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The Gardens of William Trevor: Myths in the Making

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1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3And God said, « Let there be light, » and there was light. 4And God saw that the light was good. And God **separated** the light from the darkness. 5God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (...) 6And God said, « Let there be an expanse *a* in the midst of the waters, and let it **separate** the waters from the waters. » 7And God made *b* the expanse and **separated** the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. 8And God called the expanse Heaven. *c* And there was evening and there was morning, the second day¹.

In ancient tales and myths of creation of all origins, whether Biblical, Coranic or Asian, myths of creation go along myths of separation between the sky and the earth. And like the Garden of Eden, all gardens are born of this separation. How should the gardens in William Trevor's work be apprehended in the context of Irish history and the social evolution of his native country? While they are linked to the myths of creation and separation, gardens help the characters accept change and the passing of time, in so far as they themselves become active and responsible partners in the never-ending process of creation. Through his works of art, the artist, whether writer, poet, painter, sculptor or photographer, embodies the Great Architect and as such sublimes and transcends reality in becoming a creator himself.

Irish by birth, William Trevor was born as Trevor Cox in county Cork in Ireland in 1928. He grew up in Ireland in the first years of the civil war and the aftermath of partition until he exiled himself to England, in south Devon, where he has been living, writing and gardening since the late 1950's. Two elements in Trevor's biography have strongly influenced his relationship to artistic creation and hence to creation in general. The first element is that William Trevor started as a sculptor. He worked under the name of Trevor Cox as a successful wood carver and sometimes stone and metal sculptor for a number of years. He then stopped working as a sculptor and turned instead to writing short stories when he decided that his art as a sculptor had become too abstract and he missed creating characters. But what remains of his skill as a sculptor in his craft as a fiction writer, is a specific mode of creation that closely links creation, separation and destruction. The second significant biographical element is William Trevor's choice to exile himself to England so that he could write about Ireland. William Trevor's work of creation is therefore associated to destruction and separation in more than one sense.

¹ *The Bible*, Genesis 1, 1-8, <http://esv.scripturetext.com/genesis/1.htm>, consulted on November 16th 2012.

The first section of this presentation will focus on the myth of the Garden of Eden as an eternal paradise and will examine the links between creation and destruction. In 2002, Homan Potterton wrote an article about William Trevor's sculptures entitled: 'Suggestions of concavity: William Trevor as a sculptor'², enlightening Trevor's work as he carved and threw away the chips until he reached 'the raw material'. The word 'concavity' is also telling of the way in which caved-in, chiselled-away volumes are left to the viewer's or the reader's imagination. The last section will therefore present how artistic creation can be read in Trevor's work as a metaphor of cosmic and divine creation and how gardens enable Trevor to present history as both synchronic and diachronic, as Giorgio Agamben develops in his thesis on what is contemporary³. Trevor's gardens illustrate what Agamben describes as the definition of historicity: the discontinuity of language and the discontinuity of time.

1. Gates, hedges and bridges: the myth of the Garden of Eden

Words are as old as myths: the word 'paradise' comes from the Greek *paradeisos*, coined after the Persian *pardez* meaning *enclosure*. The word *garden* itself comes from a Gallo-Roman root, with the Latin *hortus* and the Gallic *gart* which also means *enclosure*. Gardens are therefore secluded islets separated from the rest of the world and the rest of nature. In the context of Irish history in which William Trevor writes, separation is all the more central as it also refers to the partition of Ireland which occurred a few years before he was born and broke out into a civil war he experienced during all his childhood. He came of age as the Republic was institutionally created. Therefore the separation between north and south or between Protestants and Catholics is one that moulded Trevor's vision of the world and became a recurrent theme in his fiction. Another form of separation is the experience of exile. Trevor left Ireland in the fifties as millions of other Irish men and women before him. Those two aspects of separation, partition and exile are clearly visible through one of Trevor's recurrent sources of inspiration: the Anglo-Irish Big House and its garden and surroundings.

Coming from an Anglo-Irish background, the world of Big Houses and of the dwindling power of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy was a world Trevor knew very well and which is often at the centre of his narratives. In this context, gardens are large enclosed expanses of land tended by hired gardeners. The Big Houses that William Trevor witnessed

² Homan Potterton, 'Suggestions of Concavity: William Trevor as a sculptor' in *Irish Arts Review*, 2002, <http://irisartsreview.com/irisartsreviyear/pdf/2002/25488313.pdf.bannered.pdf>, last consulted on November 16th 2012.

³ Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus ? and other Essays*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009.

had been declining for some years and the motif of the ruin is central to most of the landscapes he describes. Over the centuries however, those Big Houses had become the setting of a life quite different by its standards, to the life of those who lived outside its walls and gates. Big Houses and their gardens display a tightly partitioned world of hedges and avenues, very much on the model of 18th-century English gardens, with a gate-lodge, a pond or a lake, an orchard and a kitchen garden. In Trevor's narratives, the Big Houses and their gardens symbolize seclusion and secrecy but also continuity, as is visible for example, in two of his novels, *The Silence in the Garden*, published in 1990 and *The Story of Lucy Gault*, published in 2003.

In *The Silence in the Garden*, the garden attached to the Big House of the Rolleston family is planted on an island which, until the time around which the whole narrative hinges, has been separated from the mainland and the rest of the village. The place, house and garden, is called Carriglas and the narrative focuses on a specific year in the life of the Rolleston family: 1931. In 1931, the youngest daughter Villana is against all odds about to marry the old family solicitor and that year also a bridge is being built between the island-garden and the rest of the village. All along the novel, the garden is described as an unchanging place. Generations of children have played among the strawberry trees, the rhododendrons and the monkey puzzle and run down its avenues while history skimmed by. Arriving at Carriglas is a mythical experience in itself:

The high white gates which Hugh had anticipated for me stood open at the head of a sunless avenue, with a gate-lodge on the left. Moss and cropped grass softened the surface beneath the horse's hooves, making our journey eerily soundless. Beech trees curved their branches overhead. The shiny leaves of rhododendrons were part of a pervading greenness⁴.

Carriglas is a land of plenty and leisure which would seem a paradise on earth to any visitor: 'We crossed the cobbled yard, Villana leading me to an ice-house and then through a shrubbery to the kitchen garden, where peaches ripened on brick-lined walls. We passed apple-trees to a secluded tennis-court and continued on a path that skirted the grounds, eventually arriving at an inlet where the island's river flowed into the sea. Rhododendrons were clumped along the riverbank⁵'.

To this description of an ideal Eden where everything seems to have been taken care of with the help of the four gardeners who tend the flowerbeds and the shrubberies, and 'keep the avenue weeded and the kitchen supplied⁶', is added the impression that it will never end. The strawberry trees and the monkey-puzzle, as well as the rhododendrons, are recurrently cited throughout the novel, emphasizing the feeling of permanence. Even the place where a murder was committed at an earlier date is not recognizable:

⁴ William Trevor, *The Silence in the Garden*, London, Penguin, 1988, p.17.

⁵ William Trevor, *The Silence in the Garden*, op.cit., p.11.

⁶ William Trevor, *The Silence in the Garden*, op.cit., p.18.

There was nothing different about that part of the avenue. The moss on the surface was the same shade of green as elsewhere. The rhododendrons on either side looked as though they had never been disturbed by an explosion⁷.

And yet, although the characters in the novel try not to see how the garden has gradually lost of its 'grandeur', and although Trevor complicates the reading in alternating two narratives, one by a first-person narrator in her diary and the other by an omniscient narrator, the two mingling and melting into each other, any attentive reader gradually realizes that the garden has in actual fact changed a lot and lost its past magnificence. On the eve of Villana's wedding to the family solicitor, the narrator mentions her struggle to keep the garden tidy enough. In a more straightforward way, Sarah confides to her diary how Carriglas has changed in one generation:

The avenue gates are now so streaked with green and rust that a camouflage has been formed, drawing them into landscape they once stood palely alien in. Grass is high on the avenue itself; weeds flourish in two rich channels on either side of it. The lawns that flank the house are only roughly cut, and the white paintwork of the hall-door and the windows is as marked and dirtied as the gates⁸.

