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William Trevor's narrative style in Fools of Fortune

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ABSTRACT

The narrative style of *Fools of Fortune* (1983) stands out because it adapts to the novel's intricate historical viewpoint. The book unsettles any fixed interpretation since it is episodic, frequently ambiguous, focused on minutiae that occasionally explodes into symbolic importance or might stay eerily unexplained, and consistently neutral while periodically alluding to dreams. Slowly but gradually, it not only delves into the character's own history of trauma but also explores (or is compelled to consider) potential solutions to that trauma. The purpose of this article is to draw connections between Trevor's vision and his techniques, which are described as humanistic and inquiring.

KEYWORDS: ***Trauma, Big house, War, Ambiguous, Exile, Narrative techniques***

Fools of Fortune demonstrates William Trevor's prodigious output as a novelist and short story writer. The renowned Molly Keane termed this work moving and essential. Mainly recounted from two different first-person perspectives, it takes place between the end of World War I and the 1980s. A stunning and intricate story, equal parts eerie and compassionate, it never fails to captivate. Willie, the protagonist, spends his formative years on the Kilneagh mansion of the affluent Quinton's in County Cork, Ireland. Willie's family consists of his parents, two elder sisters, and two aunts. Willie's father is a mill owner. He and his wife are protestant still they sympathise with the revolutionary movement. Willie is being tutored by a Catholic priest named Father Kilgarriff, and Michael Collins pays a visit to their house. One night, the Quinton house is burned down by the Black and Tans, who are commanded by an overzealous sergeant. It's an astounding act of brutality, and only Willie and his mother

make it out alive (the aunts were away on holiday). Trauma, loss, and revenge are the lasting effects of this terrible crime committed just after World War I, preventing the scars of the past from ever fully healing. “I was in Tim Paddy’s arms, and then there was the dampness of the grass before the pain began, all over my legs and back. The ponies and my mother’s horse snorted and neighed. I could hear their hooves banging at the stable doors. There were stars in the sky. An orange glow crept over the edges of my vision. The noise there’d been had changed, becoming a kind of crackling, with crashes that sounded like thunder. I couldn’t move. I thought: We are all like this, Geraldine, Deirdre, my mother and father, Josephine and Mrs Flynn; we are all lying on the wet grass, in pain.” (Trevor 40).

Willie and his mom relocate to a property in Cork after losing their home, dad, sisters, and a few helpers. When Willie's father's mill burns down, his aunts and Father Kilgarriff are left behind to live in the Orchard Wing while Willie's father's clerk takes over as mill manager. Young maid Josephine, who had just been hired by the Quintons but miraculously escaped the fire, is living with Willie and his mother. Willie has little choice but to enrol in a school in town. Willie's teacher, Miss Halliwell, develops an odd sense of love and sympathy for him, which Willie finds uncomfortable. As a result, Willie is relieved when it comes time for him to go boarding school.

The night their home was set on fire left an indelible mark on Willie's mother, who has yet to fully overcome from the trauma and shock. Though Josephine takes good care of her, she becomes more dependent on alcohol. She doesn't want letters from her aunts in Kilneagh, doesn't want visits from the mill manager twice a year, and won't even allow her parents in India write to her. Willie is responsible for penning her correspondence. Even though the sergeant who commanded the Black and Tans has returned to Liverpool and established a greengrocery business, the memory of him continues to torment Willie's mother.

Willie's English cousin Marianne narrates the book's second half. There is an instant attraction between the two upon meeting, but it appears like there are too many obstacles in their path. Their relationship doesn't last long before Marianne heads off to Switzerland, where she experiences a terrible time. She chooses to go back to Ireland to inform Willie that he is the father of their unborn baby, but Willie has vanished.

With the hope that Willie would return one day, Marianne makes the decision to remain in Ireland and raise their baby at Kilneagh, settling with the willie aunts in the Orchard Wing. The third and last section of the book is presented from the point of view of Imelda, daughter of Willie and Marianne. Imelda is yet another kid who grows

up in Kilneagh, but unlike the other children, she gets older with a dreadful legacy from the past. It's a legacy that not even her later birth can change.

