where we are the most separate, at the point where we are the most singular. This is one of my most comforting, most interesting experiences as a writer; it is in speaking of what is the most singular that I have arrived at what is the most general and that I have touched my readers most deeply (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 296)

De Beauvoir passionately believes that people who read literary novels, and more especially so-called literature 'noir', with its uncompromising descriptions of the undeniable suffering in the world, has, in fact a positive effect on the reader:

speaking of the most personal experiences that we can have like loneliness, anguish, the death of the people we love, our own death, is on the contrary a way of bringing us together, of helping each other and of making the world less somber. I believe that this is one of the absolutely irreplaceable and essential tasks of literature: helping us communicate with each other through that which is the most solitary in ourselves and by which we are bound the most intimately is the most solitary in ourselves and by which we are bound the most intimately to one another (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 297)

Interspersed throughout this thesis will be many examples of Trevor's fictional characters reading literary fiction. Crucial to de Beauvoir's literary theory is its connectedness to her abiding interest in the notion of the Other, and how this becomes central to her theory of existential ethics. Trevor's championing of the female characters across his fiction and his willingness to explore their 'otherness', relates explicitly to the ensuing existential concepts that help to provide a structure for analysing and understanding his fiction.

The Other; Facticity; Reciprocity; Evil; Oppression; Transcendence; Solidarity

De Beauvoir first argued for a notion of the Other as reciprocally equal, in her essay ‘Pyrrhus et Cineás’. Unlike Sartre, who saw the Other as conflictual, de Beauvoir believed that the Self-Other relation is necessary and potentially reciprocal and that we need the Other to act as witness to our actions and to be the recipient of our testimonies (Tidd 1999, p. 164).¹² De Beauvoir’s concern with other consciousnesses is amongst the most important contributions to existentialist philosophy. *The Ethics of Ambiguity* appeared in 1947, and is the articulation of her existentialist ethics. When she went on to write *The Second Sex* in 1949, existentialist ethics was used by de Beauvoir to analyse the oppression of women and her ethical position also underlies many of her novels and short stories. The recognition of the freedom of the Other is fundamental to de Beauvoir’s conception of ethics, and is rooted in her philosophy when she addresses the question in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* ‘How could men, originally separated, get together?’ (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 18). Subjective morality is necessary for de Beauvoir and must entail the recognition of the existence of others: ‘no existence can be validly fulfilled if it is limited to itself’ and one can only define themselves through interaction with other people, that ‘man can find a justification of his own existence only in the existence of other men’ (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 72).

In the Introduction to *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir argues that ‘the category of Other is as original as consciousness itself’ and that throughout history woman ‘determines and differentiates herself in relation to man, and he does not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other’ (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 6). What de Beauvoir sets out to achieve in this biological, psychoanalytical, and historical materialist analysis of women is to demonstrate why woman

¹² The term the “Other” is one that has a rich and lengthy history in philosophy. Emmanuel Levinas and Simone de Beauvoir’s engagement with alterity influenced theorists of political, racial, and sexual identity. Throughout the thesis this term will sometimes be capitalised and sometimes not. Where it is capitalised, it is generally de Beauvoir’s concept of it and when it is not, it is employed as a more general term that denotes difference.

has been traditionally defined as Other. In this book, she explores the consequences from both men and women's points of view. One of the most important conclusions she draws from her analysis of women as Other is the real possibility of reciprocity between men and women. As previously stated, de Beauvoir is foremost amongst the existentialists in arguing for a conception of subjective reciprocity. This reciprocity calls for the mutual recognition of the other's freely chosen project. She believed that each person is comprised of both transcendence and immanence, and that reciprocity obliges us to proclaim our own transcendence and immanence while at the same time acknowledging the transcendence of the other person.

To explicate the concept of transcendence it is necessary to go back to the term 'facticity'. Facticity could be said to be a third-person observation of the factual properties of a person, namely race, nationality, social standing, family background, education and so forth, but it cannot define the essence of that person, the unique, living being that each person actually is. This objective knowledge of a person, however, is separate from the person's unique ability to take a stance toward his facticity. This is what de Beauvoir calls 'transcendence' (Bergoffen 2015, p. 11). She argued that each one has the ability to 'go beyond', and the notion of transcendence is used in the sense of being beyond the limits of experience, in that one is not merely defined by one's past or present circumstances, but has a choice to decide. It describes a mode of agency. Viktor Frankl, the Holocaust survivor, movingly illustrates this concept when he said 'the one thing you can't take away from me is the way I choose to respond what you do to me. The last of one's freedom is to choose one's attitude in any given circumstances' (Frankl 2005, p. 21). De Beauvoir is well aware of the difficulties of living an authentic life, and her experience of living through a terrible period in history, made this awareness all the more acute. She deals extensively with the notion of oppression in all its guises, and believes that all oppression is doomed to failure. Oppression

occurs when an individual's freedom is severed from itself by another and 'transcendence is condemned to fall uselessly back upon itself because it is cut off from its goals' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 81).

As human beings can only confirm the existence of each other, so only they can oppress: man is never oppressed by things: 'unless he is a naïve child who hits stones or a mad prince who orders the sea to be thrashed, he does not rebel against things, but only against other men' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 81) For de Beauvoir there is nothing 'natural' about oppression, it happens because: 'only man can be an enemy for man; only he can rob him of the meaning of his acts and his life because it also belongs only to him alone to confirm it in its existence, to recognise it in actual fact as a freedom' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 82). She stresses the importance of 'we' when she says:

It is this interdependence which explains why oppression is possible and why it is hateful. As we have seen, my freedom, in order to fulfil itself, requires that it emerge into an open future: it is other men who open the future to me, it is they who, setting up the world of tomorrow, define my future (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 82)

She also recognises that real evil, such as that of the concentration camps of World War Two, was a case in point of a situation so limiting that almost no expression of transcendence was possible. However, aside from events such as she experienced, World War Two and the Algerian War, there existed in her a strong belief in man's ability to exist authentically in the world and that social as well as individual transformation must occur in order to overcome oppression. Nevertheless, she is always aware of the situations of oppressed peoples such as slaves, and many women who exist in a childlike world in which values, customs, gods, and laws are given to them without being freely chosen.

Their situation is defined not by the possibility of transcendence, but by the enforcement of external institutions and power structures. Because of the power exerted upon them, their limitations cannot, in many circumstances, be transcended because they are

not even known. Women generally in de Beauvoir's opinion are an oppressed group but in her analysis, they differ from other oppressed groups, for example Blacks or Jews. She believed that women did not share solidarity with other women, unlike other oppressed groups who experienced a much stronger sense of solidarity, which springs from a shared tradition, culture, history, or an historical event that brought about oppression. She goes to great length to analyse women's oppression through the trope of existentialist ethics that seeks to determine the cause of the oppression. She argues that woman's status as Other appears to be occasioned in the masculine mean: 'he is the Subject, he is the Absolute – She is the Other' (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 6). Because she is arguing from a perspective that always entails ambiguity, full blame cannot be ascribed wholly to the privileged group of the One, and though viewed as the Other, woman may also collaborate in her submission:

No subject posits itself spontaneously and at once as the inessential from the outset; it is not the Other who, defining itself as Other, defines the One; the Other is posited as Other by the One positing itself as One. But in order for the Other not to turn into the One, the Other has to submit to this foreign point of view. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 7)

Here, de Beauvoir states that there is an element of avoidance at play, in that woman accepts her status and fails to assert her transcendence, thus rendering her partially blameworthy for her condition. Though fully accepting and acknowledging society's role in the construction of what it is to be female, de Beauvoir nevertheless offers a deconstruction of the myths through the methods of existential phenomenology, which lays them bare. Once they are laid out in all their emptiness, the possibility of freedom emerges. Trevor's identification of women's historical journey, and the damage that stemmed from their subjugation, is a key concern in his writing and a reading of this through the lens of de Beauvoir's work will form a central focus for this thesis. De Beauvoir's extensive treatise on marriage will be employed to explore the female/male relationships across the relevant fiction.

De Beauvoir on Marriage

De Beauvoir explores the subject of marriage in great depth in Chapter Five of *The Second Sex*. She believes that:

marriage has always been presented in radically different ways for men and for women. The two sexes are necessary for each other, but this necessity has never fostered reciprocity; women have never constituted a caste establishing exchange and contracts on an equal footing with men. Man is a socially autonomous and complete individual; he is regarded above all as a producer and his existence is justified by the work he provides for the group. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 452)

De Beauvoir's in-depth analysis of the institution of marriage in *The Second Sex* connects readily to the centrality of marriage in much of Trevor's female-centred fiction in this thesis. Her deconstruction of the myths that surround women, and how those myths are culturally constructed, will serve as a framework from which to explore the subjectivity of the female characters in Trevor's writing. What is interesting about de Beauvoir is her balanced standpoint on both the male and female perspectives. Though largely accrediting blame to a universal disposition of male domination, she nevertheless recognises that members of both sexes suffer from different forms of subjection, and in *The Second Sex* she reveals 'the complexity of the male world, which reveals itself, in Hegelian vein, not simply as a realm of transcendent subjects, but as one where men, like women can be rendered immanent' (James 2003, p. 150). Through the methodology of existentialist ethics, de Beauvoir explores the conflicts within marriage and, despite its publication over fifty years ago, her book still asks fundamental philosophical questions regarding the conceptual structures and language that relate to women's oppression that are still relevant today.

De Beauvoir uses existentialism to explore values, and she denies a theoretical position that would have dogmatic connotations and instead offers an existentialist ethics; an ethics that employs the notions of authenticity and freedom when looking at facts. In *The*

Second Sex, de Beauvoir scrupulously shifts the blame from individuals on to the socio-historical situation in which they find themselves living. This connects with her notion of facticity and situatedness, and is particularly pertinent to the historical situation of women while also germane to her belief that everything in life must be related to lived experience. This is especially true for her when she philosophises on the question of old age across a period of over thirty years.

De Beauvoir on Old Age

In *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir has a chapter entitled 'From Maturity to Old Age', in which she depicts how a woman 'helplessly looks on at the degeneration of this fleshly object which she confuses with herself', and is convinced that aging is inevitably associated with the loss of 'sexual attraction and fertility, from which, in society's and her own eyes, she derives the justification of her existence and her chances of happiness: bereft of all future, she has approximately half of her adult life still to live' (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 633). Penelope Deutscher argues that de Beauvoir, for a considerable period in her writing, saw aging as an unremittingly negative aspect of life (Deutscher 2003, p. 288). However, as Toril Moi has pointed out, these reflections were eventually 'turned into a source of activity', and the publication of *The Coming of Age* in 1970 represents de Beauvoir's 'triumphant settling of scores with her old enemy, death. Now she can face her age with equanimity' (Moi 1994, p. 243).

In *The Coming of Age*, de Beauvoir asks a number of questions: what do the words elderly, old, and aged really mean; how are they used by society; how in turn do they define the generation that we are taught to respect and love but instead castigate and avoid; and most importantly, how is our treatment of the elderly in society a reflection of our society's values and promises. She offers a contemptuous critique of society in *Old Age* when she says:

The aged do not form a body with any economic strength whatsoever and they have no possible way of enforcing their rights: and it is in the interest of the exploiting class to destroy the solidarity between the workers and the unproductive old so that there is no one at all to protect them. The myths and the clichés put out by bourgeois thought aim at holding up the elderly man as someone who is different, as *another being*. ‘Adolescents who last long enough are what life makes old men out of,’ observes Proust. They still retain the virtues and the faults of the men they once were and still are: and this is something that public opinion chooses to overlook. If old people show the same desires, the same feelings and the same requirements as the young, the world looks upon them with disgust: in them love and jealousy seem revolting or absurd, sexuality repulsive and violence ludicrous. They are required to be a standing example of all virtues. Above all they are called up to display serenity: the world asserts that they possess it, and this assertion allows the world to ignore their unhappiness. The purified image of themselves that society offers the aged is that of the while-haired and venerable Sage, rich in experience, planning high above the common state of mankind: if they vary from this, then they fall below it. The counterpart of the first image is that the old fool in his dotage, a laughing-stock for children. In any case, either by their virtue or by their degradation they stand outside humanity. The world, therefore, need feel no scruple in refusing them the minimum of support which is considered necessary for living like a human being. (de Beauvoir 1996, pp. 3-4)

The real value of de Beauvoir’s comprehensive treatise on old age is its correlation to her own personal, *bona fide* experience of aging. Once again, she employs existentialist ethics to tease out the moral responsibilities that arise when social marginalisation impedes on an individual’s freedom (Card 2009, p. 289). Specifically relevant to the arguments in this thesis are her reflections on the implications of ageing, and her view that the aged are often treated in society as the Other. She decried the notion that ‘so long as you feel young, you are young’, and felt this showed a complete misunderstanding of the complex truth of old age:

For the outsider it is a dialectic relationship between my being as he defines it objectively and the awareness of myself that I acquire by means of him. Within me it is the Other – that is to say the person I am for the outsider – who is old: and that Other is myself. In most cases for the rest of the world our being is as many-sided as the rest of the world itself.

Any observation made about us may be challenged on the basis of some differing opinion. But in this particular instance no challenge is permissible: the words 'sixty-year-old' interpret the same fact for everybody. They correspond to biological phenomena that may be detected by examination (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 284)

In the chapter entitled 'The Discovery and Assumption of Old Age', de Beauvoir provides a lengthy and detailed analysis of different individual responses to ageing. Despite her belief that one's attitude to ageing is highly individualistic, nevertheless there are valid difficulties:

another obstacle is the pressure of public opinion. The elderly person conforms to the conventional ideal that is offered for his acceptance. He is afraid of scandal or quite simply of ridicule. He becomes the slave of what other people might say. He inwardly accepts the watchwords of propriety and continence imposed by the community (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 320)

She gives voice to the multiplicity of situations that pertain to one's work or class and probes how this influences the experiences of ageing. She suggests that those who are materially more advantaged may experience a comfortable old age, whilst those who are disadvantaged may find ageing more difficult. She argues in true existentialist fashion that old age must still be a time of creative and meaningful projects and relationships with other people, despite the limitations that inevitably exist for the aged. Her philosophy of existentialist ethics demands that both individuals and society must recognise that a person's value lies in his or her humanity which is unaffected by age. De Beauvoir's reflections on old age will offer an insightful lens when examining Trevor's portrayal of his elderly characters in the final chapter of this thesis. Trevor's profound engagement with chronicling the fictional lives of a whole host of characters from all occupations, offers an intense exploration of existence, and de Beauvoir's existential philosophy, in all its manifestations, really does seem to offer the most suitable lens from which to delve into the analysis of his fiction.

Chapter Two: *Elizabeth Alone* – A Veritable Female Sanctum

This chapter will offer an in-depth analysis of Trevor's novel, *Elizabeth Alone* (1973), as it is arguably the seedbed for so much of his later fiction that pays specific attention to women's lives. The particular focus in this chapter lays the groundwork for the shape and direction of the remaining chapters. This novel will be analysed primarily to draw attention to Trevor's core concerns about how individuals, in particular women, relate to each other, about the difficulties of interpersonal relationships; about individual's life circumstances; about the impact of the past on the choices he or she makes; about the inequalities in society; and about the dangers of oppression and how it may lead to the objectification of other human beings. There are a number of reasons for choosing this novel as a primary narrative in this thesis. It will be argued that it encompasses Trevor's embedded but unspoken feminist agenda that is integral to his writer's imagination. A history of feminism subtly pervades the narrative and becomes a *leitmotif* throughout. The setting of the novel, the gynaecological ward of a women's hospital, a veritable female sanctum, is powerfully indicative of Trevor's desire to explore 'other people's worlds', and other consciousnesses, specifically those of the female other. It will then be demonstrated that *Elizabeth Alone* offers a comprehensive *inhabiting* of a diverse group of women across all strata of society that evolves from a chance encounter in the liminal space of a hospital. *Inhabiting*, not just imagining the other, according to Anna Jones Abramson, is a belief in the significance of spatial space in the ethics of alterity, a space that allows the reader to 'share a perceptual experience' and thus 'to inhabit a common space' (Abramson 2014, p. 22). This transitory confinement in a highly specific spatial context sanctions a freedom for the woman that allows them to communicate their worries, hopes and dreams to each other in a safe place.

This concept of inhabiting connects to de Beauvoir's belief that 'the truth that is other becomes mine without ceasing to be an "other". I abdicate my "I" in favour of he who is speaking, and yet I remain myself' (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 201). The individual life stories of the women in this novel connect to a wider network of family and friends that Trevor explores with great subtlety, which allows their individual facticity to unfold. His exposition of the varying relationships in the novel presents a powerful meditation on the varying difficulties that his female characters encounter in a patriarchal society, a society that conventionally views women as embodiments of dependence. It could be argued that *Elizabeth Alone*, his sixth novel, demonstrates how his narrative strategies have matured and progressed to facilitate an in-depth, realistic representation of the lives of these four women. Trevor's specific and distinctive naming of characters will also become apparent in the analysis of this narrative.

While Trevor had already written two novels with female protagonists, *Mrs Eckdorf in O'Neill's Hotel* (1969), and *Miss Gomez and the Brethern* (1971), it is with *Elizabeth Alone* that he develops and intensifies his engagement with otherness, in all of its incarnations, across societal barriers. Schirmer argues that with *Elizabeth Alone*, Trevor's best writing as a novelist begins:

not only does this book present a broader, more varied canvas than do any of Trevor's novels that come before it – ranging with facility between the suburbs of the upper-middle classes to down-and-out city streets worked by con-artists and petty criminals – but also it achieves considerably more depth than any preceding book in Trevor's canon. (Schirmer 1990, p. 54)

In one of his earliest novels, *The Old Boys* (1964), the characterisation of Mrs Jaraby anticipates his continuing interest in the female perspective, and also demonstrates his interest in the imbalance and failure at the private, intimate level of marriage. His willingness and his ability to do this allow him to write with compassion and understanding

about the lives of his female characters. The evocation of this key imperative links itself inextricably to de Beauvoir's writings on feminism, and allied with her views and theories on ethics and literature, will offer a lens that will enhance and strengthen the reading of Trevor as an ethical writer in his portrayal of the lives of his female characters. This chapter will begin with a discussion on feminism, and will be followed by an exposition of the many themes that arise in the narrative, and will illustrate how they link seamlessly with de Beauvoir's ethical interests and their basis in existential phenomenology: themes such as loneliness, despair, anxiety, oppression, complicity, otherness, marriage in all its permutations and many others, will be explored under the collective theme of 'relationships' in the lives of each of the four main female characters.

Set in the early 1970s, *Elizabeth Alone*'s central focus is on the experience of four women who find themselves in the gynaecological ward of London's Cheltenham Street Hospital. Three of them, Elizabeth Aidallbery, Sylvia Clapper and Miss Sampson await hysterectomies, while Lily Drucker is confined to the ward indefinitely, on bed-rest due to a problematic pregnancy. Trevor incisively enters the worlds of these women's individual lives with a compassion and understanding that is exceptional for a male writer writing in this period. Elizabeth, the genteel, middle-class, forty-one year old, divorced mother of three, takes centre stage, and at its core, the novel is a commemoration of her hard-won success in transforming her self-image. His exposition of the varying relationships in the novel presents a powerful meditation on the manifold difficulties that his female characters encounter in a patriarchal society, a society that at that time conventionally still viewed women as inferior and therefore subservient to men.¹³ A close analysis of *Elizabeth Alone* will demonstrate a

¹³ Elizabeth Wilson refers to Brigid Brophy's collection of Essays, 'Don't Never Forget' (1966), in which she 'spoke of women as resembling the animals in a modern zoo; the old cage bars of legal disability had simply been replaced by 'zones of fierce social disapproval' through which it might be as hard to step, but which confused because they were invisible' (Wilson 1980, p. 3).

subtle and nuanced subversion of this perceived denigration of women, and will become a compelling element of his fiction across his entire *oeuvre*.

Feminism and the Construction of the Other

The seriousness of Trevor's desire to explore female subjectivity is introduced through two symbolic devices at an early stage in this novel. The first one concerns the information that the hospital was founded by Lady Augusta Haptree and her friends, in 1841, as a maternity hospital. She wrote her autobiography in 1886, fifteen years before her death, and this autobiography has become essential reading for patients. Lily Drucker, in hospital for a lengthy stay, is encouraged by Sister O'Keeffe to read it:

It was not a book that Lily found it easy to concentrate her attention on, but she persevered because Sister O'Keeffe knew every page of Lady Augusta's autobiography off by heart. (Trevor 1973, p. 26)

Sister O'Keeffe is portrayed by Trevor to be the guardian of Lady Augusta's legacy to ameliorate the lives of women. Sister O'Keeffe emulates the pioneering spirit of previous feminists with her focus squarely located in the lives of her female patients. Trevor casts her as a fifty-one year old Irish spinster who sees her job as a vocation: 'sometimes you came back with the feet walked off you, with just about the energy to boil an egg. You'd feel low as a kind of luxury, because you'd been bright all day' (Trevor 1973, p. 155). She is presented as a strong, kind, fair-minded woman, a woman whose life is intimately entwined in the myriad realities of other women's lives. Lily's reading uncovers the reasons for Lady Augusta's decision for opening a hospital for women:

I determined that women who were treated no better than water-rats should in sickness at least be offered the privileges of common humanity. There were brought before my husband two men from the Shoreditch neighbourhood who had beaten with chair legs the

wife of one of them because she would not sell the clothes her mother had left her. In the hospital to which this woman was brought nothing was done for her. Nurses refused to undress her, believing her to be a street-walker. She was unable to undress herself and died on the third day of her confinement, the wounds beneath her clothes having taken in poison. That the hospital should bear a share of guilt to that for which the two men were imprisoned I have no doubt. Yet a hospital can be judged only by the law of God. (Trevor 1973, pp. 26-27)

The second symbolic device is the figure of the nameless woman who parades daily outside the Cheltenham Street Hospital, carrying a banner that reads ‘Liberation Now’ (Trevor 1973, p. 25). Both devices serve to illustrate Trevor’s keen awareness of the difficulties around being a woman, as well as a knowledge of the history of feminism, especially when one considers the period in which this novel was written, namely the early seventies, a period known for the development of second-wave feminism.¹⁴ Interestingly these two symbolic tropes involve texts, the autobiography and the words on the banner, which deal with the role of woman in patriarchy, and that attempt to re-write that role, something which Trevor himself is undertaking in this novel.

The novel traces the transition from first-wave feminism, which began in the mid to late 19th century when the efforts for women’s rights coalesced into a clearly identifiable and self-conscious series of movements such as the Suffragette movement in the early 20th century, to the second period which was occurring during the late sixties and early seventies, a time that would anticipate real legal reform for women in England.¹⁵ It is interesting to look at the ages of Trevor’s female characters in this novel, from the elderly grey-haired Miss Sampson, the forty-one year old Elizabeth, the thirty-three year old Lily Drucker and the twenty-five year old Sylvia Clapper. All of these women would have been born over a time-

¹⁴ See Linda Nicholson’s *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory* (1997), a collection of many of the major essays on feminist theory since the 1960s.

¹⁵ See Sheila Rowbotham’s *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States in the Twentieth Century* (2007), for a decade by decade perspective of the history of feminism.

period that extended from the early nineteenth hundreds through to the late nineteenth forties, so in effect Trevor is predicating generational differences among his female characters.

Trevor's inclusion of Lady Augusta's autobiography with its disclosures of her personal circumstances coincides with de Beauvoir's existentialist belief that every individual must embrace their freedom and try to transcend their circumstances. The character of Lady Augusta embodies this concept when she initiated the opening of a hospital specifically for women during one of the most repressive eras for women in history. De Beauvoir describes the second half of the nineteenth century as a period in which:

Victorian England imperiously isolates woman in her home; Jane Austen wrote in secret; it took great courage or an exceptional destiny to become George Eliot or Emily Bronte; in 1888 an English scholar wrote: 'Women are not only not part of the race, they are not even half of the race but a sub-species destined uniquely for reproduction'. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 145)

Though belonging to the wealthy, upper-middle-classes, Lady Augusta nevertheless possesses an acute social consciousness, which finds its motivation in helping women to take responsibility for their own lives:

I am angered sometimes by the exploitation of women, not in the factories, of which nowadays we hear much, but in the homes which they themselves have helped to make. And I am angered by women's folly in encouraging that exploitation and by accepting without protest the status of mindless creatures. (Trevor 1973, p. 76)

Her belief that women are complicit in their own subjugation finds innumerable reverberations with de Beauvoir's contention that this complicity, though indicative of society in the nineteenth century, nevertheless constitutes 'bad faith', on the part of the woman. This concept of 'bad faith' or self-deception essentially arises out of oppression and de Beauvoir quotes John Stuart Mill who in 1867:

pleaded the first case ever officially pronounced before Parliament in favour of the vote for women. In his writings he imperiously demanded equality of men and women in the family and society: “The principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself, and now one of the hindrances to human improvement”. (de Beauvoir 2009, pp. 142-143)

Lady Augusta, (supposedly) writing in this time-period, advocates a belief, shared with the existentialists, that despite one’s limiting circumstances, once a consciousness-raising awareness takes place in the psyche of women that validated their experience of injustice, then the concept of liberation from inequality could become a reality. Her desire to alleviate, in some way, the suffering of her fellow females is indicative of her personal integrity and courage, despite being a Victorian lady with all its attendant constraints and limitations.

Excerpts from her autobiography are presented throughout the book, and her strength of character is endorsed by Trevor when he reveals her pragmatic valuing of both her marriage and her life:

Few women are as fortunate in their marriages as I was. He was a man of little charm, for he did not hold its possession to be a virtue. He did not laugh much, not being blessed with a feeling for the humorous. Yet he was kind in every way to all God’s creatures, to me and to our children. His character was strong, his nature loyal. I believe in my seventieth year that no woman can expect more of a man. My husband did not ever love me. (Trevor 1973, p. 84)

Lady Augusta’s intense realism anticipates, and finds, many echoes in de Beauvoir’s existential philosophy, one that demands a strong sense of personal responsibility for each individual. Trevor’s portrayal of the elderly Lady Augusta as a strong, pragmatic woman, finds numerous echoes throughout his fiction in the characters of other elderly women. Chapter Five will closely examine a selection of these fictional characters that will extend his ethically charged appreciation of these women’s lives.

A very different symbolic device is employed by Trevor in the person of the nameless woman who is a constant presence outside the hospital:

from early morning until dusk, every day of the week, this woman walked by the black wrought-iron railings in front of the weathered brick façade....she handed out no leaflets, nor had she ever bothered a patient or a member of the hospital staff. No one knew why she had chosen a women's hospital to make her protest in front of, or if the liberation the banner urged was liberation specifically for women, though this was generally supposed to be so. (Trevor 1973, p. 25)

This enigmatic, nameless woman would only say, 'that she was doing what must be done', and the general opinion was that her protest was 'a sign of the times', which seems to infer that changes were occurring for women in society (Trevor 1973, p. 26). This could also suggest that her continual presence is a necessary strategy to ensure the perpetuation of the liberation of women into the future. Her namelessness and extreme reticence, coupled with the public prominence that she is given by Trevor, serve to reiterate the need for change, and to suggest that these changes need to be constantly sought for all women across society. The use of the word 'liberation' may have connotations beyond a feminist denotation. For de Beauvoir, liberation or freedom is a fundamental concept for every human being:

freedom is the source from which all significations and values spring. It is the original condition of all justification of existence. The man who seeks to justify his life must want freedom itself absolutely and above everything else. (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 24)

This nameless woman may be soundlessly embracing her freedom and doing exactly what she wants to do, free from the traditional roles assigned to women by society. This concept of liberation and the consequences for women who do not choose this path, or who are not being allowed to choose it, will be alluded to both in this chapter and throughout this thesis.

Trevor's setting of his story in a woman's hospital mirrors other temporary spaces such as the boarding house, the pub, the hotel and the boarding-school, venues that suggest

the transitory and temporariness in so much of his fiction, all of which allow him to engage with a microcosm of humanity. The setting of this story in the gynaecological ward of a woman's hospital forcefully and compellingly reiterates his sensitive and perceptive exploration of the female other. The significance of a gynaecological ward predicates a space that comprises both the beginnings of life, and the bringing to an end of the life force that constituted birth. The themes of fertility and infertility will be discussed further in the next chapter, but the focus will be on the sterility of two of the male characters in two of the short stories. MacKenna considers the unlikelihood of male authors engaging with such a setting, noting:

In *Elizabeth Alone* Trevor ventures into a female sanctum which is rarely explored by male writers – the gynaecological ward of a hospital – a location in which the normal divisions of society have little meaning and in which the vulnerability of the human condition is emphasised because of patient's illnesses. (MacKenna 1999, p. 101)

The stories of these four very different women set out a lived narration of the reality of women's lives in the second half of the twentieth century, and reveal the materiality of de Beauvoir's historical analysis of women and how they became the Other; his utilisation of generational differences connects throughout with this analysis and with the fact that the writing and publication of this novel occurred in the aftermath of de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, a foundational text of contemporary feminism. Trevor's imagining of the singular lives of these women reveals an intense appreciation and empathetic response to their plight and this response by him, through the medium of fiction, may be indicative of that period of time and of the influence and prevalence of second wave feminism.

The fictional lives of Trevor's female characters in *Elizabeth Alone* correspond to de Beauvoir's examination of the social institutions that have defined woman as Other. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir establishes that the myths that shape religion and culture are the root

cause of woman being seen as ‘inessential’.¹⁶ In the second volume of *The Second Sex*, she famously declares that ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’, and goes on to show how this is ingrained in the individual since childhood (de Beauvoir 2010, p. 293). The imposition of gender roles is fundamental to the oppression that women experience when they find themselves enthralled to the myth of femininity that is found in social mores that dictate proper feminine behaviour and social standards of beauty. One of the most damaging consequences of the historical subjugation of women is the sense of inferiority felt by women because society’s perception of them is one that views them as socially and intellectually imperfect beings. De Beauvoir asserts, however, that women are complicit in their own subjugation, as they are constructed by societal institutions that ‘predetermine human political inequality and impede each individual’s ability to recognise the freedom of the other’ (Card 2003, p. 33).

This is evident in so many of the relationships in *Elizabeth Alone*. De Beauvoir believed that male/female relationships are uniquely ambiguous, and that women and men exist in a ‘primordial *Mitsein*’, a term she borrows from Heidegger used to describe the unique bond between the male who is Subject and the female who is Object; in other words it is a recognition of a world in which the heterosexual norm prevails, and it is also a description of the hegemonic and hitherto unthought implications of patriarchy (Bergoffen 2014, p. 11). A consideration of the male/female relationships in the novel will be explored through the lens of de Beauvoir’s reflections on marriage that will begin with an in-depth exploration of the main protagonist, Elizabeth, and how her life has been shaped by both circumstances and chance. This will be followed with an in-depth analysis of the other three female characters, each with their own divergent story.

¹⁶ See *The Second Sex* (2010) Introduction for an analysis of the term ‘inessential’.

Marriage – Male and Female Relationships, Marriage and Existential Questions

Reading *Elizabeth Alone* through de Beauvoir's existential lens corresponds with MacKenna's assertion that Trevor manoeuvres his characters throughout his fiction to 'draw strength from each other', and explore how they 'find an answer to their existentialist questions' (MacKenna 1999, p. 103). Existentialism is essentially concerned with challenging individuals to examine their lives for intimations of bad faith and to heighten their sensitivity to oppression and exploitation in the world. *Elizabeth Alone* is a narrative that resolutely embarks on an existentialist journey from its very beginning. Elizabeth, the central character in the novel, experiences through the duration of the narrative, a crisis of identity that has caused her to feel alienated, lonely and directionless in life. She is about to enter a hospital to undergo a hysterectomy, a significant event that symbolises a distinctly female biological finality that is irreversible. At forty-one she now finds herself divorced and in a sense, alone. The title of the novel *Elizabeth Alone* is essentially a study in being alone and demonstrates the essential solitariness of every individual, which is a central tenet of the philosophy of existentialism.

The term 'existential angst' could be used to describe what she is going through. The concept of existential angst began with Kierkegaard, and was taken up by Heidegger and the existentialists. They believed that this feeling of anxiety causes a temporary loss of the basic sense of identity, and that it may result in a person feeling threatened in some way as well as feeling vulnerable and alienated. However, these philosophers view such existential angst in a positive way, and see anguish as the consciousness of freedom; in other words that anxiety leads to self-understanding by revealing fundamental aspects of the self (Crowell 2010, p. 4). Through the exposition of Elizabeth's crisis, Trevor artfully explores her loss of identity and reveals how her identity has been locked into other people's perceptions of her, and how this

has in effect defined her. Elizabeth, the central character experiences an existential crisis when she loses, temporarily, the basic sense of who she is:

At forty-one, Elizabeth Aidallbery had a way of dwelling on her past....the past she examined at forty-one was full of other people....the past was full of changes and moods, of regrets that were still regrets, and resolutions. Whatever it was, the past that she had come so much to dwell upon seemed now to possess her. The guilt that flavoured it mocked her, and her errors of judgement took on larger dimensions. The damage she believed she'd inflicted on other people hurt her more, the patternless quality of the whole oppressed her. She would have listened to any comforting voice or to any explanation, but at the time there happened to be neither. (Trevor 1973, pp. 7-15)

Elizabeth's reminiscing on her past reveals unhappy memories from her childhood in relation to her relationship with her father:

he'd shuffled about the house, a grey, pernickety figure, exuding disapproval. He spread it like a fog about him, damply cold,....grey clothes, grey hair, spectacles hanging on a grey ribbon, a grey untidy tie....he blew his nose in a particular way, he pursed his lips, he watched her eating food. Wearily, he closed his eyes over school reports from Miss Henderson's and Miss Gamble's Kindergarten. 'Obstreperous', he slowly said. 'It says here you're obstreperous Elizabeth'. (Trevor 1973, p. 8)

These unhappy memories have left her with a residual sense of guilt:

At twelve, she had been unable to weep at her father's funeral and unable, also, to prevent herself from thinking that the house would be nicer now. Looking back, she established that as the beginning of the guilt which had since coloured her life. (Trevor 1973, p. 8)

These unhappy memories merge with her own unhappy marital experience, a marriage that she had entered into willingly and about which 'she hadn't for a split second hesitated' (Trevor 1973, p. 10). Her reverie enables her to realise that she had married a man very similar to her father:

In the household he took quite naturally her father's place. In time, even, their eldest daughter's untidiness enraged him, as Elizabeth's untidiness had enraged her father. The

noise of his two younger daughters displeased him also. He couldn't work, he complained in unemotional fury....no man in the world could work with noise like that going on. (Trevor 1973, p. 11)

She reflects on the feelings of disapproval which she experienced from both her father and her now ex-husband, and for which she sought the help of a psychiatrist who suggested that Elizabeth was attempting to punish her father by 'punishing the man you married' (Trevor 1973, p. 11):

She tries to analyse her husband's behaviour in an effort to apprehend the relationship and concludes that what troubled Elizabeth most was that she felt her husband had developed a disappointed way of looking at her. And when the subject of the children's noise or untidiness came up she felt he considered that she, more than the children, was responsible for the children's shortcomings....often she felt that he regarded her as a fourth child in the house. (Trevor 1973, p. 12)

Trevor's inclusion of the psychiatrist's partisan summation of Elizabeth's angst serves to highlight the prejudices that still existed towards women in the nineteen sixties. Psychiatry was still a male-dominated profession that failed to comprehend fully the lived realities of women's lives. The psychiatrist's pat one-liner, that Elizabeth was 'punishing the man you married', denies any culpability on her husband's part (Trevor 1973, p. 12).¹⁷

Elizabeth's insight in to her husband's infantilisation of her at this individual level, is emblematic of a similar sense of recognition that became an important moment in the history of feminism, that began with Mary Wollstonecraft who, in her *Vindication for the Rights of Women* (1792), and who argued against society's infantilisation of women. Trevor, in his characterisation of Elizabeth's husband, creates a twentieth century male who portrays the archetypal inheritor of archaic notions of masculine superiority. She muses on the

¹⁷ *Only Half-Way to Paradise: Women in Post-War Britain 1945-1980*, examines the difficulties women faced in spite of the endeavours made to change their status in society. Wilson's belief that feminism went 'underground' during this period offers an interesting debate and is particularly relevant to the timeframe that Trevor wrote his earliest books, including *The Old Boys* (1964), *Other People's Worlds* (1970), and *Elizabeth Alone* (1973).

compromises she made by reading books he recommended, textbooks on anthropology and archaeology:

He'd suggested that she should read books about the Archaemenians and reports on the integration of the central African tribe that interested him. Dutifully she did so, but when she once suggested that he might like to glance through *Wives and Daughters*, which he'd never read, he said he didn't think it would much involve him. (Trevor 1973, p. 12)

Trevor's contrasting of the different types of literature read by Elizabeth and her mother with the non-literary material beloved by her husband, is revealing. His dismissal of Elizabeth Gaskell's novel, *Wives and Daughters* (1864), is indicative of his refusal of the domestic and the feminine world. Hermione Lee argues that Trevor allusions to literary texts 'suggest, or to contrast with, a way of thinking or a way of life', and the stark differences in reading material in this instance, reveal a real disconnection between the male and the female (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 16).

Furthermore, there is a strong suggestion that people who read good literary fiction have more self-awareness, and an ability to think things through in their own lives, than those who do not read such books. Elizabeth's positive memories from her early life are all connected with warm, affectionate reminiscences from books both she and her mother had read:

Her mother had a way of speaking about fictional characters as if they were real: Mr Dubbley, Daisy Mutlar, Perugia Gaukrodger....Elizabeth had become used to this kind of chatter, which had been there ever since the days she and Di Troughton had first come across the girls of the Chalet School.... (Trevor 1973, p. 12)

All of these fictional characters that are recalled by Elizabeth belong squarely in the comic genre: Dicken's *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), George and Weedon Grossmith's *The Diary of a Nobody* (1892), and A.G. MacDonnell, *England, Their England* (1933), and would have been considered classic comic fiction. The positive memories of these fictional

characters suggest a good-humoured and inclusive environment, one that was initiated by Elizabeth's mother. Trevor's associations with the different types of literature read by the characters, connect cohesively to de Beauvoir's thinking, which explores the relationship between literature and information. She asserts that only literary fiction can broaden one's horizons:

the only form of communication capable of giving me the incommunicable – capable of giving me the taste of another life....that is why Proust was right to think that literature is the privileged place of intersubjectivity. (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 201)

There is a strong implication regarding the value of literary fiction in the work of Trevor and this is keenly corroborated in the resilience and strength of Elizabeth and her mother, while the dearth of literary fiction in her husband's life symbolises his emotional frigidity.

In hospital, Elizabeth finds it difficult to escape her memories of the past. She reflects on the early days of her marriage when she suggested to her husband that she invite three very special people in her life to tea. Two of them, Miss Middlesmith, a teacher who had recognised a talent for drawing in Elizabeth, and Mr Feuchtwanger, who owned an art school and who felt that Elizabeth's talent 'was developing nicely', along with Miss Digg, her piano teacher, all came to tea on different occasions:

On three different Sundays they came, soon after the honeymoon: spindly Miss Digg, and Mr Feuchtwanger, and Miss Middlesmith, who'd first of all made her draw flowers. She wanted him to meet them because she's always like them very much. Mr Feuchtwanger was tall and thin, metallic-looking, like a Giacometti man. Miss Middlesmith was fat, with a face like a moon. There were silences when each of them came to tea. (Trevor 1973, p. 86)

Elizabeth loved their *joie de vivre*:

Mr Feuchtwanger was always ringing off the name of flowers because he liked the sound of them. Meadow Clary and Mother of Thyme, *valeriana officinalis*, *atropa belladonna*, larkspur and wood anemone, cuckoo bread, whinberry, stonecrop. Just to think of them

made Mr Feuchtwager happy. You'd go mad, he used to tell her, if you lost your faith in happiness....Miss Middlesmith was a happy person also....Miss Digg was kind. (Trevor 1973, p. 87)

However, her husband is blind to their attributes: 'Heavens, I thought he'd never stop!' her husband had laughingly said after Mr Feuchtwanger had been to tea. 'What a tedious old man!' (Trevor 1973, p. 87) Elizabeth muses that:

Perhaps he was, and perhaps Miss Middlesmith was greedy about cake and perhaps Miss Digg was as he said, pathetic. It didn't matter, and even now she didn't want to remember his condemnations of people who were special to her and who did no harm. (Trevor 1973, p. 87)

By giving the reader a glimpse into Elizabeth's introspections, Trevor persuasively captures the stealthy negation of Elizabeth's subjectivity. Interestingly, Elizabeth's now ex-husband remains nameless throughout the novel, with only one derisory comment on his family name evoked by Elizabeth's mother, Mrs Orpen: 'Aidallbery', her mother had said. 'What an odd name!' (Trevor 1973, p. 9). His perpetual namelessness is clearly illustrative of the gradual negation of his subjectivity throughout Elizabeth's memories of him.

Trevor's analysis of marriage and its imbalances is continued in the portrait of Elizabeth's mother. Mrs Orpen herself had an unhappy marriage. She now lives in a nursing home, and reflects on a marriage that lasted twenty-one years, but now feels no regret for its demise or the demise of her husband. She acknowledges that 'history had repeated itself', that 'Elizabeth had been foolish' in a 'schoolgirlish kind of way', and that she herself 'should have taken her away at once' and regrets that it was 'too easy, being wise after the event' (Trevor 1973, p. 59). Intriguingly, Trevor, through the exposition of the behaviour of these male figures, prompts a questioning about the concept of masculine perceptions that connects with de Beauvoir's analysis of why men behave like this. In dominating his wife, she argues, a husband makes up for:

all the resentments accumulated daily among other men whose existence means that he is brow-beaten and injured – all that is purged from him at home as he lets loose his authority upon his wife and that when her admiration is not enough, he enacts his power by restoring to tyranny and in this particular case, emotional abuse. (de Beauvoir 1999, p. 483)

Both mother and daughter's experiences of marriage offer a rich *inhabiting* by Trevor across two generations. What is striking about the failure of these two marriages is the exposition by Trevor of the unpleasant and arrogant nature of these two male characters. Elizabeth's memories of her father connect to Mrs Orpen's frank recollections of Mr Orpen, and to how she can now admit that 'she didn't miss her own husband, which was a hard thought, but which was true' (Trevor 1973, p. 59). They appear to embody implicitly *Mitsein*, the concept of themselves as Subject and their female partners as Other, with all its attendant disavowal of their divine right to be perceived equal in every way.

They are almost classical archetypes of de Beauvoir's analysis of the institution of marriage, in all its mythical construction, that contrived to establish men's superiority over their female counterparts. De Beauvoir, writing *The Second Sex*, straddles the time periods in which Elizabeth and her mother live. Mrs Orpen is eighty-two in the novel, which places her birth in the early part of the twentieth century, with Elizabeth being located in the second half. Yet for both generations, marriage typifies inequality and unhappiness. Trevor, especially through the characterisation of Elizabeth, unsparingly illuminates the objectification that occurs when her husband blatantly devalues her in his unsparing condensation of her femaleness. Elizabeth, though having freely chosen her future husband, illustrates de Beauvoir's point, that 'the destiny that society traditionally offers women in marriage', and thus she is an inheritor of the established structure that society sought to impose on its people (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 451). De Beauvoir argues that:

Marriage has always been presented in radically different ways for men and for women. The two sexes are necessary for each other, but this necessity has never fostered reciprocity. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 451)

In Elizabeth's case, the continuous subtle oppression that was emblematic of her husband's patriarchal attitudes, has supplanted and denied reciprocity, and has led to her having an affair with her best friend's husband, an affair about which she is full of regrets. She has a very strong sense of guilt around the mistakenness of this short-lived affair with the husband of a woman called Daphne. She acknowledges that her affair led to Daphne having a nervous breakdown, and that she would have to live with this guilt for the rest of her life: 'but Daphne's face was still there....it would always be there, Elizabeth thought, in the gallery of faces that would always be there' (Trevor 1973, p. 90).