The fact is that the change in the state of the garden coincides with the building of the bridge that will soon link the mainland to the island. The bridge goes along with the change in the garden and as the garden changes, one by one the inhabitants at Carriglas die. The island is not separated from the mainland anymore and the garden and its surroundings do not survive. The true reason for this is of course the mystery at the core of the story. Here too a couple has been chased from Paradise. In the past Villana was engaged to Hugh Pollexfen and their engagement was ultimately broken because of a crime they had committed in the garden and which the garden would always remind them of. And they could not imagine their children playing in that garden. It is therefore highly significant that Villana should marry the old family solicitor whom she does not love in the same period when a bridge breaks the isolation of the Carriglas garden and it is no longer separated from the rest of the world. As time goes by the garden becomes less separated from the rest of society and gradually returns to a wild state, while at the same time the growing brambles hide ('camouflage') the stories that have 'marked' its history.

In *The Story of Lucy Gault* separation takes the form of exile. When young Lucy refuses to leave her house of Lahardane in 1921 after it has been attacked at night, she escapes and hides away, hoping that, not finding her, her parents will postpone or even give up their decision of exiling themselves. Unfortunately she hurts one of her feet in the process and has

⁷ William Trevor, *The Silence in the Garden*, op.cit., p.19

⁸ William Trevor, *The Silence in the Garden*, op.cit., p.38.

to seek protection in a hut in the woods. Failing to find her, her parents think she has drowned herself. Full of despair, they choose to exile themselves. Lucy is later found alive but her parents never learn about it. When she is eventually reunited with her father she is a young woman and her mother has died. Meanwhile Lucy grows up at Lahardane, wearing her mother's clothes, reading her mother's books and wandering about in the garden, the orchard and the grounds around the house, as she has always done, as if time had stopped. The garden is for Lucy a solace and a world in itself. Even her love story with Ralph can only exist within the precincts of the garden and not outside it. Although she loves him, she refuses to marry him and leave Lahardane. It is as if garden could only exist as long as it were separated from the rest of the world. For example, the garden is only first described by the narrator as a background for Lucy's mother, Heloise, as she runs desperately and shouting Lucy's name because she cannot be found:

Heloise heard him shouting Lucy's name in the yard sheds. 'Lucy!' she shouted herself in the apple orchard and in the field where the cattle were, which was the way back from the O'Reillys'. She passed through the gate in the white railings that separated the fields from the turn-around in front of the house. She crossed the gravel to the hydrangea lawn⁹.

The garden comes into existence in the narrative as a separate entity from the rest of the environment, just as the story is about to dip into the myth it will become: the parents chased away from it by guilt and the place forever doomed. A decade later when Ralph comes to court Lucy, the garden is barely recognizable and only exists as such in Lucy's memory and imagination. The garden in all its past glory only exists in Lucy's mind as a myth.

It didn't look like an avenue', Ralph said. 'The gate-lodge was closed up.' He hadn't noticed the faded green entrance gates, obscured by nettles and dying cow parsley. He'd driven beneath a canopy of leaves and suddenly the big stone house was there¹⁰.

The garden has disappeared and faded into the rest of the landscape. The limits and former design of the garden, the avenue, the gate-lodge, even the entrance gates have been covered by a layer of vegetation. In all its negativity ('closed-up', 'faded', 'obscured', 'dying') and unattractive aspect ('nettles', 'cow parsley'), the landscape seems to withhold a kind of mysterious aura ('a canopy of leaves') which has led Ralph to the 'big stone house' and keeps the reader alert, interested not so much in what has been lost but in what remains.

Little by little Trevor's prose unveils the secrets and mysteries hidden in the back lanes behind the shrubberies and the gazebos. His gardens cannot escape change. The 'concave' walls of the house at Carriglas echo the title of Potterton's article on Trevor's

⁹ William Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault*, op.cit., p.28.

¹⁰ William Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault*, op.cit., p.86.

sculptures, and concavity is indeed an interesting shape to discuss Trevor's work. Technically speaking, Trevor carved away the wood until he got to the raw material of his sculpture. This process reflects Trevor's attitude to life and to the creation of a work of art. In an interview to the *Telegraph* in 2011, he explained how he created his garden thirty years ago and how in his old age he was now 'unmaking' it: 'We've cut an awful lot out this summer, including four trees. We've enjoyed making a garden, we're now enjoying un-making it a bit¹¹.' In this interview, Trevor also links art, writing and gardening. Making something out of nothing is part of Trevor's aesthetics, focusing on what remains is often at the heart of his narratives. But the 'unmaking' process is also part of William Trevor's mode of creation.

