A Vulnerable Heroine?: Trauma and Self-Begetting in William Trevor's *The Story of Lucy Gault*

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> "That Spanish woman, who lived three hundred years ago, was certainly not the last of her kind. Many Theresas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action; perhaps only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity; perhaps a tragic failure which found no sacred poet and sank unwept into oblivion."
> (George Eliot, *Middlemarch*)

Introduction: the "contradictory pulls" of William Trevor's narrative style

Readers of William Trevor's fiction agree that his novels and short stories delve deep into the mystery of human mind, bringing to light the fragility of life and the lingering echoes of the past. Thus, while Hermione Lee describes Trevor's macrotext as "a story of the past, of memory, and of how time works" (n.p.), Paul Delaney and Michael Parker see Trevor's fiction as concerned with the "interrogation of patterns of inheritance and ideological heritage, and the impact of the past on the choices a person makes" (5). While illustrating his own aesthetic choices in a conversation with Costanza del Río Álvaro, Trevor himself acknowledges that the ineffability of ordinary life is at the core of his narratives: "I'm interested in people, I'm very curious about people and I write out of this sense of

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straight, ordinary curiosity. I want to find out myself" (del Río Álvaro, "Talking with William Trevor" 121). As these comments make clear, understanding the complexity of human life is the driving force that shapes Trevor's narrative style. Its concern with the vulnerability of human existence and the connections between ordinary events and larger historical questions, such as the turbulent history of the Anglo-Irish relations, are the main themes in Trevor's works.

In a writing career spanning over fifty years, the mystery of human life has always sparkled intellectual curiosity in the Irish writer. This explains why the typical characters that populate Trevor's fictional world are women, children and bachelors, as they represent an unfamiliar world to explore. Moreover, Trevor's narratives generally present psychologically wounded characters in the throes of individual and collective grief experiences. The struggle with the mystery of human life is also intertwined with the haunting legacy of the Irish Troubles. Accordingly, silences, ellipses and violent incidents pervade Trevor's fiction, thereby favouring a critical reading of his works through the lens of trauma studies (see del Río Álvaro "Talking with William Trevor;" Monaco "Postcolonial Trauma"). This is specifically evident in the three Big House novels, *Fools of Fortune* (1983), *The Silence in the Garden* (1988) and *The Story of Lucy Gault* (2002), where violent history adversely impacts on the lives of ordinary people. Set against the backdrop of the War of Independence (1919-21) and of the Civil War (1922-23), these novels showcase the long legacy of British colonialism in Ireland and employ the motif of the Big House as a colonial metaphor for power and conflict. In 2021, Ireland commemorates the hundredth anniversary of the Anglo-Irish Treaty that put an end to the Troubles and gave way to the birth of the Free Irish State in 1922. However, the emotional and psychological wounds of such a historical turmoil have continued to impact on the ways writers have depicted this watershed, thereby laying emphasis on the "contradictory pulls in the contemporary Irish novel towards veiling and unveiling the memory of the past" (del Río Álvaro, "Trauma Studies" 9).

Starting from these claims, my article proposes to read the third and last novel of Trevor's Big House trilogy, *The Story of Lucy Gault*, as an exemplary case study on how the contradictory forces of Irish history impinge on a coming-of-age story. *The Story of Lucy Gault* portrays, in contemporary *Bildungsroman* fashion, the life and quest for self-identity of the eponymous heroine. In this novel, spanning nearly a century, from the Irish Troubles in the early 1920s to the violence of World War II and to Ireland's economic miracle at the dawn of the third millennium, readers follow Trevor's heroine from her childhood years to her old age. The whole plot is set in the Gaults' mansion of Lahardane, along the coast of County Cork. The Gaults, Protestant estate owners in South Ireland, are the symbol of a decaying gentry family whose origins date back to the eighteenth century, though the "style of the past was no longer possible" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 6) in Lahardane. The narrative opens with an attempted arson by three young Catholics from the local village of Enniseala. As Captain Everard Gault, Lucy's father, mistakenly shoots and wounds one of the three arsonists, Everard and his wife Heloise decide to leave Lahardane, causing unhappiness to their only child. Lucy secretly escapes from Lahardane and when a sandal belonging to the child is found by the sea, she is assumed to be drowned. Left bereft of their only child, Everard and Heloise leave Ireland, while Lucy is eventually found alive in the woods with a swollen ankle by Henry, the Gaults' retainer. The child is brought up by Henry and his wife Bridget, waiting for the return of her parents. These long years of waiting represent the bulk of the narrative as Lucy retreats to a lonely existence, in a sort of exile from the world. Living on the family estate of Lahardane, Lucy will get old, becoming an almost mythical figure in a highly transformed country.