In contrast, Elizabeth's ex-husband's lack of guilt in relation to his ex-wife and especially to his children, demonstrates a fundamental lack of emotional responsibility towards them. Now living apart from them, this emotional estrangement is illuminated through his thoughts as he shaves his face in Aberdeen:

He did not think about the woman who'd been his wife while he did any of this; he did not ever permit himself to think about her. Once a month he wrote three letters to their three children, but as the children grew older he found it difficult to think of anything to say to them. In time, he knew, he would cease to write altogether, for this monthly association was increasingly a painful business. (Trevor 1973, p. 158)

Elizabeth's marriage embodies what male cultural hegemony symbolises, namely the physical, psychological and intellectual confinement of the female Other. De Beauvoir believed that this confinement of women encouraged them to accept mediocrity instead of greatness and Elizabeth exemplifies this reality.

De Beauvoir wrote the *Second Sex* in the 1940s, a period she perceived as one of transition, and one in which society was still defined by 'ancient structures and values', and

she felt that ‘modern marriage can be understood only in light of the past it perpetuates’ (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 453). As Elizabeth is forty-one years old in the story, and was married for twenty years, she would have married probably in the late forties, the period of de Beauvoir’s writing.¹⁸ De Beauvoir, in her considerations on marriage at this time, argues that middle-class women chose marriage over a career and this is reflected in Elizabeth:

Even when she is more emancipated, the economic advantage held by males forces her to prefer marriage over a career: she will look for a husband she hopes will ‘get ahead’ faster and further than she could. It is still accepted that the love act is a service she renders to the man; he takes his pleasure and he owes compensation in return. The woman’s body is an object to be purchased; for her it represents capital she has the right to exploit....she will keep the house, raise the children...she has the right to let herself be supported, and traditional morality even exhorts it. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 455)

Marriage has limited Elizabeth’s essential freedom, and she has responded with resignation over the years:

In the early days of her marriage Elizabeth has come to recognise the virtues of reports on African tribal integration, but now, at forty-one, she felt all that had been a pretence on her part. Everything had been a pretence, lying in bed with him, the endless coming up to scratch, the listening to a voice she’d once thought beautiful and then no longer did, the bearing of children because it was the thing to do, apologising for noise and untidiness, apologising when keys fell down the drain. (Trevor 1973, p. 13)

Other marriages are scrutinised in this novel, and Trevor offers a wide canvas of its many permutations. Illegitimacy and spinsterhood as derivatives around the institution of marriage are also examined by Trevor. The marriage of Lily Drucker’s parents-in-law, for example, is a parody of the traditional marriage, with Mrs Drucker appearing to be the dominant partner who has succeeded in browbeating Mr Drucker in to a

¹⁸ Niamh Baker’s *Happily Ever After?: Women’s Fiction in Postwar Britain 1945-60* (1989), examines in the Introduction ‘a myth of happiness’ (p. 1-24) and in Chapter Two: ‘Happily ever after? The consequences of acceptance’ (p. 44-65). Both chapters emphasise the ‘assumption that girlhood and young womanhood was a preparation for marriage and, once married, a woman’s main preoccupation was the successful maintenance of married life and the raising of children’ (p. 2).

permanent state of non-committal. Kenneth, the only child of this marriage, deliberates on why both he and his father remain largely unresponsive to the interminable prattle of Mrs Drucker:

Kenneth was frightened of his mother, and as far as he could remember he always had been. His mother would say anything. All day long her words would smear over people in what appeared to be a casual, quite ordinary way. As a child, he'd felt them smearing over himself, reducing him to silence, as they had reduced his father...he'd often thought that the only thing his mother would understand would be if someone struck her on the face...in his parent's terraced house Kenneth had crept about, listening to the rattle of the sewing-machines and his mother's voice talking to the women she made clothes for, and the silence of his father, which was audible also. (Trevor 1973, p. 145)

The Druckers' inversion of the male dominated marriage is a travesty of the concept of reciprocity with both types of union exposing the inherent precariousness that marriage imposes on two individuals. Lily, the daughter-in-law of Mr and Mrs Drucker, is seemingly happily married to their son Kenneth, but again this marriage is flawed because of Kenneth's past actions, which become known during Lily's hospital stay. Mrs Drucker is the most vivid illustration of de Beauvoir's concept of bad faith, through her unrelenting, garrulous, domination of her husband and her inappropriate cajoling of their son Kenneth. Her undermining and demoralising treatment of Lily is duplicitous and treacherous. Although a minor character, Trevor offers a very different portrait of womanhood within marriage in the character of Mrs Drucker.

Trevor again underscores the inability of his male characters to confront this aberration in the Drucker household, and presents the psychological damage that arises from the mother's dysfunctionality, evidenced initially with Kenneth's procurement of prostitutes as a young man and later in Lily's experiencing several miscarriages. Having bullied Kenneth into painting the bathroom in his parent's house, Lily instinctively

knows that Mrs Drucker will take this opportunity to reinforce her belief as to the unsuitability of Lily as a wife and future mother:

Lily, having been feeling more cheerful, was low again when Kenneth came. His presence reminded her of her mother-in-law, of her mother-in-law talking while he painted her bathroom for her. 'No wonder she's mingy, with blood like that', Mrs Drucker would say. 'No wonder she can't have a baby like a proper person'. And Kenneth, for sake of peace, wouldn't argue. 'She's turned me into a nerve-case, Kenneth. Ever since that day you brought me back to tea with them I've felt nerves all over me. I get jittery every time I think of her'. (Trevor 1973, p. 140)

Mrs Drucker's indefatigable negating of Lily is keenly felt by her:

His mother kissed her cheek, laughing excitedly. There was malice, Lily believed, hidden beneath that display of affection: Mrs Drucker hated her. Every Sunday afternoon as she lay there she imagined she could feel Mrs Drucker hating her: typical, Mrs Drucker thought, not to be able to have a baby, typical of the kind of girl she was. (Trevor 1973, p. 69)

Lily thinks back to the time her mother-in-law had first made known her feelings regarding their forthcoming marriage, and how she felt about her son marrying an orphan:

Mrs Drucker had said the marriage was the worst idea she'd ever heard of, and Mr Drucker had told his son that he didn't think it was a good idea, either. 'We've nothing against illegitimacy as such,' Mrs Drucker had assured Kenneth. 'But that girl has unfortunate blood in her, Kenneth, which your dad and I will never be capable of forgetting.' Kenneth hadn't told Lily that, but Mrs Drucker had, saying she thought Lily ought to know that this conversation had taken place. It would be better for Lily to know, Mrs Drucker had said, and better for her to marry someone of her own kind. 'It's in kindness to you, dear,' Mrs Drucker had said, taking Lily's hand and smiling at her with her large, prominent teeth. (Trevor 1973, 69)

Trevor acutely exposes the subject of illegitimacy and the prejudices that existed around it in the middle of the twentieth century. The exposition of Mrs Drucker's outrageous damning of her daughter-in-law's origins, and the non-verbal but implied agreement with this

condemnation by Mr Drucker, is disturbingly articulated. Lily characterises society's inability to confront the problems of children born out of wedlock:

Abandoned as a baby because of her illegitimacy, she'd spent her childhood in the care of people who weren't her parents, in St Clare's Home for London's Girls, in Higham's Park. She was used to institutions. (Trevor 1973, p. 28)

Trevor's use of the word 'abandonment' highlights the intolerance and stigmatisation of illegitimacy that literally caused Lily's mother to forsake her daughter. Illegitimacy in the first half of the twentieth century was perceived as a transgressive violation of the rules of decency in society, a society that still identified with the Victorian ideal of the sanctity of marriage as being the rightful institution for the procreation of children.¹⁹

This repudiation is demonstrated in Mrs Drucker's inability to accept Lily and is a blatant example of the concept of otherness and of the hegemonic power of *Mitsein*. Lily is the innocent victim of a societal prejudice that is propagated through the ignorance and stupidity of Mrs Drucker, and the burden of this is shown in her introspections:

In St Clare's Home for London's Girls Lily had often wondered what it would be like to live in a house with a mother and father. She felt embarrassed when Kenneth's parents objected to the marriage and there was no objection from anyone on her side. She had lodgings at the time with a Mrs Malprits, but Mrs Malprits said it was an excellent idea, marrying a chap who had a good job in a library. Sister Eugenie at St Clare's said the same, and so did everyone else who'd known her at St Clare's. Because there was no objection from anyone on her side she felt that the Druckers were probably right. Any illegitimate girl was lucky to be marrying into a respectable family, Kenneth was getting the worst of the bargain. (Trevor 1973, p. 70)

Lily symbolises all the feelings of inferiority that existed for women that did not meet the criteria dictated by society, and is indicative of what de Beauvoir argues: 'the charge society

¹⁹ See *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints? Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth-Century England* (2012) for an in-depth look at the situation of unmarried women.

imposes on her is considered as a *service* rendered to the husband' (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 452).

Trevor's exposé of these two marriages offers a reflection on the inherently abusive nature of the older Drucker marriage, with its overriding depictions of the numerous instances of bad faith on the part of both characters, and their complete inability to take any responsibility for their part in the emotional turmoil they have inflicted on their son and his wife. The irresponsible behaviour of the older Druckers will anticipate varying degrees of parental inadequacies will be discussed in the two chapters. Although ostensibly a 'silent' character, Mr Drucker is revealed by Trevor as being just as complicit as Mrs Drucker in the insidious undermining of the relationship and marriage of their son and his wife. Their lack of integrity and objectification of the younger couple is antithetical to principled and moral behaviour, particularly when they fail to accept any responsibility for Kenneth's repudiation of them. When Kenneth finally acknowledges the truth of Lily's belief that his mother is dangerously intent on destroying their relationship, he experiences a sudden, acute emotional reaction to his mother's insidious verbal rambling:

He interrupted, shouting incomprehensibly. The noise came violently out of him. 'Leave us alone', he said, still shouting noisily. 'Leave us, can't you?' 'Leave you, dear? But what harm have we ever done, Kenneth?' 'You've driven Lily to miscarriages, you've scared the living daylights of our her. And, my God', he said more quietly, but with greater bitterness, 'look what you've done to me'. 'No one's driven her to miscarriages', his mother said, cross herself. 'No one could, Kenneth. That's nonsense talk' 'It isn't nonsense talk. People like you are always driving other people. Look where you've driven him', he shouted, pointing at his father. 'You've killed him stone dead'. His father's impassive face was jerking with a kind of life that Kenneth had never before seen in it. His mother's mouth was gawkishly open. The sight of them made him angrier. Why couldn't his father ever have protested? Why couldn't his father ever have told her to leave Lily alone? They deserved one another, they were awful people. It had taken him thirty-five years, he said to himself, suddenly quite calm, to tell his parents he hated them. (Trevor 1973, p. 195, 196)

Of the three Druckers, Kenneth is the only one who acknowledges the wrongs inflicted on him by his parents, and how this manifested itself during his teenage years in his inappropriate behaviour with prostitutes, and he is also aware of the wrongs his parents inflicted on his vulnerable young wife. Regrettably, the Druckers take no responsibility for their mistakes, and lay the blame for Kenneth's behaviour squarely on Lily:

I think you should ask Kenneth, Lily, why he said these things to his mother and father, bringing dirt into our home. Kenneth was always brought up as best we could. There was never anything like that, which seems to be something that has come since marriage. (Trevor 1973, p. 245)

That Kenneth sought to tell Lily about his shameful past immediately, anticipated his mother's recounting of it in the letter she sent to the hospital and there is no doubt that Trevor is highlighting Mrs Drucker's appalling and malevolent intentions.

Trevor presents an engaging ethical dilemma in this family dynamic that deliberates between the forces of good and evil and the complexities that exist in male/female relationships. De Beauvoir's belief that each individual must take responsibility for their actions finds many resonances in the fictional lives of these characters. What is vividly illustrated in this instance is the absence of solidarity between the Drucker women. Mrs Drucker believes that Lily, in her otherness, is profoundly unequal, and according to de Beauvoir, this sets-up the possibility for oppression. Both the Drucker men are guilty of inauthenticity, in that they do not honour their essential freedom but instead succumb to a terrifying female who seems intent on controlling their lives. Kenneth manages to salvage his selfhood, but he pays a high price for this when he burdens his wife with his past. Mr Drucker chooses to remain in what de Beauvoir calls 'immanence', a concept generally used to describe the restrictions in women's lives, by siding with his wife against his son and Lily, and by his inability to initiate changes to the status quo in his own marriage. Trevor visibly

embodies de Beauvoir's concepts of immanence and transcendence through these two characters, and clearly illuminates the notion of individual choice and its implications.

A different set of circumstances surround the youngest of the women in this story. Sylvia Clapper is the daughter of petty criminals, who no longer has any contact with her parents. She has been emotionally compromised by her uncaring, dysfunctional parents:

Her parents didn't mind when Sylvie went. At first she used to go back and see them, but often they weren't in when they'd said they'd be, so in the end she just stopped going. (Trevor 1973, p. 72)

Yet Sylvia envisions a future in which children will feature, and where they will be given a loving, caring environment in which to grow up: 'for her children she wanted a healthy upbringing, not like what she'd known herself, with her toys being questioned by detectives' (Trevor 1973, p. 74). Unfortunately, a future with children will not happen for Sylvia, as she is in hospital for a hysterectomy, a necessary medical procedure because of multiple abortions in her past: 'I told them I didn't want to come in at all, but they reckon I'm a mess inside. Like an army's marched through me....' (Trevor 1973, p. 39). Her careless upbringing has led to countless misplaced relationships with many unsuitable and questionable men who were incapable of loving her.

Unfortunately, she falls in love with a dubious, unreliable Irishman called Declan, who has strong petty criminal tendencies, but she is determined to marry him and 'settle' him. Sylvia, despite all the shortcomings in her life, nevertheless personifies a powerful *Eros*, or passion for living, that manifests itself in her indomitable spirit, a spirit that is imbued with positive aspirations to live an authentic life. Her ability to transcend her facticity is remarkable and exemplifies de Beauvoir's belief that the individual is an amalgam of pure freedom interspersed with limitations imposed by the world. In true existentialist spirit, Sylvia embraces her freedom and gets on with her life. She is capable of appraising

her past, and of making value judgements on how she has been reared, but is determined to create a different life for herself, one that embraces standards and principles that are more normal. Trevor has, through the characterisation of Sylvia, presents a powerful example of the tenaciousness of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Sylvia is described as distinctly lower class, uneducated and perhaps a touch foolish, but Trevor cleverly alters our view of her by interrogating her implied inferiority and validating her strengths.

Trevor presents a keenly nuanced consideration of Sylvia's determination to marry Declan despite her growing awareness of his criminality, 'it was only after she'd known him for some months that she suspected he had the same tendencies as her parents and her brother', that generates a rumination on the nature of love and attraction between two human beings (Trevor 1973, p. 75). He captures and explores all of the ambiguities that exist when a couple meet and fall in love. Declan's dishonest actions are disclosed by Trevor, and serve to cast grave doubts about his ability to settle down with Sylvia. His dishonourable behaviour, his petty thievery and his bold-faced lies, are in clear opposition to Sylvia's innate goodness and fortitude, with Trevor offsetting Sylvia's authenticity against the complete lack of it in Declan. Yet there is also the belief that the concept of reciprocity between Sylvia and Declan may give rise to a feasible future for them. Trevor's manipulation of the characters' thoughts illuminates their diverging strategies in their individual attitudes regarding their future together. Declan, having abandoned Sylvia during the majority of the time she has been in the hospital, lies his way back in to her life. Sylvia however, is under no illusions regarding Declan:

Why on earth had she fallen in love with him? Out of all the perfectly straightforward men in London, why had she had to pick this one as the special one, above all the others she'd known. He'd been in gaol: the more she thought about it the more certain she was. Fifteen days he'd done, or more maybe, because he hadn't been able to keep his hands off property that wasn't his. On the train on the way to Liverpool he'd unscrewed something in the

toilet, a mirror or a fitting. Or maybe he'd walked out of a shop in Liverpool with something he hadn't paid for, something small and ridiculous. (Trevor 1973, p. 291)

Her unsentimental and pragmatic evaluation of Declan's dishonesties and lies serves, in a peculiar way, to reinforce the necessity for truth, and while the truth may not be very palpable for Sylvia, she makes a decision to stay with Declan after asking the question: 'could you marry a man and forget that he'd told you lies, covering up a gaol sentence or whatever it was?' (Trevor 1973, p. 298). Her belief that she can build a life with him is affirmed when she simply says 'Oh God, I love him', and this trust in the power of love illustrates Trevor's positive belief in human connectivity.

The moral implications of juxtaposing the fallen Declan with the resilient Sylvia may save Declan from the fate of Mr Maloney, a much darker and more dangerous figure. Mr Maloney, a devious loan shark with criminal intent, is thematically important to the moral implications of the story. He represents an individual who has lost all sense of integrity and honesty, and who prospers from other people's misfortunes. He is portrayed by Trevor as being beyond redemption. Declan's reckless and irresponsible petty criminal activity may be seen as a precursor to a fate similar to that of Mr Maloney, but this is subverted by Trevor in the person of Sylvia, who is undoubtedly a force of good and who may, perhaps, rehabilitate Declan. Like Lily Drucker, Sylvia is prepared to forgive and hopefully to forget their partner's misdemeanours, and there is a sense that they both women have embraced new truths in their lives, truths that may help them survive in an unpredictable world.

A very different woman to Sylvia is encountered in the character of Miss Samson, a woman who falls outside the traditional of heterosexual norms, through no fault of her own. Trevor's willingness to explore otherness is never more evident than in the character of Miss Samson, an elderly spinster with a severe facial disfigurement. According to Lily, who is the first of the three women to meet Miss Samson when she is admitted to the hospital ward:

There was something the matter with the grey-haired woman's face, a birthmark that was swollen as well as crimson, misshaping the features and affecting her left eye, which did not seem real. When the woman held out her hand, Lily felt herself shivering. (Trevor 1973, p. 30)

Lily keenly comprehends the calamity of such an affliction on a woman despite Miss Samson's denial of it:

But Miss Samson smiled and to Lily's horrified surprise referred to her affliction, saying she'd always had it and with God's help had learnt to live with it. 'It's not so terrible', she murmured, but Lily, shaking the proffered hand, felt that it was terrible enough for any woman, an ugliness like that. (Trevor 1973, p. 30)

It seems Miss Samson has indeed rationalised and accepted her disfigurement from a young age:

She had never had an intimate connection with a man; no man had ever proposed marriage to her. It was not her role in the world to attract the attentions or desires of men, Miss Samson had told herself since the age of thirteen. Had that been her role, God would not have permitted the accident at her birth and the ugliness she had ever since carried on her face. (Trevor 1973, p. 46)

Trevor poignantly captures Miss Samson's youthful and courageous acceptance of her deformity, as well as offering an accurate depiction of society's prejudices towards people with physical disfigurements. Miss Samson is doubly compromised in her otherness, as she is not just the female other, but is a female who does not conform to society's standard of beauty. De Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex* that 'disabled, ugly or old, woman repels. Old and ugly women not only are objects without assets but also provoke hatred mixed with fear' (de Beauvoir 2009, pp. 183-4). Interestingly it is a man, Mr Ibbs, who reaches out to her and invites her to become part of a religious enclave at No 9 Balaclava Avenue:

Yet at the centre of her life there was the generosity of a man: the kindness of Mr Ibbs, who had taken her into Number Nine, even though others might have argued that her

deformity would put paying guests off. Mr Ibbs, dead since 1958, was the man who existed most brightly in Miss Samson's imagination and was honoured for his goodness and his wisdom, sharing precious glory with Christ her Lord. (Trevor 1973, p. 46)

Through the character of Miss Samson, Trevor offers a wide-ranging consideration on the nature of religious belief and puts forward an argument around belief and non-belief in God. Yet it is the poignancy of her physical disfigurement, and the ways in which she absorbed its connotations, namely being precluded her from marriage, that is most significant here. Miss Samson's assimilation and inculcation of inferiority is imposed on her by a society that decrees her as being unfit for purpose.

At the beginning of the novel, Miss Samson is revealed as being a deeply religious person, whose faith has essentially helped her to survive her marginalisation. She has led a seemingly fulfilled life, working for Mr Ibbs in his boarding house, and she has been rewarded for this by being left the house in his will. However, prior to her entering the hospital, she has discovered in the diary of her religious mentor about his loss of faith shortly before his death. This knowledge is profoundly upsetting for her, and during her stay in hospital, she experiences an existential crisis that generates a re-examination of all of her previously-held beliefs in the goodness of her Christian God. It is post-operatively that Miss Samson tries to come to terms with her newfound loss of belief that her God was a benevolent figure:

What kind of a thing is He? He plays that ugly little trick on us. He gives us human cruelty.....and marriages between two people He calls His children, in which everything goes wrong. Men murder their wives, and wives their husbands. (Trevor 1973, p. 325)

The character of Miss Samson embodies, in many ways, the undervaluing of an individual by the enforcement of the norms and rules of external institutions, in this case the Church, and the power structure of patriarchy. These rules and norms were hitherto never questioned by somebody like Miss Samson, as they appeared to be the natural order of the world. She is a

classic example of someone who has been ideologically enculturated into the norms of her society. While her acceptance of her facial affliction, and her ‘can do’ attitude to life, have helped her to survive for a considerable period of her life, this state of affairs did not last and her discovery of the diary of Mr Ibbs became the catalyst of her existentialist crisis.

In the chapter called ‘The Mystic’ in *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir argues that women who fall outside the remit of heterosexual love seek to find it elsewhere:

Love has been assigned to woman as her supreme vocation, and when she addresses it to a man, she is seeking God in him: if circumstances deny her human love, if she is disappointed or demanding, she will choose to worship the divinity in God himself. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 726)

In a sense, both God and Mr Ibbs are interchangeable for Miss Samson, and she is very devoted to the Christian religion practised in No 9 Balaclava Avenue. Mr Ibbs, now long since dead, is venerated by Miss Samson, until she discovers a diary:

The last three lines, written a week before his death in royal-blue ink, had caused weakness in her legs, and sudden, wild palpitations in her body and her head. I no longer doubt. I am certain now that God and all the rest of it is a myth we’ve made to keep us happy.....the royal-blue handwriting had been firm and clear. Mr Ibbs at the end of his life had not believed. (Trevor 1973, pp. 184-5)

Miss Samson’s initial denial of this revelation, and her decision to suppress it, instigates emotional turmoil that threatens to overwhelm her. As happened in the character of Elizabeth, this crisis serves to illuminate a truth that was originally denied by Miss Samson:

I didn’t realise that I’d fallen in love with Mr Ibbs all those years ago. I didn’t know that that was what it had been. I thought it was something to do with God, Mr Ibbs seemed to be God’s chosen person in this house. Because I’m religious, I suppose I thought it had all to do with that. But now it’s different. Now God is on one side and Mr Ibbs is on the other. (Trevor 1973, p. 318)

Both Miss Samson's and Mr Ibbs' loss of religious faith embodies de Beauvoir's existentialist belief, first written about in the essay, 'Pyrrhus and Cineás' (1944), that reliance on external values may be unsustainable:

If God is infinite, and a plenitude of being, there is no distance between his project and reality. What he wishes just is; he wished things as they are. His will is simply the foundation of static being; one could hardly call it a will. Such a God is not a particular individual: he is the universal, the immutable and eternal being. And the universal is silence. It doesn't entreat us to do anything, it demands no sacrifice, it dispenses no rewards or punishments, it cannot justify anything, and it cannot be the basis for either hope or despair. It exists, nothing further can be said about it. The perfection of its being leaves no space for man. (Mahon 1997, pp. 4-5)

Trevor declines to give a reason for Mr Ibbs' loss of faith. Miss Samson's existential crisis is primarily linked to her hospital stay, and to her encounter with the sufferings and difficulties of other people's lives. She now begins to feel that her conception of a God who has only to will X for X to exist, or occur, and that denies human agency, no longer holds true. Her radical loss of faith causes her to view everything in a very negative light, and Elizabeth accuses her of being morbid and gloomy:

Yes, yes I know I am. It's what happens, don't you see when your faith goes? Hell begins, Mrs Aidallbery. One day your children will grow up and you'll find yourself alone, with nothing to comfort you except faces on a television set. Your mother'll be long since dead, and there'll be no husband to help you on your way. One day little Mrs Drucker's father-in-law will die also, and her mother-in-law will come and live with them, because that's the way it always happens. She'll last to the healthy age that He in His mercy grants her, becoming more difficult with every passing minute. One day Miss Clapper's boyfriend won't return from his bacon factory, and not long afterwards she hears a sentence passed. (Trevor 1973, pp. 325-326)

Miss Samson then reveals how she unrealistically hoped things could be different:

I wanted it to be all different, I wanted you not to have married the man you did. I wanted you to be married to someone nice, not worrying on your own, not blaming yourself any

more. I wanted Miss Clapper suddenly to be rich, and her husband to undergo a character change. I wanted time to turn backwards so that Lady Augusta wouldn't have had to make do with a loveless marriage. I wanted the woman to put away her banner and forget whatever it was. I wanted little Mrs Drucker's mother-in-law to kneel down and ask forgiveness of her. (Trevor 1973, p. 326)

Miss Samson's verbalising of her emotional torment to Elizabeth seems to produce a cathartic effect on both women:

Elizabeth shook her head. In the warm sitting-room the compassion of Miss Samson affected her, and seemed extraordinary....the compassion of Miss Samson bewildered Elizabeth. It felt precious in the warm sitting-room, yet it also seemed unnatural, as if it were part of a miracle itself. (Trevor 1973, pp. 328-9)

Elizabeth counters Miss Simpson's compassion with her own hard-won affirmation of the resilience of the various women in the novel:

Elizabeth drank more Nescafe. She said that the women Miss Samson had come across in the Cheltenham Street Women's Hospital, including the one who was dead and the one who was a stranger, had lives that should not be wept over. The woman with the banner retained the spirit to make her eccentric protest, and in a spirited way also Lady Augusta Haptree had built a hospital with her husband's money. And Sylvie and Lily Drucker and she herself would manage. She wanted to add, but could not, that the lives of these five women contained no tragedy to compare with the comfort so savagely torn from Miss Samson's own life. (Trevor 1973, p. 328)

A whole secular humanist philosophy emerges through the character of Miss Samson who, despite being a compromised 'outsider' figure, living a very sheltered life, nevertheless advocates an enormous compassion for her fellow human beings. She symbolises the efficacy of Trevor's ethical integrity, an integrity that is grounded in the twin concepts of reciprocity and solidarity.

Conclusion

What Trevor offers his readers in *Elizabeth Alone* is a succinct, thought-provoking story that unambiguously illustrates his very deliberate consideration of the lives of these four women, and one that offers a deeply reflective experience of how these women cope with their circumstances. As the novel moves towards its closing stages, there is a real sense of just how much has happened in the individual lives of these women since they first entered the hospital. All four of them have suffered some degree of emotional upset during their stay, which instigates newfound truths that will imperceptibly change how they will live their lives in the future. Their imposed situatedness in a hospital ward where Trevor has created a liminal space that sanctions confidentiality and fosters a sense of solidarity amongst them. As each one of them prepares to leave the hospital, they are hopeful of connecting with each other again in the future. This happens very shortly for Miss Samson and Elizabeth, and their meeting is pivotal to the novel's *denouement* that exemplifies the value of human connectedness across class divisions. Elizabeth's promise to visit Miss Samson culminates in a reiteration of the existentialist belief that each individual is the source of her own meaning, and is consequently responsible for providing meaning to her own existence. Elizabeth is experiencing a sense of lethargy and lack of purpose, but this encounter reverses her negativity and she now feels a new renewal in her ability to forge a more positive future for her and her children.

In the final pages of the narrative, Elizabeth and Miss Samson walk in the garden and Elizabeth is now able to philosophise gently on her life:

....summer would come and in the autumn they'd have a bonfire....one day Jennifer would look for Mr Feuchtwanger's pancake shop in St Germain des Prés. One day Joanna might marry someone and live in this house, and perhaps the house still wouldn't change much. One day they'd all pack her off to a Sunset Home...the Cheltenham Street Women's Hospital would be there for a bit longer, and Nine Balaclava Avenue, and room in

Shepherd's Bush that Sylvie had illicitly shared with Declan, and the small terraced house where the Druckers' sewing- machines rattled, and Meridian Close. Other drama would develop in all those places. Other women would make do, with the dazzle gone out of their marriages, or on their own because they'd never been dazzled in the first place, or had never been asked, or because things had fallen apart... 'One of these days', Joanna said, 'you should marry again yourself. You sometimes look sad, you know'. Elizabeth laughed. She knelt to pick some dock from a rose-bed. She was happy enough alone, she said. (Trevor 1973, pp. 335-6)

Elizabeth's emergence from her existential crisis has allowed her to acknowledge calmly the unknowability of life, and in doing so, to recognise her own resilience.

All four women espouse de Beauvoir's existential themes of solidarity, transcendence, authenticity and responsibility. Even though the story is told by an omniscient narrator, each of the women's interiorities is shown through their introspections, and the honesty that Trevor's narrative technique adopts for each character's musings on their lives is remarkable when contrasted with most of the male character's lack of self-reflexivity. The exception to this is the wonderful characterisation of Henry, Elizabeth's friend from her childhood, who is by society's standards, a failure. Henry is the only fully realised male character in the novel, and his continuing failures in life reveal much about otherness and society's intolerance of its weaker and more vulnerable members. Henry's introspections illuminate much existentialist concerns, and deserve a more fully realised examination than is possible here.²⁰ Through the character of Miss Samson, Trevor encapsulates the ambiguity of life in her worst predictions about what the future may hold for the other three women. While there is a strong sense that though these possible scenarios may indeed happen: Elizabeth being on her own; Sylvia facing the possibility of Declan going to prison; and Lily having to look after her horrible mother-in-law; what Trevor is doing here is offering the worst possible outcome, but one that may be not necessarily be fulfilled. There is a real sense of the unpredictability and

²⁰ See the final pages in Chapter 20 of the book for a poignant reading of Henry's heart-breaking, but strangely inspiring and affecting, epiphany that occurs prior to his accidental death.

randomness of life facing each of these women, and Trevor provides each of them with a renewed strength of purpose as they leave the hospital.

All of these women's psychic injuries, as opposed to their physical ailments, are acknowledged and validated through simply confiding in each other without the burden of being judged. Their chance encountering of each other presents a powerful reflection on the necessity for human connection and segues at a core level with de Beauvoir's thoughts on the necessity of the Other, especially when an existentialist crisis occurs that causes anxiety and often paralysis. Each of these women has experienced, in one way or another, a crisis with which they have to come to terms, and each of them is empowered to return to the outside world with a new sense of purpose to face a life that will once again present its vicissitudes. Yet each of them embodies a stronger sense of the realities of life, a realism that imbues them with the strength to carry on. They find strength in themselves and in each other, not in any abstract, universal system that evades the finiteness of the here and now. De Beauvoir argues that she herself had to come to terms with her own finitude, and find a strength within herself to cope with what it means to exist as a human being:

But once I got into the street again, into my life, out of the system, beneath a real sky, the system was no longer of any use to me: what it had offered me, under a show of the infinite, was the consolations of death; and I again wanted to live in the midst of living men. I think that, inversely, existentialism does not offer to the reader the consolations of an abstract evasion: existentialism proposes no evasion...it is up to each one to fulfil his existence as an absolute. Regardless of the staggering dimensions of the world about us, the density of our ignorance, the risks of catastrophes to come, and our individual weakness within the immense collectivity, the fact remains that we are absolutely free today if we choose to will our existence in its finiteness, a finiteness which is open on the infinite. (de Beauvoir 1948, pp. 158-9)

George O'Brien in his essay, 'Trevor's England', argues that Trevor sensitively and perceptively subverts the conventional view of these women as embodiments of dependence, and instead sees them as 'unexpected sources of renewal and reconciliation' (Delaney and

Parker 2013, p. 33). Trevor creates a strong ethical dimension by staging these four females' chance encounter in a hospital ward to illuminate and crucially, to circumvent the imposition of their pasts, and illustrate the idea that '*Strength Groweth From Affliction*', an aphorism that is referred to more than once throughout the novel (Trevor 1973, p. 316).

In the final pages of the novel, Trevor encapsulates the reconciliation of Elizabeth's spirit, her emergence from her existentialist crisis, and her acknowledgement that her encounter with Miss Samson had profoundly changed her:

Charged with the spirit of Miss Samson, she did not herself seek an understanding with God, nor did she herself become more compassionate towards distress in other people. But whenever she thought of Miss Samson, she continued to be moved...she considered that Miss Samson's unnatural compassion was beautiful, like the *dianthus carthusianorum*. (Trevor 1973, p. 332)

She reflects on how she would have resisted saying 'that other people give you strength' when she was newly married but now believes what her mother said: 'it's other people who make sense. You never do yourself' (Trevor 1973, p. 333). This judicious utterance connects profoundly to de Beauvoir's fundamental belief of the necessity of the Other. The reflections Trevor offers in his portrayal of his female characters are suffused with ethical considerations, and the novel ends in a suitably existentialist deliberation when Elizabeth realises that 'she was happy enough alone', a declaration that acknowledges our essential solitariness but also each individual's ability to transcend their circumstances by constantly seeking to transcend life's limitations and through taking responsibility for one's actions.

As previously stated, *Elizabeth Alone*, offers a foretaste of the many lenses that Trevor looks through in order to give an authentic glimpse of the facticity of these women's lives; lenses that magnify their circumstances, and their societal positioning. Overall, in this novel, there is a strong sense of the resilience and stoic qualities of these women being affirmed with the exception of the dreadful Mrs Drucker. In fact, Mrs Drucker anticipates the

exposition of bad faith that will become a feature of the next chapter. Chapter Three will discuss a selection of stories from Trevor's short fiction that will generally show some of his female characters in a less favourable light. All of these stories offer a penetrating exploration of women who, for whatever reason, deny their innate freedom and become complicit in the destruction of their selfhood, and sometimes in the destruction of other people.

Chapter Three: The Perils Inherent in Female Passivity

If a woman discovers herself as the inessential, and never turns into the essential, it is because she does not bring about this transformation herself. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 8)

When Trevor states that he is a writer of short stories who happens to write novels, there is an immediate sense of the importance of this genre in his writing (Stout 1989, p. 19). His appreciation of the form is inextricably linked both to his rural Irish background and to the tradition of oral storytelling that he believes is a ‘national characteristic’ in the history of Irish writing (Trevor 1991, p. x). When asked what his definition of a short story was by Mira Stout he replied:

I think it is the art of the glimpse. If the novel is like an intricate Renaissance painting, the short story is an impressionist painting. It should be an explosion of truth. Its strength lies in what it leaves out just as much as what it puts in, if not more. It is concerned with the total exclusion of meaninglessness. Life, on the other hand, is meaningless most of the time. The novel imitates life, where the short story is bony, and cannot wander. It is essential art. (Stout 1989, p. 16)

His observations regarding the differences between his Irish short stories and his English and Italian stories offer an interesting perspective when he says:

There is a sense of community in the Irish short stories that doesn’t exist in the others. In the Irish short stories people tend to talk to each other, whereas in the English ones people talk at each other. The English are much more oblique; we Irish are more direct. (Stout 1989, p. 16)

Trevor’s employment of the short story genre to create stories that portray deeply convincing female figures who take centre stage connects to his belief of the aptness of the short story to represent the marginalised that includes ‘hard-done-by women’, and is demonstrated

throughout much of the short fiction (Trevor 1991, xiv). Despite the constraints that the form of the short story imposes, Trevor's narrative techniques are never more in evidence than when he enters the mind-sets of the female characters in this selection of his short fiction.

This chapter discusses four of Trevor's short stories and in doing so, will reveal that not all of Trevor's female characters are worthy people. Trevor's focus on more reprehensible women illustrates the breadth and diversity of his attention to the female condition. Unlike many of his novels, Trevor's short stories are considerably darker in theme, and the subtle affirmative implications that were apparent at the end of *Elizabeth Alone* are mainly absent in the short stories. Two of the characters in *Elizabeth Alone*, Elizabeth and Miss Simpson, offer believable, insightful examples of women tentatively affirming themselves despite their circumstances. The female characters in this chapter offer no such affirmation. Schirmer argues that Trevor's characters in the short stories are 'rarely able to discover the means to break out of their social and moral estrangement, or to overcome the crippling illusions with which they mask their inadequacies' (Schirmer 1990, p. 86). This assertion will be teased out and substantiated in the impending analysis of the four short stories in this chapter. Even in the much darker novels, which debate the themes of good and evil that will comprise the next chapter, there exist components of compassion and hope. Many of his short stories develop the theme of marriage and relationships as a means to pursue existentialist depths and truths through portraits of dangerously deluded women. Trevor continues to question the essence of matrimony in both moral and psychological terms and this selection of short stories will reflect these concerns.

The selected stories for examination are: 'O Fat White Woman' and 'The Grass Widows', two stories from *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories* (1972); 'The Bedroom Eyes of Mrs Vansittart' from *Beyond the Pale and Other Stories* (1981); and finally 'Lunch in Winter' from *The News from Ireland and Other Stories* (1986). These particular

stories have been chosen as they offer highly specific examples of acute female compromise. Within these stories, Trevor skilfully and chillingly creates scenarios that illustrate the dangers of complacency, complicity and the denial of the worthiness and the inviolability of the Other. Each story offers a contemplation of the profundity of unethical behaviour by individuals, and the damage that ensues both for the individual themselves and for others, because of such behaviour. Most of these stories, except for the final story, 'Lunch in Winter', enunciate the destructiveness of male oppression that produces the physical, psychological and intellectual confinement of the female characters. 'Lunch in Winter', presents an apparently autonomous female as its protagonist, but the gradual revelation of her true nature emerges in the story soon dispels this perception. 'Lunch in Winter' offers an interesting deviation from the explicit complacency and complicity that exists in the lives of the characters in the first three stories, but just as Trevor parodies the character, Mrs Drucker, in *Elizabeth Alone*, so the character of Nancy Simpson presents an antithesis to his focus on male dominated marriages. However, this antithesis is grounded in the theme of narcissism, a condition that seeks to evade the truth about oneself. The theme of narcissism that Trevor has chosen for this story finds profound correlations in de Beauvoir's analysis of it in *The Second Sex* where she views it as an inauthentic justification for living a life.

Joseph O'Connor believes that in Trevor's short fiction: 'there is never a moment of false lyricism. Many of his women live in a world of choking passivity, where events can only be controlled at a price' (O'Connor 2009, p. 3). Trevor exposes this 'choking passivity' and, invariably, its consequences. He manages to convey the reality of these women's lives with an intensity and complexity that belies the brevity of the form being employed. All of these stories share Trevor's characteristic handling of narrative voice, one that meanders between a relatively distant, impersonal tone and another, which is decidedly in the vein of the character's own introspections. These narrative voices thus offer different perspectives

and countenance a broad proffering of varying points of view that suspend and defer judgement for the reader. I will argue that these short stories advance some serious moral debate around the lived realities of these women's lives and illustrate the sometimes-appalling consequences that result from their actions or inactions.

All these stories offer ethical considerations that connect indissolubly with de Beauvoir's fundamental belief that each individual is charged with the responsibility of choosing a set of values through his or her actions. Her deeply held views that there exists a strong comparison between the lives of women and those of children, in that they are both restricted by a patriarchal order, and that this is manifested in infantile behaviour, also find many echoes in Trevor's stories. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she highlights this:

Even today in western countries, among women who have not had in their work an apprenticeship of freedom, there are still many who take shelter in the shadow of men; they adopt without discussion the opinions and values recognised by their husband or their lover, and that allows them to develop childish qualities which are forbidden to adults because they are based on a feeling of irresponsibility. (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 39)

In particular, the three female characters in two of the stories, Mrs Digby-Hunter in 'O Fat White Woman', and Mrs Angusthorpe and Mrs Jackson Major in 'The Grass Widows', all illustrate and epitomise the incongruities that exist in marriage that arises from their inculcation in a so-called feminine world with its code of feminine values. De Beauvoir argues that these feminine values create a conundrum because marriage has always been presented in radically different ways for men and for women:

The two sexes are necessary for each other, but this necessity has never fostered reciprocity women have never constituted a caste establishing exchanges and contracts on an equal footing with men. (de Beauvoir 2009, pp. 451-452)

The idea of reciprocity is one of de Beauvoir's most important contributions to existential ethics and its only requirement is that each individual recognise the freedom of the other person with whom they have a relationship. She believed it to be essential and writes:

How is it, then, that this reciprocity has not been recognised between the sexes, that one of the contrasting terms is set up as the sole essential, denying any relativity in regard to its correlative and defining the latter as pure otherness? (de Beauvoir 2009, p. xvii)

Trevor's stories comprehend and draw attention to the dearth of reciprocity that exists in his male/female relationships in much of his fiction. De Beauvoir also believed that reciprocity lends itself to solidarity and that women need to find strength in each other in order to dispute male sovereignty. De Beauvoir's penetrating observations offer an acute appraisal of the many examples of the lack of reciprocity and solidarity that is apparent in the fictional marriages in the first three short stories that comprise this chapter, and her pronouncements illuminate further the lives of these women. In particular, Part Three of the *Second Sex*, 'Justifications', offers three specific profiles of female alienation that will correlate directly with three of Trevor's characters, Miss Simpson, Mrs Vansittart, and Nancy Simpson.

Essentially, Trevor's narrative technique renders the interior worlds of his female characters, and compassionately explores their situations, situations where they are almost automatically compromised by the institution of marriage because, ultimately, society has defined them as Other. However, the crucial precept that will emerge from a study of the lives of these fictional characters is the lack of recognition around the question of their freedom to transcend and change their lives. De Beauvoir's fundamental axiom is that consciousness is *free* irrespective of gender. Toril Moi argues that for de Beauvoir:

the scandal of human history is the fact that one group of free subjects have been coerced into defining themselves as objects, as *other* in relation to another group of free subjects. Such a domination of the other's freedom is always intolerable and never to be condoned. (Moi 1994, p. 184)

However, if consciousness is free then from identity, then it is up to women to forge their individuality through the choices they make in their lives. The existentialist choices these women have made in their lives are always open to change and Trevor keenly exposes the failure of these women to change how they live their lives in all of these stories.

‘O Fat White Woman’

I will begin my analysis with the short story ‘O Fat White Woman’. It is likely that this short story was inspired by a poem written by Frances Cornford in 1910 called ‘To a Fat Lady Seen from the Train’:

O why do you walk through the fields in gloves,
Missing so much and so much?
O fat white woman whom nobody loves,
Why do you walk through the fields in gloves,
When the grass is soft as the breast of doves
And shivering sweet to the touch?
O why do you walk through the fields in gloves,
Missing so much and so much.