The narrative style of *Fools of Fortune* stands out because it adapts to the novel's intricate historical viewpoint. The book unsettles any fixed interpretation since it is episodic, frequently ambiguous, focused on minutiae that occasionally explodes into symbolic importance or might stay eerily unexplained, and consistently neutral while periodically alluding to dreams. Slowly but gradually, it not only delves into the character's own history of trauma but also explores (or is compelled to consider) potential solutions to that trauma. The purpose of this article is to draw connections between Trevor's vision and his techniques, which are described as humanistic and inquiring.

Even while, as Russell points out, Fools of Fortune tends toward harsh exposes of the human propensity for deception, corruption, and wickedness, the narrative's motions of humanity are not only a mechanism by which people disclose their erroneous understandings. Russell would have us think that the book never hesitatingly considers other interpretations, but instead always conclusively convicts a character. As an example, Willie tells his daughter that "in Ireland it occurs occasionally that the mad are regarded to be saints of a type" after recalling what a nun had told him about "terror and disaster" shaping the saints. 'Willie cynically recognises that not just Josephine but also the local society has valorised his daughter for her silence in its combined efforts to bury the tragedies of the past,' says Russell. However, the scepticism may not be the characters but the critics. Trevor's final word leaves us on a knife edge; in deciding how to proceed, we are in effect evaluating our own worldview. Despite its knowledge that conflict and change have always dominated Irish history, the novel yearns for stability and tranquillity.

It's a bit of a departure from the usual Big House fare in that the militant group known as the Black and Tans end up destroying Kilneagh rather than the republicans. With a keen awareness of the way we live in time, Trevor recounts the history of the Quinton family before, during, and after the Irish Revolutionary War. He shows us how we are both a part of and apart from a medium that, despite appearances, is constantly changing. Just as in a Chekhov play, the characters give the impression that their lives are controlled by a web of complex chance and free will. One can see these connections in the first six parts of the novel, and can get hints of them through Trevor's use of reference and internal echo as well.

The novel's dates stand out like landmarks along a winding route of seemingly unremarkable happenings. But it appears that history dooms every new generation to repeating this path. The narrative begins with a series of dates

and a series of questions, both overt and covert, regarding the lessons that history may teach. After the Black and Tans are deployed to suppress Irish' rebellion,' Willie's personal history will soon become intertwined with current events: 'It was the spring of 1918 … I had no wish ever to leave Kilneagh. I was eight in 1918' (Trevor 12).

Kilneagh's history is included with a tone suddenly muted towards the introductory part making the perspective seems less like Willie's and more like the narrator with the neutral voice: 'Kilneagh had been built in 1770, its gardens laid out at the same date, the orchard added later' (Trevor 13). Then there's Ireland's troubled past, which has been received in various ways by Willie's father (who looks amiably accepting) and mother (more intensely sympathetic to nationalist goals 'There was injustice in Ireland was what my mother maintained; you didn't have to be Irish to wish to expunge it' (Trevor 26), and Father Kilgrarriff, who is upset by military triumphs and losses and is against violence. It is from Father Kilgarriff that Willie learns about the Battle of the Yellow Ford, which was supposed to be 'victory had somehow been turned into defeat, for even as I learnt about that new beginning in 1598 Irish soldiers were fighting for England in the German war' (Trevor 13). That "somehow" conveys a sense of foreboding destiny, and the confusing of identities at the end portrays the "Irish troops" as "fools of fortune."