As made clear in this summary, the novel charts the life of an ordinary character whose quest for identity is dominated by historical clashes and a lingering feeling of individual guilt. A latent manifestation of pain percolates through the silences, gaps and recollections that punctuate Lucy's quest narrative, as the child becomes an adult and the world goes through violent events and social transformations. Lahardane becomes a healing and contemplative place, tangential to major watersheds. As if time has stopped, Lucy grows up and espouses her wounds, devoting her time to reading Victorian novels, keeping bees and gardening. The victim of familial and historical forces she is unable to control, Lucy, like a martyr, embraces loss as a position of strength rather than weakness. Her quest for self-definition is predicated upon psychological and physical wounds produced by traumatic historical forces. However, these moments of exposure to loss turn out to be "paradoxically productive" (Butler 468). While addressing the creative power of loss, Judith Butler reminds us that loss emerges from a condition of spatial and temporal dislocation. The "animated afterlife" (468) of traumatic loss haunts the present, carrying a sense of belatedness. And yet, what is produced from grief can be "oddly fecund" (468), thereby becoming the condition for relationality.

In this respect, *The Story of Lucy Gault* bears the traces of this animated afterlife of trauma. By bearing witness to their traumatic experiences, Lucy and the main characters of the story shed some light on the creative power of loss. As the omniscient narrator wonders, was such a sense of belonging to a place so deep to cause "this terrible commotion, and grief like you wouldn't witness in a lifetime?" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 43). To answer this question, my paper will look at Lucy's *Bildungsroman* as both trauma and self-begetting fiction. Following the recent critical debate on the nature of the *Bildungsroman*, I will first argue that Trevor exploits the conventions of the genre to illuminate the mystery of human mind, juxtaposing historical realism with other genres such as the elegiac and the Gothic. Then, I will discuss the influence that trauma exercises on the growth of the protagonist. Lucy' self-quest is conveyed through silences, doublings, secrets and analepses, narrative conventions that can be said to question the unspeakable nature of trauma. Finally, I will examine how the wounded heroine's exile from the world can be seen in terms of dispossession (Butler and Athanasiou 2013). In its affirmative terms, dispossession entails an ethical openness to the self and the other, thus providing the basis for self-definition. As in a self-begetting novel (Kellman 1976; 1980), Lucy's story begets both a self and itself. Lucy's quest for self-identity becomes the condition for the narration of the story itself, turning the heroine into subject and object at the same time.

The Bildungsroman *and historical realism*

In *The Story of Lucy Gault*, Trevor offers a telling example of a coming-of-age story where the correlation between traumatic experiences and sense of guilt are remarkably direct. As already stated, Trevor exploits the conventions of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, combining historical events and other less realist elements. For its reliance on a model of progressive maturation and development, from childhood to old age, *The Story of Lucy Gault* thematises the struggle between inner self and socio-historical changes or, to borrow Franco Moretti's words, it places emphasis on "the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of *socialization*" (15; emphasis in the original). The interface between these forces is what makes the *Bildungsroman* "*intrinsically contradictory*" (6; emphasis in the original) in that it tends to intertwine idiosyncrasies with socio-cultural processes. Self-definition is predicated upon a struggle with the world around, a dialectical opposition that György Lukács sees as a "problematic reconciliation" (*The Theory of the Novel* 132). From a female perspective, it has been argued that this struggle generates a fractured self. The quest for self-identity is a painful compromise for female characters as it entails "a distinctive values system and unorthodox development goals, defined in terms of community and empathy rather than achievement and autonomy" (Abel, Hirsch, Langland 10). As Maroula Joannou contends, "[d]isillusionment, disappointment, diminution in stature and the dashing of idealistic aspiration, if not disaster and death, are all too common for the heroine" (204), thus recording the problematic nature of a female quest for self-definition. These contradictions are well illustrated, for instance, in Dorothea Brooke's story of maturation in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72). Here, the heroine's lofty vocation is juxtaposed with what Eliot calls "the web," a central metaphor for "the hampering threadlike pressure of small social conditions, and their frustrating complexity" (169). The "life of mistakes" (7) of women like Dorothea, as quoted in the epigraph of my essay, stands for this contrast between one's vocation and the forces that rule societies. In this respect, Trevor's heroine can be said to remind readers of Dorothea's "life of mistakes" as Lucy's story is similarly undermined by guilt, mistakes and limitations. And yet, unlike the Victorian heroine who finds some redemption in a second marriage, Lucy's abnegation eventually achieves a regenerative effect, turning Trevor's heroine into a dispossessed human being. As Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou argue, dispossession can allow for "relationality and binding for others" (92). In other words, Lucy's portrait is that of a victim of conflicts where a permanent state of attentiveness and care translate into a potential for relationality and self-definition.