Essentially this poem is a metaphor for a person’s inability to see things as they really are. The second line of the poem, and its repetition at the very end of the poem, links evocatively to the symbolic ‘blindness’ of the character of Mrs Digby-Hunter in this short story. ‘O Fat White Woman’ was also made into a BBC play in 1971. The setting of the story in a school is a favourite theme of Trevor throughout his fiction that began with *The Old Boys* (1964), and one that continues in a variety of ways in stories like ‘Miss Smith’, ‘The Grass Widows’, ‘Mrs Silly’, ‘A School Story’ and ‘Torrige’.²¹ All offer a diverse yet analogous critique of schools and their teachers and at their heart, and all of these stories expose the vulnerability

²¹William Trevor, *The Collected Stories* (New York: Penguin, 1992).

of children in a world dominated by maladroit adults in situations of power. The title may be seen as humorous, but the story is anything but funny, as it spins a tale of the tragedy that follows passive resistance. The story is set somewhere in the English countryside, rendered in idyllic detail through the consciousness of Mrs Digby-Hunter, the fifty-one year old wife of the headmaster of a boy's boarding-school:

Relaxing in the garden of her husband's boarding-school, Mrs Digby-Hunter could not help thinking that it was good to be alive. On the shortgrass of the lawn, tucked out of sight beneath her deck-chair, was a small box of Terry's All Gold chocolates, and on her lap, open at page eight, lay a paper-backed novel by her second-favourite writer of historical fiction. In the garden there was the pleasant sound of insects, and occasionally the buzzing of bees. (Trevor 1972, p. 311)

The intimacy between the voice of Mrs Digby-Hunter and the narrator's voice fuses seamlessly in recounting her past life, and in detailing how she ended up running a 'crammer' boarding-school, Milton Grange, with her husband. From this account, a damning depiction of a subjugated woman emerges, one who has been implicitly complicit in her own exploitation and, even more significantly, her involvement in the exploitation of the vulnerable children entrusted to her care. De Beauvoir, in the chapter 'Woman's Situation and Character' in *The Second Sex*, illuminates the cultural customs and moral expectations that have created a mis-representation of a woman's right to be treated as equal. Her view on this will shed light on the situation of the character of Mrs Digby-Hunter will become as evident as it was for Elizabeth in *Elizabeth Alone*:

The woman herself recognises that the universe as a whole is masculine; it is men who have shaped it, ruled it and who still today dominate it; as for her, she does not consider herself responsible for it; it is understood that she is inferior and dependent; she has not learned the lessons of violence, she has never emerged as a subject in front of other members of the group; enclosed in her flesh, in her home, she grasps herself as passive opposite to these human-faced gods who set goals and standards....And in the man's world, since she does not *do* anything, her thinking, as it does not flow into any project, is no different from a

dream; she does not have the sense of truth, because she lacks efficacy; she struggles only by means of images and words: that is why she accepts the most contradictory assertions without a problem; she does not care about clarifying the mysteries of a sphere, which in any case is beyond her scope; she settles for horribly vague knowledge when it concerns her: she confuses parties, opinions, places, people and events; there is a strange jumble in her head. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 654)

Mrs Digby-Hunter has been married for twenty-nine years to the man referred to, throughout the story, as Digby-Hunter. It seems she had been very much in love with this man: 'her father, well-to-do and stern, had given her away and she'd been quite happy about his gesture, for love had then possessed her fully' (Trevor 1972, p. 312). Her mind-set at the age of twenty-two was one of optimism and determination:

Determined at all costs to make a success of her marriage and to come up to scratch as a wife, she had pursued a policy of agreeableness: she smiled instead of making a fuss, in her easy-going way she accepted what there was to accept, placing her faith in her husband as she believed a good wife should. (Trevor 1972, p. 312)

Mrs Digby-Hunter, like Elizabeth in the previous chapter, has assimilated the ideology of marriage into her consciousness with all the attendant myths that it entails. Her capacity to diminish her own sense of worthiness is extraordinary:

In her own opinion she was not a clever person, but at least he could offer loyalty and devotion, instead of nagging and arguing. In a bedroom of a Welsh hotel she had disguised, on her wedding night, her puzzled disappointment when her husband had abruptly left her side, having lain there for only a matter of minutes. (Trevor 1972, p. 312)

This early rejection of the physical enactment of their relationship, a state of affairs that was to last throughout their marriage, is submerged in her all-consuming agreeableness:

Thus a pattern began in their marriage and as a result of it Mrs Digby-Hunter had never borne children although she had, gradually and at an increasing rate, put on weight. (Trevor 1972, p. 312)

The enormity of Mrs Digby-Hunter's significant loss of normal marital expectations is relayed unobtrusively and with almost a sense of normalcy:

At first she had minded about this and had attempted to diet. She had deprived herself of what she most enjoyed until it occurred to her that caring in this way was making her bad-tempered and miserable: it didn't suit her, all the worrying about calories and extra ounces. She weighed now, although she didn't know it, thirteen stone. (Trevor 1972, p. 312)

Her unwillingness to acknowledge or limit her escalating weight symbolise other refused knowledge. Trevor's use of free indirect discourse to allow access to Mrs Digby-Hunter's introspections enables the reader to share her perspective, but also to question the veracity of this perspective.

Similarly, her thoughts about her husband blend the factual with the sentimental and offer another example of her passivity:

Her husband was a leaner, a tall man with bony fingers and smooth black hair and eyes that stared at other people's eyes as if to imply shrewdness. He had a gaunt face and on it a well-kept though not extensive moustache. Shortly after their marriage he had abandoned his career in the army because, he said, he could see no future in it. Mrs Digby-Hunter was surprised but assumed that what was apparent to her husband was not apparent to her. She smiled and did not argue. (Trevor 1972, p. 312)

His somewhat peripatetic career from that moment on traces a gradual arc of failure, which is signified by requests for financial aid from his father-in-law. His short-lived career as a director of a step-ladder company ends abruptly. His request that she solicit a loan from her father is suggested: 'Your father could help', he murmured, having imparted to her the unfortunate news, 'but her father, when invited to save the step-ladder firm, closed his eyes in boredom' (Trevor 1972, p. 312). This business failure was followed by a stint in a vending-machine business that also failed.

During this particular period in their early-married life, Mrs Digby-Hunter's father died, leaving her some money. His next business idea was to buy a small country house and open it as a small hotel, and again his wife's extreme agreeableness came to the fore:

She agreed that that would be nice. She felt that perhaps neither of them was qualified to run an hotel, but it didn't seem worth making a fuss about that, especially since her husband had, without qualifications, joined a step-ladder firm and then, equally unskilled, had gone in to the vending-machine business. (Trevor 1972, p. 313)

A chance encounter with a man whose son had failed the Common Entrance exam, a prerequisite for entry to England's public schools, gave Digby-Hunter the idea of opening a small boarding school that would, primarily, be a 'cramming' school for boys preparing for this exam. Surprisingly this venture is successful:

The school, begun as a small one, remained so because, as her husband explained, any school of this nature must be small. The turn-over in boys was rapid, and it soon became part of the educational policy of Milton Grange to accept not more than twenty boys at any one time, the wisdom of which was reflected in results that parents and headmasters agreed were remarkable: the sons who had idled at the back of their preparatory school classrooms passed into the great public schools of England, and their parents paid the high fees of Milton Grange most gratefully. (Trevor 1972, p. 313)

Mrs Digby-Hunter was apparently quite pleased with her new life:

At Milton Grange, part ivy-clad, turreted and baronial, Mrs Digby-Hunter was happy. She did not understand the ins and outs of the Common Entrance examination, for her province was the kitchen and the dormitories, but certainly life at Milton Grange as the headmaster's wife was much more like it than occupying half the ground floor of a semi-detached villa in Croydon, as the wife of a vending-machine operator. (Trevor 1972, p. 313)

Her belief that she has achieved equilibrium in her life is evidenced in her self-satisfied thoughts:

'Christ, what a time we're having with that boy for Harrow', her husband would say, and she would make a sighing noise to match the annoyance he felt, and smile to cheer him up.

It was extraordinary what he had achieved with the dullards he took on, and she now and again wondered if one day he might even receive a small recognition, an OBE maybe. As for her, Milton Grange was recognition enough: an apt reward, she felt, for her marital agreeableness, for not being a nuisance, and coming up to scratch as a wife. (Trevor 1972, p. 314)

Yet despite this apparent submissiveness, there exists a yearning in her:

Just occasionally Mrs Digby-Hunter wondered what life would have been like if she'd married someone else. She wondered what it would have been like to have had children of her own and to have engaged in the activity that caused, eventually, children to be born. She imagined, once a year or so, as she lay alone in her room in the darkness, what it would be like to share a double bed night after night. She imagined a faceless man, a pale naked body beside hers, hands caressing flesh. (Trevor 1972, p. 314)

Her seemingly harmless acquiescence is justified to herself when she muses over her past:

But Milton Grange was where she belonged now: she had chosen a man and married him and had ended up, for better or worse, in a turreted house in Gloucestershire. There was give and take in marriage, as always she had known, and where she was concerned there was everything to be thankful for. (Trevor 1972, p. 314)

Her satisfaction with her life is further enhanced with her recall of the yearly Conservative fete, held each year in the school grounds, and of the many occasions that she and her husband travelled to other country houses for dinner or cocktails. Her love of nature is recalled:

In winter she put down bulbs, and in spring she watched the birds collecting twigs and straw for nests. She loved the gardens and often repeated to the maids in the kitchen that one was 'nearer God's Heart in a garden than anywhere else on earth'. It was a beautiful sentiment, she said, and very true. (Trevor 1972, p. 314)

The manipulation of narrative voice by Trevor allows both a subjective and objective filling-in of the perspective and to some degree the reality of Mrs Digby-Hunter's life to-date. Following this gentle exposition of factual information, an exposition grounded in the idyllic

setting of a garden, what happens subsequently transmogrifies this pastoral setting. The idyllic setting of a garden is one of Trevor's dominant metaphors. The contrast between the sublimity of the garden in the midst of the emerging reality of what Milton Grange really turns out to be reinforces the notion of the disjuncture that exists between the public and private and the dangers of misconceptions and self-deceptions. This metaphor of the garden is also employed by Trevor in the novel, *Other People's Worlds*, and will be examined further in the next chapter.

The focus of the story moves on this idyllic June day, to a classroom in the school where 'the bearded Mr Kelly walked between two rows of desks in a bare attic room' (Trevor 1972, p. 314). The disparity between the idyllic garden with what happens in this classroom is stark:

Six boys bent over the desks, writing speedily. In the room next door six other boys wrote also. They would not be idling, Mr Kelly knew, any more than the boys in the room across the corridor would be idling. 'Amavero, amaveris, amaverit', he said softly, his haired lips close to the ear of a boy called Timpson, 'Amaverimus, Timpson, amaveritis, amaverint'. A thumb and forefinger of Mr Kelly's seized and turned the flesh on the back of Timpson's left hand. 'Amaveritis', he said again, 'amaverint'. While the flesh was twisted this way and that and while Timpson moaned in the quiet manner that Mr Kelly preferred.... (Trevor 1972, pp. 314-315)

The two young girls who were employed as kitchen maids look out their bedroom window at Mrs Digby-Hunter sleeps in the garden:

'White fat slug', said Barbara. 'Look at her'. 'She can't think', said Dympna. 'She's incapable of mental activity'. 'She's a dead white slug', said Barbara.... 'Dead white slug', repeated Barbara, 'Was she human once?' (Trevor 1972, p. 315)

The use of the word 'slug' in this instance suggests a Christian allusion, a symbol of the deadly sin of sloth, but also infers that Mrs Digby-Hunter is not quite the serpent in the

garden. This coarse disparagement of Mrs Digby-Hunter's solipsism is crudely perceptive in light of the events that will occur later in this story.

Finally, the character of Digby-Hunter emerges more fully in the story when he is viewed in his study having a one-to-one with a boy called Marshalsea. Apparently, this boy is having an algebra grind that is not going very well for him:

Because the triangle DEF has two angles at the base and two sides equal to the two angles at the base and two sides of the triangle A B C – 'You're talking bloody nonsense', said Digby-Hunter quietly. 'Think about it boy'. (Trevor 1972, p. 315)

The use of the third person subjective is brought into focus when Digby-Hunter looks out his window and observes his wife in her deckchair. Up to this point in the story, only Mrs Digby-Hunter's perspective of her husband is revealed, but now there is a narrative reversal, as his consciousness is revealed. He momentarily ruminates on their seventeen years at Milton Grange, and on how his wife 'had become expert at making shepherd's pie. Her bridge, on the other hand, had not improved and she still made tiresome remarks to parents' (Trevor 1972, p. 316). His thoughts dwell on the early days of their relationship:

Once, briefly, he had loved her, a love that had begun to die in the bedroom of a Welsh hotel, on the night of their wedding day. Her nakedness, which he had daily imagined in lush anticipation, had strangely repelled him. 'I'm sorry', he'd murmured, and had slipped into the other twin bed, knowing then that this side of marriage was something he was not going to be able to manage. She had not said anything, and between them the matter had never been mentioned again. (Trevor 1972, p. 316)

This brief glimpse of an immense, intimate dilemma at the heart of their married life, and its consequences for the relationship, is shocking in the brevity of its exposition. So too is his physical repulsion of his young bride and the unstated implications of this. His thoughts are interrupted when a student knocks on his door:

What d'you want, Wraggett? he said. 'I think I'd better go to bed, sir'. 'Bed? What's the matter with you?' 'There's a pain in my neck sir. At the back, sir. I can't seem to see properly....' 'So have you lost your sight, Wraggett?' 'No, sir'. 'Why the damn hell are you bellyaching, then?' 'I keep seeing double, sir. I feel a bit sick, sir'. 'Are you malingering, Wraggett?' 'No, sir'. 'Then why are you saying you can't see?' 'Sir –' 'If you're not malingering, get on with the work you've been set, boy....You're a cretin', shouted Digby-Hunter. 'Get out of here at once'. 'I've a pain, sir –' 'Take your pain out with you, for God's sake. Get down to some honest work, Wraggett. (Trevor 1972, pp. 316-317)

Returning his attention to Marshalsea, his sadism unmistakably emerges as the student repeats the mathematical theorem:

His voice ceased abruptly. He closed his eyes. He felt the small fingers of Digby-Hunter briefly on his scalp before they grasped a clump of hair. 'Open your eyes', said Digby-Hunter. Marshalsea did so and saw pleasure in Digby-Hunter's face. 'You haven't listened', said Digby-Hunter. His left hand pulled the hair, causing the boy to rise from his seat. His right hand moved slowly and then suddenly shot out, completing its journey, striking at Marshalsea's jawbone. Digby-Hunter always used the side of his hand, Mr Kelly the ball of the thumb. 'Take two triangles, A B C and D E F', said Digby-Hunter. Again the edge of his right hand struck Marshalsea's face and then, clenched into a fist, the hand struck repeatedly at Marshalsea's stomach. (Trevor 1972, p. 317)

As the truth emerges in the story of the brutality of Digby-Hunter, the boy Wraggett, in desperation, seeks Mrs Digby-Hunter out. He tries in vain to get her to acknowledge his illness, but she dismisses him. Driven to despair by her garrulous chatter that he must let the headmaster know he retaliates with:

'They pull the hair out of your head', Wraggett cried, his voice suddenly shrill. 'They hit you in a special way, so that it doesn't bruise you. They drive their fists into your stomach'....They enjoy it, shouted Wraggett....Your husband half murdered me, Mrs Digby-Hunter....Mr Kelly hit Malcolmson in the groin. With a ruler. (Trevor 1972, pp. 318-319)

The boy's unrestrained language in this instance is indicative of the seriousness and depth of both his emotional and physical suffering. Mrs Digby-Hunter responds to his claims with a 'pep talk' that seeks to justify the harsh regime at Milton Grange:

They came to Milton Grange so that, after the skilled teaching of the headmaster and Mr Kelly, they might succeed at an examination that would lead them to one of England's great public schools. Corporal punishment was part of the curriculum at Milton Grange, and all parents were apprised of that fact....We rap the occasional knuckle....Quite simply, we stand no nonsense'. (Trevor 1972, p. 319)

It emerges that once before, a mother had come to the school to remove her son who had said 'that Milton Grange was run by lunatics and criminals'. However, this claim is refuted by Mrs Digby-Hunter (Trevor 1972, p. 320).

The boy Wraggett makes his way to the kitchen and collapses at the kitchen table where he dies seconds later. What follows is a scene of panic and confusion quickly followed by the realisation that life at Milton Grange is irrevocably changed. The two kitchen maids threaten to expose what has gone on:

'Your husband', said Dympna, 'derives sexual pleasure from inflicting pain on children. So does Kelly. They are queer men'. 'Your husband', said Barbara, 'will be jailed. He'll go to prison with a sack over his head so that he won't have to see the disgust on people's faces'. (Trevor 1972, p. 323)

What ensues at this point in the story is a sudden and striking realisation by Mrs Digby-Hunter of her treacherous complicity in the affairs of the school, and of how her dangerous acquiescence to her husband's despotic regime has compromised the emotional and physical well-being of the students. Now mentally unhinged by the boy's death, she blames herself for what has happened: 'it was all her fault. In twenty-nine years it had taken violence and death to make sense of facts that were as terrible' (Trevor 1972, pp. 324-5). Her assumption of blame is a further indication of her extreme agreeableness. Her existential crisis finally

allows her to access her inauthenticity, and to recognise the deliberate and dangerous evasions she practiced from the beginning of her marriage to the present time but again, her self-blaming is utterly unbalanced and self-defeating.

De Beauvoir in the chapter, 'Woman's Situation and Character', in *The Second Sex*, describes accurately the character traits Mrs Digby-Hunter presents:

The woman herself recognises that the universe as a whole is masculine; it is men who have shaped it, ruled it and who still today dominate it; as for her, she does not consider herself responsible for it; it is understood that she is inferior and dependent; she has not learned the lessons of violence, she has never emerged as a subject in front of others members of the group; enclosed in her flesh, in her home, she grasps herself as passive opposite to these human-faced gods who set goals and standards....And in the man's world, since she does not *do* anything, her thinking, as it does not flow into any project is no different from a dream; she does not have the sense of truth, because she lacks efficacy; she struggles only by means of images and words: that is why she accepts the most contradictory assertions without a problem; she does not care about clarifying the mysteries of a sphere, which in any case is beyond her scope; she settles for horribly vague knowledge when it concerns her; she confuses parties, opinions, places, people and events; there is a strange jumble in her head. But after all, seeing clearly is not her business: she was taught to accept masculine authority; she thus forgoes criticising, examining and judging for herself. She leaves it to the superior caste. (de Beauvoir 1997, pp. 654-5)

Mrs Digby-Hunter's acute passivity and agreeableness have resulted in a complete negation of her authentic self, and Trevor's portrayal of these symptoms of bad faith correlate fittingly with de Beauvoir's lucid analysis of women's characters. The 'strange jumble in her head', of which de Beauvoir speaks, is well-captured entirely by Trevor in the closing paragraphs of the story (de Beauvoir 1997, p. 655).

Trevor poignantly captures her regrets when she visualises how things might have been different if she had challenged her husband from the beginning of her married life:

She saw herself weeping, as she had not wept then. In a confused way she saw herself on that occasion and on others, protesting, shaking her head, not smiling. 'I'm leaving the

army for a step-ladder firm', he said to her, and she struck his face with her hands, tormented by the absurdity of what he said. She cried out in anger that she had married an army officer, not a step-ladder salesman who was after her father's money....He had failed her, she shrieked at him, that night in the Welsh hotel and he had failed her ever since. In front of the boys, she accused him of ill-treating those who had been placed in his care. If ever it happened again, she threatened, the police would be sent for. (Trevor 1972, p. 325)

The illusionary nature of this fantasy offers her a diversion from the abomination that has occurred, but it remains an internal fantasy. The enormity of her guilt results in a cringing *denouement* that sees her take full responsibility for what has happened:

....still weeping, she left the room and descended the back stairs to the kitchen. To her husband she said that it was all her fault, she said she was sorry. She had knitted and put down bulbs, she said, and in the end a boy had died....Loyalty and devotion, said Mrs Digby-Hunter, and now a boy was dead, and her husband with a sack over his head would be taken from Milton Grange and later would have sessions with a prison psychiatrist. It was all her fault. She would say so to the reporters when they came. She would explain and take the blame, she would come up to scratch as a wife. (Trevor 1972, p. 325)

Her recourse to tears is indicative of what de Beauvoir articulates when speaking of women's emotions, and her disparagement of women who deploy tears is characteristic of 'a defeatist vis-à-vis the world because she has never frankly assumed it' (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 663):

They [tears] are also a supreme alibi; sudden as a storm, coming out in fits, a cyclone, shower, deluge, they metamorphose the woman into a complaining fountain, a stormy sky; her eyes can no longer see, mist blurs them: they are no longer even a gaze, they melt in rain; blinded, the woman returns to the passivity of natural things. She must be vanquished: she is lost in her defeat; she sinks, she drowns, she escapes man who contemplates her, powerless as if before a cataract. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 663)

This is evidenced when:

Her husband and Sergeant Wall and Mr Kelly looked at Mrs Digby-Hunter. She stood in the centre of the kitchen, one hand on the table, a stout woman in a blue dress, weeping.

The tragedy had temporarily unhinged her, Sergeant Wall thought, and Mr Kelly in irritation thought that if she could see herself she'd go somewhere else, and her husband thought that it was typical of her to be tiresomely stupid at a time like this. The three men sighed and looked away, all of them thinking the same thing now, that she made no sense at all, with her talk about putting down bulbs and coming up to scratch. (Trevor 1972, p. 326)

Sadly, for her, enlightenment has come too late, and at too high a price. She embodies in her victimisation what de Beauvoir believes is the ambiguity of a woman such as Mrs Digby-Hunter:

If tears are not sufficient to express her revolt, she will carry on in such incoherent violence that it will disconcert the man even more...But above all, through nervous fits in her body she attempts to express the refusals she cannot carry out concretely. It is not only for physiological reasons that she is subject to convulsive manifestations; a convulsion is an interiorisation of an energy that, thrown into the world, fails to grasp any object; it is a useless expenditure of all the powers of negation caused by the situation...this is the ambiguity I already mentioned: the woman does not sincerely seek to take leave of what she detests. She plays at rupture but in the end remains with the man who makes her suffer; she protests against man, against life, against her condition, but she does not escape from it. (de Beauvoir 2009, pp. 663-4)

Mrs Digby-Hunter's self-blame, in the end, negates her truth-seeking where she falls back into the trap of immanence, as de Beauvoir describes it, namely, the place of restriction in which she immorally resided for so much of her life. There is no doubt that Trevor's portrayal of both the Digby-Hunters is open to a psychoanalytic reading due to their failure to comprehend their emotional disturbances and also how these disturbances impose themselves in their consciousness.

However, as Mrs Digby-Hunter is the character being dealt with in this chapter, the psychoanalytic viewpoint may not be adequate to an analysis of her character. De Beauvoir in her chapter, 'The Psychoanalytical Point of View', argues that: 'Freud was not very concerned with woman's destiny; it is clear that he modelled his description of it on that of masculine destiny, merely modifying some of the traits' (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 51). While

not completely rejecting the contributions of psychoanalysis, she disagreed with its method, one that bases itself squarely on the belief that sexuality is a given. For de Beauvoir, woman is defined:

within the society of which she is a member' and that one's life 'is a relation with the world; the individual defines himself by choosing himself through the world; we must turn to the world to answer the questions that preoccupy us. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 59)

Mrs Digby-Hunter, and indeed all the other female characters in this chapter, embodies the ambiguity about which de Beauvoir speaks. They all personify varying facets of existing in the world in two ways: firstly by succumbing to society's imposition of what a woman's role is, and secondly, through the degree to which they succumb to these impositions. Mrs Digby-Hunter is an extreme example of the latter concept, but her characterisation by Trevor offers a chilling version of events that feature a linear corrosion of an individual's abjuration of ethical behaviour. There is a strong sense of foreboding apparent in the seemingly innocuous desire of Mrs Digby-Hunter to pursue 'a policy of agreeableness', but this compliant behaviour is interspersed with many instances of what de Beauvoir terms 'bad faith'. The ambiguity of her situation – her ridiculous enthrallment to the institution of marriage and her obsession 'to come up to scratch as a wife' – do not serve to excuse her terrible behaviour.

Although a victim of a male privileged institution to a degree, Mrs Digby-Hunter has never taken any responsibility for living an authentic life. She presents a disturbing illustration of a woman succumbing to a charade of a marriage, one that demonstrates the inherent destruction that arises from an individual seeking an escape route from tyranny, but who refuses to acknowledge her own self-deception. De Beauvoir believes that all such escape routes lead to ruination and Mrs Digby-Hunter's total abdication of responsibility buried in agreeableness and pretences, incites caution: 'this symbolic behaviour through which women seek escape can lead to mental decay, obsessions, even crimes' (de Beauvoir

1996, p. 256). Trevor offers no redemptive finale to this story. He believes that the short story *should* be an explosion of truth and it is palpably clear in this short story that the real truth of the story resides in the exposition of Mrs Digby-Hunter's shallowness and complete disregard of the truth (Stout 1989, p. 5). Even more ambiguous but maybe less dramatic, are the two female characters in the next short story under consideration 'The Grass Widows'.

'The Grass Widows'

This short story is remarkable in its in-depth exposure of the insidious impact of the imposition of patriarchal norms in the psyches of the two female characters. What is especially revealing is the dearth of any sense of societal progression in the younger woman's perception of the institution of marriage and her unconscious self-subjugation. Marriage, for Mrs Jackson Major, reflects de Beauvoir's belief that it is 'the destiny', generally, of the single woman (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 452). The story begins with an idyllic description of a west of Ireland hotel where:

The headmaster of a great English public school visited every summer a village in County Galway for the sake of the fishing...among blue mountains' and how 'the soft peace of the riverside and of the unrivalled glory of being alone with one's mind. (Trevor 1976, p. 267)

Mr Angusthorpe, the patrician headmaster, has recounted innumerable times to generations of his pupils, tales of this fortuitous holiday destination, the Slieve Gashal Hotel. So compelling is his description of this rural idyll, that one of his past pupils, Jackson Major, a former head boy of the famous school, 'did not ever forget the paradise that then had formed in his mind' and planned to spend his honeymoon there (Trevor 1976, p. 268). This story is set in the summer of 1968 and, as he had done every year, Mr Angusthorpe and his wife arrive at the hotel with the expectation that they will be welcomed, as usual, by the genial owner, Mr Doyle, and given their favourite room. However, it transpires that Mr Doyle has died in the

previous year and the hotel is now being run by his son, Scut Doyle, and his wife.²² The pejorative connotations of the new owner's first name anticipate adversity. Neither makes an impression on Angusthorpe who believes 'that nothing was ever going to be the same again' (Trevor 1976, p. 268). Trevor comically evokes both the personal and physical deterioration of the hotel and its owners:

He [Doyle] told them that he had inherited the Slieve Gashal and that for all his adult life he had been employed in the accounts department of a paper-mill in Dublin. 'I thought at first I'd sell the place up', he informed the Angusthorpes, 'and then I thought maybe I'd attempt to make a go of it'. 'Will we have a shot at it?' I said to the wife, and, God bless her, she said why wouldn't I?' While he spoke, the subject of his last remarks appeared behind him in the hall, a woman whose appearance did not impress Mr Angusthorpe. She was pale-faced and fat, and so Mr Angusthorpe afterwards suggested to his wife, sullen. She stood silently by her husband, whose appearance did not impress Mr Angusthorpe either, since the new proprietor of the Slieve Gashal, a man with shaking hands and cocky black moustache, did not appear to have shaved himself that day. 'One or other of them, if not both', said Mr Angusthorpe afterwards, 'smelt of drink'. (Trevor 1976, p. 268)

This inauspicious start to their holiday foreshadows a series of events that will negate the very meaning of the word 'holiday'. They find their customary bedroom is now half its former size, with a partition creating two rooms where there had been one.

Despite these shortcomings and Mr Angusthorp's instinct to vacate the hotel immediately, he makes up his mind to stay without consulting his wife. He justifies this by deciding that:

the best thing to do would be to remain for the moment. The rivers could hardly have altered, he was thinking, and that the hotel was now more than inadequate was a consequence that would affect his wife more than it would affect him. (Trevor 1976, p. 270)

His disregard for his wife's perspective on these matters highlights his enormous disrespect towards her. Dinner that evening is an unmitigated disaster, with inedible food. This,

²² Trevor's use of the word 'scut' foreshadows trouble. In colloquial terms, it has connotations of dishonesty and trickery.

however, brings out the stoic in Mr Angusthorpe, who is now ‘determined that the hotel must be regarded as a joke’, and responded by ‘saying it was better to make the best of things’ (Trevor 1976, p. 270). The interplay of the merging voices of the narrator with the revelatory consciousness of Mr Angusthorpe, interspersed with the thoughts of Mrs Angusthorpe, reveal the ruthless psychological oppression imposed on her by her husband, through a subtle variation of narrative perspective:

Turnip made Mrs Angusthorpe sick in the stomach, even the sight of it: at another time in their life her husband might have remembered and ordered the vegetable from the table, but what he was more intent upon now was discovering if the Slieve Gashal still possessed a passable hock, which surprisingly it did. (Trevor 1976, p. 270)

The narrator’s voice manages to extract the personal grievances of Mrs Angusthorpe and merges both past and present to create a strong sense of the bitterness in their marriage.²³ Access to Mr Angusthorpe’s thoughts discloses his own sense of superiority, and his inability to consider his wife’s position:

In the past she had been wont to spend her days going for a brief walk in the morning and returning to the pleasant little dining-room for a solitary lunch, and then sleeping or reading until it was time for a cup of tea, after which she would again take a brief walk. (Trevor 1976, p. 270)

This contrasts sharply with her memories of this yearly two-week holiday: ‘she remembered days in the rain, walking about the one-horse village with nothing whatsoever to do except to walk about, or lie on her bed reading detective stories’ (Trevor 1976, p. 273).

What emerges is a depressing depiction of a marriage that is fundamentally flawed and broken. That they as a couple are still together is preposterous, and this absurdity is invoked by Trevor through the employment of black humour. The Angusthorpes are woken in the middle of the night by noise from the room beyond the partition:

²³ We know that this is free indirect style because it must be Mrs Angusthorpe who is experiencing these memories.

‘Put a pillow down, darling’, a male voice was saying as clearly as if its possessor stood in the room beside the Angusthorpe’s bed. ‘Couldn’t we wait until another time?’ a woman pleaded in reply. ‘I don’t see what good a pillow will do’. ‘It’ll lift you up a bit’, the man explained. ‘It said in the book to put a pillow down if there was difficulty’. ‘I don’t see ‘It’ll make entry easier’, said the man. ‘It’s a well-known thing’. (Trevor 1976, p. 272)

It suddenly dawns on Mr Angusthorpe that the male voice belongs to his former head-boy, Jackson Major, and for the next couple of hours, they are privy to the conversation of Jackson Major and his new bride who are honeymooning in the hotel because of Mr Angusthorpe’s excessive eulogising of the hotel’s merits. Through the thoughts of Mrs Angusthorpe, the events of the night are recalled:

For hours they had lain awake, listening to the conversation beyond the inadequate partition. The newly wed wife of Jackson Major had wept and said that Jackson had better divorce her at once. She had designated the hotel they were in as a frightful place, fit only for Irish tinkers. ‘That filthy meal!’ the wife of Jackson Major had cried emotionally. ‘That awful drunk man!’ And Jackson Major had apologised and had mentioned Mr Angusthorpe by name, wondering what on earth his old headmaster could ever have seen in such an establishment. ‘Let’s try again’, he had suggested and the Angusthorpes had listened to a repetition of Mrs Jackson’s unhappy tears’. (Trevor 1976, p. 273)

Mr Angusthorpe decides that he and his wife must conceal the fact that they occupy the room next door to the Majors. His suggestion that they whisper when they are in their bedroom initiates a reflection on the type of man to whom she was married:

He was a great, successful man, big and square and commanding, with the cold eyes of the fish he sought in mountain rivers. He had made a firm impression on generations of boys, and on parents and governors, and often on a more general public, yet he had never been able to give her children. She had needed children because she was, compared with him, an unimportant kind of person.... Yet now this revered, feared, and clever man was suggesting that they should whisper for a fortnight in their bedroom, so that the couple next door might not feel embarrassment, so that he himself might remain in a particularly uncomfortable hotel in order to fish. (Trevor 1976, p. 274)

This description of Mr Angusthorpe bears striking resemblances to the previous short story, 'O Fat White Woman', when both the public and private realms of his life are revealed. The public persona of both men is depicted in sharp contrast to their physical and emotional inadequacies. Their implied sterility is circumvented, in both narratives, through their immersion in the lives of young boys. Yet both their wives are left to endure a childless future, and one not of their making.

Trevor's restrained rendering of these women's circumstances is compassionately drawn when one considers that women in the sixties and seventies were victims of a patriarchal social system that required them to find identity and meaning in their lives through their husbands and children. Both Mrs Digby-Hunter and Mrs Angusthorpe again embody the concept of 'destiny' about which de Beauvoir speaks: 'the destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage', whereas men do not regard it as such.²⁴ Mrs Angusthorpe recalls her memory of Jackson Major:

She remembered Jackson Major, a tall boy with short black hair who would endlessly discuss with her husband a web of school affairs. 'The best head boy I remember', her husband's voice said again, coming back to her over a number of years. There had been a complaint from some child's mother, she recalled, who claimed that her son had been, by Jackson Major, too severely caned. (Trevor 1976, p. 274)

At breakfast, the following morning, Mrs Angusthorpe felt she has endured quite enough, and attempts to insist on their leaving the hotel, but this is interrupted by the arrival of Jackson Major and his wife at their table. Social niceties prevail, and the truth about both couple's experiences in the hotel is diminished, in particular by the men. Both women's complaints about the standard of the food are also ignored by the men, and the women's compliance in

²⁴ Debra B Bergoffen in an essay, 'Marriage, Autonomy, and the Feminine Protest' argues that 'the key term here is *destiny*; for at the heart of Beauvoir's critique of marriage is the fact that for most women, marriage is not a choice but a destiny. Furthermore, because it is a woman's but not a man's destiny, marriage, framed as a contractual relationship, is not a contract between equals and not, therefore, a reciprocal relationship' (Simons 2006, p. 94).

accepting the situation is assumed. The two men enthusiastically make plans to fish together. Both women are dismissed with the suggestion that they can link up together and 'scout around' for a better hotel for the following year.

A short time later, the women encounter each other in the small village, and stop to talk. The events of the previous twenty-four hours have culminated in an existential crisis for Mrs Angusthorpe. Mrs Angusthorpe apologises for what she sees as her role in the other couple being in the hotel: 'I'm afraid it's our fault, for being here. My husband's, I mean, and mine', and in Mrs Jackson Major's reply, 'my husband could have declined to go fishing', a poignant sense of their powerlessness is evoked; their husbands' disregard for their wishes is all too clear (Trevor 1972, p. 277). Mrs Angusthorpe makes a desperate attempt to save the younger woman from a fate similar to hers. The insight offered through her introspections is full of antipathies and deep resentments:

The words were sour. They were sour and icy, Mrs Angusthorpe thought, matching her own mood. On her brief walk she had that morning disliked her husband more than ever she had disliked him before, and there was venom in her now. Once upon a time he might at least have heard her desires with what could even have been taken for understanding. He would not have acted upon her desires, since it was not in his nature to do so, but he would not have been guilty, either, of announcing in so obviously false a way that they should enjoy what they could and not make a fuss. (Trevor 1976, p. 277)

She now acutely feels his lack of respect for her:

It was a long time since he could possibly have been concerned as to whether or not she found the food in a hotel unpalatable. She was angry when she thought of it this morning, not because she was unused to these circumstances of her life but because, quite suddenly, she had seen her state of resignation as an insult to the woman she once, too long ago, had been. (Trevor 1976, p. 277)

Mrs Angusthorpe's recollection of her younger self, and her momentary admiration of the woman she once was, is reflected for her in the younger woman. She glimpses the freedom

she once had but fails to consider that freedom is always a choice. Again, like Mrs Digby-Hunter in the previous story, enlightenment occurs but unfortunately, it finds its focus in attempting to persuade Mrs Jackson Major to leave her marriage. Through the intricacy of the narrative shifts, moving from the consciousness of Mrs Angusthorpe to her actual conversation with the younger woman, her outward concern is negated by the projected imaginings of telling her husband that Mrs Jackson Major's wife has left him.

Though genuine in her desire to warn the younger woman of the mistakes she had made in her marriage, Mrs Angusthorpe is not willing to walk away from her own marriage and instead tries to project her experience onto Mrs Jackson Major, and force her into making a very fundamental decision. When Mrs Jackson Major tries to tell Mrs Angusthorpe that her marriage is of no concern to her, Mrs Angusthorpe replies:

They are talking now on a riverside, whispering maybe so as not to disturb their prey. They are murmuring about the past, of achievements on the sports field and marches undertaken by a cadet force. While you and I are having a different kind of talk'. 'What they are not saying is that two women in the bar of this hotel are unhappy. They have forgotten about the two women: they are more relaxed and contented than ever they are with us'. Mrs Angusthorpe, beady-eyed as she spoke, saw the effect of her words reflected in the uneasy face of the woman beside her. She felt herself carried away by this small triumph, she experienced a headiness that was blissful. She saw in her mind another scene, imagining herself, over lunch, telling her husband about the simple thing that had happened. She would watch him sitting there in all his dignity: she would wait until he was about to pass a forkful of food to his mouth and then she would say: 'Jackson Major's wife has left him already'. And she would smile at him. (Trevor 1976, p. 280)

This vision of her one-upmanship over her husband generates an impulsive desire to get the younger woman to abandon her marriage straight away, but this does not happen.

Again, as in the story 'O Fat White Woman', there is a propensity to view these women as victims of domineering, selfish and heartless men, yet there is also an undeniable deliberation around the question of personal responsibility. Like Mrs Digby-Hunter, Mrs

Angusthorpe has a realisation that her lifelong resignation to playing a poor second fiddle to her husband has compromised her selfhood. Regrettably, her fears concerning the younger woman's future, fears that are grounded in truth, are disregarded and she is left with the aftermath of failure. She retreats into immanence, the state of resignation and apathy she has subscribed to throughout her married life.

Trevor's depiction of a newly married Mrs Jackson-Major is revelatory and demonstrates the depth of his engagement with the subject of marriage. Again, his ability to take on the colouration of a young woman, and to disclose both her vulnerabilities and her youthful confidence, is remarkable. Her characterisation offers a reflection on the speculative nature of the perils involved in forming relationships, as well as the societal imperative that sanctions marriage as a realisable norm, especially for women. Trevor's adeptness at creating an environment that perceives and reveals women as Other is evidenced through the consciousness of the hotel owner, Scut Doyle, who is admiring Mrs Jackson Major:

Doyle watched her, admiring her slender legs and the flowered dress she was wearing. A light blue cardigan hung casually from her shoulders, its sleeves not occupied by her arms. Wouldn't it be great, he thought, to be married to a young body like that? (Trevor 1976, p. 276)

This stark objectification of her is followed by her encounter with Mrs Angusthorpe who baldly tells her that she was privy to all the intimate details of the younger woman's plight during the previous night. The horror of the night is recalled:

He had come at her as she was taking off her blouse. His right hand had shot beneath her underclothes, pressing at her and gripping her. All during their inedible dinner he had been urging her to drink whisky and wine, and drinking quantities of both himself. In bed he had suddenly become calmer, remembering instructions read in a book. (Trevor 1976, p. 279)

The subject of sex and marriage is addressed in some detail by de Beauvoir, and she argues that sexual pleasure is not merely a manner of technique, and is critical of traditional

marriage, which: 'is far from creating the most favourable conditions for the awakening and developing of feminine eroticism' (de Beauvoir 2000, p. 427).

However, these memories and Mrs Angusthorpe's insistence that Mr Jackson Major is an almost exact replica of her husband, force her to flee to her bedroom where she mentally revisits the actions of her husband. She makes up her mind to challenge her husband, beginning with her demand to leave this hotel at once. Despite her earnest pleas to reclaim their honeymoon in some other location, Jackson-Major refuses to concede to her wishes. His adamant refusal to leave is tempered with a seductive, disingenuous logic that results in her adopting a 'choking passivity' (O'Connor 2009, p. 3): 'she closed her eyes for a moment in silence. Then she opened them, and being unable to think of anything else to say, she said: "I'm sorry"' (Trevor 1976, p. 284). The absurdity of her apology is reminiscent of Mrs Digby-Hunter's equally absurd assumption of blame and captures completely their servile deference to their husbands.

Trevor lucidly captures the emotional and physical cost of her passivity through her introspections: There were no thoughts in her mind:

no voice, neither her own nor Mrs Angusthorpe's spoke; she felt a weariness, as though an ordeal was over and she had survived it. All she knew was that he had listened to her: he had been patient and understanding, allowing her to say all that was in her mind and then being reassuring. It was not his fault that the hotel had turned out so unfortunately. Nor was it his fault that a bullying old man had sought him out as a fishing companion. He couldn't help it if his desire for her brought out a clumsiness in him. He was a man, she thought: he was not the same as she was: she must meet him half-way. (Trevor 1976, p. 285)

De Beauvoir offers an interesting analysis of the origins of passivity in women, tracing it back to Aristotle who declared that 'woman just provided passive material while the male principle is strength, activity, movement and life' and how this was 'perpetuated throughout the Middle Ages and down to the modern period' (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 25). The infiltration

of this belief insidiously prevailed over time, and created perplexity around women's self-identification and according to de Beauvoir, passivity occurs in response to this undefined sense of self:

the fact is, deciding who she is would be quite awkward for her...as man holds a privileged place in this world, he is the one who is able actively to display his love...thus, the degree of his attachment to her can be roughly estimated by his general attitude, while woman barely has the means to sound out her own heart; according to her moods she will take different points of view about her own feelings, and as long as she submits to them passively, no one interpretation will be truer than another. (de Beauvoir 2009, pp. 279-80)

An unsettling sense of this young woman deliberately entering into a life in which her wants and needs will be subordinated to those of her husband is evoked here, and so much of what de Beauvoir says about marriage is embodied in the relationships of these characters. The two men in this story reflect her belief that 'man is a socially autonomous and complete individual' and woman is not (de Beauvoir 2000, p. 452). Mrs Jackson Major's rejection of the possible truths of Mrs Angusthorpe's fears for her future, are swept aside and the possibility of solidarity between them is disregarded. What becomes apparent from Trevor's depiction of the lives of these two women is their sense of dependency on their husbands and their lack of independence on so many levels.

It could be argued that these women represent an old-fashioned viewpoint of marriage and that their experiences belong in the sixties and seventies. Yet even today, the symbolic value of marriage is as seductive as ever. Though historical oppressions have been reformed, and wives are equal to husbands in all areas of law, marriage remains an institution in which women may be compromised.²⁵ Many of Trevor's later short stories engage with the subject of marriage and offer numerous perspectives on male/female relationships. What becomes

²⁵ For an in-depth view of the subject of marriage today read Carole Pateman's, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988) p. 5 in which she says: 'Feminists have been pointing out the peculiarities of the marriage contract for at least a century and a half, but to no avail' (Pateman 1985, p. 5). See also Sylvia Walby, *The Future of Feminism* (Polity Press, 2011).

apparent across his fiction, especially in relation to marriage, is the sheer incongruity of this constructed institution replete with gender codes. Morrow-Paulson argues that fundamentally ‘feminine and masculine perspectives on marriage are diametrically opposed’ and that ‘few women are ever “on a level with” a man in Trevor’s stories’ (Morrow-Paulson 1993, p. 66, 71). Through the character of Mrs Jackson-Major, Trevor offers the reader an insightful glimpse of her reasons for choosing Jackson-Major as a future husband:

She had met her husband in the Hurlingham Club....She had thought he was rather nice. There was something about his distant manner that attracted her; there was a touch of arrogance in the way he didn’t look at her when he spoke. She’d make him look at her, she vowed. (Trevor 1976, 280)

In de Beauvoir’s chapter, ‘The Woman in Love’, she argues that the female is destined from childhood to seek fulfilment in acquiring a husband, and this young woman’s behaviour parallels this:

closed off in the sphere of the relative, destined for the male from her earliest childhood, used to seeing him as a sovereign, with whom equality is not permitted, the woman who has not suppressed her claim to be human will dream of surpassing her being towards one of those superior beings, of becoming one, of fusing with the sovereign subject; there is no other way out for her than losing herself body and soul in the one designated to her as the absolute, as the essential. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 700)

Trevor’s employment of free indirect style in rendering her innermost thoughts reveals a precarious basis for getting married, and this precariousness is further developed a little while later when Mrs Angusthorpe pleads with her to leave the marriage:

The words belonged to a nightmare and Daphne was aware of wishing that she was asleep and dreaming. The memory of tension on her wedding day, and of guests standing around in sunshine in a London garden, and then the flight by plane, were elements that confused her mind as she listened to this small woman. The tension had been with her as she walked towards the altar and had been with her, too, in her parent’s garden. Nor had it eased when she escaped with her husband....It had certainly increased while she attempted to eat

stringy chicken at a late hour in the dining-room, while her husband smiled at her and talked about intoxicants. (Trevor 1976, p. 279)

When Mrs Angusthorpe suggests that ‘by one o’clock tonight you could be sitting in your bed at home, eating from a tray that your mother brought you’, the possibility of escape beckons. Her emotional turmoil is poignantly captured through an imagined reunion with her parents:

Without wishing to and perhaps, she thought, because she was so upset, she saw herself suddenly as Mrs Angusthorpe had suggested, sitting up in her own bedroom with a tray of food on her knees and her mother standing beside her, saying it was all right. ‘I suddenly realised’, she heard herself saying. ‘He took me to this awful hotel, where his old headmaster was. He gave me wine and whisky, and then in bed I thought I might be sick’. Her mother replied to her, telling her that it wasn’t a disgrace, and her father came in later and told her not to worry. It was better not to be unhappy, her father said: it was better to have courage now. (Trevor 1976 p. 281)

Interestingly here, the choice offered to her is either to stay married or to return to her childhood home: the notion of living a contented single life is clearly not an option in this story. Trevor skilfully captures the role of the imagination, in the creation of fantasy; a fantasy that becomes a coping mechanism in an existentialist crisis. Just as Mrs Digby-Hunter and Mrs Angusthorpe have done, so Mrs Jackson Major allows imagination and fantasy to keep reality at bay. However, her imagined retreat from the distress of her situation to the comfort and safety of her parent’s home is never realised. Instead, she chooses to deny her freedom to act and settles for what she has, in all probability, for a marriage that will mirror that of Mrs Angusthorpe.