Much of Trevor's work reflects his awareness of time's precariousness: "If we constantly inhabit the present, we 're constantly clutching the light of memories to reveal us the darkness of the past.". On top of that, the present is a compilation of several actions of remembering and forgetting. Because it's the year the work was initially published, it might trigger a number of memories. As the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland escalated in the 1970s and 1980s, the book became topical. After the opening phrase of the book, Trevor, using the omniscient narrator's neutral tones, moves into the work's major theme of contrast and connection across locations. The big mansion of Woodcombe Part in Dorset is always a hive of activity. Kilneagh, Ireland, is more subdued and peaceful town and as silent as a grave. The words sidestep the England vs. Ireland conflict nexus by diverting attention to the county of Dorset. There is an asymmetry between the two settings, with one being described as "bustling with life" and the other as "as silent as a cemetery." Death and life, however, will go back and forth between the two nations throughout the narrative. In this first paragraph, the narrator expresses an opinion that Trevor subtly dismisses while also embracing. When describing the pattern of the Quintons' fortunes, the narrator makes it seem as if everything happened according to a sad, repetitive, and simplistic formula. The narrator makes the following broad assertions about Marianne's past: 'This couple's only child was brought up in Woodcombe Rectory and

later caused history again to repeat itself, as in Anglo-Irish relationships it has a way of doing: she fell in love with a Quinton cousin and became, in time, the third English girl to come and live at Kilneagh' (Trevor 9). 'Time's changes and repetitions are brought out with subtle shock, but the narrator's attribution of action to "the couple's single child," who "later forced history once more to replicate itself," is unchallenging and unconvincing. The novel's protagonists are confused by the unpredictable nature of historical continuity and discontinuity. The author seems to have purposefully chosen a lengthy vantage point, suggesting that by the end of the story, a mature knowledge of "Anglo-Irish relations" would have been reached.

Nonetheless, it is also implied that this is an illusion, and the final statement of the introductory section seems to purposefully downplay transitions and balances of commitment and loyalty: 'The sense of the past, so well preserved in the great house and the town in Dorset, is only to be found in echoes at Kilneagh, in the voices of the cousins' (Trevor 10). Dorset, the line seems to say, is content to keep its "feeling of the past" intact; it may be "well conserved," but the book will hint that a "sense of the past" that is not vigilant to "echoes" is prone to fall to mistaken nostalgia and simplicity. Although hearing the name "Woodcombe" over and over again may seem comforting, Wood combe's own history is far from simple. Linked to Kilneagh and hinting to exile and displacement, the experiences of three women (Anna, Evie, and Marianne) associated with Woodcombe are intertwined. The reader gets the sense that Trevor is sculpting many levels of authorial existence throughout, as he does here, by adopting the identity of a guidebook writer, implying the limitations of such a viewpoint, and hinting that Kilneagh is a place of interruption through the oppositions.

Mr. Quinton is shown in the book as an individual who takes pride in his Cork roots and whose family has "deeply entrenched affiliation with Irish Self Government," making them "traitors to our society and to the Anglo-Irish culture," as Willie puts it. The father's portrayal is indicative of Trevor's frugality, speed, and curiosity in ambiguity. In spite of the fact that it has been said that he "looks affably sympathetic," the first section of the novel reveals other aspects of his character that have bearing on Willie's ability to make sense of his own past. One may argue that Willie develops a bias against women and a lack of confidence in his own judgement.

Mr. Quinton may seem to be wavering when he explains to Willie why he addressed a Black and Tan (Rudkin) on the road, but he is really acutely aware of the entangled tensions in his environment and doing his utmost to settle them peacefully. Trevor portrays and implies the worth of Mr. Quinton's nobility regard for rival claims by showing how he sought to cope up with Collins and reinstate Doyle despite the fact that doing so could have