In Trevor's novel, realistic coming-of-age conventions, namely clear temporal markers, are intermingled with less realistic elements, such as lyrical and elegiac interludes and gothic and sensational forms. This combination of different formal mechanisms can be read as an effort to remould the genre of the *Bildungsroman* as to accommodate the quest for self-definition of an ordinary female character. The need to reanimate the genre was already a concern in Victorian female authors like Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot herself. "[B]y questioning the preoccupation of the classical Bildungsroman with male perfectibility as well as its restrictive proscription of femininity" (204), Joannou argues, these novels provide ample evidence of the limitations of the classical *Bildungsroman* to represent female perspectives. The tale of trapped provincial women, as Jed Esty explains, characterises both the Victorian and Modernist generation where readers can find "female protagonists tied fatefully to some kind of modernizing landscape in which they can neither thrive nor survive" (223, note 43). This sort of arrested self-development also marks Lucy's *Bildung* as readers can infer from the very initial pages of the novel when upheavals and transformations wreak havoc on the growth of the child.

When the novel begins, Lucy is "almost nine" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 8) and she is a devoted to child to her parents Everard and Heloise. Divided in six parts, *The Story of Lucy Gault* opens with the scene of Everard shooting and wounding Horahan, one of the three young Catholic boys who were trying to set Lahardane on fire. It is the twenty-first of January 1921 and, as readers can learn, this failed arson was the last of other intimidations while the country was "in a state of arrest, one that amounted to war" (3). An invalid survivor of World War I, Everard Gault carries "fragments of shrapnel" (4) in his body. Despite his physical wounds, the man lives a happy life with his English wife Heloise and their only child Lucy. The child is totally immersed in the present: she plays with the dog of the O'Reillys, the Gaults' neighbours, and enjoys her secret swims at the near beach with the animal. Her sense of belonging to Lahardane, to the glen, the woods and the seashore is rooted in the 'here and now.' Like the Lucy celebrated in William Wordsworth's famous poems, Trevor's Lucy belongs to her birthplace until she comes to realise that history has entered her life in violent ways. She eavesdrops on her parents' conversations, understanding that they are willing to leave Ireland and that "[n]othing could be left behind" (10). Historical events and religious conflicts force the boundaries of Lucy's childhood, thereby disrupting her peaceful life.

Therefore, history collides heavily with Lucy's life and the Gaults' vicissitudes. This begins even before Lucy's birth as readers can infer from the very first pages of the novel. The origins of the Gaults date back to an uncertain past. By the eighteenth century, they moved from Norfolk to County Cork when the land at Lahardane was purchased and the house was built. The Gaults represent the typical Anglo-Irish gentry that had played a dominant role in the socio-political life of Ireland since the late seventeenth century. In consequence of its colonial legacy, the Protestant Ascendancy knew a gradual decline and became the target of Irish nationalists in the first two decades of the twentieth century, as the attacks at Lahardane demonstrate. "History touched the place" (5), the omniscient extradiegetic narrator observes while alluding to the prominent historical figures who had visited Lahardane, such as the viceroy of Ireland George Townshed in 1769 and Daniel O'Connell, the leader of the Irish nationalist movement, in 1809. The two contrasting figures illustrate the faltering attitude of the Gaults towards Irish nationalism. Moreover, history invades the Gaults' house with its disruptive force. This is suggested by the fields that the family lost because of card-playing and, more importantly, by a diphtheria outbreak that killed the whole family, except for Everard and his brother, at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this respect, the stories of Lucy's ancestors, that the child hardly knows about, form the very background of her existence, thus conditioning in some ways her personal development.

As is clear from what we have seen so far, Trevor uses historical events and real figures to allow readers to gain a foothold. However, these events cast some light on the contrast between history and personal development, revealing the psychological and emotional complexity of human mind. By presenting the pure and paradisiacal gaze of a child, Trevor tries to infuse a sense of innocence to the idea of history as progress or, as Lukács's calls it, to the "unbroken upward evolution of mankind" (*Studies in European Realism* 3). In *The Story of Lucy Gault*, development does not entail organic progress. It instead occurs as a violent upheaval. History, specifically the traumatic events of Irish history, percolate through Lucy's coming-of-age journey, "producing jagged effects on the politics and poetics of subject formation" (Esty 2). These disruptive elements, that Jed Esty associates with imperialism and colonialism, can be found in the ways Trevor combines historical realism and non-realist strategies to portray such a problematic self-development, namely the elegiac and the Gothic.