Trevor captures her wilful illusions in the face of a discernible misalliance that will see her youthful optimism being slowly eroded with the passage of time. The possibilities of transmuting their situations are only glimpsed by both women but in the end, they themselves preclude change and settle for passive defeat just as Mrs Digby-Hunter did. In the next story,

‘The Bedroom Eyes of Mrs Vansittart’, the main character, Mrs Vansittart, is presented in a truly enigmatic fashion, and advances a very different reflection to the themes of compliance and complicity.

‘The Bedroom Eyes of Mrs Vansittart’

The eponymous Mrs Vansittart is a deeply ambiguous figure. The preliminary depiction of her character, and the background to her married life, is told through the perspectives of other people. The story is set in Cap Ferrat in the South of France where Mrs Vansittart and her husband Harry now live in the Villa Teresa ‘and they do not intend to move again’ (Trevor 1976, p. 650). A pejorative profile is rendered of Mrs Vansittart: ‘you couldn’t trust those eyes’, people on Cap Ferrat say, for they find it hard to be charitable where Mrs Vansittart is concerned. “‘The Wife Whom Nobody Cares For’”, Joe-John remarks, attaching a tinselly jangle to the statement, which manages to suggest that Mrs Vansittart belongs in neon lights’ (Trevor 1976, p. 649).

The sardonic tone of the narrator delineates a couple who have led a transitory lifestyle and the reasons for this emerge later in the story. The gossip that is rendered about Mrs Vansittart, though malicious in nature, appears credible in light of her remarkable attractiveness:

At fifty-four, so Joe-John has remarked as well, she remains a winner and a taker, for in St Jean and Monte Carlo young men still glance a second time when the slim body passes by, their attention lingering usually on the rhythmic hips. (Trevor 1976, p. 649)

An image is created of the exclusivity of the lives of the Vansittarts and their group of friends who play bridge and tennis with them. Cap Ferrat and its inhabitants are caustically drawn: ‘riches have brought these people to Cap Ferrat, riches maintain them’ (Trevor 1976, 650). Its natural beauty is legendary but this beauty comes at a price: ‘against the alien outside

world a mesh of steel lurks within the boundary hedges; stern warnings abound, of a *Chien Mechant* and the ferocious *Securite du Cap*' (Trevor 1976, p. 650). This group of wealthy expatriates, three couples and one single man, all agree that Harry Vansittart is a much nicer person than his wife, and perceive him as a downtrodden husband:

Everyone who comes to the villa likes him, and sympathises because his wife humiliates him so. To strangers he seems like a servant about the place, grubbily on his knees in the garden, emerging from the kitchen regions with flour on his face. Insult is constantly added to injury, strangers notice, but the regular tennis-companions and bridge-players have long since accepted that it goes rather further, that Harry is the creature of his wife. (Trevor 1976, p. 651)

In the course of one of their 'bridge' parties, a stranger arrives at the villa looking specifically for Mrs Vansittart. Some of her conversation with this man is overheard, and the assumption is made that this man is one of her lovers. They are overheard arranging to meet at the lighthouse the following morning. When the bridge party ends at midnight, all the friends agree privately that Mrs Vansittart's public display of her lover is reprehensible.

Trevor brilliantly captures here the notion of the public/private discourse of polite society with the impersonal narrative voice stating: 'the visitors remarked that the evening had been delightful. They smiled and thanked Mrs Vansittart' yet access to their individual thoughts reveal their real feelings (Trevor 1976, p. 655). Mrs Cecil, one of the bridge players, decides not to say anything until she enters her own villa:

'She has destroyed that man' and 'Signor Borromeo said to himself, there were all kinds of people in this world but found that this reflection caused him to like Mrs Vansittart no more. A *cornuto* was one thing, but a man humiliated in *pubblico* was an unforgivable shame' (Trevor 1976, p. 655)

Joe-John, Mrs Vansittart's bridge partner, later declares to his friend that 'she has destroyed that man' (Trevor 1976, p. 655). The impersonal narrative voice then moves to give a bird's-eye view of Mrs Vansittart sitting alone in her bedroom: 'her mind contained few thoughts.

Her mind was tired, afflicted with the same fatigue that deadened, just a little, the eyes that people are rude about' (Trevor 1976, p. 655). This is followed immediately by a similar view of Harry sitting happily in his den, totally immersed in his musical composition, a fantastical project that he has spent many years perfecting. Trevor's deliberate reticence in describing what Harry is actually composing creates a sense of uneasiness. Mrs Vansittart describes it as a 'cycle' and:

no one except Mrs Vansittart had been permitted to hear the cycle. It was through her, not its author that the people of the villas knew what they did: that, for instance, the current composition concerned a Red Indian called Foontimo. (Trevor 1976, p. 652)

Sitting alone in his den Harry finds inspiration:

The child-wife who visited the dreams of Foontimo said her name was Soaring Cloud. She prepared a heaven for Foontimo. She would never leave him, nor would she ever grow old. Harry smiled over that, his even white teeth moist with excitement. He had known she could not elude him for ever. (Trevor 1976, p. 656)

This curious and peculiar insight into Harry's consciousness has sinister implications when the truth is revealed about his sexual predilections. A cinematic shift in the narrative to the following morning sees Joe-John observing the meeting between the waiter and Mrs Vansittart and sees her giving him money. The narrator gives voice to Joe-John's astonishment when he says: 'My God' ... 'she pays for it' (Trevor 1976, p. 656).

Another cinematic shift sees Mrs Vansittart at the Villa Teresa writing in her diary and the omniscient narrator's voice informing the reader that:

While Harry composes his songs she fills a number of hard-backed notebooks with the facts she does not wish to divulge to anyone now but which, one day after her death and after Harry's, she would like to be known. (Trevor 1976, p. 656)

The narrative voice then changes to the first person singular and in a few pages, Mrs Vansittart offers a succinct account of the history of her marriage.

The story of their life together, is a bizarre, curious tale of an obsessive and dysfunctional love that began when they were both eleven years old. What emerges is a disturbing account of a self-annihilation on the part of Mrs Vansittart that is justified in the name of love. There is a suggestion of a dysfunctional relationship between Harry and his mother and in her diary, Mrs Vansittart reflects on this:

On the coastal path this morning I thought about Harry and myself when we were both eleven; I was in love with him even then. In Holland Falls he's brought me to this mother's bedroom to show me the rings she crowded on to her plump fingers, her heavily-stoppered scent bottles, her garish silk stockings...Everyone knew that Harry loathed his mother, but no one thought about it or blamed him particularly, she being huge and pink and doting on her only child in a shaming way. (Trevor 1976, pp. 656-7)

When the two eleven-year-olds are found naked in bed, a situation instigated by Harry, and witnessed by Harry's mother's maid, who informs the mother, the maid is dismissed. When the father of the young Mrs Vansittart learns of his daughter's misdemeanour and challenges her, the explanation offered is tellingly prophetic of the position she will take in the future:

My father bawled at me, his fury a single crimson explosion of lips and tongue, his dotted necktie gulping up and down. It wasn't Harry's fault, I said, I'd tempted Harry because I loved him. Besides, I added, nothing had happened. 'At eleven years of age?' my father yelled. 'It's not the point, for God's sake, that nothing happened!' (Trevor 1976, p. 657)

Eleven years elapse until 'we ran away from Holland Falls when we were twenty-two' and the next year is spent driving 'from town to town, motel to motel' (Trevor 1976, p. 657). They inhabit separate rooms because Harry is composing his 'cycle' 'and liked to be alone with it at night' (Trevor 1976, p. 657).

Relating these facts about their early-married life together exposes her failure and powerlessness to face the truth about her husband:

I loved him more than I could ever tell him but never again, for Harry, did I take my clothers off. Harry has never kissed me, though I, in passing, cannot even now resist bending down to touch the side of his face with my lips. (Trevor 1976, p. 657)

Her puerile projections that her love for Harry is on par with the illustrious historical figures like ‘Heloise and Abelard, Beatrice and Dante, and all the others’, is clearly delusional, but also indicative of acute passivity and subjugation (Trevor 1976, p. 657). De Beauvoir in her chapter, ‘The Woman in Love’ (*The Second Sex*), offers a discerning exploration of this emotional state:

The word ‘love’ has not at all the same meaning for both sexes and this is a source of the grave misunderstandings that separate them. Byron rightly said that love is merely an occupation in the life of the man, while it is life itself for the woman. (de Beauvoir 2000, p. 699)

The portrait of Mrs Vansittart perfectly illustrates this concept with her fixated love of Harry and reinforces many of de Beauvoir’s conceptions that she writes about in the chapter, ‘The Woman in Love’, about how love is such a different experience for women:

It is the difference in their situations that is reflected in the conceptions man and woman have of love. The individual who is a subject, who is himself, endeavours to extend his grasp on the world if he has the generous inclination for transcendence: he is ambitious, he acts. But an inessential being cannot discover the absolute in the heart of his subjectivity; a being doomed to immanence could not realise himself in his acts. Closed off in the sphere of the relative, destined for the male from her earliest childhood, used to seeing him as a sovereign, with whom equality is not permitted, the woman who has not suppressed her claim to be human will dream of surpassing her being towards one of those superior beings, of becoming one, of fusing with the sovereign subject; there is no other way out for her than losing herself body and soul in the one designated to her as the absolute, as the essential....she chooses to want her enslavement so ardently that it will seem to her to be the expression of her freedom; she will try to overcome her situation as inessential object by radically assuming it; through her flesh, her feelings and her behaviour, she will exalt as sovereign the one she loves, she will posit him as value and supreme reality: she will efface herself before him. Love becomes a religion for her. (de Beauvoir 2000, p. 700)

The danger inherent in this emotional enslavement to another materialises in the lives of the Vansittarts during their stay in the city of Harrisburg, when Mrs Vansittart finds a young girl 'lying on my bed, as I had lain on his mother's with him' (Trevor 1976, p. 657). Mrs Vansittart's compliance and complicity is evident when she recounts 'in my presence he paid her forty dollars, but I knew he had not laid a finger on her, any more than he had on me when I was her age' (Trevor 1976, p. 657). Harry berates his wife: 'You're never cross enough', Harry said, with childish petulance in the City Hotel, and an unmistakeable psychological connection to the mother he 'loathed' is elicited.

This incident initiates the threat of police surveillance and is the catalyst for their move to England. Her extreme need to protect him from himself involves circumventing his sexual predilections and diverting his energies elsewhere:

And loving him so, I naturally did my best to please him. Any distraction a harmless little game could provide, any compensation: that was how I saw my duty, if in the circumstances that is not too absurd a word. (Trevor 1976, p. 658)

Eventually these diversions ceased to work ,and there were two incidents in England. Mrs Vansittart recalls this incident:

It's all right', the poor child cried out in London when I entered my room. 'Please don't tell, Mrs Vansittart'. Harry paid her the money he had promised her, and when she had gone I broke down and wept. I didn't even want to look at Harry, I didn't want to hear him speak. In an hour or so he brought me up a cup of tea. (Trevor 1976, p. 658)

Just like Mrs Digby-Hunter, Mrs Vansittart manages to justify her defence of her husband:

It was, heaven knows, simple enough on the surface of things. I could not leave Harry because I loved him too much. I loved his chubby white hands and tranquil smile, and the weakness in his eyes when he took his spectacles off. If I'd left him, he would have ended up in prison because Harry needs to be loved. And then, besides, there has been so much happiness, at least for me: our travelling together, the pictures and furniture we've so

fondly collected, and of course the Villa Teresa. It's the strangest thing in the world, all that. (Trevor 1976, p. 658)

This access to her innermost thoughts, with their materialistic overtones, offers a disturbing reflection on some of the reasons that constitute the desire for marriage on the part of women. Again, as in the previous stories, the social expectation that marriage is a destiny that is traditionally offered to women propagates subterfuges on all levels.

However, it is only one aspect to the complexities of the character of Mrs Vansittart. Again like Mrs Digby-Hunter, her extreme passivity and agreeableness in relation to her husband are serious examples of bad faith that have resulted in her enabling her husband to continue his diabolical behaviour with young girls. Not only has she obliterated her own selfhood, but she has also facilitated the ruination of these individual girls, demonstrating the moral vacuum in which she lives, as well as being part of their oppression. The deterioration of her mental state becomes apparent when she refers to Harry's habit of always apologising:

He's always sorry when he comes in from the flowerbeds with clay on his shoes, or puts a teapot on a polished surface, or breaks the promises he makes. In a way that's hard to communicate Harry likes being sorry. (Trevor 1976, p. 658)

Her final diary entry concerns the memory of an incident that happened in Switzerland eleven years previously. The reason for the caller to the Villa Teresa on the previous night is given:

My presence at the lighthouse that morning had to do with a German girl in Switzerland eleven years ago. The waiter who is at the Grand-Hotel for the season was at the Bon Accueil in Chateau d'Oex. The German girl was given wine at dinner-time and suddenly burst into tears, hysterically flinging her accusations about. I simply laughed. I said it was ridiculous. We were gone by breakfast-time and Harry has kept his promise since, frightened for eleven years. Dear, gentle Harry, who never laid a finger on any of those girls, who never would. (Trevor 1976, p. 659)

Mrs Vansittart's belief that her husband never interfered with these girls is questionable, especially in light of payment being made to a waiter who had witnessed this particular incident many years previously.

Once the blackmailer is paid off, nothing changes at the Villa Teresa. Their friends go on believing that Mrs Vansittart deceives her husband, and that Harry is a much nicer person than his wife, but the truth about Harry's profound psychological manipulation of his wife is revealed towards the end of the story when they are playing hosts to yet another bridge party and Harry deliberately initiates a rebuke from his wife:

'Oh, my dear, don't pour it yet!' She cries across the room, and then with some asperity, 'We really aren't quite ready, old thing'. Harry apologises, enjoying the wave of sympathy her protest engenders. He waits until the hand is played, knowing that then her voice will again command him. He can feel the stifled irritation in the room, and then the sympathy. (Trevor 1976, p. 660)

The free indirect style that reveals Harry's disturbing thoughts abruptly shifts to Mrs Vansittart's consciousness and exposes her enthrallment to him:

Once, at the beginning of their time in the Villa Teresa, she had a way of getting up and helping him with the tea-cups, but then she sensed that that was wrong. She senses things in a clumsy kind of way. She is not clever. (Trevor 1976, p. 660)

The narrative voice then switches to an impersonal note that discloses his dismissive and heartless attitude to his wife:

It is a long time now since she sensed his modest wish, and in answer to it developed the rhythmic swing of her hips and the look in her eyes. Unconsciously, of course, she developed them....It's enjoyable when they think she shouldn't swing her hips so and when they come to conclusions about her made-up English voice. It's enjoyable when she listens to his saga of Soaring Cloud the child-wife, and when her face is worried because yet another song has a theme of self-inflicted death. Harry enjoys that most of all. (Trevor 1976, p. 660)

In the final lines of the story, the severity of Mrs Vansittart's obsessional love is reiterated once more by her through her memories:

She tried not to love him when her father was so upset. She tried to forget him, but he was always there, wordlessly pleading from a distance, so passionately demanding the love she passionately felt. She'd felt it long before the day she took her clothes off for him, and she remembers perfectly how it was. (Trevor 1976, p. 661)

The extent of her delusional love for him convinces her that theirs is a reciprocal love and her imaginative vision of reciprocity conflates into a daydream:

For a moment at the bridge table the thoughts that have slipped beneath her guard make her so light-headed that she wants to jump up and run after him to the kitchen. She sees herself, gazing at him from the doorway, enticing him with her eyes, as first of all she did in Holland Falls. He puts his arms around her, and she feels on hers the lips she never has felt...Her virginal longing still warms her as the daydream dissipates. From its fragments Harry thanks her for the companion she has been, and her love is calm again at the bridge table. (Trevor 1976, p. 661)

Again, as with the other female characters in this chapter, their ability to escape into a fantasy world reveals their discontent.

It is interesting that Trevor ends this story with Mrs Vansittart's reiteration of the love she feels for her husband. It mirrors to a degree the love Lily Drucker had for her delinquent boyfriend Declan in *Elizabeth Alone* in Chapter Two. Hugh Ormsby-Lennon has suggested that for Trevor:

The etiology of erotic feeling always proves mysterious to some extent, and Trevor finds it utterly unaccountable. People love or do not love, *c'est tout*. In any event, the reason for love is not a subject of interest to Trevor. One's emotions fix on another, and that is that. (Ormsby-Lennon 2005, p. 291)

This is true, and yet it is a much darker tale in so many ways. Trevor's employment of Mrs Vansittart's diary is thought provoking. It offers an unvarnished view of her real self and

however delusional her feelings and actions may be, it is offered with veracity. There is a quiet desperation in Mrs Vansittart's personal story, a story she has been writing for years in 'a number of hard-backed notebooks' that one day 'she would like to be known' (Trevor 1976, p. 656).

Trevor very subtly creates ambiguity in this desire for her story to be known; there is clear culpability on her part by the very act of writing down the incidences of sexual misdemeanours that have occurred; yet her wish for a posthumous exposition of her diary very clearly indicates her complete inability to change anything about her current situation. Like Mrs Digby-Hunter, Mrs Angusthorpe and the young Mrs Jackson-Major, Mrs Vansittart does not take personal responsibility for the compliance and complicity she has actively shown throughout her life. Trevor does not generate an existential crisis *per se* for Mrs Vansittart, but overall, there is an atmosphere of low-key existential misery that surfaces in her diary entries. Despite her privileged lifestyle, she is acutely alienated amongst people who can never quite say what they mean or what they feel. In effect, she has sacrificed her selfhood with its attendant virtues of authenticity, integrity, and personal responsibility, for a nefarious existence. That this is done in the name of love is a misnomer, one that devalues its true meaning and this is why Trevor offers us this strange, ambiguous story.

The other three women discussed have existential crisis that cause them momentarily to acknowledge their wrongdoing, but each of them retreats back into their immanent situations, as does Mrs Vansittart. In this short story, as indeed in the others, the pivotal contribution that accrues from reading these stories is the exploration and temporary *inhabiting* of other people's worlds. The different emotions experienced in the absorption of the different perceptions of her character, and to a lesser degree of those around her, Mrs Vansittart offers a multidimensional space that goes beyond mere awareness of her life. There is an imperative to weigh up carefully the facts as they are presented by Trevor, and to

decide for oneself the nature of his moral vision in writing this story. Trevor's intense engagement with existential themes is never more apparent than in this story. The ambiguity that de Beauvoir sees as a fundamental feature of human existence and one that characterises human behaviour is lucidly present in this narrative. Trevor's ability to create this narrative links to de Beauvoir's belief that good literature is the result of a writer having 'considerable freedom to manipulate time, space and place, to base the plot on an individual or a group, to describe the characters from the outside or from the inside, and to make considerable demands on the reader' (Fallaise 2011, p. 93). Trevor's ability to inhabit so many diverse characters and his capacity to render so many different female experiences continues unabated in the next story, 'Lunch in Winter'.

'Lunch in Winter'

'Lunch in Winter', from the short story collection, *The News From Ireland & Other Stories* (1986), is a rather curious mix of being both riveting and depressing in its portrayal of the protagonist, Mrs Nancy Simpson. Trevor's unobtrusive narrative strategy is at its most sophisticated in this story, with its centrality squarely located in the multiple perspectives of Nancy Simpson throughout. It is her perspectives and hers alone that pre-empt the theme of narcissism that emerges in the narrative. Narcissism is the third theme that emerge in the 'Justifications' section of de Beauvoir's the *Second Sex*, and it offers interesting parallels in this narrative. These three themes are seen by de Beauvoir as attempts by women to justify their existence in the midst of their immanence, a project doomed to failure in her estimation:

They try to justify their existence within their own immanence, that is, to achieve transcendence through immanence. It is this ultimate effort – sometimes ridiculous, often pathetic – of the imprisoned woman to convert her prison into a heaven of glory, her servitude into sovereign freedom. That we find in the narcissist, the woman in love and the mystic. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 680)

As in all the female characters examined in this chapter, Trevor demonstrates the agility of the protagonist's voice to become a conduit for the ambiguous self. The opening paragraph demonstrates the complete surrendering of Trevor's authorial voice to that of the protagonist, and it allows her to reminisce on her past and in doing so to provide the reader with some knowledge of her.

Again, as in all of Trevor's short stories but more especially in this story, he negotiates the distinction between the public and the private through free indirect discourse. The opening sentence flawlessly captures the essence of her: 'Mrs Nancy Simpson – who did not at all care for that name and would have wished to be Nancy le Puys or Nancy du Maurier – awoke on a December morning' (Trevor 1986, p. 69). This one-liner captures a sense of a lack of self-acceptance and a pretentious desire to be other than she is. Her recall of the previous night's dreams reveals that she had been a chorus girl in the Old Gaiety, when her name had been Nancy Dawes. The principal task of her day is revealed:

She rose, and before she did anything else applied make-up to her face with very great care. She often thought there was nothing she liked better than sitting in her petticoat in front of a looking-glass, putting another face on. (Trevor 1986, pp. 69-70)

Trevor's interest in the artifice of make-up is something he has spoken about in an interview with the *Paris Review* when he was asked about his propensity to write about middle-aged women:

Quite often, I do write about people who are rather glamorous – middle-aged women very heavily made-up – but that glamour is a false one: I find it interesting because of that. (Stout 1989, p. 125)

In the final chapter of this thesis, a different perspective on the artifice of make-up will arise.

De Beauvoir in the chapter, 'The Narcissist', quotes Otto Rank whose theory of the double refers to a representation of the ego that can assume, for example, the form of a

reflection in a mirror and that is historically located in the ancient Greek myth Narcissus. She credits Rank with bringing 'to light the mirror-double relation in myths and dreams' (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 684). She argues that:

It is above all in woman that the reflection allows itself to be assimilated to the self. Male beauty is a sign of transcendence, that of woman has the passivity of immanence: the latter alone is made to arrest man's gaze and can thus be caught in the immobile trap of the mirror's silvering. (de Beauvoir 2009, 685)

Her description of the seduction of the mirror is unambiguous, yet it connects profoundly to Trevor's portrait of the emerging character of Mrs Nancy Simpson:

What satisfies the soul is that, while the mind will have to prove its worth, the contemplated face is here, today, given and indubitable. The whole future is concentrated in this rectangle of light and its frame makes a universe; outside these narrow limits, things are no more than disorganised chaos; the world is reduced to this piece of glass where one image shines: the One and Only. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 685)

Nancy's thoughts turn to a lunch date she has with her ex-husband, Fitz, whom she has encountered, quite by chance, in the previous six months, and at whose suggestion they now meet every Thursday. Her offhand memory about agreeing to this is recalled:

'Of course, why ever not?' she'd said when he'd suggested that they might occasionally see one another. 'Old times' sake,' she'd probably said: she couldn't remember now. (Trevor 1986, p. 70)

The narrator describes the tiny flat in which she lives in Putney, and its proximity to the Sceptre Hotel that she frequents, and then proceeds to deliver her questionable perspective on her life as she sees it. Her thoughts meander from the Sceptre Hotel, where it seems tennis players playing in Wimbledon have stayed over the years – 'she liked to think that McEnroe had stayed in the Sceptre before he'd got going, but she hadn't actually seen him' – to thinking about the yearly 'Boat Race going by, but really had no interest in it' (Trevor 1986,

p. 70). She visualises Fitz travelling by train for their lunch date as she is crossing Putney Bridge. Her thoughts dwell on the infamous murderer, John Christie, and his arrest on this same bridge back in 1953, but no hint of revulsion or empathy for his victims is registered.

The dismissive tone of her contemplations on Fitz is exposed:

‘My, you’re a romantic, Fitz!’ she’d said all those years ago, and really he hadn’t changed. Typical of him to want to make it a regular Thursday rendezvous. Typical to come up specially from the Coast, catching a train and then another train back. During the War they’d been married for four years. (Trevor 1986, p. 71)

Remembering this fact ‘she sang for a moment, remembering that; and then wanting to forget it’, but is unable to disregard the fact that his family was horrified when Fitz told them he was going to marry her:

His family had thought he was mad, you could see that immediately. He’d led her into a huge drawing-room in Warwickshire, with a grand piano in one corner, his mother and sister had actually recoiled. ‘But for God’s sake, you can’t!’ she’d heard his sister’s shrill, unpleasant voice exclaiming in the middle of that same night. ‘You can’t marry a chorus girl!’ But he had married her; they’d had to stomach her in the end. (Trevor 1986, p. 71)

She thinks about Fitz’s caring qualities when he had first met her: ‘he’d said she had a flimsy quality and needed looking after’ and now, despite their divorce, his delight in meeting her all these years later, charms her (Trevor 1986, p. 71).

Her ex-husband’s willingness to forgive and forget is recounted with indifference, and when he arrives for their lunch date in the Trattoria San Michele, indifference and inattentiveness becomes commonplace in her behaviour towards him. Everything we know about Fitz is told from her perspective, and is mainly positive so that a picture of a very nice, caring man emerges, but it is recounted with a studied indifference that infers a lack of genuine interest in his life. Her abrupt dismissal of his second marriage is indicative of this: ‘He’d married someone else, but after twenty-three years she’d gone and died on him’

(Trevor 1986, p. 72). At lunch in the Trattoria San Michele, she privately recalls her serial promiscuity during her marriage to Fitz, and how her marriage ended due to her inability to remain monogamous. Though feeling a little uncomfortable with these memories, a genuine remorse is not evident:

She wanted to pay him back and asked him if he remembered the theme from *State Fair*. 'Marvellous. And then of course, *Spring Fever*, in the same picture'. She sang for a moment. '....and it isn't even *Spring*. 'Member'? (Trevor 1986, p. 72)

After her marriage break-up, she went to Canada and married a man called Eddie Lush and gave birth to two children, but this did not work out either, and she returned to England without her son and daughter:

They'd become more attached to Eddie Lush than to her, which had hurt her at the time, and there'd been accusations of neglect during the court case, which had been hurtful too. Once upon a time they'd written letters to her occasionally, but she wasn't sure now what they were doing. (Trevor 1986, p. 73)

This memory triggers another musical offering:

'And *I'll Be Around*' 'Member *I'll Be Around*?' She sang again, very softly. 'No matter how....you treat me now....Who was it sang it, d'you 'member?' (Trevor 1986, p. 73)

Trevor's merging of her thoughts on her problematic past with musical snippets captures her capriciousness. Her ability to abrogate such a serious episode in her own life, and in the lives of her children, is astounding but is in fact quite standard behaviour for her. Any doubt concerning the extent of Nancy Simpson's self-absorption is obliterated when her inappropriate obsession with the young Italian waiter is revealed during the lunch:

The waiter brought their trout and Nancy smiled at him. The tedium that had just begun to creep into these Thursday lunches had evaporated as soon as she'd set eyes on the Trattoria's new waiter six or so weeks ago. (Trevor 1986, p. 73)

The inappropriateness of her desire for the Italian waiter is nonchalantly acknowledged by her:

Typical of her, of course, to go falling for a restaurant waiter: you set yourself out on a sensible course, all serious and determined, and the next thing was you were half in love with an unsuitable younger man. Not that she looked fifty-nine, of course, more like forty – even thirty-eight, as a chap in the Bayeux Lounge had said when she'd asked him to guess a month ago. (Trevor 1986, p. 74)

She flirts openly with the waiter, and when her ex-husband suggests a more permanent relationship for the two of them, she declines graciously, but inwardly she finds a justification for this:

She couldn't tell all the truth, she couldn't – to Fitz of all people – reveal the hope that at long last old Mr Robin Right would come bob-bob-bobbing along. She believed in Mr R.R., always had, and for some reason she'd got it into her head that he might quite easily walk into the Bayeux Lounge of the Sceptre Hotel. (Trevor 1986, p. 74)

She laughs inwardly at Fitz's proposal and the full extent of her crippling delusions and denials of the truths about her life emerge:

She smiled at him. How typical it was that he didn't know it was impossible to pick up pieces that had been lying about for forty years! The past was full of Simpson and Laurie Henderson and Eddie Lush, and the two children she'd borne, the girl the child of a fertiliser salesman, which was something Eddie Lush had never guessed. You couldn't keep going on journeys down Memory Lane, and the more you did the more you realised that it was just an ugly black tunnel. (Trevor 1986, p. 77)

As the lunch progresses, Nancy's behaviour deteriorates and Fitz makes a decision to take an earlier train home.

When he fails to make a date for the following week, she momentarily has a pang of conscience regarding her embarrassing behaviour with the waiter. However, later that

evening she finds herself in the Bayeux Lounge, endeavouring to justify Fitz's proposal to her with her distorted take on the concept of hope:

You gave up hope if you just agreed because it sounded cosy....But all hope would be gone if she'd agreed....She hadn't been keen to go back to the flat because she wanted to save up the hope that something might have come on the second post, an offer of a part. If she saved it up it would still hover in her mind while she sat in the Bayeux Lounge – just a chance in a million but that was how chances always were. It was more likely, when her luck changed, that the telephone would ring, but even so you could never rule out a letter. You never should. You should never rule out anything. (Trevor 1986, p. 83)

An intense sadness emerges in the story as the full extent of her fantasies is revealed, particularly her imagined future relationship with the waiter. Her fantasising is again reminiscent of all the characters in this narrative that illustrate different aberrations of reality. The self-induced loneliness of her life, a life where she has alienated those around her, is reminiscent of de Beauvoir's concept of a narcissist:

narcissism is a well-defined process of alienation: the self is posited as an absolute end and the subject escapes itself in it....in truth, it is not possible to be *for self* positively Other and grasp oneself as object in the light of consciousness. (de Beauvoir 2009, pp. 683-4)

Nancy Simpson is incapable of recognising the importance of the Other as a way of defining who she is. The two men she married, the two children to whom she gave birth, have been relegated to a false oblivion created with falsehoods and fabrications. Instead, she resides in an infantile world that holds the promise of Mr Right, as well as the incongruous belief that she will get a part in a musical. Her delusions connect entirely to de Beauvoir's belief that the narcissist 'as centre of her universe and aware of no other universe except her own, she becomes the absolute centre of the world' (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 696).

Trevor vividly captures the progressive nature of narcissism in the character of Nancy Simpson when she is shown at the very end of the story escaping into her fantasy on Mr. R.R.:

You couldn't give up on Mr R.R., might as well walk out and throw yourself down into the river; like giving up on yourself it would be. 'I think of you only', she murmured in her soft whisper, feeling much better now because of the vodka and tonic, 'only wishing, wishing you were by my side'. (Trevor 1986, p. 84)

The phantom Mr. R.R. is more real to her than the people she has encountered in her life. De Beauvoir believes that this displacement occurs because:

narcissist drama plays itself out at the expense of real life; an imaginary personage solicits the admiration of an imaginary public; a woman tormented by her ego loses all hold on the concrete world, she does not care about establishing any real relationship with others. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 696)

'Lunch in Winter' offers no redemptive future for Nancy Simpson because she is unwilling to change. De Beauvoir disturbingly perceives an abysmal future for the narcissist:

The paradox of her attitude is that she demands to be valued by a world to which she denies all value, since she alone counts in her own eyes. Outside approbation is an inhuman, mysterious and capricious force that must be tapped magically. In spite of her superficial arrogance, the narcissistic woman knows she is threatened; it is why she is uneasy, susceptible, irritable and constantly suspicious; her vanity is never satisfied; the older she grows, the more anxiously she seeks praise and success, the more she suspects plots around her; lost and obsessed, she sinks into the darkness of bad faith and often ends up by building a paranoid delirium around her. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 698)

'Lunch in Winter' differs from many of Trevor's short stories in that it lacks his customary ambiguity that usually instigates reflection on what has been said. Instead, this story has a clear, well-defined moral significance that is impossible to ignore. It is full of existentialist premises that highlight the dangers of untruths, inauthenticity, illusions, lack of empathy, lack of reciprocity, irresponsibility, and the voluntary abdication of self. Trevor's ability to enter the consciousness of a doomed fifty-nine year old narcissistic woman offers an intriguing *inhabiting* of a world far from our own. Though refusing to provide either the character or

the readers with redemption, Trevor nevertheless awakes an ethical dimension through the exposition of unethical behaviour.

Conclusion

The critical argument of this thesis is to claim that Trevor, in his representation of female characterisation in his fiction, creates an ethical dimension. His ability to grasp the depth of the role that imagination and fantasy play in the lives of these female characters is testament to the richness and skill of his narrative complexity. That the female characters discussed in this chapter are negatively portrayed does not diminish in any way this ethical dimension. Instead, all these stories offer an engagement with the fictional lives of these characters that facilitates reflection. Suzie Gibson in her essay 'Being Irresponsible in J. M. Coetzee's Novel *Disgrace*', believes that:

ethics cannot be housed or located because it is not a "thing" in and of itself. It cannot be directly accessed or identified but only understood through its relationship to other things – people, places, events, ideas, and stories. (Jernigan, Murphy, Quigley and Wagner 2009, p. 300)

She believes that the value of literature lies in its ability to:

dramatise situation, events, and actions that call upon characters and readers alike to respond in ways that test our values, morals, and principles. (Jernigan, Murphy, Quigley and Wagner 2009, p. 300)

In these texts, Trevor has ultimately engaged with the different ways in which freedom is evaded or misused and with these characters, he demonstrates the personal costs that emerge when these women deny their freedom. The next chapter will engage with the fictional lives of four very different females, all of whom will exhibit resilience and strength of character in abundance.

Chapter Four: Oppression and Evil in three novels: *The Children of Dynmouth, Other People's Worlds and Felicia's Journey*

This chapter will explore a darker vein of human behaviour in these three novels. While a dysfunctional male is foundational to each storyline, these male characters will not be the focus of this chapter. However, their varying predilections to cause pain and suffering to those whom they encounter in their lives will become the catalyst for the intervention of the three main female protagonists in the novels. Unlike the previous chapter, where the focus was on reprehensible female characters, a very different representation of female identity will emerge in this chapter. In contrast to the paralysis experienced and the damage inflicted by the female characters in the previous chapter, a formidable paradigm of female strength will emerge in this one.

The instigators of the oppression and evil in these three novels range from the deranged fifteen-year-old Timothy Gedge in *The Children of Dynmouth*, to the dangerous sociopath, Francis Tyte in *Other People's Worlds*, and finally to the serial killer Hilditch in *Felicia's Journey*. Trevor, in these three novels, shifts his focus to characters whose pasts have shaped them. All three male perpetrators have emerged from particular fictional familial situations that influenced their futures. Each narrative offers complex representations of very different family situations and permutations, but it is the positions of the women within each narrative, and their individual responses to the situations they have to confront, that will dictate the analysis in this chapter. It will become apparent that Trevor's

preoccupation with male exploitation, and with women's diverging and complex responses to it, continues unabated in these novels.

Trevor's desire to explore the ways in which oppression and evil, more often than not, originate in childhood, is evident in these three novels. All of them copper-fasten the assertion that curiosity is the fundamental stimulus behind Trevor's immersion in the lives of characters beyond his own experience. In his essay 'The Malign Vision in William Trevor's fiction', Andrew Parkin argues that:

the malignity and the strangeness of Trevor's situations are markers of his own imagination, the writer's imagination that cannot escape the obligation to make excursions into the imagined world in order to increase our awareness of the nature of reality itself. (Parkin 2001, p. 83)

Trevor's engagement with the question of evil, and its opposite, goodness, finds resonances in de Beauvoir's existentialist views on the question of evil. One of the fundamental principles of existentialism is the notion of freedom, and de Beauvoir believed that the concept of freedom can function as a guideline for human behaviour. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, de Beauvoir argues that oppression emanates from other human beings and invariably originates in one individual denying another individual his or her freedom. As previously stated in the Introduction, de Beauvoir grappled extensively with the question of oppression and evil and according to her, only existentialism 'gives a real role to evil' as opposed to the notion of evil as 'error' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 34). She essentially believed that there existed a negativity at the very core of human existence: 'there is within him a perpetual playing with the negative', and describes how this negativity requires a willingness either to choose or deny freedom: 'and it is precisely because an evil will is here possible that the words "to will oneself free" have a meaning' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 33). De Beauvoir asserts that man's fundamental negativity presages problems: 'all errors are possible since man is a negativity, and they are motivated by the anguish he feels in the fact of his freedom',

and that this failure to assume his freedom may lead to oppression and evil (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 34). It is only through human failure that ethics can be considered for, as de Beauvoir states: 'without failure, no ethics' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 10).

Again, the concept of ambiguity is central to her notion of evil, since every human being is both subject and object in his or her relationship with another human being. This reality, through its oppositional structure, creates an interdependency that is always susceptible to oppression being imposed by one individual on another, and often leads to conflictual situations. Ambiguity, from the perspective of the perpetrator of harm, is always a factor according to de Beauvoir, since each situation is complex, and this is particularly relevant to Trevor's portrayal of situations in the lives of his male perpetrators. It is important to state at this stage that, for both de Beauvoir and Trevor, ambiguity in presentation or perspective in no way devalues or attenuates the harm inflicted by these perpetrators. Instead, they both see the necessity for an impartial contemplation of all the mitigating circumstances surrounding each individual situation. De Beauvoir's themes of bad faith and inauthenticity are particularly significant to the overall ethical considerations in these novels, where Trevor generates scenarios that utilise the recurring trope of delusion and fantasy in his male characters, and juxtaposes them with the understated but perceptive pragmatism of the female characters. In the previous chapter, the female characters engaged in delusional tactics that enabled their survival, however inauthentic that survival may have been. All three novels under consideration in this chapter could, presumably, be construed as psychological thrillers, yet this classification is a grossly reductive one, as it would fail to address the multiple layers of meaning within these novels as will be seen from the following analysis.

The earliest novel in this trio of novels, *The Children of Dynmouth*, tracks the social and environmental circumstances that surround the unfortunate and disconcerting character of

Timothy Gedge. The character of Francis Tyte in the next novel, *Other People's Worlds*, has many of the characteristics of Timothy Gedge in that he too has been deprived of a childhood that should have been a place of safety and nurturing. Likewise, in the third novel, *Felicia's Journey*, the character of Joseph Ambrose Hilditch has also had his childhood compromised. In all three novels, the mothers of these characters are complicit to varying degrees in the lack of morality shown by their sons in their encounters with innocent victims. Trevor's moral message is implied subtly through the exposition of their carelessness and, in the case of Hilditch's mother, an unforgivable outrage is revealed almost at the very end of the story. Though significant to the essence of all three stories, these neglectful mothers are absent in different ways, and Trevor does not engage with their individual stories to any degree. De Beauvoir offers an extremely interesting analysis in *The Second Sex* in relation to the question of motherhood. She begins her analysis with a particularly ironic statement:

It is through motherhood that woman fully achieves her physiological destiny; that is her 'natural' vocation, since her whole organism is directed towards the perpetuation of the species. (de Beauvoir 2010, p. 537)

She is deeply critical of societal exaltation of the 'natural function' of a woman, and argues that motherhood must be a conscious decision on the part of the woman. She is contemptuous of the belief that 'the child is sure to find happiness in his mother's arms', and the denial by society that 'there is no such thing as an 'unnatural mother', since maternal love has nothing natural about it: but precisely because of that, there are bad mothers' (de Beauvoir 2010, p. 581).

Trevor's characterisation of both Timothy Gedge's mother, and Hilditch's mother, exemplify this belief. De Beauvoir acknowledges in this instance, the findings of psychoanalysis regarding 'the danger "normal" parents constitute for a child', and also how parents' own psychological damage may be a very real factor in constituting compromised

futures for their offspring' (de Beauvoir 2010, 581). Trevor fictionally explores the consequences of the three protagonist's dysfunctional childhoods, and how these are manifested in their adult lives. Although not quite an adult, the character of Timothy Gedge offers the reader a contemplation of the antecedent factors in younger people that may transform into dangerous, dysfunctional adult men. In contrast, the characters of Francis Tyte and Joseph Hilditch are fully realised malcontents with dangerous proclivities. In these novels, Trevor skilfully transcribes situations that put into question, not just the themes of evil and oppression, but also more importantly, the daunting possibility of attempting to mitigate the fallout from the harm produced by these individuals. In the ensuing analysis, it is the characters of Lavinia in *The Children of Dynmouth*, Julia and her mother in *Other People's Worlds*, and Felicia and other unnamed female characters in *Felicia's Journey*, who triumph over evil. It will become apparent that Trevor offers an intensely challenging engagement to the reader in each novel's *denouement*, *denouements* that radically subvert predictable, conventional endings.

The Children of Dynmouth (1976)

This novel opens with a detailed descriptive segment of a pretty coastal town called Dynmouth. The town's historical past, and its evolvment into a mid-twentieth century English town, is perceptively drawn. The idyllic perception of the town's coastal location is gradually diminished through the exposition of incidents and facts surrounding the reality of life in this quaint English seaside town. Trevor's sociological lens is in sharp focus when he describes the physical layout of the different types of homes that people in Dynmouth inhabit:

the houses of the well-to-do, solitary and generous gardens, were followed in order of such esteem by semi-detached villas....after which came dwellings that had a look of economy about them, reflecting the burden of rent or mortgage Far from the sea-front and the centre

of the town was the sprawl of council estates and sand-yellow blocks of council flats. In streets near the river there were terraced houses of cramped proportions....so close to the river that they were regularly flooded by it were the cottages of Boughs Lane, which people said were a disgrace. (Trevor 1976, pp. 8-9)

This description of what is essentially a class divide presages a disquieting portrayal of contemporary suburban life in 1970s England. For a book that was published almost forty years ago, it offers a remarkable exploration of the mind-set of a dysfunctional fifteen-year-old boy, Timothy Gedge.

A resume of the character of Timothy is necessary in order to render the circumstances of his life, and to suggest how these will ultimately reveal the depth of Trevor's essential engagement with the moral issues surrounding this male protagonist. Trevor vividly apprehends the complex psychological characteristics and traits of a potential sociopath with his deep insights into the boy's malfunctioning moral compass. Again, as in all the previous narratives being explored, Trevor's dexterous employment of free indirect discourse allows a very realistic insight that oscillates between a subjective and an objective view of Timothy. His first appearance in the narrative is filtered through the perceptions of the vicar of St Simon and St Jude's, the Rev. Quentin Featherston, and offers an unprepossessing description of Timothy:

Timothy Gedge was a youth of fifteen, ungainly due to adolescence, a boy with a sharp-boned face and wide, thin shoulders, whose short hair was almost white. His eyes seemed hungry, giving him a predatory look; his cheeks had a hollowness about them....he lived with his mother and his sister, Rose-Ann, in a block of council-built flats called Cornerways; without distinction, he attended Dynmouth Comprehensive School. He was a boy who was given to making jokes, a habit that caused him sometimes to seem eccentric. He smiled a lot. (Trevor 1976, pp. 14-15)

His ability to cause annoyance to others is apprehended through direct speech coupled with access to inner thoughts, when he greets the Rev. Featherston:

'Hi, Mr Feather', he said. 'Hullo, Timothy'. 'Nice day, Mr Feather'. 'Well, I don't know about nice-' 'I was meaning for ducks, sir'. 'Did you want to speak to me, Timothy?' He wished the boy would address him by his correct name. He had asked him to, but the boy had pretended not to understand: it was all meant to be a joke. (Trevor 1976, p. 15)

The access to Featherston's thoughts on Timothy allows a reliable interpretation of his behaviour to emerge, one that negotiates between the boy's background and the perception of him by others.