2. Weeding, pruning and digging: destroying and creating

Creating a garden is about clearing away the unwanted natural elements of nature. Paradoxically, creating a garden has therefore to do with destroying what is grown or is lying in the way. In Trevor's fictional gardens as in all real-life gardens, time passes and revolutions or other dramatic events make gardens recede to a wilder state or lose their enclosed and separate characteristics by being bridged to the mainland or by being caught up by modernity. Gardens are a way for Trevor to reconcile his characters to the notion of change, social evolution, historic revolution and passing time. Chased from Eden, the characters need to fend for themselves and build a new garden. The tension between destruction and creation is doubled by another tension between persecution or guilt and reconciliation in the present time.

In the short story 'Of the Cloth' from the collection *The Hill Bachelors*, the main character is a priest of the Church of Ireland who hires a Catholic gardener to create the garden of the rectory. The story focuses on the relationship between the gardener and the priest and, after the gardener has died, on the relationship between the Catholic clergy to which the gardener belonged and the priest of the Church of Ireland who employed him. The story tells a tale where making a garden has brought peace where there used to be defiance and prejudice. The story begins with an emphasis on the fact that the priest is 'out of touch with the times¹²'.

As in Trevor's own life, the change had started before the priest's birth when the family still remembered vividly revolution and civil war. Then Con Tonan, 'who had lost use

¹¹ Annabel Freyberg, 'Celebrity Gardens: William Trevor's Garden' in *The Telegraph*, 29 July, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/8663038/Celebrity-Gardeners-William-Trevors-garden.html>, last accessed November 23rd, 2012.

¹² William Trevor, 'Of the Cloth', *The Hill Bachelors*, London, Penguin, 2001, p. 25.

of an arm in a tractor accident¹³, came to the rectory, cycling the six miles, to tend the garden:

Doing what he could to release the choked shrubs and restore the flowerbeds that had all disappeared¹⁴. (...) Even after the gardener has died, the priest remembers what the gardener did: 'he'd learnt how to rid the roses of suckers, and when to clip the yew hedge, and not to burn the leaves that came down in autumn but to let them decay into mould to enrich the soil'¹⁵.

Later on, when the Catholic priests from Tonan's church come and visit and all three take a walk around the garden, Con Tonan's job is described in the following terms: 'Con knocked the garden into shape for me'¹⁶. The job of making a garden is a violent one and the vocabulary associated with it expresses riddance, clipping, knocking away. It contrasts with the peace that emanates from the garden when it flourishes, but is a perfect illustration of the change that the characters experience in their lives as time passes: 'Anywhere you'd be,' Grattan said, 'there's always change. Like day becoming night'¹⁷. There are clear echoes of the Biblical creation text in this sentence addressed by a Protestant priest to a Catholic one, as they share their intimations about what both their respective churches have become while modernity swept through Ireland. The metaphor of day and night and the natural elements helps them to express the passing of time and the changes brought about by the new generations. They are even able to share that the Catholic churches are less attended, how a different culture has oozed in, 'in which restraint and prayer were not the way, as once they had been'¹⁸. Modernity and change have brought evil with them, as most characters deplore. But here the three men of the cloth have been able to build peace and a form of ecumenical dialogue. The same phenomenon of reconciliation can be read at the end of *The Story of Lucy Gault*, when Lucy has become an old lady and her house has been transformed into a hotel with the Internet where she befriends and welcomes the Catholic nuns. The novel ends on an ecumenical note but also on a pacifying one as Lucy goes to the prison where she can visit the man who back in 1921 attempted to burn her house down and triggered the whole tragic concatenation of her parents' exile without her.

The violence and the destruction that change brings along is nowhere more visible than in the short story 'At Olivehill' from the collection *Cheating at Canasta* (2007). Here the Garden of Eden has clearly shifted to the garden of the Mount of Olives, as the title of the short story 'At Olivehill' clearly subtly indicates. The children of James and Molly have agreed to sell part of the garden of the family house to an entrepreneur and turn part of the

¹³ William Trevor, 'Of the Cloth', *The Hill Bachelors*, op.cit., p. 24.