Elegy and romance

As the title itself suggests, *The Story of Lucy Gault* centres on the life of the eponymous heroine, specifically on the days and months following her unfortunate incident in the woods. While Lucy grows up, she isolates from the rest of the world, gradually plunging into a state of permanent melancholia. Political upheavals disrupt the country and yet time is blocked from Lucy's perspective. "Past and present had somehow become one" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 146) in Lucy's world. As the heroine becomes an adult, she struggles to keep alive the memories of the past and the recollection of the lost ones in spite of the major changes and transformations in her native land. Her individual progress looks like a vigil which never closes or refuses to do so. This recurrent interest with the representation of loss and absence is, I think, characteristic of a certain elegiac fashion. The marine setting, the dialogue with the departed, the use of repetitions and returns, the theme of the vigil and the lamentation are the main features of elegiac writing that, as David Kennedy explains, is a "form without frontiers" (1), thus transcending the border between fiction and poetry. From this point of view, Lucy's story disrupts the linear passage of time and, at the same time, it shows how the past remains paradoxically present in a country that has eventually gained independence.

As a form of narrative elegy, *The Story of Lucy Gault* recalls contemporary elegies that "take human fragility as their main theme and build up an urn of language characterised by vulnerable form" (Ganteau 95). What Jean-Michel Ganteau sees as a "vulnerable text" (150) is one characterised by hauntings, uncertainty, openness, doubt and dialogism (150), which stretch narrative representation to the limits while privileging presentation rather than representation (170). In *The Story of Lucy Gault*, this is specifically suggested in the manipulation of focalisation and in the temporal disorientation in spite of the presence of clear time markers. Although focused on a central character, *The Story of Lucy Gault* is not a first-person narrative. By contrast, Trevor resorts to the omniscient eye of an extradiegetic narrator to orchestrate a multifocal perspective with shifting focalisation. When Lucy is found alive in the woods, the narrative alternates long chapters chronicling the heroine's life at Lahardane, waiting for the return of her parents, with Everard and Heloise's exile as they travel first to Switzerland and then to Italy. Unwilling to settle in Sussex, as they had initially decided, Lucy's parents move far from Ireland and England, looking forward to a fresh start. This explains why Henry's telegram announcing Lucy's finding never reaches Everard and Heloise who have eventually set up home in the fictional town of Montemarmoreo in central Italy, a place which adumbrates the typical Tuscan and Umbrian towns Trevor himself had inhabited. Moreover, the Gaults' circumstances and vicissitudes of life are intercut with parallel short chapters on Horahan's hallucinations. The man is haunted by the past, specifically by the image of a house destroyed by blazing fire and by the recollections of a drowned child. The figments of Horahan's imagination shed light on his own sense of guilt, refashioning the passage of time in a disarticulated way. For Horahan "it became a struggle […] to establish reality (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 77). Past and present, presence and absence are inextricably intertwined: while lamenting on loss, trauma and exile, the characters' voices echo each other, offering different and distant perspectives on their common sense of alienation. Silences, repetitions, amnesia, hallucinations and recollections pervade the narrative, making trauma permanent and omnipresent. These formal traits push the realist project to the limit or, as Anne Whitehead suggests, "traumatic realism" is a contradiction in terms since "traumatic knowledge cannot be fully communicated or retrieved without distortion" (84).

Seen in this light, *The Story of Lucy Gault* uses elegy to poetically perform the effects of loss, thus distorting the realist and chronological linearity of the narrative. As Lucy herself states, "[m]emories can be everything if we choose to make so" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 119). Here, Lucy is talking to Ralph, a young man coming from County Wexford to tutor the O'Reillys' children during summer break. Lucy and Ralph first meet by chance, while the young man was trying to reach the O'Reillys', and later, persuaded by the local clergyman Canon Crosbie, Ralph regularly visits Lucy, keeping her company until he falls in love with her. Lucy invites Ralph to visit her at Lahardane once a week, asking him to extend his sojourn in County Cork. And yet, she refuses his love, pretending not to listen to his feelings, replying with silence to his tender and gentle words. Notably, readers are given no access to Lucy's thoughts. In a way, though she is the heroine, she is absent from the story: her mute suffering and her stoic renunciation make her a spectral and enigmatic character. During the conversations between Lucy and Ralph in the summer of 1936, readers never learn Lucy's intentions as the girl is usually silent or describes her house and the garden. Likewise, Ralph, who has been told about the Gaults' story by the O'Reillys, seems to be unable to access the girl's mind:

> In the silence that had gathered as they stood by the car, Ralph wanted to say that he knew about the snares of the childhood, and knew as well that his experience was puny compared with what still continued for the girl he believed he loved. His sympathy was part of love, as tender as his fondness. (100)

What seems to be recorded here is Ralph's awareness of the hazards of life, a fact that elicits empathic connections. Throughout their summer infatuation, Lucy never replies to Ralph's words of affection. By contrast, a numbing sensation seems to affect Lucy who talks of the 4072 books in the library of Lahardane or urges Ralph to describe his home and his childhood. Some form of shock is thus brought to light through silences and ellipses. The elliptic treatment of Lucy's traumatic experience is typical of a traumatic realism which presents a sense of haunting belatedness and generates an emotional and cognitive crisis. As Ganteau argues, elegiac narratives "perform the effects of disrupted time" (96) by evoking the belated time of trauma and its disruptive effects.