A subtle hint of annoyance is captured in the thoughts of Mr Featherston but is comically sabotaged through Timothy's calculated shortening of his name. This comic aside will have ironic echoes at the end of the novel. A sense of disquiet is prompted by the clergyman's observations that:

In adolescence, unfortunately, the boy was increasingly becoming a nuisance to people, endlessly friendly and smiling, keen for conversation. He was what Lavinia called a latch-key child, returning to the empty flat in Cornerways from the Comprehensive school, on his own in it all day during the school holidays. Being on his own seemed somehow to have become part of him. (Trevor 1976, p. 16)

Timothy's own introspections reveal the absence of a father in his life 'fourteen years ago his father had driven from Dynmouth with a lorry-load of tiles and hadn't ever returned, a father of whom he had no memories' (Trevor 1976, p. 32).

His life from the time he was a very young child, has been defined by his chronic aloneness. His memories of being looked after, reluctantly, by a ghastly aunt when he was three and a half, and of being left on his own in an empty flat when he first started in primary school serve to illustrate this. He has been abandoned emotionally by both his sister and his mother:

There had, over the years, developed in Timothy a distrust of his mother, and of his sister also. He didn't speak much in their company, having become familiar with their lack of

response. He'd be the death of her, his mother used to reply when he asked her something, although he'd never been able to understand why he should be. (Trevor 1976, p. 34)

A long list of misbehaviours and delinquencies emerge as features of Timothy Gedge's life. Nobody takes any interest in him or in his situation, and though he is tolerated by everybody, he is liked by no one and by the novel's end; he has come close to destroying a number of people. Trevor's imaginative mapping of Timothy Gedge's passage from innocent child to disturbing adolescent, who develops voyeuristic and sadistic tendencies, astutely portrays the conditions that create modern day monsters. McKenna argues that the boy 'is a ruthless manipulator and as amoral as any megalomaniac in history', and that 'his real strength lies in the fact that there is a large element of truth in the discreditable stories he threatens to reveal' (McKenna 1999, p. 160).

Due to his almost total abandonment by his mother and sister, Timothy spends his time spying on various people, and in doing so, he acquires knowledge of their particular situations. This knowledge is usually of an intensely private nature, and the people involved would not have wished for it to be known. He becomes obsessed with the notion of enacting a one-man performance in a local talent competition based on a famous London murderer named George Joseph Smith. He fantasises that a talent scout will recognise his gift for comedy and help to create a future for him on the stage. His chosen victims, in different ways, all have something he needs that will enable him to proceed with his act. They include the elderly couple, the Abigails, whose marriage Timothy almost breaks up with his revelations of Commander Abigail's unacknowledged homosexuality, and another elderly couple, Mr and Mrs Dass, whose youngest son's harsh rejection of his parents causes extreme hurt and shame. His mother's married lover, Mr Plant, the reprehensible owner of a local pub, whose sexual infidelity with his mother has been witnessed by Timothy, is threatened and coerced by him. However, it is the emotional bombardment meted out by Timothy to the

two innocent 12- year-olds from well-to-do families, and the inexcusable anguish they endure, which is the most disturbing aspect of the novel. The two children, Stephen and Kate, suffer an appalling loss of innocence prompted by a concoction of half-truths, lies and a disturbing envy of their seemingly privileged lives.

The metaphor of the garden is again evoked in this story, in order to draw attention to the class divisions that separate Timothy from these two middle-class children. Timothy's disturbing appearance in the garden of Sea House, the children's home, is sharply evoked by the housekeeper Mrs Blakey's observations:

At the landing window Mrs Blakey frowned....He was so familiar on the streets of the town, with that zipped yellow jacket and his jeans, yet he looked like something from another world in the garden. He didn't belong in gardens, any more than he belonged in the company of two small children. (Trevor 1976, p. 140)

A powerful sense of Timothy as the outsider, almost summoning the notion of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, is employed by Trevor to illustrate the reality of his marginalisation. In the previous short story, 'O Fat White Woman', the symbolism of the slug was employed to denote Mrs Digby-Hunter's passivity, whereas in this narrative, the beautiful garden at Swan House, a garden that had earned a reputation for its 'shrubbery of azaleas', is utterly alien to somebody of Timothy's background. In her discussion on evil in Trevor's fiction, Morrison discusses the symbolism of the garden and contends that Timothy is 'another child whose personal damage is juxtaposed with the tranquil beauty of a garden and its gentle cycle of normal change' (Morrison 1993, p. 30).

Timothy's brainless malice is rooted in his desperation to achieve some sort of recognition from other people. His only recourse to getting any sort of attention is through blackmail and the initial resistance that he encounters from the different individuals fails to register on his non-existent moral conscience. Timothy's behaviour clearly illustrates the shocking consequences of acute neglect that is demonstrated repeatedly in his almost

pathological lack of empathy towards his victims. In Timothy, Trevor creates a character that is almost totally reprehensible, but the causal factors underlying his behaviour are also laid bare.

Trevor vividly captures the antecedent factors that lead to fantasies and delusions, and shows how they emerge primarily as survival strategies. Timothy's fantasy of becoming famous is indicative of his desire to transcend the reality of his lived experience and somehow escape it. The disturbed way in which he goes about achieving this desire is shameful, but also pathetically brave. The single affirmative incident in his life occurred when he and his classmates were allowed to dress up and given an historical incident to act:

The eight children in Timothy Gedge's group laughed uproariously when he dressed up as Queen Elizabeth 1, in a red wig and a garment that had a lank white fluff at its neck. Timothy laughed himself, seeing in a mirror how peculiar he looked, with a pair of tights stuffed into the dress to give him a bosom. He enjoyed laughing at himself and being laughed at....it was the only occasion he had ever enjoyed at Dynmouth Comprehensive and it was crowned by his discovery that without any difficulty whatsoever he could adopt a falsetto voice. (Trevor 1976, p. 28)

This episode mitigated his previous failed attempt at model-aeroplane making. His brief encounter with a temporary student teacher in his local Comprehensive school, and this teacher's belief that there existed for everybody in the world a void but that this void could be assuaged if people embraced their 'soul', had resonated with him (Trevor 1976, p. 26). Timothy particularly remembers this teacher saying that 'everybody was good at something, nobody was without talent: it was a question of discovering yourself' (Trevor 1976, p. 26).

Timothy inwardly debates this notion and heartbreakingly tries to find something at which he will excel. When he tries to construct a model-aeroplane, he visualises a hobby that will absorb him:

It would all have taken hours, sitting contentedly in the kitchen with the radio on while his mother and sister were out in the evening, as they generally were, but unfortunately he found the construction work difficult. (Trevor 1976, p. 27)

The absence of a male figure in Timothy's life is evoked here and, this absence also accentuates the complete lack of interest by his mother. Trevor's compassion is never in doubt when these facts emerge, and the intimation in this instance is one of regret that there was nobody in Timothy's life that could have helped him. Timothy's emotionally absent mother and her abandonment of her son are not given any vocalisation in the text, and neither is Timothy's sister. The mother's lack of maternal instinct connects to de Beauvoir's belief that 'the mother's attitude is defined by her total situation and by the way she accepts it' and this is evident here (de Beauvoir 2010, p. 580). De Beauvoir does not, however, sanction an immoral attitude when she says:

To have a child is to take on a commitment; if the mother shrinks from it, she commits an offence against human existence, against a freedom; but no one can impose it on her. (de Beauvoir 2010, p. 580)

De Beauvoir comprehends the complexities that surround the child/mother relationship and concludes that society has its part to play in how motherhood is portrayed. She is contemptuous of the idea that motherhood is a woman's 'natural' vocation. Again, as in the previous chapter, the myth of marriage and children, is detrimental to both women and children.²⁶ She is always cognisant of a mother's facticity and how:

the complexes, obsessions and neuroses adults suffer from have their roots in their family past; parents who have their own conflicts, quarrels and dramas are the least desirable company for children. Deeply marked by the paternal household, they approach their own children through complexes and frustrations: and this chain of misery perpetuates itself indefinitely. (de Beauvoir 2010, p. 581)

²⁶ In the chapter, 'The Mother', de Beauvoir discusses at length the different scenarios that surround motherhood and is always aware of the outrageous contradictions in society's attitudes towards women and children. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (2010), p. 536-584.

For de Beauvoir, women who fall outside the traditional family unit, such as Timothy's mother, a woman who has been abandoned by Timothy's father, and who is economically driven to earn a living, are abandoned by society. She believes that such situations could be improved if:

in a properly organised society where the child would in great part be taken charge of by the group, where the mother would be cared for and helped, motherhood would absolutely not be incompatible with women's work. (de Beauvoir 2010, p. 582)

Though written over twenty years before Trevor began writing, his characterisation of Timothy's mother's neglect finds resonances in de Beauvoir's critique of society that is pertinent to their situation where:

no effort has been made to assure children's health, care and education outside the home. This is social neglect: but it is a sophism to justify it by pretending that a law was written in heaven or in the bowels of the earth that requires that the mother and child belong to each other exclusively; this mutual belonging in reality only constitutes a double and harmful oppression. (de Beauvoir 2010, p. 583)

Trevor has clearly illustrated this, and endeavours to demonstrate how a damaged fifteen-year-old boy, whom nobody loves or wants, may be rescued.

The problem of how to deal with the consequences of Timothy's behaviour preoccupies the thoughts of Mr Featherston, and consequently those of his wife Lavinia. In fact, Lavinia Featherston is encountered very early on in the narrative when she contrasts her memory of Dynmouth when she was a child, with her present sense of the commonplaceness and drabness of the place from her adult perspective. She has recently suffered a miscarriage and as a result is despondent and irritable. Her hopes of having more children in the future are no longer realisable. As the wife of the local rector, Lavinia's home is an 'open house', one that welcomes both community and church participants, as well as a coterie of miscreants. Once again, Trevor's employment of free indirect discourse serves to subtly set-

up differences in how the female perspective of a problem may diverge from the male perspective.

Access to Mr Featherston's thoughts more often than not reveals his hesitancy and lack of believe around his ministry. His impatience and possibly his limitations are subtly revealed when he has to host a Mother's Union tea party:

an event he had to brace himself to sustain. Nineteen women would arrive at the rectory....they'd engage in Dynmouth chatter, and he would call on God and God would remind him that the women were His creatures. (Trevor 1976, p. 91)

Trevor comically depicts Mr Featherston's secret misogyny, but this is never publicly admitted. His encounters with Timothy create an enormous sense of inadequacy and unease in him:

The boy was standing there, smiling at him for the second time that day. He attempted to smile back at him, but found it difficult. The same uneasy feeling he'd experienced that morning returned and he realised now why it came: of all the people of Dynmouth this boy in his adolescence was the single exception. He could feel no Christian love for him. (Trevor 1976, p. 121)

Initially, Lavinia is apprehensive in her attitude to Timothy when, she finds her four-year-old twin daughters being highly entertained by him performing in a woman's voice, and orders her husband to forbid Timothy access to the rectory. However, she later concedes that her anger was inappropriate and apologises for her outburst. The arrival of Kate at the rectory, the twelve-year-old who, along with her new stepbrother, Stephen, has been mercilessly bullied by Timothy, in an extremely distressed state, serves as the defining moment of the story. In a heartrending *denouement*, Trevor captures the emotional turmoil and fear that Timothy creates for these two children, leading them to believe that Stephen's father murdered Stephen's mother in order to marry Kate's mother. Stephen's worrisome reaction to this information traumatises Kate, and the narrative poignantly depicts her trying

desperately to process this damage. She accomplishes this by seeing Timothy as being possessed by devils: 'if you believed he was possessed, she whispered between her sobs, everything was explained' (Trevor 1976, p. 184).

Mr Featherston is finally made aware of the extent of Timothy's dastardly deeds by Kate, but he denies that their perpetrator is possessed. Instead, he offers a consideration on the origins of evil and how all too easily people like Timothy become categorised as monsters 'which would be nice for everyone because monsters were a species on their own'(Trevor 1976, p. 196). Mr Featherston tries to explain to Kate that:

Timothy Gedge was as ordinary as anyone else, but the ill fortune of circumstances or nature made ordinary people eccentric and lent them colour in the greyness. And the colour was protection because ill fortune weakened its victims and made them vulnerable. (Trevor 1976, p. 196)

His belief that 'there was a pattern of greys, half-tones and shadows' at play in the lives of people did not appeal to Kate because 'it cut across her child's world' (Trevor 1976, p. 196). Trevor's sense that 'he doesn't believe in the black and white' surfaces in this exchange, and finds echoes in de Beauvoir's belief that all human situations are complex and multi-faceted, and that each situation can only be examined through its own terms of reference (cited by Tim Adams, 'William Trevor: The keen-eyed chronicler', *Guardian* 2009). Mr Featherston is keenly aware that he has failed to offer a satisfactory explanation to Kate, but decides that a visit to Timothy is necessary. What follows is an unsatisfactory *tête-à-tête* where the only benefit is Timothy's agreement not to participate in his comedy act.

Disturbingly by the end of his visit, Mr Featherston witnesses Timothy embracing a newfound fantasy, the fantasy of his being the child of an affair between the local doctor and the retired schoolteacher, Miss Lavant, and that he had been given to Mrs Gedge to rear for monetary consideration. Mr Featherston is profoundly depressed by Timothy:

The boy would stand in court-rooms with his smile. He would sit in the drab offices of social workers. He would be incarcerated in the cells of different gaols. By looking at him now you could sense that future, and his eyes reminded you that he had not asked to be born. What crime would it be? What greater vengeance would he take? The child was right when she said it was people like that who did terrible things. (Trevor 1976, p. 207)

His despair concerning Timothy continues to haunt him and incites an existential crisis that sees him confronting the very nature of existence and its chance permutations. He now views Timothy's life as a 'horror', and sees God as viscerally lacking in this instant. He is now able to comprehend Timothy in greater depth:

He had grown around him a shell because a shell was necessary....his eyes were the eyes of the battered....existence had battered him: there'd been a different child once. What use were services that recalled the Crucifixion when there was Timothy Gedge wandering about the place, a far better reminder of waste and destruction? (Trevor 1976, p. 210)

However, Mr Featherston is unable to discern any ray of hope for Timothy, and is enveloped in gloom.

In sharp contrast to this outlook, Lavinia's somewhat more optimistic view is considered. While acknowledging the facts of Timothy's awful existence, she admits to nothing but feelings of irritation when she is around him. However, her intense pragmatism becomes the foil for her husband's pessimism, and a fundamental existentialist belief is revealed when she recognises how it may fall to her to take responsibility for Timothy:

It was she who one day, in the rectory or the garden, might penetrate the shell that out of necessity had grown....she could in no way be glad that Timothy Gedge would come regularly to the rectory: that prospect was grim. Yet she felt, unable to help herself, a certain irrational joyfulness, as though an end and a beginning had been reached at the same time. You could not live without hope, some part of her woman's intuition told her: while a future was left you must not. (Trevor 1976, p. 219)

She dares to speculate that perhaps, in some inexplicable way, Timothy will replace the loss of her unborn son. Throughout the entire story, Timothy is unreservedly regarded as the

Other by every person he encounters from his childhood to his troubled teenage years. Timothy's lack of morality is due to the material conditions of his situation, and because he is not yet an adult, he cannot be fully charged with the concept of bad faith. According to de Beauvoir, only humans can confirm the existence of one another, and Timothy has never been confirmed by anybody. Lavinia, once she is made fully aware of the extent of Timothy's problems, feels compelled to try to make a difference in his life and attempt to confirm him.

De Beauvoir, in her essay, 'Pyrrhus et Cineás', argues that not only are we morally obliged to keep from harming others, but we are also obliged to speak out if harm is witnessed and to engage in mitigating this harm. Lavinia's intentions towards Timothy will be problematic, and may well have a strong element of risk in them, and her awareness of this danger connects tacitly to de Beauvoir's belief that we must carry out projects in risk and uncertainty. Lavinia's taking of responsibility for Timothy, with all its corresponding uncertainties, is a supremely ethical action, and in itself offers a clear reversal of the inaction of so many other people who chose to ignore his situation. Trevor offers a powerful example of ethical responsibility, and in choosing a female character to discharge this responsibility, he offers yet another case in point of affirming his ethical undertaking in the elevation of his female characters. Simultaneous with this contention is the assertion that in capturing the insidious abjuration of responsibility, both parentally and societally, Trevor's chronicling of this situation in the early seventies in England, became a truism in child behavioural psychology from that time on.

One cannot but help connecting *The Children of Dynmouth* with a novel written twenty-six years later, *In the Forest* (2002), by Edna O'Brien, a fictional account of a real-life triple murder case that happened in Ireland in 1994. O'Brien comprehensively captures the neglect and abuse that O'Donnell, the central character, suffered at the hands of both his

family and the officialdom into whose care he was taken. In O'Donnell, she creates an archetype of modern delinquency and alienation with his psychotic disconnection from reality. Though Timothy Gedge manages to stay on the right side of the criminal justice system, nevertheless he presents with many of the psychological markers that defined O'Donnell. Both protagonists offer serious challenges to society. Trevor intensely captures the all too human distaste and aversion that problematic people invite from mainstream society. Andrew Parkin, in his essay 'The Outsider in The Novels of William Trevor', argues that Trevor deliberately chooses particular characters in order to probe the different pathways and circumstances that result in their 'outsider' status (Parkin 1995, pp. 1-18). *The Children of Dynmouth* is, on the one hand, a disturbing and unsettling depiction of contemporary suburban life, but it is also a deeply contemplative narrative that probes the question of good versus evil. Trevor's deliberations on the question of good and evil reveal compatibility with de Beauvoir's employment of Montaigne's belief that: 'life itself is neither good nor evil. It is the place of good and evil, according to what you make it' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 6). The discussion of good versus evil will move on to the grown-up world of adults in the next novel, *Other People's Worlds* (1980).

Other People's Worlds

Having explored the sphere of Timothy Gedge's teenage world, Trevor, some years later, creates a narrative that is considerably darker in its portrayal of an adult perpetrator of evil. To a degree, the male protagonist, Francis Tyte, has some of Timothy Gedge's dysfunctional characteristics. However, these characteristics are deeply embedded in the psyche of Francis Tyte and, it seems, there is little chance of them being reversed. Again, as in *The Children of Dynmouth*, Trevor has chosen to penetrate another 'outsider' character, one who presents himself to the world as urbane and sophisticated and who denies the reality of his treacherous

and duplicitous nature. To begin with, the narrative is concerned with the arrival of Francis in the life of middle-class Julia Ferndale and her family, and the subsequent emerging of the speciousness of his personal history. The permanent departure of Francis half way through the narrative disrupts the anticipated deliberation of good versus evil that Julia's and Francis's stories presages, and instead, forces an intense existentialist debate that provokes Julia to question the very fabric of her privileged existence. Again, as in *The Children of Dynmouth*, Trevor engages with class division and with the reality of lives that are diametrically diverse, especially for those imprisoned in the lower classes by poverty and dysfunctionality.

De Beauvoir has readily identified social oppression and the enslavement of human beings with the concept of evil, and believed that it is part of the lived realities of life. Her belief that evil is ambiguous is clearly evident in her thought when she claims that people inadvertently take the side of evil by accepting the inequalities they witness and by remaining detached from them. De Beauvoir's essay on racism in America, 'America Day by Day (1947)', explores the social oppression of black people that showed her 'the truth of poverty, exhaustion, hatred, cruelty, revolt – the truth of evil' (Card 2003, p. 235). Equally, this observation could be applied to the class divisions of modern-day life into which Trevor ventures. Once more, the fact of Trevor's penetrating curiosity into characters' lives far outside his own experience, and his imaginative portrayal of these lives, strengthens the claim that he is deeply engaged as a writer with contemporary society and its existentialist concerns. Schirmer believes that Trevor's exposition of characters like Francis and Timothy Gedge delineates and differentiates the rational and irrational use of the imagination: 'Francis has an extraordinary imagination, but it is unrefined, not tied to any moral vision or principles, a power that mixes truth and lies easily' (Schirmer 1990, p. 84).

MacKenna argues that Trevor in examining both goodness and evil in *Other People's Worlds*, accentuates how both these themes are crucial to what she sees as the nucleus of the narrative: 'underpinning each and forming the main focus of the work is the imagination which inspires each of these conditions' (MacKenna 1999, p. 163). Trevor's illustration of good, evil, and delusion in a highly realistic setting is replete with existentialist themes. Again, Trevor's manipulation of narrative voice is highly revelatory when exposing the inner deliberations of a disturbed mind, and the ambiguity of that voice in its revelations that in turn creates ambiguity in the mind of the reader. The character of Francis Tyte offers a classic case in point of an individual deliberately denying his freedom to live his life as an authentic human being, and choosing instead to remain a victim to his facticity. His ability to project himself in the world as a so-called 'normal' person, clearly illustrates his capability to do this but it is inappropriately misdirected. De Beauvoir's belief that freedom was the fundamental moral value, is completely negated by Francis because her idea that 'to will oneself free is also to will others free', is never even considered by him in relation to those he encounters (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 73).

Other People's Worlds begins in a manner somewhat similar to that of *Elizabeth Alone* with its portrait of Julia Ferndale and her elderly mother, Mrs Anstey. Both families are middle-class, comfortable and entrenched in a particular way of life. Julia shares with Elizabeth a good relationship with her mother, but both occupy very different physical worlds, in that Elizabeth lives in a desirable part of London, while Julia lives in the rural, idyllic village of Stone St Martin in the Gloucestershire countryside. Initially, Trevor weaves a satisfyingly and informative tale of Julia's life interspersed with a brief family history of her mother's upper class, privileged life, one that ended when her husband was made bankrupt. Julia, a widow with two grown-up daughters, lives with her mother in Swan House, the house she had moved into with her deceased husband when they returned from

living in Germany. Long reconciled to her husband's death, she is shortly to be married again, to a much younger man, Francis Tyte. He is an actor who:

Since it had become known that she was to remarry, the identity of her fiancé had been of interest in Stone St Martin and its neighbourhood...In the realm of television advertisements he had established himself as a figure with a particular English charm and a smile that stayed in the mind. He was currently on show in a series which promoted a brand of tobacco. (Trevor 1980, p. 11)

This information emerges in a conversation Julia is having with her hairdresser. Julia is to be married in three weeks and her thoughts are taken up with Francis. A compelling account of Julia's religious belief emerges with the details of the Anstey family's historically inherited Catholicism, and her own unwavering belief in God. This belief is not shared by any of her immediate family, and when Francis, at the beginning of their relationship, tells her that he too is a Catholic, she is delighted 'it seemed like a treat, plucked out of nowhere' (Trevor 1980, p. 10).

Julia's diary, one that dates from childhood to the present time, reveals her 'tendency to find herself haunted by plights that were not her own' (Trevor 1980, p. 14). This tendency is reiterated when Julia recalls her mother admonishing her about her misplaced consideration of others: 'You have an innocence I don't possess. There's a sense of guilt which comes from that' (Trevor 1980, p. 14). Julia's awareness of her predilection of being more affected by other people's troubles is recorded in her diary:

The death itself – and being a mother and a widow – was recorded in lines that revealed a certain stoicism, for Julia's tendency was to find herself haunted by plights that were not her own. Her own she could somehow cope with.... even after her husband's death. (Trevor 1980, p. 14)

Julia's protracted sense of guilt offers an interesting debate around the question of boundaries, and the whole notion of victim versus victimiser, and this will become a core

theme of the story. Trevor's employment of the diary as a source for the unadorned truth, emulates the diary entries of Mrs Vansittart, and serves to render the authenticity of both women's thoughts and beliefs. The early diary excerpts at the beginning of the novel serve to illustrate the depth of Julia's compassion, but these entries end abruptly as the narrative develops momentum. The shocking and dreadful unveiling of the events that occur from the collision of two very different worlds does not result in another diary entry until the final part of the novel. A short résumé of the plot will draw attention to the circumstances that surround these characters' lives.

Other People's Worlds, like *The Children of Dynmouth*, opens on to a tranquil, natural environment in rural Gloucestershire followed by a detailed description of the beautiful garden at Swan House. As in previous stories, the symbolism of the garden with its connotations of a civilised, leisured lifestyle, as well as its being a safe place where only pleasantness and good conversation ensue, is evoked. Francis, the man Julia is soon to marry, has ingratiated himself into her life, and that of her mother, Mrs Anstey. His unflinching politeness and charm have persuaded Julia's immediate family that she has made the correct decision in agreeing to marry him. A drinks party at Swan House, planned to introduce the prospective groom to the Anstey's neighbours is a pleasant affair. However, towards the end of the night Mrs Anstey begins to have doubts about her daughter's future, doubts that have apparently little substance:

Something worried Mrs Anstey quite suddenly then, something formless, like a fragment from a dream: she couldn't establish what it was. She poked about in her mind, but could only find the same sensation of unease. (Trevor 1980, p. 25)

A few pages later, Mrs Anstey's nameless fears are revealed when Francis retires to his room in Swan House. The sudden change of perspective that facilitates an unadorned entry to the most private actions of Frances is unexpected. The facts that emerge in the final two

paragraphs concerning Francis are brilliantly generated through free indirect discourse, which fuses the narrator's speech with Francis' thoughts, and that permits the first intimate glimpse of his character:

On the inside of Francis's bedroom door there was a key, which he turned. He always did so when he stayed in other people's houses.....for a moment he leaned against the door, reflecting that it would be nice when in the evening she wore her dragon brooch and the long loops of her seed-pearl necklace, and her sapphires. It would be nice to be seen with her in a piazza, nice if they ran into someone from the past....He moved from the door and sat on the edge of his bed. Slowly he cleared his lean face of the traces of make-up which he always inconspicuously wore. (Trevor 1980, p. 32)

This disturbing fact initiates an entire chapter from the perspective of Francis, a perspective that is utterly mesmerising in evoking the delusional machinations of a very disturbed mind, and how that mind has vicariously manipulated quite a number of people along the way. The access to Francis's thought is pursued through his own self-assessment and point of view, one that is riddled with lies, self-justification, self-pity, inappropriateness, and ultimately utter self-delusion.

The fact of Francis being an actor connects succinctly to his ability to deceive others. He literally takes on a role in every encounter he initiates and, to a large degree, he is taken at face value for quite long periods. The sheer audacity of his singlemindedness in ingratiating himself into the lives of Julia and her mother is carried out relentlessly and ruthlessly. It transpires that they are the latest victims in a long line of victims scattered throughout his past. All of these various people have at some stage fallen for his fabricated version of his life, a version that has no base in reality. Disturbingly, this recollection of his origins is recalled with equanimity:

Francis told Mrs Anstey and her daughter all about himself, as he had told the Massmith sisters and the doctor and his wife, the Kilvert-Dunnes and all the others. After the tragedy of his parent's death when he was eleven he'd spent the remainder of his childhood in

Suffolk, with a faded old aunt who had died herself a few years ago. None of that was true. As a child he had developed the fantasy of the train crash; his parents were still alive, the aunt and her cottage figments of his imagination. But in the drawing-room of Swan House he recalled the railway tragedy with suitable regret....'No, I never married', he revealed....the statement sounded natural enough....it wasn't actually true. In 1965, out of work and feeling weary, about to be twenty, Francis had met a widow one afternoon on the sea-front at Folkestone....she was thirty years older than he was....But the marriage itself now belonged in the past, and Francis saw no reason to burden the women of Swan House with it. To have done so would have sounded as out-of-place in their drawing-room as regaling them with the fact that a girl in a department store had once borne a child of his, or with various other facts about himself. (Trevor 1980, p. 36)

His astute deducing of the family's Catholicism, is the catalyst that intrigues Julia and gives her a real sense of connectedness to Francis. By the time, he meets the family for the second time, his research into their religion has been considerable and he presents a very credible knowledge of it:

Francis had learnt by heart the prayers and responses in the Catholic prayer-book he had bought. He had learnt by heart as well the Gospel according to St Mark, and often pleased Julia by murmuring the verses in the Catholic voice he'd cultivated....talking at length about St Colette and St Fulgentius. He particularly enjoyed confession.... (Trevor 1980, p. 92)

His aptitude for acting and taking on a role that requires dedicated time and effort, is astonishing. The effortlessness of his ability to reinvent himself is extraordinary, but it is his complete abjuration of personal responsibility, and how this abjuration has metamorphosed into acute delusional behaviour, that offers an unsettling, progressive delineation of his essential self.

As always, Trevor scrupulously scripts the context of Francis' childhood, a childhood blighted by sexual abuse when he was eleven years old. Born to elderly parents, Francis's abuse by a male lodger in his home is poignantly recalled. As in *The Children of Dynmouth*,

Trevor illustrates a child's inability to communicate his suffering and that draws attention to the inadequacies inherent in language:

during meals or on the common, in the sitting-room where the clock and the knitting-needles kept time with one another, he told years afterwards how he had fought a bleakness and a despair that often made him want to smash the cosiness to pieces by screaming out the truth. But the debt-collector had said it was their secret now....Francis was eleven then. (Trevor 1980, p. 89)

Though a much-wanted child, Francis is nevertheless compromised by his parent's elderliness, a situation that may be seen as one arising from a degree of irresponsibility that in turn triggered negligence. De Beauvoir's argument that children are not always safe in the care of their parents is embodied once again in this story.

The depth of Francis' dissoluteness is shockingly revealed through a mixture of free indirect discourse and direct speech that narrates his homosexual encounter with a nameless man for monetary gain:

When it was over Francis walked away from the garage with the money the man had given him. Tears oozed from the corners of his eyes, leaving tiny tracks in his make-up, causing his face to seem older. He wished he didn't always cry. (Trevor 1980, p. 86)

Schirmer draws attention to how the perception of Francis is created through Trevor's use of different narrative perspectives, a technique that allows the introspections of other characters to come into play, and he comments on how this technique creates ambiguity in the reader that defers overt judgement (Schirmer 1990, p. 81). Schirmer argues that these different perspectives of Francis, including his own, either generate sympathy or repulsion, and 'even the scene in which Francis is at his most repugnant – when he picks up a homosexual near Piccadilly Circus – concludes with a subjective description designed to generate some sympathy for him' (Trevor 1980, p. 81). However, Schirmer maintains that this is always balanced with other characters' perspectives, and that fundamentally, Trevor creates an

oppositional view of Francis as both victim and victimiser (Schirmer 1990, p. 81). That every one of his previous friendships with other people ended badly without it ever being his fault is evidence of his victim mentality. His relationship with Doris, the mother of his daughter, Joy, is one based on an identification with her personal belief that she too is a victim of her childhood.

The connection they share is negatively corroborated by de Beauvoir when she argues that 'the oppressor would not be so strong if he did not have accomplices among the oppressed themselves' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 98). Both Frances and Doris become obsessed with a television drama that deals with the retelling of a nineteenth-century murder carried out by an adolescent, Constance Kent, with whom they both identify through their sense of being victims of other people. Francis has a minor role in this television drama and towards the end of the novel, when the drama is broadcast, it becomes a factor in Julia's existentialist crisis. Trevor's proffering of a deliberation on victim versus victimhood is necessarily existentialist, and connects to the very core of how one lives one's life, and whether to choose to exist either authentically or in-authentically.

Despite Mrs Anstey's doubts about Francis, the wedding goes ahead, and Julia and Francis leave for a honeymoon in Italy, paid for by Julia. Forty-eight hours later, in a telephone call from Italy, Julia informs her local priest, Fr Lavin, that her marriage is over and that Francis has gone to Germany. She now believes that her marriage is bigamous. On her return to England and to her home in Stone St Martin, Julia tells Fr Lavin and her mother that: 'Francis is a psychopath'....He wanted my jewellery. His parents are alive. They live in a home in Hampton Wick' (Trevor 1980, p. 156)

Like Miss Samson in *Elizabeth Alone*, Julia suffers a profound existentialist crisis that challenges her life-long religious belief and undermines her former way of life. She re-lives the trauma of Francis' shocking revelations:

Even here, at home, it still continued to feel like a nightmare, its reality still lost in the shock that had not ceased to numb her. She was just another person among the people he had told her about, people in whose houses he had stayed....As long ago as the day they met in the coffee lounge of the Queen's Hotel he must have noticed her dragon brooch and estimated its worth, and must afterwards have deduced that the household's only valuable objects were its jewellery. Was it just for them that he had charmed his way into her life, or had he married her in order to set another piece of cruelty in motion to humiliate her with the truth? 'You're a good woman', he'd said in Italy. 'You're a special kind of person, Julia'. It was hard to keep remembering that he said whatever suited him. It was hard to remember that he lived in fantasies and make-believe, that not for an instant did he cease to practise his actor's art, smiling nicely. Of course it was out of cruelty that he had bigamously married her, of course it was to mock her and insult her. He hated the kind of person she was; he had begun to revenge himself from the first moment he'd laid eyes on her. (Trevor 1980, p. 158)

Trying to come to terms with her humiliation at the hands of Francis, Julia is shocked to receive a call from Doris, his ex-girlfriend. Her arrival at Swan House with her daughter, Joy, sees the troubling collision of two disparate worlds. The purpose of her visit is to determine whether or not Julia had actually slept with Francis and when Julia replies that she has not, Doris is visibly relieved. Doris has progressed into acute alcoholism and though now aware of the lies Francis has spun her for years, nevertheless retains her belief that Francis is more victim than victimiser.

In a moment of clarity, Doris tells Julia and Mrs Anstey her worries concerning Joy: 'It's just that I don't want Joy to be a weirdo like Frankie and myself. It's that what worries me, Mrs Anstey. It's being awake nights, thinking about poor Joy' (Trevor 1980, p. 187).

Following their departure, Julia is troubled with thoughts of them:

The image of her remained in Julia's mind as she drove through Cheltenham and out on to the Stone St Martin road, even though she did not wish to think about her. By common consent they would never have to meet again. (Trevor 1980, p. 189)

Julia reluctantly comprehends that somehow the arrival and departure of Francis in her life has initiated consequences for her:

For the second time that summer a woman's intuition nagged uncomfortably in Swan House: the pattern she had once been unable to discern, not even then being aware of the people it involved, spread itself chillingly through her. Connections suddenly were everywhere, an ugly sense crept out of hiding. (Trevor 1980, p. 189)

A watershed moment is reached in her existential crisis with a diary entry:

I have lived too long among flowerbeds, Julia wrote, I move from room to room of my doll's house. I type out conveyances and deeds of release, I have borne two children and seen a husband die. I pray to my childhood God, yet in this pretty town my life has been less real than other people's. (Trevor 1980, p. 190)

This diary entry is profoundly existentialist in its imperative to change and transcend her facticity. The realisation that Julia's life, as she has known it, is about to change slowly dawns on her consciousness. De Beauvoir argues against the claim that existential ethics is solipsistic, asserting that:

whereas for existentialism, it is not impersonal universal man who is the source of values, but the plurality of concrete, particular men projecting themselves toward their ends on the basis of situations whose particularity is as radical and as irreducible as subjectivity itself. (de Beauvoir 1948, pp. 17-18)

Here, she is essentially arguing that a situation like the one in which Julia finds herself, with all its attendant ramifications and uncertainties, has created a singular opportunity for her to recognise her own fundamental, deep-rooted negativity that is central to every individual's life. Julia continues to mull over all that has happened, and tries to understand the motivations that led her to reach out to people and to see what her family meant when they felt that 'her compassion made a victim of her' (Trevor 1980, p. 239).

Even after all that has happened, she acknowledges the authenticity of her compassion for the damaged, delusional Francis, and believes that 'she had begun to love him for what he should have been' (Trevor 1980, p. 215). It seems the purity of her compassion transcends the superficiality of her belief in 'My bearded cloudy God who saw me through my childhood and my widowing', and sees her instead slowly reaching the conclusion that she needs to create meaning in her life. Julia's lifelong devotion to her Catholic faith and her subsequent doubts around its veracity, reflect de Beauvoir's belief that taking our moral standards from God implies that we deny ourselves our innate capability to create our own, how 'he will understand that it is not a matter of being right in the eyes of a God, but of being right in his own eyes' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 14). Julia's crisis is characteristic of how de Beauvoir describes the search for authenticity: 'my contemplation is an excruciation only because it is also a joy' (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 12). Trevor captures all the bewilderment and uncertainty that anticipates an ethical act, and Julia's procrastination perfectly mirrors this. Julia's existentialist crisis has exposed what de Beauvoir calls the 'tragic ambiguity' of existence that sees her on the one hand as master of her own life but yet vulnerable to outside forces (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 9).

The final two consequences of Francis' lethal legacy are the deranged Doris murdering Francis's elderly wife in Folkestone, and the arrival of a letter from him looking for financial recompense from Julia because, extraordinarily, he believed 'forgiveness was owed, one to the other, it stated inexplicably' (Trevor 1980, p. 239). Julia's swift compliance to his request for money is somewhat implausible, but it may also be seen as a clear-cut admission of personal responsibility in the self/other relationship:

Yet reading the letter, it seemed almost eccentric to question its sincerity: it sounded perfectly the truth that the marriage had taken place out of kindness to her, because she'd passionately wished for the formality of being joined to him. She sent the money that was required. (Trevor 1980, p. 239)

Trevor, it seems, exercises a deep and profound questioning of the notion of responsibility that the individual has to an Other. Joy, the unfortunate offspring of two dysfunctional parents, is the innocent victim, 'the child was the victim of other people's worlds', who is now alone in the world (Trevor 1980, p. 242). Mrs Anstey, the wise and serene octogenarian, verbalises Joy's dilemma to the surprise of her daughter:

'My dear', her mother said, 'I often wonder about that child, you know'. They sat in the garden, watching the water of the river. Julia made a nodding motion and then slightly smiled, not wishing to seem entirely unreceptive. Her mother was hard as a nut and always had been: charity begins at home, tread warily. Yet here her mother was, exchanging roles with her, her eyes implying that the child would carry with her for ever a picture of a woman killed in an alcoholic fervour, a face suddenly dead. (Trevor 1980, p. 240)

This subtle and restrained concern by Mrs Anstey accentuates Julia's evolving belief that 'it was the child's story that mattered' (Trevor 1980, p. 242). Julia now envisages a future at Swan House that will see Joy as part of their life, and how this will give new meaning to the terrible events that have happened:

....she couldn't pack God and Francis Tyte away. All she completely knew was that the niceness of her world was not entirely without purpose, the white swan in its niche above the hall door, the roses and japonica of the garden, a plain house made the most of. (Trevor 1980, p. 243)

The final lines of the novel powerfully apprehend the existentialist concept of the Other: 'the child should not have been born but the child was there, her chapped face and plastic-rimmed spectacles' (Trevor 1980, p. 243).

Julia's innate compassion and propensity to help lame ducks has been substantially elevated by her very courageous plan to look after an extremely compromised child, a child who has never witnessed anything like a normal upbringing, and one who lacks a moral compass. Trevor keenly exposes the challenge that good actions impose and the resistance to change that is almost viscerally imposed. However, we are never in doubt about Trevor's

moral imperative, an imperative that demands action and one that, if ignored, could have a cataclysmic outcome for a vulnerable child. Again, as in *The Children of Dynmouth*, Trevor elects a female character, indeed two female characters, to mitigate the damage wreaked by a man who was in turn also damaged as a young child. Trevor is clearly demonstrating the inability of a person such as Francis Tyte to comprehend his victimhood, a position that will not allow him to relinquish his damaged past.

George O'Brien, in his essay, 'In Another Country: Aspects of Trevor's England', believes that characters such as Francis Tyte, and the character of Joseph Hilditch in *Felicia's Journey*, and their inability to relinquish their pasts means 'their behaviour both distorts the present and creates the prospect of a merely repetitious future' (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 35). The moral resolve of Julia in welcoming Joy into her home invalidates and refutes the damages of the past, and subverts the notion of a determinate and repetitious future. The desire of Julia and her mother to take on Joy finds echoes in de Beauvoir's belief that:

It is desire that creates the desirable, and the project which sets up the end. It is human existence which makes value spring up in the world on the basis of which it will be able to judge the enterprise in which it will be engaged. (de Beauvoir 1948, pp. 14-15)

Trevor's awarding of a higher perception to his female characters above his male characters in this novel, consolidates the argument that Trevor, once again, in his portrayal of his female characters, reveals a strong ethical dimension.

John Updike, writing in *The New Yorker*, considers that *Other People's Worlds* is remarkable for its in-depth exploration of the lower echelons of society, and asserts that:

Mr Trevor knows, and dramatizes two principal truths about low life: it never utterly lies down, but persists in asserting claims and values of its own derivation; and it cannot be fenced off and disowned by the fortunate. There is indeed 'infinite responsibility'. (*The New Yorker* 1981, pp. 156-7)

In *Other People's Worlds*, Trevor has conflated the principle of responsibility with its attendant component of connectivity. Julia is chosen to articulate the belief when she probes for answers: 'surely God's creatures are all connected?' (Trevor 1980, p. 196). Trevor has, once again, elected his female characters to articulate his moral vision. A consideration of the third and final novel, *Felicia's Journey*, offers enormous scope to explore Trevor's portrayal of his female characters in a novel that explores with great sensitivity, the plight of a motherless eighteen-year-old Irish girl, and her unfortunate encounter with a psychopathic male.

Felicia's Journey

Felicia's Journey won the 1994 Sunday Express Book of the Year Award in Britain, and was subsequently made into a film in 1999. For these reasons, *Felicia's Journey* is probably his most famous and commercially successful novel, and one that has generated much critical debate. At the outset, this novel appears to belong to the genre of psychological thrillers and indeed it has many of aspects of the genre, and this is especially true of its marked emphasis on the mental states of its characters: their perceptions, distortions, and delusions, together with an underlying current of fear and anxiety that builds suspense slowly through ambiguity. *Felicia's Journey* has the complexity to be read on many levels; Fitzgerald-Hoyt believes that Trevor deliberately constructs *Felicia's Journey* as a psychological thriller that may be seen 'as a sustained allegory of Anglo-Irish relations' (Fitzgerald-Hoyt 2003, p. 174). Likewise, Harte and Pettitt subscribe to a post-colonial reading of this novel that sees the character of Hilditch as the English predator and Felicia as the Irish victim (Harte and Pettitt 2000, p. 73). The post-colonial perspective is also taken by Sian White in the essay 'Warming the Other Side: Trevor, Cixous and Facing a New Direction', in which she employs Cixous' theory of opposition with its hierarchical oppositions (White 2005, p. 228).

Other critics disagree with this one-dimensional focus, and argue that this novel, together with *The Children of Dynmouth* and *Other People's Worlds*, are testaments to Trevor's complex grasp of human nature, and to how historical, social and environmental circumstances may create disturbances of varying degrees that lead to abnormal or unhealthy interpersonal behaviour. Denis Sampson believes that Trevor's portrayal of characters like Timothy Gedge, Francis Tyte, and Joseph Hilditch, serves to expose 'their fantasies of identity [as] masks for a deeper psychological condition of acute shame and alienation', and he argues that their individual anguish and the squalor of their lives has 'been shaped by the commercial and media-driven fantasies of that working-class culture in England' (Sampson 2002, p. 283). Michael Parker, while not denying the historical conflicts between Ireland and England and its significance in *Felicia's Journey*, nevertheless asserts that 'the novel transcends such simplistic paradigms and embraces a much broader picture of humanity and inhumanity' (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 146). Similarly Christine St. Peter in her essay, 'Consuming Pleasures: *Felicia's Journey* in Fiction and Film', concurs with Parker when she argues that Trevor's reasons for writing this novel stems primarily from his desire to give a voice to the homeless:

while this exploration is rooted narratively in the asymmetrical linkages between England and Ireland, its meaning surely encompassed the damage, the evil and – occasionally – the salvation in all human relations. (St. Peter 2002, p. 338)

Constanza Del-Rio-Alvaro in her essay, 'William Trevor's *Felicia's Journey*: Inherited Dissent or Fresh Departure from Tradition?', contends that this novel transcends the traditional Irish narrative of emigration as well as the 'crude or exploitative descriptions and events so frequent in other serial killer narratives', and offers instead what she sees as the novel's real concern: 'the exploration of the psychology and motivations of the two central characters' (Del Rio-Alvaro 2007, p. 7). The following analysis intersects more with the

views that Trevor's concerns are ultimately engaged with all aspects of human existence, in all its complexities.