¹⁴ William Trevor, 'Of the Cloth', *The Hill Bachelors*, op.cit., p.25.

¹⁵ William Trevor, 'Of the Cloth', *The Hill Bachelors*, op.cit., p. 28. My emphasis.

¹⁶ William Trevor, 'Of the Cloth', *The Hill Bachelors*, op.cit., p.33.

¹⁷ William Trevor, 'Of the Cloth', *The Hill Bachelors*, op.cit., p. 38.

¹⁸ William Trevor, 'Of the Cloth', *The Hill Bachelors*, op.cit., p.36.

century-old garden into a Golf Club. Here again change and modernity burst into the sheltered life of a family, and again the garden, as Trevor represents it, is the space where change has blatantly become visible, while its organization and essence are being bulldozed and shattered. The consequence of this destruction on the mother and grandmother Molly is wonderfully described by Trevor as he depicts her retreating in her drawing-room, closing in the house over her, literally shutting her eyes and ears to what she cannot bear to imagine¹⁹:

That day Mollie didn't go out of the house, not even as far as the garden or the yards. Had she been less deaf, she would have heard, from the far distance, rocks and stones clattering into the buckets of the diggers. She would have heard the oak coming down in the field they called the Oak tree Field, the chain-saws in Ana Woods. A third digger had been hired, Eoghan told her, with a man taken on to operate it, since Kealy had let them down. She hadn't listened²⁰.

Gradually Mollie shuts herself up from the world, behind the pulled curtains of her drawing room and lives only in the memory of the garden she has always known, reprocessing the images to suit her whim:

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 borne²¹.

Persecution is the common denominator in Mollie's interpretation of history. In her understanding of history, the garden should remain as she has always known it, changing only within the pattern of the changing seasons. In the darkness of her living-room, with all the curtains drawn as in a sort of *camera obscura*, Mollie processes what she wants to keep of reality and lingers at her ease on the unchanging quality of a landscape she has always known. Trevor inscribes the metaphor of photographing and the dark room within his writing, showing how imagination can create a world worth living, in which the present events can be ranked as part of history and in which history itself becomes a myth. To Molly, the destruction of her garden to make an international Golf Club is the end of her world and opens one more chapter of persecution in Irish history. To her children it is a necessary sacrifice which will save them all from chaos and ruin. As in the Mount of Olives of the Scriptures, the sacrifice in this Irish garden of Olivehill is the beginning of a new myth of creation, that of a new era in a modern global age. Of this double-edged myth of creation, Trevor is the great architect using his typewriter as he would his chisel or his pruning-shears.

3. Writing with a chisel and a pair of pruning shears: turning history into myth

¹⁹ Marie Mianowski, 'Reprocessing Landscapes in William Trevor's 'At Olivehill'', *Post Celtic Tiger Landscapes in Irish Fiction*, London, Routledge, 2017, pp. 15-27.

²⁰ William Trevor, 'At Olivehill', *Cheating at Canasta*, London: Viking, 2007, p. 122.

²¹ William Trevor, 'At Olivehill', op.cit., p. 128.

William Trevor's prose is well known for its cutting-edge style and implicit revelations. This third section looks into the way his garden narratives serve as revealers of concavity, how they reveal an empty, unspoken virgin space which Trevor leaves for the reader to fill in with his imagination and how in turn this process becomes a metaphor of creation. Imagination is fertile. In Trevor's fiction, gardens become the means for him to be the great architect of a myth of creation and a myth of fertility to which his readers will collaborate.

One of the best examples is again the novel *The Story of Lucy Gault*. Not only does Trevor write a novel, but his novel is also about how a story, itself part of Irish history, becomes *The Story of...Lucy Gault* and a myth in itself. Many stories circulate in the villages of Kilaoran and Ennis near Lahardane, Lucy Gault's house, but they are rumours and gossip that will cease only when enough time has passed and Lucy's story has gone cold and become a myth:

What strangers made of past events was influenced in the present by the observation of a lonely life. Lucy herself was aware that this opinion was as temporary as the one that anger and distaste had once created: the story had not yet passed into myth, and would not be cast in permanence until her life was over, until it was reflected in time's cold light²².