As these comments illustrate, it seems as if Lucy were the victim of a grief rooted in a crypt or, as Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok would argue, her trauma rests "on some 'gaping wound' opened long ago within the ego" (142). The crypt is a symbol for secrets that are almost unspeakable as Lucy's silence illustrates. Prey to frequent bouts of melancholia, Lucy's coming-of-age narrative is conveyed through a poetics of limitations and faithfulness to her wounds. The scars and the echoes of the past return to torment the heroine. As Lucy and Ralph hear "the sound of keening" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 118) coming from a cottage where people are mourning one of the two fisherman caught by a storm at sea, Lucy surprisingly wonders: "'How could I have run away from them?' […] 'I made them suffer as those women are suffering now. I long for their forgiveness. That will just not go away'" (118). Here, as Ralph reaffirms his love to the girl, Lucy admits that she was "possessed" and she will continue to live with her memories. The marine setting and the wailing pain of the women corroborate the idea of Lucy's story as an elegiac narrative where sudden epiphanic confessions occur. Interestingly, neither the omniscient narrator nor the characters will allude to this lucid explanation never again. Therefore, readers realise that Lucy's silent self-begetting is encrypted in her psyche or, as Abraham and Torok contend, "entombed in a fast and secure place, awaiting resurrection" (141). Memories become less distinct or, as the narrator explains, "time turned memories into figments anyway" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 110). In this sense, the elegiac form contributes to a poetics of relationality in which the grieving subject exposes himself/herself to the others. By using a poetics of vulnerability based on lamentation, silences and unrequited love, Trevor mobilises the powers of elegy to alternate the visible with what is left invisible and unsaid.

Lucy's crypt contains a loss where shadows and voices of the past congregate, providing a potent image of vulnerability. In addition to temporal disorientation, *The Story of Lucy Gault* evokes also Gothic conventions: the isolated and decaying home, a female heroine left alone, the ghosts of the past and the socio-political transformations reflect a certain gothic mode. As already alluded to, Lahardane, with the remnants of the pasture land and the avenue on which chestnut trees had been planted centuries ago (4-5), represents the typical Ascendancy Houses, but it also recalls gothic castles since the characters themselves see the place as an "old gaunt house" (165). A mirror-image of the Anglo-Irish families that moved to Ireland by the eighteenth century, Lahardane, like other Big Houses, becomes the symbol of colonial power during the turbulent years of Irish history. In this respect, Trevor resorts to the theme of the decaying Big House already captured in many Irish novels, such as in *Castle Rackrent* (1800) by Maria Edgeworth and, in the twentieth century, in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* (1929) and in *Birchwood* (1973) by John Banville, among others. A sense of anxiety is at the core of the Big House literary tradition, a feeling of uneasiness also shared by Gothic fiction. In *The Story of Lucy Gault*, as in Trevor's other two Big House novels, this sense of gradual decline is further problematised by the tragedies of the two World Wars and the Anglo-Irish conflicts that threaten the future of the Ascendancy. During these years, big houses were burned or bombed and eventually abandoned, an adverse fate that also affects Lahardane. As already observed before, Lahardane had been visited by historical characters and had been invaded by historical incidents. The house then discloses some fragmentary memories of the past that still haunt the present. This ties in with Vera Kreilkamp's contention that the Big House "constitutes a nostalgic or reactionary form, rooted in elegiac longings" (Kreilkamp, "The Novel of the Big House" 61).

Due to the sense of decay and insecurity, Big House novels retain some gothic elements. According to Kreilkamp, the Big House shares with the Gothic some features, such as the motif of the decaying mansion; problems related to lineage and succession; an exiled major character, usually, the landlord; and inherited guilts and family secrets (Kreilkamp, *The Anglo-Irish Novel* 23-4). Trevor uses these elements to create narrative distortions, thus laying emphasis on the condition of alienation of a young Protestant woman living in a solitary place where the signs of the past are visible and have an impact on the present. The house, close to a seashore where waves roared up "like wild white horses, spectral forms exploding into foam" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 116), is decayed and dusty and "the dark clung to it" (115). In this gothic atmosphere Lucy already appears as a ghost, imagining the day when Ralph will go away and leave her alone. Like Lahardane seems to be "petrified, arrested in the drama there had been" (139), so Lucy is "stilled too, a detail as in one of her own embroidered compositions" (139). Both the heroine and the place are subject to narrative stasis, despite the political forces which govern the passing of time outside Lahardane.