In this section, I will argue that at its heart, this novel explores the themes of good and evil in what is probably the darkest context employed by Trevor. Pivotal to this exploration will be the exposition of the circumstances of Felicia's life and Trevor's powerful evocation of the solitariness of her situation. The analysis will focus primarily on the character of Felicia, and on the development of her character from a naïve, frightened young girl who encounters tangible danger to one who transcends the terrible hand life has dealt her. The following analysis of this novel will perceive Trevor as radically subverting notions of freedom through the character of Felicia, a freedom that is anathema to so-called mainstream society. Felicia's curious concept of freedom profoundly connects to de Beauvoir's notion of freedom:

Freedom must project itself toward its own reality through a content whose value it establishes. An end is valid only by a return to the freedom which established it and which willed itself through this end. (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 70)

That Trevor is not a writer weighed down by tradition, but one who is capable of disturbing perceived norms, is never more apparent than in this novel. A brief outline of the story will follow to demonstrate the events that occur in Felicia's life and this will be followed by a consideration of the grimness of her journey from childhood to young adulthood.

Set in the 1990s, *Felicia's Journey*, tells the story of a young Irish Catholic girl's journey from Ireland through the English Midlands in search of the father of her unborn child. Felicia is a seventeen-year old girl whose short life has been dominated mainly by events beyond her control. Her mother died when she was just six years old, and her young life has been controlled by her father and brothers. She has been obliged to share a room with her ninety-nine-year-old great grandmother, a woman who is senile, incontinent and

querulous. When a young man called Johnny Lysaght, living in England but temporarily back in Ireland visiting his mother, seduces Felicia, her life changes irrevocably. Johnny disappears back to England without leaving a forwarding address. She then finds herself pregnant with his child, and is compelled to escape her claustrophobic, patriarchal home dominated by a father who assumes that a life of family caretaking and part-time menial work is adequate for his only daughter. When her father inadvertently deduces that Felicia is pregnant he:

called her a hooer, looking at her over the smoke from the frying pan, not raising his voice. He said he was glad her mother wasn't alive. No better than a dirty hooer, he furiously repeated. (Trevor 1994, p. 60)

Felicia knew she could not remain living in an environment that sought to vilify her in this way, and in a state of desperation, she flees her home. She convinces herself that if she goes to England that somehow, she will be able to locate Johnny and that everything will be fine.

Felicia's experience of male exploitation continues with her arrival in a town north of Birmingham where she encounters Joseph Ambrose Hilditch, a genial overweight catering manager who offers to assist her in tracking down Johnny. However, Hilditch is not what he seems, and gradually a sinister picture of a lonely, predatory male with a serious personality disorder emerges. What follows is a drama between the forces of good and evil, the confrontation between Felicia's innocence and Hilditch's corruption. However, as in *Other People's Worlds*, oppositional concepts are always ambiguous.

The circumstances surrounding Hilditch's life are more complex than at first appears. The possible origins of his dysfunctional personality are withheld until the end of the novel, and this deliberate action by Trevor will be considered. The storyline proceeds very much in the thriller genre that traces Hilditch's methodical and deadly pursuit of this innocent and naïve Irish girl. Allegedly professing to help her find Johnny, Hilditch manufactures

scenarios that are full of falsehoods, and this eventually results in Felicia believing that her hopes of finding Johnny are non-existent. The extent of Hilditch's ability to lie and mislead is on par with the two previous protagonists in this chapter, but there is a more sinister element at work here. The duality of Hilditch's personality is shocking in its intensity; on the one hand, he is an affable, fully-functioning, middle-management catering manager who is liked by his work colleagues, but in reality he is a fabulist whose whole life has been a construct. Trevor's narrative techniques allow, once again, the external and internal views of characters to be expressed from their own points of view, through free indirect discourse, and this technique allows the extreme duality of Hilditch's character to emerge.

His recollection of what he calls 'Memory Lane' is the first real indication of his psychosis, and reveals his memories of five girls whom he has befriended in the past but who now belong in 'Memory Lane', and a real sense of foreboding is evoked when it is Felicia who revives these memories. Initially resisting his help, Felicia takes refuge in the Gathering House, home to a community of religious zealots led by a Jamaican woman, Miss Calligary. This religious dimension to the story augments the existentialist elements that underlie the development of the plot, where the very existence of Felicia is threatened, and where the inadequacies of absolutist beliefs are made clear. Just as Miss Samson in *Elizabeth Alone*, and Julia in *Other People's Worlds*, Trevor's 'God bothering' is at play here, a term that describes his exploration of different religious beliefs across his fiction (MacKenna 1999, p. 106). Felicia's wholehearted acceptance by the religious community, and their anticipation of the birth of her unborn baby into this community, is soon resisted by Felicia, 'the heady, unreal atmosphere becomes cloying in the end', and after a short time, she leaves (Trevor 1994, p. 92).

Shortly after her departure, she finds that she is nearly penniless and that a substantial sum of money has disappeared from her belongings. Desperation leads her to spend a night

amongst the homeless, but by the following morning, she makes up her mind to ask Hilditch for a loan. Ironically, it was he who stole her money, and he now persuades her to have an abortion and offers to pay for it. Felicia reluctantly agrees and her pregnancy is terminated. Post-operatively, Felicia's dreams, though distressing and unsettling, instigate a strong desire in her to leave Hilditch's house as quickly as possible. When this decision is imparted to Hilditch, it precipitates the beginning of the end, and is the catalyst for his intention to murder Felicia. Her rejection of him mirrors all the other rejections he suffered with each of the five girls he helped previously:

She has guessed, as Beth guessed, the first of the others to do so. When Beth announced out of the blue that she was going south, everything she'd guessed was there in her eyes. It was there in all their eyes in the end. They were his friends and he was good to them. Then there was the other. (Trevor 1994, pp. 150-151)

Felicia retires to bed for her final night in Hilditch's house, but is awoken by him during the night. He tells her about his generosity to the five girls and his close relationship with each of them but there is no mention of what became of them. Felicia senses their fate:

She knows the girls are dead. There is something that states it in the room, in the hoarse breathing, in the sweat that for a moment touches the side of her face, in the way he talks. The dark is oppressive with their deaths, cloying, threatening to turn odorous. (Trevor 1994, p. 155)

He orders her to get dressed and intimates that he will drive her away from his house and will give her money for her journey. She instinctively knows not to get into his car and somehow manages to escape from him.

For the next fifty pages, Trevor charts the physical and mental collapse of Hilditch that culminates in his suicide. The revelation of the sexual abuse that he suffered as a child at the hands of his sexually promiscuous mother, emerges almost subliminally, but has in fact

appeared almost unconsciously at various stages throughout the novel. For the first time he consciously probes the reasons for it:

Had she always foreseen, when he was six and eight and ten, when he sat beside her watching Dumbo, and Bambi, when first he practised his signature, when he wrote down Major Hilditch: had she always known what she would turn to him when there was no one else?...Had she foreseen it when first she said, 'Just you and Mamma in their own little next?' Or was it all different, the spur of the moment when she woke him up to show him the rings on her fingers? His blue-striped pyjamas, a shred of tobacco on her teeth when she smiled down at him, her ginny breath...like a tattoo, she said, the lipstick on his shoulder. Her face was different then. (Trevor 1994, p. 195)

Sampson believes that the terrible unseemliness of this situation has caused a character such as Hilditch to create an identity that masks 'a deeper psychological condition of acute shame and alienation', and this manifests itself in the fallacious and paranoid belief that everybody knows about his abuse (Sampson 2002, p. 283). Trevor's compassion is never in doubt regarding the circumstances that shaped a character such as Hilditch, but his death in the novel is nothing more than an act of despair. St Peter argues that Trevor 'gives Felicia, who, after an initially supine response to her danger, finally seizes the chance to save herself when she figures out what Hilditch is planning for her', and this redemptive role for Felicia is by far the most compelling part of the book (St Peter 2002, p. 333).

As already mentioned in this chapter, Trevor in this heterogeneous narrative, once again reiterates his willingness to write sensitively and compassionately about the realities of women's lives. MacKenna maintains that Felicia has 'like so many Trevor characters, been allocated a life by others – one of loneliness, poverty and dependence' (MacKenna 1999, p. 180). That he has chosen to give this young girl's name to the title of the novel is indicative of his desire to articulate her story. His moving description of her time in rural Ireland captures acutely the limitations of Felicia's young life, and the continuing limitations

imposed on her by a patriarchal society. A brief look at the preceding decade to the nineties offers an interesting insight into the events that reveal the social concerns of Irish society.

The early nineteen eighties were concerned with amending the Constitution and ensuring a constitutional ban on abortion. In 1983 the insertion of article 40.3.3., gave the unborn child and pregnant women an equal right to life. This divisive abortion referendum succeeded in creating confusion over where that left the rights of the mother. Less than four months later, a fifteen year-old girl, Ann Lovett, gave birth to a baby boy in a graveyard in Granard, Co Longford, and within hours, both were dead. Despite the public outcry this case produced, there remained a climate of shame and secrecy in relation to pregnancy outside of marriage. In 1985, Eileen Flynn was dismissed from her job as a teacher in a State-funded convent secondary school when she gave birth to a baby as an unmarried mother, the father being a separated man. In 1992, a pregnant fourteen year-old rape victim, known as Miss X, was prevented from leaving Ireland to procure an abortion. Between 1993 and 1995, four newborn babies, abandoned by their young mothers, were found dead (*Irish Times* 2014). The Crisis Pregnancy Programme was set up in 2001, seventeen years after the events in Granard. This agency was set up in response to the numbers of women having abortions in the UK, not because of concern for the health of women. In 2001, some 6,673 women with Irish addresses had an abortion in Britain. *Felicia's Journey's* gestation was in the eighties and early nineties, but its concern with women's lives in a country that gave foetuses the same constitutional rights as its female citizens, is clearly epitomised here. Just as he did with the character of Timothy Gedge in *The Children of Dynmouth*, Trevor depicts the antecedent factors that shaped Felicia.

Having lost her mother at the age of six, Felicia seems to have grown up in a household that has never valued her. Though always having had the presence of her great-grandmother in her life, there is nothing to suggest anything positive or enhancing in their

relationship. In Felicia's first direct reference to her grandmother, she recalls the day her mother died in the house and she still remembers the words she said: "I've outlived another one", the old woman said' (Trevor 1994, p. 5). Felicia in fact recalls this statement twice in the story when her thoughts return to her home in Ireland (Trevor 1994, p. 55). This redoubtable claim to her longevity has a suggestion of triumphalism when it emerges that she has outlived a husband, a son, a daughter-in-law, and her grandson's wife. This survival has acquired mythical status in the eyes of her grandson, Felicia's father, and he is forever extolling and glorifying her Civil War connection to all and sundry. Felicia has been obliged to share a bedroom with this woman. Having lost her job in a local factory, Felicia was expected to keep house for her father and brothers without any financial recompense. Her father hoped she would only now find part-time work so that she could continue to look after the old lady, as well as cook and clean for them all. Her meagre savings soon disappeared yet her father insisted 'that any dole money coming into the house should go towards board and upkeep. A family had to pull together, especially the family of a widower' (Trevor 1994, p. 24). Trevor captures the terrible limitations of her existence, an existence that can be seen to embody de Beauvoir's thoughts on the concept of immanence, and how it results from oppression:

Every individual concerned with justifying his existence experiences his existence as an indefinite need to transcend himself. But what singularly defines the situation of woman is that being, like all humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other: an attempt is made to freeze her as an object and doom her to immanence, since her transcendence will be forever transcended by another essential and sovereign consciousness. (de Beauvoir 2010, p. 17)

The aspirations of Felicia to find full-time employment, and to somehow transcend her limiting home life, are the result of this objectification, which has doomed her to immanence.

Felicia has been described by numerous critics as naïve and credulous, with one critic going so far as to note that Felicia resembles Hilditch in that 'she seems capable of constructing equally fantastic narratives around Johnny' (Goszczyńska 2010, p. 144). This over-simplification of Felicia's aspirations denies the sheer terror and desperation of her situation. Fitzgerald-Hoyt credits Trevor with an enormous understanding of the constrained lives of women when she argues that:

Trevor not only offers complex of credible portraits of Irish women, he also explodes Ireland's long cherished female icons by pointing up the disparity between real and mythical women, the failings of a society that simultaneously romanticises and abuses women. (Fitzgerald-Hoyt 2002, p. 160)

Felicia's young life has never been affirmed and her seduction at the hands of the duplicitous Johnny is inexorable. Her experiences of seeking help, firstly from Johnny's mother, and then from a spinster older woman, are repulsed. Johnny's mother, an embittered, separated woman, does nothing to help Felicia when:

Felicia's predicament dawned in Mrs Lysaght's features then. Her mouth sagged; distaste crept into the coldness in her eyes. 'Leave my son alone'. She spoke without emotion. 'Leave him'. (Trevor 1994, p. 46)

Her desperation led her to approach a woman called Miss Furey who it was rumoured, had once been pregnant but 'when abruptly her condition changed and she returned to normal it was said with certainty that no child existed in the farmhouse where she lived' (Trevor 1994, p. 56).

Felicia's hope that Miss Furey might help is soon dashed when Felicia naively recounts the local gossip that she had aborted a pregnancy. Miss Furey reacts violently when Felicia asks: "“Could you help me, Miss Furey?” “People will say anything. Any lies that will come to their lips. Go home now”" (Trevor 1994, p. 59). Her rejection by two adult women who could possibly have helped her is compassionately depicted:

Riding back, Felicia wept and the oozing of her tears became a flow that blinded her. When finally they ceased she dismounted in order to wipe away the traces from her cheeks and to blow her nose. 'Please, God', she prayed. 'Please, God, help me'. But no help came. (Trevor 1994, p. 58)

Shortly after this, her father inadvertently surmises that she is pregnant. Felicia exhibits all the contradictions and inconsistencies that a patriarchal society has covertly created for young women like her. Though set in Ireland in the early nineties, a palpable repressive atmosphere prevailed in this small rural Munster town. In one fell swoop, Trevor deconstructs the perception of Ireland as a modern, inclusive society, one based in Christian beliefs and family values. The absence of support shown to Felicia by the two women is shocking in its heartlessness, and is characteristic of de Beauvoir's view of the lack of solidarity between women. Trevor's characterisation of Johnny's mother, Mrs Lysaght, is of a woman unable to transcend the circumstances of her life. The departure of her husband from her and her son's life has left a legacy of self-pity and cynicism. When Felicia is tramping the streets of the town where she thinks Johnny resides, her thoughts return to Mrs Lysaght's treatment of her and hindsight allows her think that:

she should have insisted when she went to see Mrs Lysaght. She should have told her everything, and refused to leave without the full address. She should have screamed at her and made a scene. After all, it is Mrs Lysaght's grandchild. (Trevor 1994, p. 86)

The proffering of this fact is sobering in its exposition. The story of Miss Furey's pregnancy is highly ambiguous; it may or may not be malicious gossip, nevertheless Miss Fury has acted in bad faith. Both women belong to the same social group as Felicia; they are all members of the female sex and by virtue of this, their freedom is situated.

The concept of situated freedom was de Beauvoir's challenging contribution to existentialist ethics. She believed that women's situation is 'socially mediated' due to their femaleness (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 38). What should have connected these women in a shared

purpose is never envisioned in the book. Mrs Lysaght and Miss Furey choose to remain entrenched in their situations for personal and social motivations that appear more compelling than helping a terrified young girl. The ghostly presence of Felicia's mother and the question around what her reaction to Felicia's pregnancy might have been if she had lived, prompt Felicia to reflect:

Would she have been able to confide in her mother? Would she have confessed and said that an error had occurred, that there was no doubt? Would her mother have gone silent, and been unable to disguise her disappointment, have even cried for a while, but then have known what to do? Would she have cried herself, and been comforted in the end? (Trevor 1994, p. 55)

The ambiguity involving the mother's reaction provides yet another means for speculating on female solidarity. De Beauvoir's analyses the reasons for the lack of solidarity among women and how they became Other offers interesting insights into these women's behaviour and also into why women have never really had a strong sense of solidarity as women:

it is that they lack the concrete means to organise themselves into a unit that could posit itself in opposition. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and unlike the proletariat, they have no solidarity of labour or interests; they even lack their own space that makes communities....they live dispersed among men, tied by homes, work,, economic interests and social conditions to certain men – fathers or husbands – more closely than to other women. (de Beauvoir 2010, pp. 8-9)

The dearth of kindness to a young girl in Ireland contrasts sharply with the welcome Felicia is shown by Miss Calligary and the Church of the Gatherers in the nameless English town. One of the congregation senses that Felicia is pregnant, and her admittance of it elicits nothing but sympathy and excitement:

Listening, not saying much herself, Felicia feels that all of it is more like a dream than reality: she has never in her life met people like this before, nor even known that such people exist. (Trevor 1994, p. 88)

However, their buoyant optimism can be quite suffocating:

No iron bars are needed, for all the animals are at peace with the happy people. Hear their beautiful song and the children's laughter filling the air! Smell the fragrance of those flowers, hear the rippling of the stream. (Trevor 1994, p. 84)

It becomes too much for Felicia, 'the heady, unreal atmosphere becomes cloying in the end' and she leaves (Trevor 1994, p. 92). Just as Felicia's Catholic God did not come to her rescue before she left Ireland, neither will this newly found sect of religious fanaticism help her when her need is greatest. When the loss of her money becomes apparent to Felicia, she initially hoped that somehow she had mislaid it in the Gathering House.

On her return to the house, she is greeted with hostility when she asks to look for the money in the room she had occupied. Her shock and distress is palpable: 'the loss of her money is a disaster almost as great as her failure to locate the right factory....she hasn't enough left for a single night's lodging' (Trevor 1994, p. 94). Her anguish and fear over this new crisis is sympathetically portrayed:

Tears run over Felicia's cheeks as she shakes her head, denying that she has turned her back. Everyone was kind to her, she says; everyone was sympathetic; she was ashamed that she moved on so hurriedly. It was all her fault; she should have looked every day to see that the money was still there. She should have divided it more evenly, half in the jersey, half in her handbag. (Trevor 1994, p. 95)

Her torment evokes no reaction: 'no one speaks. Miss Calligary has become so still her features might be cut in ebony....With nothing left to say, Felicia goes away' (Trevor 1994, p. 95).

The failure of the millenarian fervour of Miss Calligary in her rejection of this vulnerable girl adds another grim adjunct to Felicia's encounters with her own sex, and with religion. Felicia's life has been dictated by a social environment directed by a hegemonic patriarchal family structure, controlled by the Catholic Church, and a questionable family

loyalty to Irish Nationalism that revered a mythical notion of the feminine. Both institutions only served to create a discourse of guilt and remorse. Similarly, her encounter with the evangelical church results in a parallel negative experience of rejection and isolation. Fortunately, this state of affairs does not persist and the redemptive features that emerge in the story will offset this.

Bruce Allen in his essay, 'Souls like Any Other Souls', contends that *Felicia's Journey* may be read as a masterly suspense thriller but that is also 'operates triumphantly on at least two other levels', the political and the religious (Allen 1998, p. 332). He explores the failure of both in relation to Felicia's experiences in Ireland and in England, but sees the novel as presenting 'with equal force counterbalancing images of goodness and forgiveness' (Allen 1998, p. 332). The emergence of the themes of goodness and forgiveness dominate the novel's *denouement*, but their roots are evident earlier in the novel. Following her rejection by the Gathering House, Felicia finds herself homeless and a disturbing picture of the reality of finding herself destitute in an alien town is drawn:

Already, hours ago, the homeless of this town have found their night-time resting places – in doorways, and underground passages left open in error, in abandoned vehicles, in the derelict gardens of demolished houses. As maggots make their way into cracks in masonry, so the people of the streets have crept into one-night homes in graveyards and on building sites, in alleyways and courtyards, making walls of dustbins pulled close together, and roofs of whatever lies nearby....All ages lie out in the places that have been found, men and women, children. The family rejects have ceased to weep into their make-do pillows; those brought low by their foolishness or by untimely greed plead silently for sleep....rejected husbands, abandoned wives victims of chance, have passed beyond bitterness, and devote their energies to keeping warm....there is no arrogance among the people of the streets, no insistent pride in their sleeping features, no lingering telltale of a past's corruption. (Trevor 1994, p. 102)

Trevor's capturing of the most fundamental 'otherness' of those people who choose, for whatever reason, to live on the margins of society, is compassionately drawn. This then is

the world Felicia has been forced to enter and in which she initially spends one night. She encounters various disturbed and troubled people, but all are kind to her and offer to share their meagre comforts with her. That she would return to this underworld is far from evident at this time, and not until the final chapter does it become clear that she has chosen to remain homeless and wander from place to place. Her close encounter with probable death has fundamentally changed her and her gratitude for having been spared is enormous.

Trevor powerfully subverts a predictable ending, one that would have seen Felicia re-enter mainstream society. Instead, he presents the reader with a description of Felicia's serenity as a homeless woman living quite contentedly among the down-and-outs. The arbitrariness of this ending has been perceived differently by critics: Fitzgerald-Hoyt views Felicia as being 'transformed into one of Trevor's familiar figures: a mentally unbalanced woman of surpassing goodness and forgiveness' (Fitzgerald-Hoyt 1999, p. 184), while for Del Rio-Alvaro 'there is no incoherence or trace of insanity in Felicia's final train of thought' (Del Rio-Alvaro 2007, p. 11). For Harte and Pettitt, Felicia is illustrative of the migrant figure (Harte and Pettitt 2000, p. 76), while both Parker and St Peter deem Felicia's chosen homelessness as an ethical strategy to challenge the perceived prejudices mainstream society has towards the dispossessed (Parker 2013, pp. 156-7; St Peter 2002, p. 338). When one considers the character of Felicia at the very beginning of the novel in comparison with the perception of her at the end of the novel, a clearer and revealing delineation of her essential personality emerges.

Her innate goodness and integrity is apparent from the novel's inception. The theme of loss of innocence resonates throughout Felicia's life. Her exploitation and isolation began in her home, where her father and brothers did not treat her as a valuable human being. Her exploitation continued outside her family situation through a society that also did not value or appreciate her. Her Catholic education was entirely inadequate in preparing her for life in the

real world. The terrible dilemma in which she finds herself forces her to steal from her great-grandmother, and her distress and anxiety over this is touching. Felicia's conscience is tangibly manifested throughout the novel. She never seeks to take advantage of any situation and endeavours to be honest and truthful in all the terrible situations in which she finds herself.

Her intrinsic goodness contrasts dramatically with Hilditch's utterly fallacious fabricated world. Her authenticity, and the sheer absence of any deceitfulness in her personality, does not change despite her close encounter with certain death. Her loss of innocence at the hands of Johnny Lysaght brings to light the damning aspects of his character underlining his manipulative and irresponsible behaviour. Despite the traumas she has suffered and endured, her innate goodness triumphs. That she has now chosen not to return to Ireland is a powerful condemnation of her previous life in that small Munster town. Her decision to join the homeless community is essentially rational in light of the traumas she has suffered and her processing of this is heartrending:

She knows she is not as she was; she is not the bridesmaid at the autumn wedding, not the girl who covered herself with a rug in the back of the car. The innocence that once was hers is now, with time, a foolishness, yet it is not disowned, and that same lost person is valued for leading her to where she is. Walking through another morning, fine after a wet night, she accepts without bewilderment the serenity that possesses her, and celebrates it fresh new presence. (Trevor 1994, p. 207)

Her deep appreciation of having escaped certain death, and her profound acknowledgement of the notion of 'chance' and how it performed for her, are recalled with gratitude:

Alone, no longer a child, no longer a girl, with the insistence of the grateful she goes from place to place, from street to street, binding her feet up, wet by rain that penetrates her clothes, frozen when there is ice on the gutter puddles....at night, there is a city's afterglow. There is happiness in her solitude at dawn....There will be charity and shelter and mercy

and disdain; and always, and everywhere, the chance that separates the living from the dead. (Trevor 1994, pp. 212-3)

Felicia's ability to transcend her misfortunes robustly intersects de Beauvoir's concept of transcendence, and her embrace of life is a formidable antidote to Hilditch's suicide. In fact, Felicia and Hilditch could be said to embody these existentialist terms.

Hilditch's life has been characterised by his facticity, by his submission to his past and his subsequent paralysis by it, whereas Felicia's life is now defined by transcendence, which is characterised by her freedom from her past. Hilditch has annihilated his future by taking his own life, whereas Felicia has chosen to embrace her future, and in doing so endorses de Beauvoir's assertion that:

regardless of the staggering dimensions of the world about us, the density of our ignorance, the risks of catastrophes to come, and our individual weakness within the immense collectivity, the fact remains that we are absolutely free today if we choose to will our existence in its finiteness, a finiteness which is open on the infinite. (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 159)

Her newfound serenity has generated a strong sense of realism and resolve in the way in which she perceives herself, and in how she deals with the mistakes of the past:

The only guilt is that she permitted her baby to be taken from her: she shouldn't have done that, but there you are. She looks out now from where she is, and does not brood: what's done is done. She does not brood on her one-time lover's treachery. She walked away from a man who murdered girls. She was allowed to walk away: that is what she dwells upon. (Trevor 1994, p. 209)

Her simple appreciation of the kindness shown to her by others is registered in her thoughts when she remembers the severe toothache she had and how her homeless friend Davo told her about the female dentist who would help her:

Not many would bother with your toothache, Davo said; not many would think toothache would occur in a derelict's mouth. 'Always come back', the woman dentist said. 'Don't be in pain'. (Trevor 1994, p. 211)

That Trevor creates a female dentist willing to treat the homeless without payment presents a powerful example of compassion and generosity. Likewise, 'the ladies come at night with soup, well-meaning, never forgetting, no matter what the weather', are acknowledged and cherished by Felicia (Trevor 1994, p. 213).

A sense of solidarity amongst this random group of women emulates the solidarity of the four women in *Elizabeth Alone*. The depth of the transformation resulting from Felicia's terrifying existential crisis is enriched through her abjuration of the material world:

When she reaches the river she settles on a seat that is pleasant in the autumn warmth. By chance her eyes pass over her clothes and over her hands and feet, the shoes she found in a disposal bin, the skirt a woman gave her. Her appearance, or the tale it tells, doesn't interest her. (Trevor 1994, p. 209)

Her interests now lie in recalling the names of the girls murdered by Hilditch:

Elsie Covington and Beth, Sharon and Gaye. Jakki and Bobbi. Chosen for death because no one would know when they were there no longer. What trouble made victims of them? Did they guess their fate a moment before it came? Her mourning is to wonder. (Trevor 1994, p. 209)

Her reflection finally extends to Hilditch himself:

Wretched, awful man, poor mockery of a human creature, with his pebble spectacles and the tiny hands that didn't match the rest of him, his executioner's compulsion...Lost within a man who murdered, there was a soul like any other soul, purity itself it surely once had been. (Trevor 1994, 212)

The breadth of Felicia's farsightedness is presented with such force that the reprehensible Hilditch is now perceived as a vulnerable human being who is deserving of pity: she has transcended her facticity whereas he has not had that ability. The most striking feature of this

final chapter is the appeal to its readers to reflect on society's way of thinking about homeless people:

Idiot gawking, fool tramping nowhere: shreds of half-weary pity are thrown in the direction of a wayside figure, before the hasty glance darts on to something else. There will be charity and shelter and mercy and disdain; and always, and everywhere, the chance that separates the living from the dead. (Trevor 1994, p. 213)

His previous, beautifully rendered reflection on the homeless in Chapter 12 springs to mind again when reading this depiction of the homeless.

By creating a narrative that follows the life of a vulnerable, compromised young girl, there is an implicit imperative that audaciously challenges society's prejudices that asks us to think again about these people. The brief glimpse that people get of a homeless person cannot ever correlate to the individual circumstances that propel them out of mainstream society. Trevor's essential ethical imperative demands a non-judgemental outlook, and calls to mind once again his thoughts on the human condition:

I don't believe in the black and white; I believe in the grey shadows and the murkiness: in the fact that you shouldn't say 'old spinster' or 'dirty old man'. In a way, I suppose, I write to prove that theory. (Cited in *The Guardian* 2009 by Tim Adams)

The final lines in the novel witness Felicia again reflecting on the dead girls and on her dead mother and wondering 'are they really all together among the fragrant flowers, safe and blessed?' and how 'she might be with them if it had happened' (Trevor 1994, p. 213). However persuasive the lure of the afterlife may be, Felicia is very sure that the certainty of her life in this world is what she wants:

that the certainty she knows is still what she would choose. She turns her hands to that the sun may catch them differently, and slightly lifts her head to warm the other side of her face. (Trevor 1994, p. 213)

Her simple pleasure in life despite her uncommon lifestyle is potently affirmative. Unlike Hilditch, she has recognised herself as an embodied consciousness responsible for the meaning of her own existence, and her instinct is to engage with the world, however humble that engagement may be. Parker believes that throughout this novel there is an underlying concern with gender and power and how 'the text presents repeated instances of female compassion [and] maternal solidarity', as well as depicting 'how societies marginalise and despise certain types and groups in their midst (Delaney and Parker 2013, pp. 156-7). As in the previous two novels in this chapter, the female characters, especially Felicia, are imbued with a strength of character considerably greater than that given to Trevor's male characters.

Conclusion

These three novels are replete with existentialist themes, and offer highly realistic representations of how fictional characters endeavour to deal with what existence entails for them. These novels offer an intense engagement with ethical issues and all exhibit a strong social consciousness. Schirmer argues that Trevor's 'broad vision of contemporary man as alienated and disconnected is pointedly cast in terms of criticism of the class system', and this is profoundly valid in these novels (Schirmer 1990, p. 65). Trevor's employment of exploitative and dangerous characters like Francis Tyte and Joseph Hilditch are a necessary stratagem in the exposition of how alienation and disconnection occur in society. The portrayal of a character such as Timothy Gedge offers a salutary and valuable representation of a malcontent in the making. The three male characters expose the far-reaching and dangerous consequences of irresponsible and negligent parenting. These narratives connect comprehensibly to de Beauvoir's belief that reading literary fiction gives:

the only form of communication capable of giving me the incommunicable – capable of giving me the taste of another life. I do not annexe it to myself; it remains separated from

mine and yet it exists for me. And it exists for others who are also separated from it and with whom I communicate.... through books, in their deepest intimacy....that is why Proust was right to think that literature is the privileged place of intersubjectivity. (Simons and Timmerman 2011, p. 201)

The privileging of the female characters, and the pragmatic evaluations they make with regard to the future, embody what Brendan Quigley spoke of in his introduction to the book, *Literature and Ethics*, in which he discusses literature's ability to contribute to ethical theory, and his belief that:

it is in the immensely rich and varied, and immensely problematic, ethical terrain mapped out in literary fiction that may provide the most honest and insightful representation of the attempt to understand the human being as ethical animal. (Jernigan, Murphy, Quigley, and Wagner 2009, p. 8)

That Trevor accords his female characters the capacity to mitigate the damage inflicted by, not just the males, but by a disconnected society, and showing enormous compassion in the process, puts into question the whole notion of comradeship and unity between men and women.

De Beauvoir strongly believed that until the 'whole hypocritical system' that caused the 'division' of women and men in society be abolished, that only then will it become clear that 'the relation of man to woman is the most natural relation of human being to human being' (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 782). She credits Marx with having perceived this when he wrote 'the direct, natural, and necessary relation of person to person is the *relation of man to woman*' and believed that 'this could not be better said. (de Beauvoir 2009, p. 782). She held that:

Within the given world, it is up to man to make the reign of freedom triumph; to carry off this supreme victory, men and women must, among other things and above and beyond their natural differentiation, unequivocally affirm their brotherhood. (de Beauvoir 2010, p. 782)

One cannot but believe that Trevor innately comprehends the damage that has arisen from the historical subjugation of women, and the sometimes-disastrous fallout from this for both women and men and consequently children. A different form of oppression will be examined in the next chapter – one that pertains to all human beings. The topic of old age will be examined in relation to Trevor's comprehension of the reality of what it is to grow old, paying special attention to the female characters.

Chapter Five: The Pleasures and Perils of Ageing in Trevor's Elderly Female Characters

This, the final chapter of the thesis, will once again explore an aspect of the human condition, this time old age, and will examine how Trevor represents it in portraits of elderly women in his fiction. Though differing thematically from the previous chapter, 'Evil and Oppression', there is, nevertheless, a strong link connecting these chapters through the concept of oppression. Interspersed with this analysis will be de Beauvoir's thoughts on ageing, particularly her exploration of the ways in which the old are positioned as society's subordinated and disparaged other. The subject of ageing has slowly emerged as an issue worthy of exploration in the twenty-first century. Until the 1960s, the social study of ageing was dominated by a 'social problems' perspective concerned with policy and welfare needs (Blaikie 1999, p. 12).

Today, however, population ageing is a major trend with global implications, and is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. Increasing longevity is one of humanity's greatest achievements and is a cause for celebration. It has far-reaching implications for all aspects of society. Ageing is a deep-rooted existential matter. It concerns every individual and is an inescapable part of life. De Beauvoir's imperative to society in the mid-twentieth century to rethink their abjuration of the elderly is brusque and urgent:

We must stop cheating: the whole meaning of our life is in question in the future that is waiting for us. If we do not know what we are going to be, we cannot know what we are:

let us recognize ourselves in this old man or in that old woman. It must be done if we are to take upon ourselves the entirety of our human side. (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 5)

Stereotypes of old age, both positive and negative, abound, and fiction may be, in part, responsible for this. According to Margaret Gullette's book *Aged by Culture*, there are two socially accepted narratives of ageing: stories of progress or stories of decline (Gullette 2004, p. 45). Neither of these narratives fully recognises the complexity of old age, and both deny the importance of its significance in the trajectory of life.

There are, however, exceptions among writers of fiction who have consistently striven to present authentically, characters grappling with the complexities of getting older. Chief amongst these are writers such as Paul Bailey, Muriel Spark, V. S. Pritchett, Alice Munro, J M Coetzee, John Updike, Phillip Roth, and Penelope Lively. Bailey and Lively in particular, have written about older people from very early in their writing careers, and what is interesting is that neither set out deliberately to write from an aged perspective, but rather from an imaginative one that encompassed a particular aspect of being alive and human. Curiously it was the influence of three novelists, John Updike, Brian Moore and William Trevor that inspired Bailey to write his first novel, *At the Jerusalem* (1967), when he was just thirty years old. Bailey cites Trevor's, *The Old Boys* (1964), John Updike's, *The Poorhouse Fair* (1959), and Brian Moore's, *The Lonely Passion of Miss Judith Hearne* (1955) as being the key motivators in writing about the elderly (Bailey 2011, p. 5).²⁷

²⁷ Paul Bailey writes a very interesting article in *The Guardian* regarding his reasons for writing about a group of elderly women in a nursing home (*The Guardian* 2011).

Old Age

Old age is something that Trevor has explored from the beginning of his writing career:

When I first began to write, I wrote about the elderly, because I was not old. I really wanted to find out what it felt like to walk across a room when you were eighty-three, and where it hurt, and everything else. ('The Shadows of William Trevor', *The New Yorker* 1992, p. 45)

These comments make explicit his ethical aspirations to enter imaginatively the lives of characters and their circumstances, far removed from his own life. His inclusion of elderly people in his narratives continues right across his *oeuvre*, and his insightful rendering of the fictional experiences of both his ageing male and female characters is remarkable when one considers that Trevor was in his early thirties when he first began to write about the elderly. His desire to write about the elderly responds implicitly to de Beauvoir's imperative 'to recognise ourselves in this old man or in that old woman' (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 5). This final chapter will explore and investigate his fictional representation of the lives of several of his elderly female characters, both in his short fiction and in a selection of his novels, and will be interspersed throughout with de Beauvoir's thoughts on ageing. While some critics have mentioned Trevor's writing on old age in passing, this chapter offers the first in-depth analysis of his elderly female characters, and in doing so it will seek to negate the stereotypical portrayal of old age with its under-representation of credible, true to life fictional characters.²⁸ This in-depth exposition of the lives of his elderly female characters will add another dimension to the argument that Trevor, in his portrayal of women, produces an ethical response in his readers.

²⁸ Dolores MacKenna refers to Trevor's inclusion of elderly people across his fiction: 'the wisdom of old age and its vulnerability are themes which Trevor explores in greater depth in his subsequent work....' (MacKenna 1999, p. 65). Gregory Schirmer states that Trevor 'has written extensively about love and marriage....and some of his best work has to do with women and the elderly from various strata of society' (Schirmer 1990, p. 2).

The main reason for choosing these texts is that they each possess an elderly female character who is worthy of an in-depth analysis and who will reveal the depth of Trevor's engagement with the experience of old age. This chapter will begin by looking at one of Trevor's earliest novels, *The Old Boys* (1964). Just as the novel *Elizabeth Alone* inaugurated and revealed Trevor's aspiration to write about the female perspective, so too does this novel divulge his desire to write about the elderly. Following on from his exposition of the chief female character in the all-male setting of *The Old Boys*, a consideration of some of his elderly characters in his English fiction, will be undertaken, from Mrs Orpen in *Elizabeth Alone* (1974), Mrs Anstey in *Other People's Worlds* (1980), Miss Efoss in the short story, 'In at the Birth' (*The Day We Got Drunk on Cake and Other Stories* 1967) and Mrs Malby in the short story, 'Broken Homes' (*Lovers of Their Time and Other Stories* 1978). This will be followed by a study of elderly characters from a selection of his Irish fiction: Mrs Rolleston in *The Silence in the Garden* (1988), to Attracta in the short story 'Attracta' (*Lovers of Their Time and Other Stories* 1978), Miss Doheny in the short story, 'The Paradise Lounge' (*Beyond The Pale and Other Stories* 1981), and Mollie in the short story, 'At Olivehill' (*Cheating At Canasta* 2007).²⁹

An examination of each of these narratives will reveal Trevor's careful attention to different facets of ageing in his elderly female characters. It will be argued that each of these characters offers a particular perspective on the lived reality of their old age that takes into account their differing economic circumstances; the antecedent factors that shaped them in the preceding decades of their lives, both historically and socially; and their singular responses to their corporeality. The division of these works under the headings of nationality is not to say that there are any structural, ethical or thematic differences between the works set in the two countries. Trevor's Anglo-Irish heritage and his long-term domicile in the UK,

²⁹ The choice of texts was predicated on attention to elderly female characters and resulted in the circumventing of three of Trevor's short stories collections that preceded the publication of *Cheating at Canasta* in 2007.

indicate that there is little of the national stereotype to be found in his work.³⁰ The division of texts into English and Irish ones denotes that for Trevor, old age is a global concern and has consequences for the human condition that transcend national borders.

Many of the themes discussed at the beginning of this thesis are returned to again in this chapter: themes that comprise Trevor's core concerns about how individuals relate to each other; about difficulties within marriage; about the impact of the past on the choices that individuals make; about the inequalities in society; and about the danger of oppression and how it may lead to the objectification of others. These enduring themes merge with the particularities distinctive to how the individual experiences the passing of time in his or her life. Drawing on de Beauvoir's thoughts on the value of literature and its ability to present the complexity, ambiguity and mult sidedness of existence, this chapter will argue that Trevor's representation of elderly females involves addressing all three of these distinctive qualities. An initial contemplation of her intense engagement with the topic of old age will get this chapter underway.

From the beginning of her writing career, both in her fiction and her non-fiction, de Beauvoir concerned herself with the question of human finitude. In her third novel, *All Men are Mortal*, published in 1946, her fictional protagonist, Fosca, cheats death and attains immortality, but finds that his infinitude immobilises him. Though motivated by a desire to save the world, and believing that man's time span on earth is too limited to provide a plan to save humanity, the reality of his immortality ensures that this idealistic desire is absurd. Due to the fantastical nature of the novel, Fosca becomes a time traveller, and is able to observe his many generations-removed grandson, Armand, who is grounded in his finitude. Armand comprehends his world through the concrete possibilities of the here and now, and challenges

³⁰ Richard Tillinghast offers an interesting perspective on how Trevor is associated with the term 'Anglo-Irish' and how this can be misleading and argues that his 'Irish characters and situations have never excluded the Catholic Irish, so he is by no means 'Anglo-Irish' in the way that Bowen was' and that his 'keen eye illuminates the lives of the Irish, the Anglo-Irish, and also the English' (Tillinghast 2008, pp. 125-139).

the incongruity of immortality. De Beauvoir's explicit conviction about the materiality of the real world is asserted and declared in this novel. It also clearly reveals the beginning of her enduring preoccupation with our relationship to time. Observing at first hand the demise of her mother, she chronicled the last year of her life with compassion and acute intelligence in *A Very Easy Death* (1964). Six years later, in 1970, she published *The Coming of Age*, a book that explores the biological, psychological and sociological factors around the question of the elderly, in order to understand their marginalisation. This six-hundred-and-fifty page tome offers a searing analysis, spanning a thousand years, that explores a variety of nations and cultures, and that seeks to interrogate the reasons behind the relegation of the elderly.

De Beauvoir begins *The Coming of Age* with a brief discussion of the absence of societal discussion of old age, and of the general denial even amongst the elderly themselves that old age is a factual occurrence in every being's life:

Great numbers of people, particularly old people, told me, kindly or angrily but always at great length and again, that old age simply did not exist! Society looks upon old age as a kind of shameful secret that it is unseemly to mention. (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 1)

As she did in *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir employs the concept of the Other, a term that she equated with being a woman, and that is now applied to both male and female people aged between sixty and sixty-five. Her views on how society perceives the elderly are incisive and clear-cut when she points to the ambivalent attitudes towards them. This ambivalence decrees that the natural advancement of time is, as such, never defined, unlike the stages of adolescence and adulthood (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 2). She notes the enduring political rights and duties the individual retains throughout his life, but also points to the fact that while 'civil law makes not the slightest difference between a man of forty and one of a hundred', this contrasts with the imposition of economic parsimony once one reaches the age of sixty-five (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 3). For de Beauvoir, this belittling of older people economically is

indicative of their otherness: 'when their economic status is decided upon, society appears to think that they belong to an entirely different species' (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 3). She is scornful of governments who espouse the belief that the elderly are a burden on the active population and deplores their short-sightedness 'as though they were not insuring their own future by seeing to it that the aged are taken care of' (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 3).

Though written over forty-five years ago, this belief that the elderly are a burden is even more prevalent in society today. In her book, *Out of Time: The Pleasures and Perils of Ageing*, Lynne Segal applies the term 'generational warfare' to describe an underlying antipathy by society towards the elderly (Segal 2013, p. 2). She calls attention to a series of negative incidents in both newspaper articles and in the media at large, that results in 'repeated scapegoating of the older generation, now mockingly labelled the "Baby Boomers", as responsible for all the woes of young people' (Segal 2013, p. 39). Segal recognises de Beauvoir's pioneering work that examined the conundrum that age presents when she writes:

Turning to my first guide into the territory of old age, no one depicted the contradictions of ageing more sharply than that intrepid feminist avatar, Simone de Beauvoir. (Segal 2013, p. 9)

De Beauvoir's intense engagement with the question of ageing preceded by decades the establishment of modern gerontology as a new academic discipline. She argued that 'old age can only be understood as a whole; it is not solely biological but also a cultural fact' (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 13). She perceived that culture and cultural norms define our notion of age, and thus, it is culture that defines the lived experience and perception of old age. De Beauvoir sets out to examine old age from two perspectives:

Every human situation can be viewed from without – seen from the point of view of an outsider – or from within....for the outsider, the aged man is the object of certain knowledge: the aged man himself experiences his condition at first hand – he has an immediate, living comprehension of it. In the second I shall do my best to describe the way

in which the aged man inwardly apprehends his relationship with his body, with time and with the outside world. (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 10)

This is enormously relevant to understanding how Trevor writes about the aged, and indeed the correlation between her theory and his imaginative inhabiting of the worlds of these elderly characters is remarkable.