resulted in Doyle's avoidable horrific death (he was hanged and his tongue was cut out) and the mansion being set on fire by Rudkin. Willie may take on the role of an avenging since he was "pretty fond of him than of anybody else." Marianne assumes that Willie did what he did because "his bravery and his honour dictated that he ought to do exactly what he had done," but he never explains why he did it. However, the brutality of the killing, which was done with a knife and included many hits, makes it evident that the killing was an act of retribution. Readers get the impression that Willie isn't only paying tribute to his loved ones when he writes this; he's also venting his anger over the loss of his childhood innocence and his father's abandonment. Also, it takes us a long to piece out how Mr. Quinton died due to Trevor's skilful narration, namely his slow-drip and thus profoundly devastating delivery of important data. Imelda's imagination is the only place we learn that 'The man in the teddy-bear dressing-gown carried his wife down the burning stairs and went in search of his children' (Trevor 159). This is a reconstruction based on secondary sources, yet it is all the more convincing for that. Imelda, perhaps relying on her mother's recollections and her misfortune of relatively close vision, concludes that Mr. Quinton was trapped in the flaming home while attempting to save his children, and that his corpse "laid smoking on the staircase" realise retrospectively that Willie must have been aware of his father's heroism and that his mother was saved by her husband only for her life to be irretrievably ruined by his loss; there is nothing that would 'rescue from their continuing decay her beauty and her elegance' (Trevor 93), a wording that demonstrates how ingrained her grace and beauty are in Willie's memory. His dad gives his life to help other people, and his mom, after being rescued, takes her own life. The savagery of Rudkin's death symbolises Willie's yearning to find an action that is commensurate to such loss (as a youngster he had dreamed of catching a "Black and Tan" with "his father's pistol", and the dearth of this kind of action due to Trevor's artistic narrative delaying and inconstancies. There's also some pent-up, illogical rage directed towards his parents for being "fools of fortune," as he says they were.

In order to make comparisons and establish relationships, Trevor often uses references from the outside world. The fact that Willie spends his holidays reading "Dickens and George Eliot and Emily Bronte" (Trevor 90) highlights the contrast between his Irish cultural upbringing and the eras depicted in famous Victorian literature. And yet, it may suggest a fondness for Dickensian stereotypes.

Another perspective on Willie and Marianne's story holds that their experience is predestined; this theory has recently found its most potent expression in Marianne's diary entry for "June 22nd, 1979," in which she describes herself, Imelda, and Willie as "fools of fortune, as his father would say; ghosts we have become. Marianne recalls

three life-changing moments: in the office of Mr. Lanigan when she predicted the truth. When she realised that willie made provision for Marianne to reside in Kilneagh after he murdered Rudkin and went underground. and when Willie found his mother dead from an apparent suicide and when Imelda "accessed the hidden drawer" with accounts of Rudkin's death. Marianne draws the following conclusion: 'After each brief moment there was as little chance for any one of us as there was for Kilneagh after the soldiers' wrath' (Trevor 187).

Marianne agrees that they are "Fools of fortune," but her seeming notion that they are victims is fascinatingly complicated. Each of these defining moments involves the three characters coming face to face with a reality that demands a response that will define who they are. The most obvious idea behind the phrase "as little chance for any of us" is that all three of us are "fools of fortune." In each instance, however, it also implies that they have been snatched from the realm of "chance" and transported to a location where they are selected by (and yet choose) their fate. This is when the novel's interest in Shakespeare's tragic play becomes most clear. The narrative demonstrates that Willie and Marianne's drive to flee from their predetermined future might have beneficial outcomes, therefore the finale is a place of ambiguous possibilities.

CONCLUSION

By using the generic term "Irish," Trevor reveals his belief that there is a significant cultural and historical split between those who write and read "the great Victorian novel" and those who prefer "the modern short story," which is well suited to "Irish" readers (and writers) who prefer "the art of the glimpse." There are similarities and differences between Trevor's work and that of the great Victorians, as has been suggested above. However, we bridge the gaps and close the ties via glances. One way to look about allusion is as a "art" that allows readers to "take a peek" of an original that is hidden from plain sight. Excellent examples of Trevor's own "art of the glance" can be found all across Fools of Fortune, a book that "deals with moments and nuances and shades of grey" while yet tackling weighty issues like free will, fate, violence, oppression, and the search for goodness, freedom, and love.

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