This image of temporal suspension recalls Miss Havisham's sideration in her dilapidated mansion, Satis House, in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Notably, heroines of Victorian *Bildungsromane* populate Lucy's imagination. In her solitary house, Lucy devours many of the books collected in the library. By reading these novels, Lucy is "drawn into a world of novelty, into other centuries and other places, into romance and complicated relationships" (78). For instance, Trevor's heroine seems to be particularly attracted to Rosa Dartle's vulnerability. A minor character in Dickens' *David Copperfield*, Rosa is a spinster like Lucy and displays a scar on her lip. The scar is a tangible reminder of the emotional pain Rosa suffered from in her childhood, like Lucy's permanent limp stands for her abnegation when she ran away to the woods above Lahardane. And yet, Lucy is not vindicative like Dickens' character. Interestingly, she feels closer to Mrs. Rochester, "[w]hom nobody had sympathy for" (118). The reference to Mrs. Rochester, alias Bertha Mason, reminds readers of a traditional gothic female figure. A ghost-like character that haunts Thornfield Hall in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Bertha represents the inherent darkness of human mind, a classic theme of the Gothic. Her madness elicits empathy in Lucy as she possibly sees in the creole woman the same anxieties and uncertainties about identity and the repression of desires. To some extent, these Victorian doubles reflect Lucy's attributes and create a duality of the self.

The *doppelgänger*, a common figure in Gothic literature, has a significant impact on the lives of the hero or heroine. As Eran Dorfman argues, the double often takes "the form of a more or less exact copy of the self" (3) in Gothic literature. Through a mechanism of projection and introjection, doubles reveal that "the boundaries between I and world, I and Other, I and me, are far from being clear" (3). Beyond the connections between Lucy and these female Victorian characters, Lucy also incorporates her parents' attitudes.

As she grows up, she tends to wear her mother's white dresses and takes up petit-point embroidery as Heloise used to do. Moreover, Lucy starts up the hives again, showing a strong interest in bee-keeping, thus maintaining her father's production of honey. On the one hand, by wearing Heloise's dresses and by keeping bees as Everard would once do, Lucy introjects what she finds pleasurable inside. On the other hand, she tends to projects her sense of alienation outside, sharing it with the heroines of the Victorian novels she eagerly reads. According to Dorfman, primary narcissism lies at the chore of the double, involving "a continuous and laborious process of introjection and projection" (23). When one is confronted with the inevitable struggle between inside and outside, and understands that many desired things are to be found outside, there emerges "a difficulty in fully acknowledging the separate existence of others and one's dependency on them, resulting in a withdrawal into one's own sphere" (22). In Lucy Gault, however, this withdrawal into the self bears the marks of the interface between fiction and reality. As Lucy remarks, "[i]n novels people run away. And novels were a reflection of reality, of all the world's desperation and of its happiness, as much of one as of the other" (*The Story of Lucy Gault* 174-75). The direct and indirect evocation of other literary characters is a metafictional strategy which directs the reader's attention towards the fact that Lucy is not alone in her excruciating experience. In addition, it underscores the self-begetting nature of the novel since Lucy seems to be self-aware of her own condition. The devotion to the past, a characteristic element of the elegy and the Gothic, prevails in Lucy's self-quest and this saturation with the past becomes a source of redemption, paradoxically healing. While it is true that Lucy Gault shares various elements with doubles, like Wordsworth's Lucy, Miss Havisham, Rosa Dartle, Bertha Mason, and Dorothea Brooke, her quest for identity does not end with death, destruction or marriage. Lucy, penitent and vigilant, dissolves with Lahardane into absence within the text. As we will see in the following pages, her personality displays saint-like qualities, conjuring up the image of such martyrs as Saint Cecilia and Saint Lucia.