I will argue that Trevor writes stories that reveal the aged person both from without and within, and this will become apparent in the in-depth analysis of the various female characters in a selection of his fiction. Crucial to de Beauvoir's quest to define old age is the belief that:

both today and throughout history, the class-struggle governs the manner in which old age takes hold of a man: there is a great gulf between the aged slave and the aged patrician, between the wretchedly pensioned ex-worker and an Onassis. (de Beauvoir 1970, p. 10)

For her, the perception of how the aged are viewed is fundamentally allied to their social context. This truism is clearly comprehended by Trevor in his portrayal of the lived reality of the different fictional lives that he narrates.

In her Preface, de Beauvoir acknowledges the challenge that ageing presents to contemporary society. She points out that ageing is not merely a biological fact but also a fundamental cultural fact. Old age as a subject for de Beauvoir is quintessentially ambiguous, which is the enduring *leitmotif* she employed for defining the subjective self. That each person is a mixture of their own individuated existence, yet is completely reliant on finding meaning in the midst of other existants, is never more apparent than in the context of the physical evidence of ageing. Ursula Tidd's understanding of de Beauvoir's observations on the contradictions of old age, and the individual's reluctance to embrace them, lie in the fact that: 'the experience of ageing is a troubling ambiguity, characterised by "doubling", in which the old person experiences him or herself as both subject and object' (Tidd 2003, p. 111). The observable signs of ageing spontaneously proclaim difference. However, the

problem arises for de Beauvoir when the aged are viewed, collectively, as Other. She takes issue with the platitude 'so long as you feel young, you are young', and believes that this shows a complete misunderstanding of the complex truth of old age:

for the outsider it is a dialectic relationship between my being as he defines it objectively and the awareness of myself that I acquire by means of him. Within me is the Other – that is to say the person I am for the outsider – who is old: and that Other is myself....the words 'a sixty-year-old' interpret the same fact for everybody. They correspond to biological phenomena that may be detected by examination. (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 284)

De Beauvoir revealingly highlights the identification crisis that happens at the threshold of old age and argues that this identification is always from an outside perspective: 'whether we like it or not, in the end we submit to the outsider's point of view' (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 290). This external identification, however, may be at odds with one's own subjective experience of ageing. Ageing then is, in a sense, a unique phenomenon, but one that has garnered negative connotations when contrasted with the other stages of life such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Though fully accepting the occurrence of physical decline as concomitant with ageing, de Beauvoir refuses to accept the insidious demotion of aged individuals. She reflects on the individual's apprehension of the finitude of his future:

A limited future and a frozen past: such is the situation that the elderly have to face up to. All their plans have either been carried out or abandoned, and their life has closed in about itself; nothing requires their presence; they no longer have anything whatsoever to do. (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 378)

De Beauvoir is always cognisant of the diversity of experiences that relate to the subject of old age. Tidd summarises de Beauvoir's analysis of old age as being an 'interaction of physiological, psychological, familial, economic, historical, socio-cultural and geographical variables' (Tidd 2003, p. 112).

A strong ethical imperative emerges in *The Coming of Age* that sees de Beauvoir challenging society's 'othering', along with the demand that every senior citizen be treated with respect without regard to his or her social and economic function. This imperative is emulated, albeit in a very different *milieu*, in Trevor's fictional accounts of the lives of his elderly female characters. Observing the divergent fictional situations of his characters and their corresponding axioms in the theoretical context de Beauvoir's thinking will offer interesting insights into the portrayal of ageing by this discerning and insightful writer.

The Old Boys

Although primarily concerned with an all-male cast of characters, Trevor's first novel, *The Old Boys* (1965), contains a surprisingly provocative and erudite insight into the life of a character called Mrs Jaraby, the elderly wife of Mr Jaraby, who is seeking to become President of his Old Boy's Association. This novel is essentially a dark comedy that charts the lives of a group of elderly men who were all once at the same school, and who now sit on the committee of the Old Boys Association. Mr Jaraby has every expectation of being elected as the next president, but Nox, once Jaraby's fag, has ancient reasons, stemming from his past, for wishing to thwart him. The narrative offers an insight into the realities of the lives of several of these elderly men and it is in this novel, officially recognised as his first novel, which highlights the beginnings of his distinctive narrative techniques, techniques that Trevor employs with great success throughout his *oeuvre*.

His narrative approach facilitates and consolidates his remarkable comprehension of the physical limitations of this group of men, but their experiences are not relevant to this

chapter.³¹ It is the marriage of the Jarabys that is of interest here and despite the novel's comic rendering of their conversations, a disturbing portrayal of disconnection and bitterness within a marriage emerges. That Trevor as a young writer comprehends this toxic environment and is able to articulate this, is indicative of his writer's imagination to probe the mind-set of an embittered elderly couple, and to reveal compassionately the inequitable position of Mrs Jaraby.

The character of Mr Jaraby is glimpsed very early on in the novel through the consciousness of Nox who, it emerges, had been dreadfully bullied by Jaraby, and who is now determined to reveal some unpalatable instance in Mr Jaraby's life that will prevent him becoming president. Nox's memories of Mr Jaraby offer a chilling account of the cruelty that he inflicted on younger boys when he was head boy. That Mrs Jaraby has endured forty years of marriage to this objectionable man has, it seems, finally shattered her ability to tolerate anymore of her husband's dictates. She is the first of many female characters throughout Trevor's fiction who have endured longstanding unhappy marriages. Their toxic relationship is rendered in short, sharp ripostes, back and forth, that gradually get more and more vicious. Mrs Jaraby seems to have arrived at a point in her life where she is determined to thwart almost everything her husband says and thinks. Trevor's narrator begins by describing her physical appearance:

Mrs Jaraby was a thin, angular woman, very tall and of a faded prettiness. She possessed no philosophy of life and considered her use in the world to be slight. She had grown sharp through living for forty years with her husband. With another man, she often thought, she might well have run to fat. (Trevor 1964, p. 13)

Her life, up to this point, has obviously been one of compliance. During an argument concerning Mr Jaraby's cat, Monmouth, who is detested by Mrs Jaraby, and who, she

³¹ All the male characters offer ample material for a study on elderly men and how, in the final years of their lives, are essentially similar to how they were as schoolboys. In particular, the characters of Mr Turtle and General Sanctuary offer particular appeal.

suggests the zoo might be interested in acquiring because, in her opinion, 'Monmouth is not the usual domestic thing', generates a caustic response from Mr Jaraby: 'I fear for your sanity. You are a stupid woman and recently you have developed this insolence. Most of what you say makes little sense' (Trevor 1964, p. 14).³² Despite this and numerous other putdowns, Mrs Jaraby is determined to reinstate their only child, a son called Basil, back into the family home.

Basil's story is recounted fragmentally throughout the novel beginning with his behavioural difficulties at school, and culminating with conjectures about his paedophilia, a disorder about which his parents are oblivious. As far as his parents are concerned, Basil Jaraby has a history of petty criminal activity that is recalled by Mr Jaraby when challenged by Mrs Jaraby about the repudiation of his son. When she asks: 'What has he ever done? You speak of your son as though he had taken charge of a gas chamber', he replies: 'He has left hotels with bills unpaid; he has borrowed indiscriminately from strangers; passed cheques that were worthless. How many times have I had to pay double the amount to quieten creditors?' (Trevor 1964, p. 133). This seems to suggest that neither of them have any real idea of the more odious characteristics of their son.

It seems that Mr Jaraby has virtually disowned Basil, and his reasons for doing this have their roots in Basil's failure to live up to his father's expectations concerning his performance at his old Alma Mater. Basil is now forty years old in the novel, and has been absent from the family home for the previous fifteen years. Mr Jaraby tries to come to terms with the reasons for his wife's obstinacy and his thoughts reflect his deep-seated masculine prejudices:

³² The naming of Mr Jaraby's cat after the Duke of Monmouth (1649-1685), the illegitimate son of Charles 11, suggests an initial prediction of greatness but, like the Duke's unseemly demise, Monmouth the cat, fails to survive the power struggle between Mr and Mrs Jaraby. James Scott, duke of Monmouth. 2016. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Retrieved 17 May, 2016, from <http://www.britannica.com/biography/James-Scott-duke-of-Monmouth>.

They had married when they were quite young. Then she had been more humble, coming from a family in which humility in children and honour shown to parents were golden rules. It was only quite recently that the humility had worn away; only recently that she had ceased to please and ceased to make allowances. She went her own way now, angering him as frequently as she could: by purchasing Australian food, which he forbade in the house because he had a prejudice against that country. (Trevor 1964, p. 74)

Here Trevor powerfully justifies Mrs Jaraby's rebelliousness with the exposition of her husband's biases and distortions. It seems old age has given Mrs Jaraby the freedom to liberate herself finally from past constraints: it is a period when she can finally transcend the facticity of her oppressive marriage.

The depths of his patriarchal delusions culminate in his attempt to get his wife declared mentally ill. Trevor skilfully touches on the subject of mental illness, and exposes the matter of fact way it is brought into play by her husband to denigrate Mrs Jaraby's rebelliousness. Mr Jaraby's attitude to his wife's attempts to have her own voice heard, and his equating of this with mental illness, is reminiscent of a patriarchal discourse that perpetuated the dominance of men and the subordination of women.³³ Trevor intriguingly creates scenarios of great ambiguity concerning the mental stability of both of these characters and though hilariously evoked, their stilted verbosity is both venomous and believable. That Mrs Jaraby wishes to have their son Basil living with them again despite the evidence that emerges of his dangerous proclivities, and her murdering of Mr Jaraby's beloved cat, Monmouth, suggest the toll that a lifetime of oppressive othering has inflicted on her. Mr Jaraby's love for the cat is contrasted with Mrs Jaraby's hatred of it and is symbolic of their estrangement. In an intense argument, in which Mrs Jaraby disparages her husband's aspirations of being elected President of The Old Boy's Association, he calls her a 'decrepit old fool', and here her response is unprecedented:

³³ In her book, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*, Elaine Showalter offers an insight into the cultural mind-set that sought to identify and contain female rebellion with accusations of derangement.

Mrs Jaraby stood up. Her long angular figure towered over him and he felt for a moment a spark of fear, for her thin hands were like claws and her eyes, he thought, had the light of a vulture. (Trevor 1964, p. 140)

A real sense of the unexpectedness of Mr Jaraby's fear around his wife is evoked here through his perception of her as a clawed and vulture-like creature. Vultures are renowned for their patience and as scavengers, and they often represent resourcefulness. They are symbolic of death and suggest the possibility that Mr Jaraby intuits the probability that Mrs Jaraby will outlive him.

Trevor's employment of bird imagery here correlates to a long history of its significance in drama, fiction and poetry.³⁴ Feminist studies have noted the birdcage metaphor as being symbolic of women's historical entrapment, and Trevor's twofold inclusion of birds, factually and symbolically, offers interesting perspectives. The cat is normally a symbol of domestic harmony, but in this instance, Monmouth is perceived almost as a wild animal and his essential masculinity is symbolic of the gender war that is being enacted in this family. Mr Jaraby's newly experienced fear of his wife may well indicate her exodus from the 'birdcage' that symbolised her marriage. The breeding of budgerigars by their dysfunctional son Basil lends a wider range of meaning to his estrangement from his family, and suggests that these birds are now his emotional anchor. Basil's anticipated return to the Jaraby household is threatened by the presence of Monmouth who will almost certainly kill his budgerigars, and this reality sees mother and son placed in opposition with Mr Jaraby. Her belated anger witnesses her resolve to change the facticity of her life when she says:

'I am not a fool', Mrs Jaraby said. 'I am a sad, pathetic woman whose life has dropped into shreds. Basil shall remain in this house. He shall cram it from top to bottom with

³⁴ *Birds in Literature* (1994) by Leonard Lutwack. He argues that 'familiarity and transcendence have given bird a wider range of meaning and symbol in literature than any other animal. The resemblance of their activities to common patterns of human family behaviour – "the feathered parallel", in Robert Browning's phrase – make them exceptionally suitable for anthropomorphic imagery that links man to the common forms of nature. The element of myster in their behaviour, on the other hand, furnished material for symbolical meanings of a supernatural order' (p. xii).

budgerigars and parrots and owls and eagles. He shall turn your garden into a tank for fish and train lizards to sing before your eyes. If he wishes for penguins and hyenas they shall be welcome. And the swift gazelle and the ostrich and the kangaroo. No matter what we do or what we now consent to we shall owe him a debt as we die. His birth was a greater sin than ever he in his wretchedness committed. I take my share of it. You, even at this advanced time, have not the confidence to take yours'. (Trevor 1964, p. 140)

Despite the exaggerated and overdramatic dialogue, there is a real desire on Mrs Jaraby's part to atone for the wrong she may have perpetrated. When she says: 'I take my share of it', it is not clear what she means, but it may be the acknowledgement of her failure to confront her husband's treatment of their son. Unlike other female characters discussed in Chapter Four such as Mrs Digby-Hunter, Mrs Angusthorpe and Mrs Vansittart, who all recognise their complicity in their dysfunctional marriages, Mrs Jaraby is prepared to welcome her son back home, and to somehow try to repair the family's disconnect.

In sharp contrast, Mr Jaraby's authoritarian and tyrannical personality is slowly and subtly drawn to expose the damage that both shaped his own childhood and his adult life, and it is implied that he perpetuated this damage in the life of his son. His complete and utter inability to acknowledge any wrongdoing is compellingly depicted by Trevor, and Mr Jaraby becomes the prototype for numerous other short-sighted, domineering and ultimately failed men throughout his fiction. The novel ends with the arrest of Basil, and the ensuing scandal leads to Mr Jaraby's unsuccessful attempt to become President of the Old Boys Association. Trevor leaves the final words of the novel to Mrs Jaraby:

'We are left to continue as we have continued; as the days fall by, to lose our faith in the advent of an early coffin....do not be downcast; we must not mourn. Has hell begun, is that it? Well, then, I must extend a welcome from my unimportant corner of that same place. We are together again, Mr Jaraby; this is an occasion for celebration, and you must to the talking for a while. Cast gloom aside, and let us see how best to make the gesture. Come now, how shall we prove we are not dead?' (Trevor 1964, pp. 190-1)

This bleak and cheerless reflection on their future is reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's novel, *The Unnameable* (1953), with its final lines: 'I must go on'. 'I can't go on'. 'I'll go on' (Beckett 1953, p. 86).³⁵ Essentially, this acrimonious and conflict-ridden story has at its heart an account of one woman finally transcending her limitations, and finding a determination to go on living with her now disempowered husband.

The Jaraby's terrible marriage echoes de Beauvoir's findings on marriage and how, in this instance, old age does not bestow peace or serenity in the final stages of life. De Beauvoir in her chapter, 'The Discovery and Assumption of Old Age', cites an independent study of old age that was carried out in Paris:

They concluded that couples find ageing more difficult than solitary individuals, because the emotional relations between husband and wife worsen and grow more complex with age. The decline in their health together with the loneliness resulting from retirement and from their children's leaving home means that each lives almost exclusively through the other. Their permanent state of dissatisfaction makes them insist upon always being together....but living together brings them more torment than happiness. (de Beauvoir 1996, pp. 351-2)

In the chapter, 'Time, Activity, History', de Beauvoir reflects on the influence of the past on the elderly, and how each individual chooses to his own perception of it. Mr Jaraby's skewed perception of his past is apprehended by his wife: 'we do not talk much about the School unless my husband is here. He returns to those days. They were his most successful' (Trevor 1964, pp. 144-5). De Beauvoir encapsulates this when she writes:

To be sure, it may happen that a man looks back at his past with pride – above all if he finds the present in which he is living and the future that he foresees disappointing. If this is so, he will prop himself up with his memories: he will turn them into a defence or even a

³⁵ See also Gregory Schirmer's, *William Trevor: The Writer and His Work* (1999), for a corresponding view on the Beckettian similarities and also for discussion on Trevor's narrative techniques.

weapon. But these intermittent outbursts of pride do not imply a whole-hearted enjoyment of that which was. (de Beauvoir 1996, pp. 368-9)

Mrs Jaraby has no such resources to turn to in order to enrich her present. Yet in so many ways, she has gained insights from her past but unfortunately, her decision to rehabilitate Basil comes to nothing. Mrs Jaraby's character offers an exposition of a life where complicity was conceived as a condition of an embodied self whose abilities, and therefore options, have been formed, to a great degree, by the social circumstances that pertained at the time. Trevor was keenly aware of this and is more than prepared to expose it. In contrast to this portrait of old age, the next section of this chapter will explore very different representations of elderly female lives.

Elizabeth Alone, 'Other People's Worlds' and 'In at the Birth'

As previously stated, de Beauvoir was cognisant of the importance of one's social and economic status when exploring the subject of ageing. Always attentive to the complex interconnection of economic, social, physiological, historical, cultural, and subjective factors in each individual's life, she is nevertheless adamant that one's personal response to ageing is a powerful indicator of how well an elderly person will live out their lives. Yet in her analysis of old age the realisation of a finite future is quite often viewed negatively:

A limited future and a frozen past: such is the situation that the elderly have to face up to. In many instances it paralyses them. All their plans have either been carried out or abandoned, and their life has closed in about itself; nothing requires their presence; they no longer have anything whatsoever to do. (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 378)

Her principal challenge to this belief lies in the conviction that only continued activity on behalf of new goals will give our lives meaning, and that even greater than good health is the need for the ageing person to have his or her world inhabited by projects:

There is only one solution if old age is not to be an absurd parody of our former life, and that it to go on pursuing ends that give our existence a meaning – devotion to individuals, to groups or to causes, social, political, intellectual or creative work. (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 540)

This philosophical solution to the problem of ageism does not, of course, pertain to all older people and de Beauvoir gives many examples of elderly lives lived in fulfilment. Trevor correlates these experiences in fictional characters such as Mrs Orpen in *Elizabeth Alone*, Mrs Anstey in *Other People's Worlds* and Miss Efoss in the surreal short story, 'In at the Birth'.

Both Mrs Orpen and Mrs Anstey have been encountered previously in Chapters Two and Four. Both were seen as positive examples of supportive mothers to their daughters. Looking at them now through the lens of old age, however, they offer equally positive representations of living out their final years with equanimity and dignity. In the novel, *Elizabeth Alone*, Mrs Orpen has chosen to live out the final years of her life in a nursing home, and is happy with her decision. She is eighty-two years old and has, it seems, come to terms with her own failed marriage and the failed marriage of her only child, Elizabeth. She has been a lifelong reader of literature, and her engagement with it is fondly recalled by Elizabeth. Though not given any central role in the narrative, Trevor nevertheless subtly advances Mrs Orpen's pragmatic valuing and acceptance of her old age:

It was grand to see, Mrs Orpen read in the Sunset Home, how the wind awoke, and bent the trees, and drove the rain before it like a cloud of smoke. Her eyes closed. The book slipped from her hands on to the bedclothes, and then slipped to the floor. It was pleasant being old, she thought in a brief moment of wakefulness just before she slept. It was pleasant to read *Bleak House*, to murmur over the cook's good gravy, to move from room to room without responsibility. Lucky, she thought, to end like this. Lucky to be finished with all the rest. (Trevor 1973, p. 191)

In a novel where the resilience of the four key female characters and their responses to their individual circumstances is central, Trevor nevertheless creates a minor character at the end

of her life whose resilience has no doubt been hard won, but who has nevertheless achieved emotional equilibrium, a much prized, existential achievement. One could, of course, argue that Mrs Orpen's upper middle-class background is a factor in her equability, and that her financial situation allowed her to (voluntarily) choose a good nursing-home. When de Beauvoir's intones that 'the class-struggle governs the manner in which old age takes hold of a man: there is a great gulf between the aged slave and the aged patrician' (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 10), Mrs Orpen's material circumstances enact her point. Yet old age is much more than this, and Trevor repeatedly offers an optimistic and positive response that is both inspirational and aspirational. Trevor's decision to dwell on this elderly woman's perspective amidst an otherwise very eventful narrative is indicative of his ethical intentions to portray the female experience across the generations and classes.

The character of Mrs Anstey in *Other People's Worlds*, offers another insightful representation of a well-rounded elderly woman. As previously encountered in Chapter Four, Mrs Anstey is the mother of Julia Ferndale, the main protagonist in this novel, and unlike Mrs Orpen, has a somewhat understated but yet significant role throughout the novel. Her relationship with her only child Julia is one of affection and mutual respect. Though physically compromised, Mrs Anstey lives out her life in what are, for her, somewhat reduced material circumstances. Early in the novel, Mrs Anstey's introspections allow us a condensed history of her life, where 'sixty years ago she had been brought to Anstey's Mill as a bride, to a house she had adored, different in every way from the one she lived in now' (Trevor 1980, p. 18).

She recalls the events that led to her departure from Anstey Mill, and how, even all these years later, she finds herself vaguely bothered by the events that led to this situation:

In 1954 Mrs Anstey's husband – whose portrait hung above the mantelpiece of the drawing-room in Swan House – had succumbed to bankruptcy due to his own mismanagement, and had died a year later. Not wishing to think about any of that, Mrs

Anstey tried to read but found that the past she had stirred still nagged a little: her husband had had stubborn ideas about the Anstey family, she herself should have firmly spoken out, the bankruptcy had been ridiculous and avoidable. Her role in the end had been to hold grimly on to her jewellery, refusing to admit to the bailiffs that it even existed. (Trevor 1980, p. 19)

Her restrained recalling of these undoubtedly traumatic events is given a deeper gravitas when she acknowledges the correctness of her decision regarding her jewellery:

She was proud that she had done so, that what she had salvaged was now occasionally worn by Julia and would eventually pass to Henrietta and Katherine. There weren't many pieces for them to share, and they weren't even particularly valuable, but at least they constituted something: almost all that remained of a marriage and a house, and the life that had gone with both. (Trevor 1980, p. 19)

Trevor's reticence is never more apparent than when so little is revealed, and yet a whole lifetime is apprehended, and where the reader is asked to conceive of a series of events that called for resilience and stoicism. A strong sense of the innate idealism and optimism that pervades a young person's psychical self, and the gradual loss of this through life's vicissitudes, is revealed in the character of Mrs Anstey, but it is her interiorising of her past that is significant:

That they [the jewellery] were also a reminder of a family down on its luck didn't matter, for time had created its perspective and the nagging always ceased when she thought her way through the changing circumstances. She had done so now and picking up her book again, she read with more success. (Trevor 1980, p. 19)

A lifelong reader of literature, Mrs Anstey's favourite author is George Eliot and again, as with Mrs Orpen, the implication by Trevor seems to suggest that reading literature may be an element in their tolerant and non-judgemental views of life.

She is well aware that older people are viewed negatively and when the cleaning lady adds the over familiar 'dear' to her name, she reacts tersely:

It was patronising to be addressed familiarly just because she'd reached a certain age. It was patronising to be called a senior citizen or an O.A.P., as if elderliness implied a desire for regimentation, the individual's spirit dead already. (Trevor 1980, p. 27)

Though married into an English minority, aristocratic Catholic family, Mrs Anstey chooses not to practise: 'it was only that the whole notion of prayer, and of the son of a universal God made man in a miraculous way, seemed more than a little absurd' (Trevor 1980, p. 25). Trevor presents this eighty-one year old woman as a person who has a strong sense of self, and who is able to absorb and process the difficulties and tribulations that beset her and her daughter. Mrs Anstey is the first person to sense that Francis Tyte, the man her daughter Julia intends to marry, may be an imposter. His appearance in their lives sets in motion a chain of events that change their lives irrevocably.

Mrs Anstey has been a witness all her life to her daughter Julia's propensity to attract 'lame ducks', and to see her being taken advantage of by some of these people. This is an underlying source of worry for her, but she refuses to make an issue out of it. When Francis absconds from his marriage on the first day of his honeymoon in Italy, Mrs Anstey copes stoically with the enormous emotional consequences. She remains free from bitterness and blame and continues to be steadfast and calm. Her extreme strength of character emerges when she initiates a conversation about Joy, the hapless 12 year-old daughter of Francis, who is now all alone in the world. Arising from Mrs Anstey's innocuous musing: "'My dear", her mother said, "I often wonder about that child, you know"', a life-changing event occurs in their comfortable lives when Julia decided to give Joy an opportunity to live a stable life with her and her mother in their home (Trevor 1980, p. 240).

Mrs Anstey's willingness and ability to embrace the unknown entity of a very disturbed teenager from a completely different social class, is nothing less than extraordinary. The depiction of this elderly woman by Trevor brings to mind de Beauvoir's thoughts on how

the elderly can empower themselves despite their physical limitations and the narrowing of their horizons when she says:

One's life has value so long as one attributes value to the life of others, by means of love, friendship, indignation, compassion. When this is so, then there are still valid reasons for activity or speech. (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 541)

Mrs Anstey epitomises a morally aware person, and in giving his readers such a representation of a well-lived old age, Trevor is once again reiterating his confidence in the capabilities of his female characters to make the world a better place. The next story offers a completely different context from the traditional, familial situations encountered so far.

Trevor's short story, 'In at the Birth', while offering an account of another elderly female character, also takes the reader into the genre of magic realism and, as Joseph O'Connor writes: 'in tales such as "In at the Birth", the ghost of Poe can be felt. Trevor is capable of seriously scaring you' (O'Connor 2002, p. 5). Andrew Parkin similarly considers this story to belong to Trevor's malign vision, and notes that its strangenesses are:

markers of his own imagination, the writer's imagination that cannot escape the obligation to make excursions into the imagined world in order to increase our awareness of the nature of reality itself. (Parker 2001, p. 86)

The story begins with an almost fairy-tale quality to it 'once upon a time there lived in a remote London suburb an elderly lady called Miss Efoss' (Trevor 1983, p. 58). Through his inimitable narrative technique, he combines the omniscient narrator's voice with the thoughts of Miss Efoss. This results in a short, sharp delineation of her past life, but also offers an acute insight into her attitude to life as an elderly person:

Miss Efoss was a spry person, and for as long as she could control the issue she was determined to remain so. She attended the cinema and the theatre with regularity; she read at length; and she preferred the company of men and women forty years her junior. Once a year she visited Athens and always on such visits she wondered why she had never settled

in Greece: now, she felt, it was rather too late to make a change; in any case she enjoyed London. (Trevor 1983, p. 58)

A brief, but in-depth account of her past life is recalled:

In her lifetime, nothing had passed Miss Efoss by. She had loved and been loved. She had once, even, given birth to a child. For a year or two she had known the ups and downs of early family life, although the actual legality of marriage had somehow been overlooked. Miss Efoss's baby died during a sharp attack of pneumonia; and shortly afterwards the child's father packed a suitcase one night. He said good-bye quite kindly to Miss Efoss, but she never saw him again. (Trevor 1983, p. 58)

Trevor creates in Miss Efoss a rather unusual female fictional character for the time in which he was writing. This story was published in 1967, so it is safe to assume that Trevor has created a character who was born at the end of the 19th century. That she was an educated woman, as well as being an unconventional one, is clear, and these qualities have apparently served her well. Trevor endows Miss Efoss with the ability to accept fully her past:

In retrospect, Miss Efoss considered that she had run the gamut of human emotions. She settled down to the lively superficiality of the everyday existence she had mapped for herself. She was quite content with it. (Trevor 1983, p. 58)

After this highly realistic exposition of Miss Efoss' life, the story takes a somewhat surprising turn that will eventually end in a rather curious way. As has been discussed already, she has babysat the 'child' of the Dutts, but then discovers that they have no children. On the next occasion that Miss Efoss babysits, she decides to enter the forbidden room and when she does, she encounters, not a child, but an elderly man asleep in a large cot. She is naturally frightened by this discovery, and decides to go to Devon to her niece for two weeks where: 'She gathered her strength in the country and returned to London at the end of a fortnight feeling refreshed and rational' (Trevor 1983, p. 64).

On her return to London she writes to the Dutts telling them of her decision not to babysit for them any longer. A year later she encounters the Dutts sitting in a park mourning the death of 'Mickey', the child/elderly man that Miss Efoss had babysat. Miss Efoss is sympathetic to their loss, but feels her sympathy is inadequate to the revelation by Mr Dutt that: 'They have all died, Miss Efoss', Mr Dutt said. 'One by one they have all died' (Trevor 1983, p. 65). When Mr Dutt continues to bemoan their childlessness and declares that 'the human frame is not built to carry such misfortunes', Miss Efoss responds acerbically: 'it is callous of me to say so, Mr Dutt, but the human frame is pretty resilient. It does not seem so at times like this I know, but you will find it is so in retrospect' (Trevor 1983, p. 65). After this encounter Miss Efoss's life begins to change:

Miss Efoss began to feel older. She walked with a stick; she found the cinema tired her eyes; she read less and discovered that she was bored by the effort of sustaining long conversations. She accepted each change quite philosophically, pleased that she could do so. She found too that there were compensations; she enjoyed, more and more, thinking about the past. Quite vividly, she re-lived the part she wished to re-live. Unlike life itself, it was pleasant to be able to pick and choose. (Trevor 1983, p. 65)

Sometime later, quite unexpectedly, Miss Efoss encounters Mr Dutt, who happily informs her that Beryl, his wife, is expecting a baby and he thanks her for her previous kind words of wisdom and how they benefitted them in their sorrow. Mr Dutt briefly philosophises on the human need to give comfort and love and that 'there is a streak of simple generosity that we do not easily understand' (Trevor 1983, p. 66). Miss Efoss responds enigmatically when she says:

'The older I become, Mr Dutt, the more I realise that one understands very little. I believe one is meant not to understand. The best things are complex and mysterious. And must remain so'. (Trevor 1983, p. 66)

Shortly after this encounter Miss Efoss, of her own volition, begins to sell her belongings and when this immense task is completed, she terminates her tenancy. She arrives at the Dutts' house and is graciously welcomed by them. Mrs Dutt informs her that her baby is due that night and the story ends with Miss Efoss heading upstairs to the bedroom she seems to know instinctively is awaiting her.

In this analysis, one has to circumvent the strangeness of the story and instead concentrate on the wonderful aspects of Trevor's characterisation of this elderly lady. It is a story replete with existential themes as it is fundamentally a story about death. The story's *denouement* heralds the end of the life of Miss Efoss, but the story's essential essence is about a woman who has been much more interested in living than in contemplating the end of her life. Miss Efoss embraces de Beauvoir's concept of freedom, a freedom that allowed her to develop a strong sense of her own identity. Like Mrs Orpen and Mrs Anstey, Miss Efoss possesses what de Beauvoir calls, a *character ethics*, an ethics that recognises *perseverance* as a virtue because it contributes to, and enhances, their freedom as individuals. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, de Beauvoir argues that:

The characteristic feature of all ethics is to consider human life as a game that can be won or lost and to teach man the means of winning' and her belief that: Popular opinion is quite right in admiring a man who, having been ruined or having suffered an accident, knows how to gain the upper hand, that is, renew his engagement in the world, thereby strongly asserting the independence of freedom in relation to thing. (de Beauvoir 1948, p. 29)

Trevor's proffering of these women's individual challenges, and their surpassing of them during their lives, is testament to their personal integrity. Miss Efoss's perseverance and resilience, and her continued interest in the larger world, connect to de Beauvoir's belief in the importance of an engagement with outside interests.

This short story pre-dates the novel, *Elizabeth Alone*, by several years, yet Trevor replicates, almost word for word, these women's acquiescence to their old age, and their

empowerment as a result of this. Miss Efoss's acceptance and appreciation of being old: 'there were compensations; she enjoyed, more and more and more, thinking about the past....unlike life itself, it was pleasant to be able to pick and choose' (Trevor 1967, p. 65), is mirrored in Mrs Orpen's appreciation of her present circumstances: 'it was pleasant being old, she thought in a brief moment of wakefulness' (Trevor 1973, p. 191). That Trevor gave a voice to the possibility of serenity in old age corresponds to de Beauvoir's belief that writing unveils truths in the world. In her essay, 'What Can Literature Do?', de Beauvoir reflects on the value of a literary work and what defines it as a literary work if that 'the writer is capable of manifesting and imposing a truth', and that is why 'all literary works are essentially a search' for truth (Simons and Timmermann 2011, pp. 201-2). Trevor's characterisations embody his own internal search for the truth of old age and these insightful representations of it reflect 'the truth of his experience for himself and for the reader' about which de Beauvoir speaks (Simons and Timmermann 2011, p. 203).

Towards the end of the story, Trevor offers an intensely philosophical reflection to his reader that interrogates the absurdity that has developed around possessions and the human desire for them. As Miss Efoss finalises the disposal of her possessions, she considers that:

She was sorry to see the familiar objects go, yet she knew that to be sentimental for them; and she knew that the fresh associations they would in time take on would be, in the long run, as false as hers. (Trevor 1983, p. 67)

'In at the Birth' presents the reader with a quandary: what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe? Maybe Trevor is somehow demonstrating the extent to which the fragile distinction between reality and fantasy could actually metamorphose into a possible solution that would provide a two-tiered solution to the question of childlessness and elderly people in need of looking after. The final story from his English fiction, 'Broken Homes', will reveal the life of another elderly lady, living alone,

but with a very different set of circumstances, and illustrating once more the diversity of Trevor's stories.

'Broken Homes'

'Broken Homes' was chosen as one of the short stories that make up *That Glimpse of Truth: The 100 Finest Short Stories Ever Written* (2014), and edited by David Miller. Mrs Malby is an eighty-seven year old widow, living on her own, over a greengrocer's shop that she and her deceased husband once owned, in Fulham, London. This story is set in the early to mid-nineteen seventies. As with his previous elderly female characters, there is much to admire in Trevor's representation of Mrs Malby. However, what differentiates this character from the previous ones is how he chillingly captures the negative connotations of Mrs Malby's embodiment of old age that are intrinsically social.³⁶ Unlike the female characters discussed in the previous section, she is decidedly working-class, and is singularly alone in the world. It seems Western culture has decided that being elderly is equated with limitation, and this belief impinges on the ontological freedom of the older person, the fundamental freedom that is a characteristic of existence.

Mrs Malby is well aware of the social dishonouring of elderly people and her anxiety around other people's perception of her is palpable. The visit by the unnamed teacher to her home in order to set up an event that, theoretically, may benefit both Mrs Malby and a number of children from disadvantaged homes, is narrated mainly through free indirect discourse that reveals her own private beliefs and truths, as well as rendering the problematic and challenging sequence of events that she has to negotiate in order for her to be taken seriously. This teacher has decided that a number of these children will call on Mrs Malby

³⁶ In philosophical terms embodiment refers to a person's physical presence in the world. Elderly people's embodiment identifies them through their physical being. De Beauvoir argues that 'the words 'a sixty-year-old' interpret the same fact for everybody' (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 284).

and will paint her kitchen on the following Tuesday. Mrs Malby very politely asks him if he may have come to the wrong house. The rapidity of his reply is caustic: “Wrong? You’re Mrs Malby, aren’t you?” He raised his voice, “You’re Mrs Malby, love?” (Trevor 1983, p. 476). Her response to this verbal bullying is a polite and courageous remonstrance: ‘Oh Yes, it’s just that my kitchen isn’t really in need of decoration’ (Trevor 1983, p. 476). He responds in a very condescending manner and accuses her of misunderstanding: ‘He said, quite softly, what she’d dreaded he might say: that she hadn’t understood’ (Trevor 1983, p. 476).

As this dialogue reveals, his sociological excursus of the benefits of his proposal is reiterated in a profoundly supercilious manner and serves to undermine her assertion of the pointlessness of painting a kitchen that does not need painting: ‘It was just, she explained, that she was thinking of the cost of decorating a kitchen which didn’t need decorating. Paint and brushes were expensive, she pointed out’ (Trevor 1983, 476). Oblivious to her protests, he confirms that the painting will be carried out on Tuesday morning. Alone with her thoughts, Mrs Malby reflects on the reality of being the age she is:

In her elderliness Mrs Malby liked to be sure of such details. You had to work quite hard sometimes at eighty-seven, straining to hear, concentrating carefully in order to be sure of things. You had to make it clear you understood because people often imagined you didn’t. Communication was what it was called nowadays, rather than conversation. (Trevor 1972, p. 476)

We learn that her husband, George, died five years previously, and that her two sons had been killed, in the same month, June 1942, during World War Two. Despite these terrible bereavements, in particular the tragedy of losing her two sons, Mrs Malby is content with her lot:

The tragedy in her life – the death of her sons – was no longer a nightmare, and the time that passed since her husband's death had allowed her to come to terms with being on her own. (Trevor 1983, p. 477)

She has achieved equanimity in her life and does not fear death. This equanimity has been realised without the buttress of religious faith and is instead a consequence of her keen intelligence:

She did not believe she would be re-united with her sons and her husband....no loving omnipotent God, in Mrs Malby's view, doled out punishments and reward: human conscience, the last survivor did that. (Trevor 1983, 476)

Unlike Mrs Orpen in *Elizabeth Alone*, Mrs Malby cannot bear the idea of living in a nursing-home: 'the thought of a communal existence, surrounded by other elderly people, with sing-songs and card-games, was anathema to her' (Trevor 1983, p. 477). Her independent spirit aspires to remain living out the rest of her life in the home she loves:

She loved the house above the greengrocer's shop. She loved walking down the stairs and out on to the street, nodding at the Kings as she went by the shop, buying birdseed and eggs and fire-lighters, and fresh bread from Len Skipps, a man of sixty-two whom she'd remembered being born. (Trevor 1983, pp. 477-8)

The poignancy of her daily routine, and its independence, is superbly captured here and Trevor subtly elevates the importance of habit in her elderliness.

His astute rendering of the benefits of habit to this elderly lady finds its correlation in de Beauvoir's discussion on habits of the elderly. While not denying the negative aspect of habit in which the older person 'acquires the habit of having habits', and becomes entrenched in them to the point of total inflexibility around them, de Beauvoir nevertheless points to the value of habit and the importance of it:

On the other hand, when a habit is thoroughly integrated into a man's life, it makes it richer, for habit has a kind of poetry....more than anyone, the old person values the poetry of habit:

by merging past, present and future it removes him from his enemy time, and it provides him with that eternity which he no longer finds in the present moment....habit thus provides the old person with a kind of ontological security. Because of habit he knows who he is. It protects him from his generalised anxieties by assuring him that tomorrow will be a repetition of today. (de Beauvoir 1996, pp. 468-9)

Her determination for her life to continue in this way is undercut by a nascent fear:

The dread of having to leave Agnes Street ordered her life. With all her visitors she was careful, constantly on the look-out for signs in their eyes which might mean they were diagnosing her as senile. It was for this reason that she listened so intently to all that was said to her, that she concentrated, determined to let nothing slip by. It was for this reason that she smiled and endeavoured to appear agreeable and co-operative at all times. She was well aware that it wasn't going to be up to her to state that she was senile, or to argue that she wasn't, when the moment came. (Trevor 1983, p. 478)

The visit of the teacher from the Tite³⁷ Comprehensive School has created a real dilemma for her and a real sense of disquiet pervades this story. When Tuesday morning heralds the arrival of the four teenagers, what follows is an aberration of a so-called social experiment that goes badly wrong. The kitchen that did not need painting is painted in a messy and chaotic fashion against the wishes of Mrs Malby, who asks them only to wash-down the kitchen cupboards. When she decided to retreat to her bedroom in order to escape their presence, she finds two of them in her bed. Opening the kitchen door, she finds that they have now succeeded in ruining, not just the cupboards, but also the ceiling and floor. This prompts her to leave her home and ask for help from the couple, the Kings, who now run the greengrocer's business.

They duly help her get in contact with the teacher from the school and a rehabilitative salvage of the damage is carried out. Unfortunately, this compromise does nothing to reassure Mrs Malby. She is made to feel ungrateful when she points out again that she never wanted it painted but then decides that:

³⁷ The homophonic connection with Francis Tyte may just be coincidental but is worth noting at the same time.

She knew she mustn't speak. She'd known she mustn't when the Kings had been there; she knew she mustn't now. She might have reminded the Kings that she'd chosen the original colours in the kitchen herself. She might have complained to the man as he rubbed at her carpets that the carpets would never be the same again. She watched him, not saying anything, not wishing to be regarded as a nuisance. The Kings would have considered her a nuisance too, agreeing to let children into her kitchen to paint it and then making a fuss. If she became a nuisance the teacher and the Kings would drift on to the same side, and the Reverend Bush would somehow be on that side also, and Miss Tingle, and even Mrs Grove and Mrs Halbert. They would agree among themselves that what had happened had to do with her elderliness, with her not understanding that children who brought paint into a kitchen were naturally going to use it. (Trevor 1972, p. 486)

The ontological security that Mrs Malby has achieved in her everyday life prior to this event has now been jeopardised, and again Trevor's evocation of this finds resonances in de Beauvoir's thought when she argues that the benefits of habit may be transitory:

But this defence that he erects against the arbitrariness of others and against the perils that fill the world by reason of this arbitrariness is itself in danger, since it depends upon the will of the outside world. (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 469)

As the teacher gets up to leave with the blandishment 'All's well that ends well....Thanks for your co-operation, Mrs Malby' (Trevor 1983, p. 487), Mrs Malby at this moment thinks of her two sons, Eric and Roy, and how she used to imagine their bodies after they had been killed. She feels compelled to tell the teacher about the happy family they had once had, 'a contented family in Agnes Street, until the war came and smashed everything to pieces. Nothing had been the same afterwards', but finds herself unable to as she is fearful of being thought senile (Trevor 1983, p. 487).

She feels intensely the relevance of the fact of her sons being killed is somehow connected to the different broken lives of these four children, but again this thought is not expressed. She ends up apologising to the teacher for not having made herself clear to the children but finds that: 'he nodded vaguely, not listening to her. He was trying to make the

world a better place, he said. For kids like that, Mrs Malby. Victims of broken homes' (Trevor 1972, p. 487). Trevor pithily captures the disconnection that exists generationally. In doing so, he inadvertently captures so much of what de Beauvoir comprehends regarding the elderly in society.

Though Mrs Malby presents a very positive model of an elderly person, one who is really not a burden on anybody, nevertheless she embodies society's patronising and demeaning attitude to the elderly. It is all too apparent in this story that she is the Other to all those that she encounters. Her objectification begins at the very beginning of the story when the teacher first meets with her and tells her that 'you really are splendid for eighty-seven', but then proceeds throughout the rest of the story to disaffirm her 'splendidness' (Trevor 1983, p. 475). The very fact of her having lived to a great age has created an ambivalence regarding her very right to exist as an autonomous person. This connects intuitively to de Beauvoir's critique of the social marginalisation of old age, and how the biological reality of the aged body is synthesised with historical, social and psychological factors (Card 2003, pp. 289-290). De Beauvoir believed that:

one cannot separate the physiological condition from its mediation by the othering of the aged and that one's living of the negative connotations of one's own embodiment leads to a less positive embodiment, an experience of one's embodiment as that which 'cannot'. (Card 2003, p. 290)

Trevor encapsulates the sociological and psychological impasses in the quiet desperation that manifests itself in the low-key existential misery experienced by Mrs Malby.