The making of the myth is also left to the reader as he is made to fill in the gaps of the implicit discourse. All of Trevor's narratives cherish the passive form and the implicit, but none excels in this style so well as *The Story of Lucy Gault*:

When he'd heard from Bridget that the boy who had come that day was to return, Henry had said nothing. His impassive features remained undisturbed, but the lack of response seemed in no way significant to his wife, since often he chose not to comment when news was passed on to him. On occasion this reticence reflected the run of Henry's thoughts; on occasion it concealed what he did not wish to reveal. When the information came that Ralph was to return there was concealment²³.

Myth and artistic creation are at the core of Trevor's writing and the way the implicit discourse triggers the fertile quality of imagination is particularly well illustrated in Trevor's Italian stories. The place occupied in his writings by representations of works of art and especially works by the Italian Masters of the Renaissance is remarkable. Many short stories mention or display Annunciation paintings with beautiful gardens in the background. In the short story 'After Rain'²⁴ in particular, William Trevor creates his own Renaissance painting, representing an Annunciation, using a perspective and a garden, both typical of the late 15th-century Italian masters. Annunciation scenes depict an essentially implicit message of creation and many characters in Trevor's fiction are described gazing at such paintings. In

²² William Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault*, op.cit., p.138. My emphasis.

²³ William Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault*, op.cit., p.97.

²⁴ William Trevor, 'After Rain', *After Rain*, London, Penguin, 1996.

those paintings the virgin space of Mary's body is the receptacle of an unspoken message, or rather the womb is the symbolic space of a silent message that becomes implicit in the painted representation. Renaissance pictures of Annunciations are a recurrent motif in Trevor's work. The short story 'The Virgin's Gift' weaves it, drawing a parallel between the Annunciation experienced by the Virgin and the message she herself delivers to the main character of the short story. The Annunciation motif is the trigger of moments of intimate revelations in the characters' lives. It also questions the links between artistic creation and any creation whether human or divine. Through his art as a fiction writer, Trevor manages to sublimate and transcend the dead ends of history and the shortcomings of the characters' individual stories. In trying to represent the act of creation, he transforms history and stories into a universal myth of creation.

Officially, William Trevor is the author of several novels and dozens of short stories. In actual fact, he has only written short stories. His novels are the result of the aggregating of short stories he had previously written. This process of creation as condensing narratives, getting to the raw material, then collating stories to make a novel, is yet another way of illustrating the tensions between fusion and separation, creation and destruction, persecution and reconciliation, which run through Trevor's fictional gardens. His gardens illustrate Trevor's vision of history and life as an ongoing process paradoxically riddled with discontinuities. He depicts how, despite all the gloom, doom and despair that most of his characters continuously deal with, they are all part of a process of ongoing creation. In Trevor's fiction, very often reconciling what seemed impossible to reconcile is one step towards accepting change. In thus doing, as other contemporary Irish authors, such as Colum McCann for example²⁵, he addresses the notion of redemption. This concept should not be understood as a theological concept but in the light of Agamben theories developed in *The Coming Community*²⁶ which grasps the notion of redemption in the light of Benjamin as a minimalist concept. In his sense, redemption does not consist in reclaiming what has been lost or in making the profane sacred but it consists in 'the irreparable loss of the lost, the definitive profanity of the profane'²⁷. Agamben's vision of redemption restores ever so slightly what has been destroyed and in reclaiming it from its state of destitution redemption rehabilitates it as a

²⁵ Eoin Flannery, *Colum McCann and the Aesthetics of Redemption*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2011.

²⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press, 1993.

²⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, op.cit., p.102.

‘dwelling place’²⁸. Agamben’s notion of redemption and how it can benefit a reading of Irish contemporary fiction is also a research project in progress. As far as gardens in Trevor’s fiction are concerned, this definition offers a possible interpretation of gardens as places where destruction occurs, but also where redemption as an ongoing process of creation and re-creation is also made possible. William Trevor presents art and imagination in their relations to reality and the present moment as the epitome of life’s redeeming process. Meanwhile, the reader slips in the concavities of meaning and fills in the blanks and silences with his own imagination, hence also collaborating to the artistic process of creation.

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²⁸ ‘Redemption’, *The Agamben Dictionary*, Alex Murray and Jessica Whyte, eds., Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2011, p. 167.

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