Trauma, dispossession, relationality

It is undeniable that the spectral evocations of the past, the temporal disruptions, silences, ellipses and repetitions are all elements that can be ascribed to literary trauma theory. For classical theorists such as

Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, among others, traumatic events are unspeakable because they result in mental wounds that disrupt the mechanisms of memory and consciousness. As Roger Luckhurst argues, drawing from Caruth, trauma is "a crisis of representation, of history and truth, and of narrative time" (5). Other scholars have instead addressed the question of trauma and vulnerability in more creative ways. Unspeakable does not always mean unrepresentable and, as Michelle Balaev contends, silences should be understood "less as an epistemological conundrum or neurobiological fact, but more as an outcome of cultural values and ideologies" (19). Balaev sees silence as a rhetorical device which enables readers to imagine the traumatic experience. This view fits with Barry Stampfl's contention that "the unspeakable is always already (paradoxically) part of a universe of discourse, a form of signification" (25). What these observations showcase is that when we engage with the question of representing trauma, plural potentialities may arise if one remembers, as Balaev explains, that "the meaning of trauma is found between the poles of the individual and society" (17). The practice of sharing trauma and the experience of caring can then challenge its inherent unspeakability, alerting readers to a plurality of situations in which singular traumas are addressed and evoked. Vulnerability, Brené Brown suggests, "begets vulnerability" (50), its contagious power eliciting solidarity and relationality as Trevor's *Bildungsroman* demonstrates.

This orientation to share trauma and care for the other seems to echo Butler and Athanasiou's understanding of dispossession as a twofold complex concept. On the one hand, dispossession arises from violent practices by which people are "disowned and abjected by normative and normalizing powers" (1), as in the histories of colonial conflict. On the other, it describes "the constituted, preemptive losses that condition one's being dispossessed (or letting oneself becoming dispossessed) by another" (1). *The Story of Lucy Gault* can be said to address this dichotomy. The acts of violence against the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy may be read as an act of resistance against the threats to lose land and rights. Likewise, as Everard himself realises before the ruins of World War II, the English and the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy had ignored the needs of Irish people, prompting them to turn violent. The novel then blends both perspectives, problematising the legitimacy of the frames of violence and victimhood. In short, all the characters are victims of their own choices and this multiple exposure to loss provides the basis for a certain relationality and interdependence.

As suggested above, ruins and grief are important components of *The Story of Lucy Gault*. They can be found everywhere in the novel. Ruins stand for the passage of time and imply the persistence of the past into the present. Like Lahardane bears the marks of historical events, so "*Ireland of the ruins* […] *more ruins and always more*" (*The Story of Lucy Gaul* 145; emphasis in the original) is what Everard imagines to find in the wake of the disaster of World War II. In the aftermath of Heloise's death, Everard travels around Europe. The conflict has wreaked enormous damage across the continent. In Vienna, for instance, Everard finds "a broken city, its great buildings looming like spectres among the ruins" (146). The debris of the war materialises through the uncanny form of spectres and ruins coming from the past and connecting to the present. Here, Captain Gault reflects on how grief and greed have wiped out the heart of Europe. In the same way, Anglo-Irish families, like the Gaults themselves, have drained Ireland of its energy, ignoring the aspirations of the dispossessed (146). This is what Everard envisages before going back home where he will discover the truth about his daughter and a country in the throes of great changes.

However, the individual-collective dichotomy governs the narrative organisation of the novel, connecting grief and pain on a personal and national level. Interestingly, one could also read Lucy's quest for self-definition alongside the theme of a nation attempting to establish itself. The daughter of a member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and of an English woman, Lucy stands amid contradictory forces like Trevor himself who was born to Anglo-Irish parents and spent most of his life in England. The rise of Irish nationalism, exemplified by the attacks at Lahardane, World War II and the economic boom of the "Celtic Tiger" are the visible signs of a world in a state of flux, moving forth towards the future of technological progress. The contrast between past and future running throughout the novel is evident when Everard Gault returns to Lahardane. In the wake of Heloise's death, Captain Gault finds a "different Ireland everywhere" (158). We are in the late 1940s and the country is undergoing radical transformations: while in Enniseala mackintosh coats are being manufactured (158), electricity reaches Lahardane and Everard buys a car (165), hoping to save his daughter's life from silence and isolation.