The most heartrending aspect to this story is the fact that she can never really say what she means or feels, because of the fear of being misunderstood, or of being subjected to indifference on the part of the other. Trevor in this story offers a searing deconstruction of so-called 'do-gooders', with their desire to help the underprivileged, but one that has serious defects because it fails to engage with ethical considerations such as respect for the elderly, or

respect for property. This travesty of mutual benefit is imposed by people like the schoolteacher who has clearly only paid lip service to the notion of helping these children from broken homes who in the end cannot possibly have benefitted from this experiment. Schirmer suggests that the title of the story, 'Broken Homes', 'refers to more than the domestic environments of the teenagers or to what the teenagers to Mrs Malby's peaceful life' (Schirmer 1990, p. 109). He argues that by juxtaposing Mrs Malby's memories of their deaths [her sons] with her helpless witnessing of the adolescent's destruction of her flat, 'the story suggests a strong, causal connection between the specific past of the war and the specific present represented by the adolescents' (Schirmer 1990, p. 109). This story offers an intense debate on the nature of ageing and Trevor's innate ability to capture what de Beauvoir's calls the two perspectives of old age:

Every human situation can be viewed from without – seen from the point of view of an outsider – or from within....for the outsider, the aged man is the object of certain knowledge: the aged man himself experiences his condition at first hand – he has an immediate, living comprehension of it. In the second I shall do my best to describe the way in which the aged man inwardly apprehends his relationship with his body, with time and with the outside world. (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 10)

Before looking at some of his fiction that has an Irish setting, it may be necessary at this stage to restate the criteria that presaged this chapter; the impetus was to explore Trevor's characterisation of elderly female characters. That three narratives comprise a sentient historical and political aspect has, of course, a relevance, but as some critics have pointed out, the historical and political are never key motivators in his writing.³⁸ Trevor himself contends that he is:

³⁸ The short story 'The Paradise Lounge' does not have a specific political milieu but it does have a particular historical aspect in its exposition of the changing societal norms.

always trying to get rid of the big reason – a political one, for instance – but sometimes it's difficult. Human reasons, for me, are more interesting than political ones....I have no messages or anything like that. (Stout 1989, p. 6)

Schirmer, in looking at Trevor's Irish fiction, believes that he transcends the political and historical by focusing instead on 'the weight of circumstances' that these milieus convey (Schirmer 1990, p. 124).

The Silence in the Garden

In this novel, published in 1988, Trevor employs the genre of the Big House Novel to explore the cost to the Rolleston family of an event in the past, and how it has influenced their lives. The Rolleston family inhabit an island demesne, Carriglas, an Anglo-Irish estate that is now in decline. The novel has a strong historical dimension to it, and Derek Hand in his essay, "‘Bid me strike a match and blow’: *The Silence in the Garden*", describes the novel as 'a masterful engagement with the human consequences of historical action' (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 126). Principally, the story reveals the decline of a once powerful family that is narrated through Sarah Pollexfen's diary entries, now being read in 1971 in the text. She has recently died and had asked that after her death, the diaries be read. There now remains only a woman called Patty, a one-time maid, and Tom, the illegitimate son of the Rolleston's last butler, in the big house. Tom is now the owner of Carriglas, a fact that is symbolic of a whole way of life that has, literally, disintegrated and disappeared. Central to the story and central to this chapter is the fictional representation of Mrs Rolleston, the matriarch of Carriglas, who lived for over seventy years and whose presence throughout the novel is significant.

Historical events play a key role in the life of Mrs Rolleston. In 1931, she is an elderly widow who has taken on the responsibility of her three grandchildren after her only

child, Colonel Rolleston, a widower, was killed in the Great War. The character of Mrs Rolleston is revealed through Sarah and Tom; Sarah's diary entries in combination with a composed, omniscient third-person narrator, recall a series of unsettling and complex historical incidents alongside personal events in the lives of the Rolleston family. Historically, the Rolleston family dated back to Cromwellian times, but later established themselves as an Anglo-Irish family of integrity, which sought to improve the lives of their tenants and who compromised themselves financially in pursuit of this. Following the death of Colonel Rolleston, his children, in defiance of their nanny and grandmother, run wild and participate in a cruel game that will have long-lasting repercussions. Their brutal intimidation of a poor local boy, Cornelius Dowley, is recalled by Mrs Rolleston in one of the diary entries:

My grandchildren hunted a child, Sarah. My grandchildren and your brother. As of right, they hunted. They were the children of Carriglas....One of them drove him on to where another waited. His feet bled on the gorse he ran through....exhausted among the rocks, his fearful tears, the shotgun aimed. (Trevor 1988, pp. 184-5)

Years later during the War of Independence, Dowley, now an adult, determined to take revenge on his tormentors, mistakenly kills the family's butler, Linchy, who is the father of Tom, the illegitimate son of Bridget, a family servant. A short time later, Dowley was murdered by the Black and Tans and became a hero for the Nationalist cause. His mother's response to her son's death was to take her own life. These terrible events precipitate the demise of the continuity of this once powerful land-owning family. The three Rollestons and their cousin Hugh are, at some level, irreparably damaged. This is never explicitly stated in

the text, but each of their lives is impacted by this event and there is an unspoken agreement that the Rolleston name will become extinct.³⁹

This novel conforms to many of the big house conventions of the genre, and Trevor is clearly responding to his predecessor, Elizabeth Bowen and her novel, *The Last September*, when he explores the cost of the Anglo-Irish experience. Indeed, in this novel the story of Mrs Rolleston's life might be read as a palimpsest through which Irish history from the seventeenth hundreds up until the time of her death in the nineteen thirties, might be read. Vera Kreilkamp asserts that Trevor, writing after Elizabeth Bowen: 'perceives how a seemingly permanent domestic space, appearing fortress-like in its physical solidity, first deludes and then fails to sustain Anglo-Irish children'. (Foster 2006, p. 73) Kreilkamp further argues that 'Elizabeth Bowen's modernist sensibility continues the shift toward a psychological reading of character', and perceives Bowen's psychological explorations apparent in other Irish novelists such as:

Molly Keane's, Jennifer Johnson's and William Trevor's explorations of the celibate or homoerotic life choices of characters who respond to the failures of heterosexual love, marriage and parenthood in the big house. (Foster 2006, p. 73)

Schirmer discusses Bowen's 'commitment to exploring human character with psychological authenticity and Chekhovian subtlety', and argues that Trevor emulates this in his writing (Schirmer 1990, p. 86).

Early in the novel, the narration of principal event that shaped the rest of Mrs Rolleston's life is evocative of Bowen's writing style in the depiction of the awfulness of the news in a telegram that she is about to receive:

³⁹ *William Trevor Revaluations* eds. Paul Delaney and Michael Parker (2013) offers an in-depth analysis of *The Silence in the Garden* written by Derek Hand (pp. 125-133). Also see Dolores MacKenna's *William Trevor: The Writer and His Work* (1999), Chapter Four: 'We are the stuff of history' (pp. 107-132).

'This isn't true', she'd whispered before she read the message, knowing what the message contained. In the drawing-room she had sat with the piece of paper between her fingers, and then had torn it in half and then into quarters and then into tiny scraps. A chaffinch had flown through the open windows and she had watched it flying about the room. (Trevor 1988, p. 84)

Again, as in the analysis of Mrs Jaraby, the imagery of the trapped bird may well be representative of the impending entrapment that awaits Mrs Rolleston. Trevor's characterisation of Mrs Rolleston as the chronicler of the family's history is shrewdly crafted. Approaching the end of her life allows for a sagacious recalling of the events that shaped the lives of her grandchildren, and her request to Sarah to record the truth of what happened is indicative of her integrity.

Throughout the novel, the perceptions of Tom, the young illegitimate boy, testify to the warmth and kindness of Mrs Rolleston: 'he liked her the best of them, Tom thought' (Trevor 1988, p. 150). Her intuitive response to the maid Bridget's pregnancy has been compassionate and pragmatic. Years later, when recalling the death of Tom's father, a guest at Carriglass, Lady Rossboyne, on being made aware that Tom was the son of Linchy asks:

'That child's father? So Linchy was a married man?' 'He wasn't. But that didn't stop him taking our parlourmaid into his bed'. 'Good Lord! 'Brigid's come up in the world since then. She cooked the fish you're eating'. 'You mean you kept her on?' 'She would hardly have cooked the fish if we hadn't'. 'Kings of England have come into the world so' Mrs Rolleston said. 'Kings of Ireland too, no doubt'. (Trevor 1988, p. 122)

Just as he did in the novel, *Elizabeth Alone*, Trevor's sense of justice and ethics emerges again on the subject of illegitimacy through Mrs Rolleston's sharp and incisive riposte. Throughout his young life, Tom has slowly learned to process the implications of his illegitimacy on the wider community, as the depth of the prejudices towards an innocent child is revealed.

Mrs Rolleston's kindness and interest in him is depicted as an antidote to this, and her championing of him serves to transcend the bitterness of past events, and their facticity. Now at the end of her life, she wishes to fulfil the obligation she had always assumed towards Tom 'only the gate-lodge child mattered now, she said. Only he was important, since he was their inheritor' (Trevor 1988, p. 173). Shortly before her death, she calls for Tom to visit her:

'Tom', she said again, and to his astonishment she held her arms out, wanting him to come closer to her. She repeated his name, and then he felt the wrinkled skin of her face on his cheek, and her lips kissing him, as softly as warmly as his mother did when she said goodnight. Her hands held on to his shoulders, her grasp tightened around him. 'Say goodbye to me, Tom', she whispered, but he didn't say anything, fearing that if he did she'd let him go. (Trevor 1988, p. 181)

This emotive scene is in sharp contrast to her private feelings towards her three grandchildren. Her desire to settle her legal affairs is met with resistance from them, but her determination to proceed is based on her long observations of their characters: 'she did not trust Villana in this matter. She did not trust John James. And Lionel would give in to pressure. The picnic was over, she thought; twilight was giving way to darkness' (Trevor 1988, p. 171). Her unwavering desire to compensate Tom for the loss of his father is put in place, and her children have to accept that it is Tom who will inherit. Her grandchildren's inability to move forward in their lives, and their reluctance to approve their grandmother's wish to offset the damage they caused in their childhood, leads her to realise that:

She did not know if she loved her grandchildren any more, and rather thought she did not, and had not for many years. She felt she had been damaged and considered that unfair, since she was, after all, only their grandmother, not their mother. (Trevor 1988, p. 170)

These terribly sad contemplations encompass so much sacrifice around the limitations that were externally imposed on her life, and their disclosure intensify the breadth of Trevor's compassionate identification of the restrictions that women like Mrs Rolleston endured; yet

there is also the sense of a moral obligation undertaken by a woman who would never have considered doing otherwise. This ambiguity is effortlessly apprehended throughout the novel. However much circumstances beyond her control dominated Mrs Rolleston's life, Trevor is nevertheless responsive to the emotional impact the past has for the elderly, and aware of an ability, possibly sanctioned by old age, to attempt to transcend these limitations.

Mrs Rolleston's preoccupation with the past is indicative of de Beauvoir's belief that 'age changes our relationship with time: as the years go by our future shortens, while our past grows heavier' (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 361). Her innate ethical self is now imbued with a compulsion towards a retrospective form of justice, and her impending finitude urges her towards a genuine ethical action. Mrs Rolleston's obsessive thoughts about the event that caused such tragedy lead her to believe that 'the past has no belongings. The past does not obligingly absorb what is not wanted' (Trevor 1988, p. 185). MacKenna considers that Trevor demonstrates 'the truth of her observation', and that 'responsibility must be taken for wrongs perpetrated but historical events cannot be used to justify further oppression' (MacKenna 1999, p. 132). Once again, Trevor has created a female character and endowed her with an enviable moral breadth, a breadth that never wavers throughout her life, and one that intensifies at the approach of her ninetieth birthday. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews views Mrs Rolleston's viewpoint as being 'the most important because she is the truth-teller, the one who insists on the need to confront and accept responsibility for the events of the past' (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 66). The next story looks to the life of an unmarried Protestant teacher and provides a historical perspective that encompasses a Protestant and a Catholic perspective as well as offering another aspect of truth telling.

'Attracta'

The background to the short story 'Attracta' is intensely political, and encompasses a dual time period, being set between the War of Independence in 1920s Ireland, and the political turbulence of Belfast in the nineteen seventies. Attracta, now a sixty-one year old Protestant spinster schoolteacher in County Cork, becomes distressed on reading a newspaper story about Penelope Vade, and the terrible tragedy that befell her in the Belfast of the early seventies. Penelope Vade was married to a British Army Officer who, whilst stationed in Belfast, is killed on duty, and his severed head mailed to his wife. Her decision to relocate to Belfast and join the Women's Peace Movement as a gesture of defiance towards his killers, is however, met with even more horror, when she is raped by the gang who murdered her husband. She later commits suicide, and it is this dreadful story that instigates an existential crisis in the life of Attracta.

Up until this point in her life, Attracta has lived contentedly all her life in a provincial town in Cork. She continued to teach at the small Protestant school, and expected to retire when she reached the age of seventy as 'her predecessor in the schoolroom, Mr Ayrie, hadn't retired until he was over seventy. She had always assumed she'd emulate him in that' (Trevor 1981, p. 592). Her identification with Penelope Vale's tragedy is predicated on her own childhood tragedy, when her parents were mistakenly killed instead of the intended Black and Tans. Their murder was carried out by a local couple of Irish Nationalists, Mr Devereux, an Anglo-Irish Protestant and his Catholic servant, Geraldine Carey. Mr Purce, a Protestant resident of the town took it upon himself to tell Attracta the story of her parent's murder when she was eleven years old. Though cognisant of the fact that her aunt had raised her since she was three years old, she had been unaware of the circumstances surrounding their absence in her life. Mr Purce's bitter, inappropriate recounting of their murder to the young Attracta does not have the desired effect for which he had hoped. For as long as she

can remember, Attracta has only experienced kindness and genuine concern for her well-being from Mr Devereux and Geraldine Carey. Her inability to connect their once violent wrong-doings with the people she came to know and love, is beautifully captured and apprehended through the responses of her Aunt Emmeline and the Protestant Archdeacon Flower, when they tried to explain to Attracta how bitterness and hatred had distorted Mr Purce's perceptions.

The inclusion of a line from Shakespeare's Sonnet 119 '*What potions have I drunk of Syren tears*' sublimely captures the chaos of the past and its presentation to the mind of child (Trevor 1983, p. 600).⁴⁰ Trevor subtly introduces the concept of regret and atonement that occurred in the years preceding the War of Independence, and also how political idealism and its attendant errors can be assuaged through personal acts of transformation and restitution. Though a casualty to a violent historical episode, Attracta's life has not been defined by it, and her lack of self-victimisation is noteworthy – she has not allowed her facticity to determine or attenuate her life.

The story of Penelope Vale's life has no such reference points, and has no redemptive outcome. Attracta's empathy with this story sees her desperately trying to comprehend it, but at the end of the text, her efforts to talk about this tragedy are rebuffed. In looking back at her teaching career, she wonders should she have spoken more about her own past and the impact of historical events upon it. Her decision to talk to her pupils about the story of Penelope Vale and connect it to her own personal story is met with apathy and perplexity. When she offers the children a debate on whether Penelope Vale should have come to Belfast and joined the Women's Peace Movement: 'was she right to go to the city where her husband had been murdered, to show its other victims that her spirit has not been wholly crushed?', her question is met with silence (Trevor 1983, p. 604). When she acknowledges the positive

⁴⁰ See Katherine Duncan-Jones: "'Syren Teares': Enchantment or Infection in Shakespeare's Sonnet 119'. Duncan-Jones, K. (1997). *The Review of English Studies*, 48 (189), 56–60. <http://www.jstor.org/libraryproxy.mic.ul.ie/stable/519131>, accessed 18 January, 2016.

outcome of her own story, she offers the children a meditative look at what might happen some day in the future to the perpetrators of Penelope Vale's tragedy:

There was silence. Feet were shuffled in the schoolroom. No one spoke. 'If only she had known'. Attracta said, 'that there was still a faith she might have had, that God does not forever withhold his mercy. Will those same men who exacted that vengeance on her one day keep bees and budgerigars? Will they serve in shops, and be kind to the blind and the deaf? Will they garden in the evenings and be good fathers?' (Trevor 1983, p. 604)

Just as the teenagers in the short story, 'Broken Homes', were desensitised to Mrs Malbay's sufferings, so these children's inability to respond to her deliberations are similarly narrated:

All she'd meant to tell them was never to despair. All she had meant to do was to prepare them for a future that looked grim. She had been happy, she said again. The conversation of Mr Purce had been full of the truth but it hadn't made sense because the years had turned the truth around. (Trevor 1983, p. 604)

The truth of her own experience is brilliantly juxtaposed with the omniscient narrator's voice that relates the children's responses to Attracta's story:

To the children she appeared to be talking now to herself. She was old, a few of them silently considered; that was it. She didn't appear to understand that almost every day there was the kind of vengeance she spoke of reported on the television. Bloodshed was wholesale, girls were tarred and left for dead, children no older than they were armed with guns. (Trevor 1983, p. 604)

This chilling account of the nonchalance surrounding the violence in Northern Ireland and its regular exposure on television is nevertheless alleviated, to some degree, by Attracta when she realises that 'the gleam of hope she'd offered had been too slight to be of use, irrelevant in the horror they took for granted, as part of life' (Trevor 1983, p. 604). Her belief that:

it mattered when monsters did not remain monsters for ever. It wasn't much to put against the last bleak moments of Penelope Vade, but it was something for all that. She wished she could have made her point. (Trevor 1983, p. 605)

This exemplifies a potent existentialist belief in the power of change. The children's perceived failure to identify with their teacher's story does not refute the truth of her reflections. Their failure merely represents an existential reality that connects to their youthful incomprehension of the reality of their elderly schoolteacher's past, alongside the possibility of their individual infinite future. It also represents society's insidious belittling of old age that has arisen from a raft of historical and cultural prejudices towards the aged.

This may well be the reason that shortly after this episode, Attracta finds herself being pensioned off:

She smiled, thinking of her sixteen docile charges. They had chattered to their parents, and the parents had been shocked to hear that they'd been told of a man decapitated and a girl raped seven times. School was not for that, they had angrily protested to the clergyman, and he had had no option but to agree. (Trevor 1983, p. 605)

The incongruity of the parent's high moral ground, contrasted with the reality of their children's desensitised attitude to violence, is ironically depicted by Trevor. The truths of the real life events that Attracta tries to explore and expose are lost on these children but the deeply felt sincerity and empathy she feels towards a woman she has never met is exposed. So too is her gratitude for the life she has had and her capacity to apprehend and appreciate the powerful connotations of forgiveness and repentance and the affirmative consequences they had in her growing up. Trevor offers a potent example of life transcending historical calamities, and his according of an elderly female voice to facilitate a dialogue around the ethical implications of the suffering of others, and the importance of the individual's response to it, extends, once more, the argument of this thesis. Like Mrs Jaraby and Mrs Rolleston, Attracta's elderliness offers her a freedom to exist authentically. The next short story chosen deals with the life of an elderly spinster and debates once again the social and historical contexts that surround a person's life.

'The Paradise Lounge'

This short story is narrated mainly through the perspectives of two female characters. The narrative begins with the exposition of the thoughts of a woman called Beatrice, interspersed with authorial observations. This facilitates both an objective and a subjective perspective on another other woman who happens to be in the same bar as her:

On her high stool by the bar the old woman was as still as a statue. Perhaps her face is expressionless, Beatrice thought, because in repose it does not betray the extent of her years. The face itself was lavishly made up, eyes and mouth, rouge softening the wrinkles, a dusting of perfumed powder. The chin was held more than a little high, at an angle that tightened the loops of flesh beneath it. Grey hair was short beneath a black cloche hat that suggested a fashion of the past, as did the tight black skirt and black velvet coat. Eighty she'd be, Beatrice deduced, or eighty-two or three. (Trevor 1983, p. 791)

This narrative technique is further supplemented with direct speech between Beatrice and her male companion, which enables an account of their situation to emerge. They are both married, but not to each other, and they have come to a hotel to end their affair. Only Beatrice's private thoughts are revealed, and they are mainly of regret and dismay that their once exciting love affair has lost all of its allure and passion, and that a mutual decision has been reached to end it. The focus of the story moves to the elderly lady, Miss Doheny, and the authorial voice again merges with her thoughts to reveal both her factual and subjective history:

Miss Doheny her name was: though beautiful once, she had never married. Every Saturday evening she met the Meldrums in the Paradise Lounge, where they spent a few hours going through the week that had passed, exchanging gossip and commenting on the world. (Trevor 1983, p. 793)

Miss Doheny liked to arrive some time before the Meldrums 'having the extra couple of drinks that, for her, were always necessary' (Trevor 1983, p. 793).

There is a suggestion that Miss Doheny is somewhat apprehensive about her weekly encounters with the Meldrums, but the reason for this will not become apparent until the end of the narrative. Her awareness of the young couple, and the extramarital dimension of their relationship, initiates an embittered contemplation of how women's lives have changed in Ireland since she herself was the age this woman is now:

In 1933 adultery and divorce and light brown motor-cars had belonged more in America and England, read about and alien to what already was being called the Irish way of life. 'Catholic Ireland', Father Horan used to say. 'Decent Catholic Ireland'. (Trevor 1983, p. 793)

She recalls the priest's very specific diatribe against 'a certain class of woman', and how they 'constitute an abhorrence' (Trevor 1983, p. 794) She wonders what he would have thought of the couple in the bar 'if he'd walked into the Paradise Lounge in Keegan's Railway Hotel to discover two adulterers' (Trevor 1983, p. 794) Conversely, she wonders what he would have thought of her use of cosmetics and the fact 'that she had become more painted as the years piled up', and of her weekly visits to the hotel on a Saturday night (Trevor 1983, p. 794). She rationalises and justifies these behaviours and equates them with her weekly Sunday visit to mass, and muses on how 'neither rain nor cold prevented her from making the journey to the Church of the Immaculate Conception or to the hotel, and illness did not often afflict her' (Trevor 1983, p. 794).

Trevor neatly illustrates her survival strategies and their meaningfulness in her life. Miss Doheny's routines create value in her life, and even her application of cosmetics may be viewed as a buttress in her survival. Trevor's attention to the artifice of make-up in the short story, 'Lunch in Winter', discussed in Chapter 3, finds echoes in this narrative, but whereas the character of Nancy Simpson retreats into defensive but crippling illusions, Miss Doheny

has deliberately denied her love for Mr Meldrum.⁴¹ Though both women make use of cosmetics, there is a subtle distinction in their reasons for doing so. At the outset, her friendship with the Meldrums is innocuously drawn:

In the Paradise Lounge she felt particularly at home. In spring and summer the Meldrums brought plants for her, or bunches of chives or parsley, sometimes flowers. Not because she wished to balance the gesture with one of her own but because it simply pleased her to do so she brought for them a pot of jam if she had just made some, or pieces of shortbread. (Trevor 1983, p. 794)

On this particular night in the hotel Miss Doheny, now in the company of the Meldrums, finds herself dwelling on the freedom this other young woman has, a freedom that has allowed her to have an affair:

How I envy her! Miss Doheny thought. How fortunate she is to find herself in these easy times, not condemned because she loves a man! It seemed right to Miss Doheny that a real love affair was taking place in the Paradise Lounge and that no one questioned it. Francis Keegan knew perfectly well that the couple were not man and wife, the strictures of old Father Horan were as fusty by now as neglected mice droppings. The holiness that had accompanied the birth of a nation had at last begun to shed its first tight skin: liberation, Miss Doheny said to herself, marvelling over the word. (Trevor 1983, p. 795)

This exalted perspective of 'a real love affair' is however sharply undercut by the now inebriated Beatrice who, *in vino veritas*, perceives the truth of Miss Doheny's unspoken love for Mr Meldrum, and proceeds to elevate it above its reality. Her self-pitying sentimentality and maudlin regrets are set against the terrible stasis that comprises the lived reality of Miss Doheny's life.

Trevor's apprehension of an elderly woman's profoundly limited life is movingly drawn:

⁴¹ See Chapter Three, page 133, for a more detailed account of Trevor's thoughts on cosmetics.

Miss Doheny passed through the darkened town, a familiar figure on a Saturday night. It had been the same as always, sitting there, close to him, the smoke drifting from the cigarette that lolled between his fingers. The girl by now would be close in a different way to the man who was somebody else's husband also. As in a film, their clothes would be scattered about the room that had been hired for love, their murmurs would break a silence. Tears ran through Miss Doheny's meticulous make-up, as often they did when she walked away from the Paradise Lounge on a Saturday night. It was difficult sometimes not to weep when she thought about the easy times that had come about in her lifetime, mocking the agony of her stifled love. (Trevor 1983, p. 799)

Trevor creates intense ambiguity in both women's perspectives; while both perspectives have delusional aspects, both characters offer a linear evaluation of a society that experienced enormous changes from the 1930s to the late 1970s, when this story was written.

The story sets out a real debate around the individual's response to limitation and also to liberation; to facticity and transcendence. However, as it is Miss Doheny's characterisation that is of interest here, her particular response to being an octogenarian allows for the narration of yet another insight of an individual existence, responding to what Schirmer calls 'the weight of circumstances', a phrase he takes from Trevor's most famous short story, 'The Ballroom of Romance' (Schirmer 1990, p. 124). Ever sympathetic to his female characters, Trevor in this instance offers a compassionate portrayal of this elderly woman in the context of a particular set of circumstances who, despite her story of repressed love, nevertheless stoically continues living her life and making connections, however constrained these may be. John S Stinson, in his essay, 'Replicas, Foils, and Revelation in Some "Irish" Short Stories of William Trevor', believes that Trevor 'achieves a wealth of implication' in 'his employment of character replicas and foils', and also that his juxtaposing of the elderly Miss Doheny with the thirty-two year old Beatrice, is a deliberate attempt to create ambiguity (Stinson 1985, p. 20).⁴² Yet a modicum of admiration emerges in the reader

⁴² Ambiguity around the younger woman's epiphany, and her idealisation of the integrity of Miss Doheny and Mr Meldrum, puts in to question the validity of it because of her inebriation.

for the resilience and spirit of Miss Doheny that surreptitiously devalues the behaviour of the younger woman. Whatever conclusions may be reached concerning the implications of the changes in sexual morality and its impact on the lives of these two women, Trevor has created yet another female character who, like Mrs Jaraby, somehow finds the strength to 'go on'. The next and final short story is one of Trevor's most recent, and its contemporaneity emphasises his enduring commitment to engage with the complexities of aging women..

'At Olivehill'

In 'At Olivehill', the elderly Mollie, recently widowed, continues to live at Olivehill, now a much-reduced estate that faces economic extinction.⁴³ Though willing to accept the common-sense perspectives of her two sons regarding the future sustainability of the estate, Mollie is privately devastated at the impending loss of the lands that surround the big house. During the final months of her husband's life, she has shielded him from the economic realities that threaten to change their old way of life. Trevor painfully captures her intense love for the life she has lived at Olivehill with her beloved husband and three children. The past has now become more tangible for her, and when her son Tom suggests the land be developed as a golf-course, she responds with a historical account of the family's survival strategies in their efforts to 'keep what was rightfully theirs' (Trevor 2007, p. 118). When he says 'that past is a long way off, Mamma', she answers with 'it's there though', but his rejoinder is incontestable 'so is the future there. And that is ours' (Trevor 2007, p. 119). These lines comprehend entirely the real dichotomies of the generational divide, and articulate the truth for both generations. In fact, this story perfectly realises the dilemmas

⁴³ This short story was published in *Cheating at Canasta* (2007), and for the previous twenty years Ireland witnessed a big increase in the number of golf clubs that were built, many of them being built on former big-house estates.

inherent in the dynamics that constitute familial situations. Luckily, for Mollie her family are considerate to her and treat her with courtesy and respect.

The changing economic circumstances that will change forever the landscape that constituted her life for the previous sixty years will never really be accepted by her, but she reluctantly accedes to them.⁴⁴ Unable and unwilling to reconcile herself to these changes, she literally retreats into the past, and is seemingly happy to do so. She refuses to visually acknowledge the transformation of the land that surrounds the house, and instead withdraws to the drawing-room that became her 'sanctuary', and where:

Memory in its ordinary way summoned harvested fields, and haycocks and autumn hedges, the first of the fuchsia, the last of the wild sweet-pea. It brought the lowing of cattle, old donkeys resting, scampering dogs, and days and places. (Trevor 2007, p. 124)

To sustain her retreat from the reality around her, she instinctively knows what she has to do: 'in the drawing-room she closed imagination down for it was treacherous and without her say-so would take her into the hostile territory' (Trevor 2007, pp. 124-5). Eventually the perimeters of her world shrink wholly to the drawing-room when she chooses to reside there. Her final severance from the outside world is established with the permanent closing of the drawing-room curtains. Though her life is now reduced to this room, there is, nevertheless, a degree of activity that embraces the outside world:

Father Thomas said Mass in the dimly lit room on Saturday evening and sometimes the family came, Angela if she happened to be in the house, Loretta and the children. Kitty Broderick and Kealy came too, Mass at that time of day being convenient for them. (Trevor 2007, p. 125)

At the end of the story, Mollie reflects on all that has happened at Olivehill:

⁴⁴ In his essay, 'The art of the glimpse': *Cheating at Canasta*, in *William Trevor: Revaluations* (2013), Paul Delaney stresses the contemporaneity of Trevor's fiction in his choice of subject matter and how in 'At Olivehill' he 'explores the subject of land development and the commodification of heritage', p. 182.

In the darkened drawing-room, as shielded as James was from the new necessities of survival, Mollie tentatively reflected what she believed he might have reflected himself. In that distant past, misfortune had surely brought confusion, as it had now – and disagreement about how to accept defeat, how best to banish pride and know humility, how best to live restricted lives. And it was surely true that there had been, then too, the anger of frustration; and guilt, and tired despair. (Trevor 2007, p. 127)

These intuitive thoughts do not suggest a passive resignation on her part, but instead indicate a pragmatic acceptance of the situation, but on her own terms. When it is suggested that she take a walk, she instinctively knows that it is only said out of politeness and ‘that she wouldn’t come out from where she belonged, and be a stranger on her own land’ (Trevor 2007, p. 128).

Her almost primeval act of resistance and non-cooperation may be seen as a triumph over the imposition of changing circumstances. Her final thoughts reveal her singular, idiosyncratic way of dealing with her situation:

Nothing changed, she thought when the maid had gone; and after all why should it? Persecution had become an ugly twist of circumstances, more suited to the times. Merciless and unrelenting, what was visited on the family could be borne, as before it had been. In her artificial dark it could be born. (Trevor 2007, p. 128)

One could of course argue that Mollie’s life is severely limited through her unwillingness to embrace change. Yet there is subtle resignation and intelligibility in her summation of the changing circumstances at Olivehill, and Delaney observes that ‘the implication, for Mollie, is that history is repeating itself, as her sons have chosen to sell their birthright for profit and in the interests of survival’ (Delaney and Parker 2013, p. 185). In the chapter, ‘Old Age and Everyday Life’, de Beauvoir looks at various behaviours old people assume, and seeks to understand them. Mollie’s behaviour may well relate to what de Beauvoir has to say about anxiety for the elderly person:

Because of his anxiety, the aged person takes important, far-reaching measures against the attacks of the outside world. He cannot do away with them: but he can reduce his contact with the exterior. (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 47)

Fundamentally, it is an existentialist choice with which Trevor provides his fictional character, and therein lies the strength of his characterisation of this elderly woman. She may have cut herself off from the outside world, but she has deliberately chosen to do this, and this is her own unique survival strategy. Trevor has given full reign to Mollie's integrity and clear-headedness to endure her changing circumstances and to do so with grace and equanimity. In contrast to Mrs Rolleston in *The Silence in the Garden* and her determined engagement with an ethical project, Mollie's project may be enervating; but fundamental to both their stories is their freedom to do as they wish, at this stage of their lives, without the need to justify it.

In choosing deliberately to write about the lives of elderly people, both women and men, across his fiction, Trevor encompasses the complexities of ageing in all its singularity, across societal divides. He depicts characters that are created by their past, by their cultural contexts and by their own responses to the circumstances that have shaped their lives. His depiction of several elderly male characters in *The Old Boys* (1964), and *The Boarding House* (1965), remain Trevor's most intense engagement with the lives of elderly men. As previously mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, stereotyping of the elderly in fiction is not representational of the diversity of individual experiences, and all of Trevor's fictional representation bear testament to this fact. His version of old age is complex, nuanced and individual, with physical degeneration sometimes being accompanied by ethical redemption, albeit often on a very small scale. In the main, Trevor creates elderly female characters as self-respecting, age-aware individuals who do not conform to cultural understandings of age and who instead reveal a hard-won acceptance of life's predicaments and misfortunes.

Conclusion

All of these women, with the exception of Mrs Jaraby, are on their own at the end of their lives. Remarkably none of them dwell on death, their concerns are with living. Probably the most penetrating insights into the lived realities of an elderly woman are found in the story 'Broken Homes'. It captures completely the Othering about which de Beauvoir speaks, and in this short story's uneasy atmosphere, there is an apprehension of a future that will ultimately deny Miss Malby's autonomy. Even in this chapter's most inscrutable story, 'In at the Birth', Miss Efoss finds security in the home of the Dutts, and the implication are that she will live out the rest of her life with them. No such security exists for Mrs Malby and her awareness of this is evident.

Trevor creates intense ambiguity in his characterisation of Mrs Malby, an ambiguity that is fundamental to so many of his elderly female characters. His acute portrayal of her fears and strengths gives serious pause for reflection, and poses some profound questions concerning society's attitudes to the reality of an elderly woman alone in the world. That historical events deprived her of two beloved sons in a war that annihilated their future and inadvertently hers, and Trevor's juxtaposition of this with the contemporary problems of mid-nineteen seventies England, also gives pause for reflection. The disconnect that is glaringly exposed between the children and Mrs Malby, crystallises the objectification of the elderly by society. The children's innate lack of respect towards this elderly woman is indicative of what de Beauvoir's sees as a widespread malaise in society:

A man's ageing and his decline always takes place inside some given society: 'it is intimately related to the character of that society and to the place that the individual in question occupies within it' (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 37)

Trevor in his exposition of the elderly lives of his characters examines the ambivalent perceptions that exist in society, and invites his reader to ponder on the different aspects of this notoriously conflicted stage of life.

De Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age* contributed greatly to a philosophical reflection on ageing. She believed that a combination of both individual and societal resistance to any broader theorisation of age resulted in a lack of consideration of the issue. Her demands for an ethical re-figuration of how old age is perceived are directed squarely at her readers when she says 'I call upon my readers to help me in doing so' (de Beauvoir 1996, p. 7). Over forty years have now passed since de Beauvoir called for this change, and slowly but surely, there is an emerging dialogue that strives to think more imaginatively about ageing. Segal in her book about ageing, *Out of Time*, applauds the pioneers of Age Studies: 'Margaret Morganroth Gullette, Kathleen Woodward, Anne Wyatt-Brown, Barbara Frey Waxman, Sylvia Hennenberg, and Cynthia Rich', alongside books by older feminist authors such as Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinman, Germaine Greer, Carolyn Heilbrun, Jane Miller, May Sarton, and Irma Kurt (Segal 2013, p. xiii). As previously mentioned, the availability of literature by both younger and older writers writing about old age has increased.

Sarah Falcus in an essay entitled, 'Unsettling ageing in Three Novels by Pat Barker', argues that in the field of literary gerontology, literary fiction is now seen 'as part of the cultural discourse around ageing in our society' (Falcus 2011, p. 1). That Trevor is a writer who, from the very beginning of his writing career, included the elderly in his cast of characters and offered restrained yet measured accounts of a variety of lived realities, is noteworthy. He fundamentally understands that old age is different from other stages in life, and that it offers a kind of culmination to life as a whole. His characters demonstrate a tolerance and a capacity for weighing more than one side of a question. His rendering of their reminiscing on their pasts subverts the stereotypical response to reminiscing that

assumes older people are obsessed with the past, and instead offers the notion of late-life reminiscing as a normal form of life review. This evocation of the past facilitates the depth of their experience as societal witnesses to the effects of loss, devastation and aggression in the world. They have lived through wars and are aware of the futility and senselessness of violence. They reveal the confident tenacity of the human spirit, and a subtle sanguinity pervades these narratives.

Having chosen to begin this chapter with Trevor's first venture into the lives of a group of elderly people in *The Old Boys*, it seems appropriate to finish with a suitably affirmative and affirming conversation between two elderly characters in the same novel, Lady Ponders, the wife of the outgoing President of The Old Boys Association, and General Sanctuary, a member of the Association. They start a conversation, quite by chance, at Old Boy's Day, and both get somewhat philosophical about their lives. Trevor's comic and semantic naming is gratifyingly evocative here. Ponders relates to pondering which is exactly what this woman does when she contemplates on old age, and Sanctuary, as a name, denotes a safe haven, a place that may be immune from life's vicissitudes. Lady Ponders' awareness of General Sanctuary's past successes is modestly depreciated by him, when she begins to engage with him on the question of wisdom in old age. His belief that success in life has very little to do with the realities of old age is counteracted by Lady Ponders:

There are compensations in age. For instance, two younger people, man and woman, could not speak as we speak. I could not say to you at any other age – except a more advanced one – that you have elements to be conceited about. You may think, though, that I shouldn't anyway; that I am being a bore'.

'We are neutralized, is that what you mean? I agree, it is a good experience. Flattery between man and woman becomes simply flattery. One can speak one's mind without being misconstrued or without being doubted'.

'When the old meet as strangers, as we do, they are at their best. They may be direct and need not pretend. I must pretend with the Headmaster's wife and she with me. If she were

my age the relationship would be simpler. As it is, I could so easily offend her. How I wish we could cut away all these frills’.

‘The middle-aged are most susceptible, are easily hurt and most in need of reassurance. They are strait-laced in their different ways, serious and intent. They have lost what they have always been taught to value: youth and a vigour for living. They suspect their health, scared to lose it too. The prime of life is a euphemism’.

‘Yet more happens in middle age’.

The General agreed. ‘Everything happens in middle age. One is old and young at the same time. One bids farewell and prepares. One’s children begin the command they later take over completely. It is true for instance that an old man grows to be an infant. He is regarded by a son or by a daughter as he himself once regarded them – as a nuisance, a responsibility, something weak and fragile; something that must be watched and planned for....We are lucky Lady Ponders: it is pleasanter to be over seventy, as it was to be very young. Nothing new will happen to us again. To have everything to come, to have nothing to come – one can cope. (Trevor 1964, pp. 98-9)

These reflections on the journey of life, and on their ability to view the past with detachment, offer an aspirational dimension to readers. Trevor’s astute and intelligent imagining of old age may be seen as an appendage to a larger discourse on the final part of human life, a discourse that will, according to Lynn Segal, ‘acknowledge the actual vicissitudes of old age while also affirming its dignity and, at time, grace or even joyfulness’ (Segal 2013, p. 275).

What is found repeatedly in Trevor’s fiction is his compassion for his fictional elderly female characters, and his profound respect and acknowledgement of their lives. Segal includes Trevor in the final chapter of her book, ‘Affirming Survival’, amongst a number of writers, philosophers, art critics, literary critics, who all have, in different ways, engaged with the ageing process.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Segal, L (2013), *Out of Time*: Verso, London. In this chapter Segal looks at people like Jacques Derrida, John Berger, Julian Barnes, Jonathan Dollimore, David Hockney, Alice Munroe, Toni Morrison and reflects on their engagement with growing old. In this chapter she also offers an interesting discussion on ‘The Strengths of Solitude’ (pp. 251-268).

Conclusion

The core argument in this thesis has been to demonstrate that William Trevor, in his portrayal of women, across a range of selected texts, presents a profoundly ethical dimension to his readers. Central to this assertion is the conviction that literary fiction is the perfect receptacle for ethical reflection. According to Michael Eskin, literature and moral philosophy are inextricably linked, and he refers to MacIntyre's observation that the 'first great enunciation of moral truth in Greek culture occurred in the *Iliad*, that is, in literature' (Eskin 2004, p. 586). He argues that literature's internal make-up, its 'capaciousness' to reveal the 'human person in all of its relations, facets, and intricacies', and its discursive ability to 'incorporate, encompass, embody, engage in live contexts, illuminate from innumerable perspectives, and thus transform – in short, interpret – the propositions, problems addressed, and "truths" attained in ethics', is what gives literature its immense value (Eskin 2004, p. 587).

Simone De Beauvoir's life-long project was to break down the distinction between philosophy and life in order to explicate the truth and necessity of philosophy, and equally to show how philosophy is intrinsically connected to a passion for life. She believed that philosophy is concurrent with existence, and that the personal is ultimately the philosophical. Her decision to choose literature as the medium through which to present her philosophy and to explore ethical situations, gives prominence and veracity to notions of literature as a medium to 'make us see and feel...in a way no philosophical treatise can' (Eskin 2004, p. 588). De Beauvoir's compatibility with Trevor has offered a really stimulating and thought-

provoking dimension to the analysis of his fiction. Both of them demonstrate a view of human life as an unresolvable, ambiguous drama of freedom and contingency.

So many of Trevor's female characters seem to bear out the implications of de Beauvoir's intensive examination of women's lives, and they demonstrate how divergent the female experience is from that of the male experience for a whole host of reasons. Sarah Bakewell in *At the Existentialist Café* (2016), argues that de Beauvoir's grasp of the complexities of the male/female relationship is the most illuminating of all the existentialists:

in its subtle sense of the balance between freedom and constraint in a person's life. She showed how choices, influences and habits can accumulate over a lifetime to create a structure that becomes hard to break out of...de Beauvoir emphasised the connection between this and our wider situations as gendered, historical beings. She gave full weight to the difficulty of breaking out of such situations – although she never doubted that we remain existentially free despite it all. Women can change their lives, which is why it is worth writing books to awaken them to this fact. (Bakewell 2016, pp. 215-6)

Bakewell believes:

The Second Sex could have become established in the canon as one of the great cultural re-evaluations of modern times, a book to set alongside the works of Charles Darwin (who re-situated humans in relation to other animals), Karl Marx (who re-situated high culture in relation to economics) and Sigmund Freud (who re-situated the conscious mind in relation to the unconscious). (Bakewell 2016, p. 216)

Trevor, as I have argued, essentially comprehends this imbalance in male/female relations, empathises with it, and then writes about it in his fiction. His sense of curiosity regarding people compels him to explore and communicate his discoveries.

Trevor's representation of both moral and immoral women emphasises the importance of literary fiction. Its value lies in its facilitation of a social critique across a wide range of issues. Trevor's subtle imperative, namely that we refrain from judging a situation and that we should, and even must, weigh and measure lives in a judicious way, fulfils the criteria for

engaged literature. In her essay 'What Can Literature Do?' de Beauvoir asserts that 'a writer can only be interested in what really interests him', and Trevor is undoubtedly one of the great practitioners of an engaged literature which probes the human condition, often from the female perspective.

This has been illustrated throughout the thesis in chapters that have explored and examined in detail a selection of Trevor's female characters, and in doing so has drawn attention, in a very specific way, to his representation of the female experience. De Beauvoir's thought and writings have offered a lens through which to more fully comprehend his approach to the female perspective. The focus of this thesis adds a new and richer profundity to his reputation as a writer who comprehends the human condition, and seeks to expose its lived realities through a vast array of storylines that encompass almost every variation of lived experience through its exposition of individual's circumstances. His rendering of the female experience in all the different phases of life, is articulated through the interiority of memorable characters. What is striking about Trevor's female characters portraiture is his *inhabiting* of their interior lives and his remarkable ability to script their thoughts. His utilisation of free indirect discourse is crucial to how he achieves this verisimilitude and its importance cannot be stressed enough.

As previously said, ambiguity is a significant feature of Trevor's writing where we can infer meaning from the stories' conclusion with only limited certainty. In so many of Trevor's stories, the free indirect style reflects the characters' unspoken thoughts, but we as readers are allowed to feel their fears and their hopes, even though, in many cases, these fears and hopes are suppressed. Trevor's attention to his female characters has to be seen as a calculated strategy. By giving voice to them, he is taking the example of a woman to measure the costs of all that has to be sacrificed in order to live within the constraints of societal and political norms, and he illustrates how these impinge on women's essential

freedom. He demonstrates in varying degrees, from gentle to savage satire, the inadequacies of so many of his male characters. His female characters' existential crises involve a searching and an often-anguished inwardness that remains intensely private. Trevor facilitates access to their innermost, private thoughts where they face their moral dilemmas. It is to these women that he grants the strength to search for authenticity and goodness, however compromised and desperate this search might be. Trevor's 'god-bothering' witnesses so many of these women flounder in a world without the guidance of a God; however, they are imbued with a strength that sees them either drawing strength from each other or from themselves (MacKenna 1999, p. 233).

A rich vein of further research remains to be explored in this distinguished novelist and major short story writer of the twentieth and twentieth-first century. Trevor's representations of his male characters across his fiction offer numerous opportunities for further analysis for example, and the very current discourse on ageing and its fictional representation, offers real possibilities for broadening this discussion.

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