Whereas unspeakability affects all the characters, Trevor highlights the feeling of relationality by means of a multi-layered plot in which connections are yet possible. Revelations, visions, hallucinations, and annunciations are the ways through which the novel connects the various characters, despite their isolated lives, thus performing some kind of narrative solidarity. Albeit her central role, Lucy is not the only wounded character featured in the novel. As already alluded to, Everard displays physical and mental wounds. However, a certain "fissuring of the subject" (Butler and Athanasiou ix) also affects Heloise and Horahan whose tormented existences contribute to a choral image of interdependence. When the Gaults settle down in Montemarmoreo, Heloise experiences a miscarriage, an incident that definitely extinguishes her hopes to have a new child. To some extent, both Heloise and Everard sublimate their grief devoting themselves to religious art and visiting Italian churches with their frescoes and mosaics. Heloise, for instance, is especially fascinated by the figure of Saint Cecilia in the local church of Montemarmoreo, "the saint whose courage in her tribulations had for centuries given heart to this town: all that was peace as much as there could be" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 67). According to a legend, the young Cecilia, who was born to a rich Roman family, vowed her virginity to God. She then got married to the pagan Valerian who later accepted her vow and was baptised. However, both Valerian and Cecilia were arrested and eventually executed. Saint Cecilia, who is venerated by the Christian, Anglican and Orthodox Churches, is considered the patron of music and musicians because she heard heavenly music during her wedding ceremony. The image of the martyr, with her story of resilience and abnegation, haunts Heloise. When the Fascist regime seizes control of Italy, the Gaults move to the Swiss town of Bellinzona, close to the Italian border, where Heloise dies of a pandemic flu. Here, in her bed, Heloise wonders whether the church in Montemarmoreo has survived the bombs of World War II and if the image of the saint has been "lost in rubble, violently destroyed, as the saint herself had been" (133). Other iconographic images obsess Heloise's mind, such as the recollections of *The Resurrection* (1463-65) by Piero della Francesca in Sansepolcro (Arezzo) or Frà Angelico's annunciations which adorn the Convent of San Marco in Florence, the Basilica of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Sangiovanni Valdarno (Arezzo) and the Church of San Domenico in Cortona (Arezzo).

In a similar vein, Raphael's *The Ecstasy of Saint Cecilia* (1514-17) may come to the reader's mind. Though this altarpiece is not mentioned in Trevor's novel, it is evocative of the vivid impressions conveyed by Renaissance religious art. In the Renaissance, painters used lights to express emotions, to shed light on the vibrations of the body. The *chiaroscuro* technique allowed Renaissance painters to juxtapose light with shade to achieve a contrasting effect. As Percy Bysshe Shelley famously commented on Raphael's *Ecstasy*, Saint Cecilia seems rapt in her inspiration, "her deep, dark, eloquent eyes lifted up […] her countenance, as it were, calmed by the depth of its passion and rapture, and penetrated throughout with the warm and radiant light of life" (Saintsbury 170). Maybe, Trevor was thinking of the Romantic poet's words when he evoked Saint Cecilia's luminous image, particularly when Lucy herself visits the Italian church. Once her father dies in the mid-1950s, Lucy sets out on a journey to Italy and Switzerland in search of her parents' traces and of herself. In Montemarmoreo, she walks the streets her mother had belonged, feeling "a shadow and the distant echo of a voice remembered" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 204). Lucy is told the story of the saint who "had heard all the world's music that was yet to come" (204), whose body first resisted the terrifying heat of the flames and then lived for three days after the decapitation. In the church, Lucy is mesmerised by the altarpiece image of the saint whose pale-blue eyes evoke a sense of relief. There is, then, a somehow redemptive quality in the eternal power of religious art that metaphorically enables characters to connect with each other, thus putting them on an equal footing.

Likewise, Trevor uses the *chiaroscuro* metaphor to shed light on Horahan's problematic condition. Obsessed by visions and hallucinations, Horahan undergoes his traumatic development and must deal with its aftermath. His restlessness leads him to change jobs: first, he works as a porter at Enniseala station, then he joins the army in the hope of finding in military discipline a refuge from his confusion. Throughout his life, "he bore his torment with fortitude" (123), the narrator observes, finding solace in prayers. In the camp where he serves as a soldier, he regularly visits the local chapel. Here, in the dark, Horahan "knelt before the Virgin he could not see, begging for the gift of a sign, a whisper of assurance that he was not abandoned" (124). In spite of the physical and mental dark that surrounds him, Horahan feels a luminous halo emanating from the Virgin, a radiance of light and consolation that all the characters in Trevor's novel aspire to achieve.

By focussing on the miraculous eyes of Saint Cecilia's iconography and on the Virgin's merciful and compassionate face, Trevor may be said to capture the reader's attention to what is hidden or invisible, opening to the material proximity of the other. It is through this ethics of care that we can acknowledge our common sense of precarity and vulnerability. This is what Emmanuel Levinas reminds us when he addresses the ethical implications of his philosophy of alterity on which Butler's investigation is partly based on. The face, Levinas argues, "is a living presence. […] The face speaks" (66). In other words, the encounter with the face of the other makes us aware of our own vulnerability and it illuminates its potential to relationality because "the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation" (189). In the novel, the face-to-face encounter materialises when Horahan unexpectedly visits Lahardane and meets Lucy, the drowned child of his delirious illusions. The man mutters during an unsettling conversation with Everard while Lucy, looking at the features of the man, "saw there only madness. No meaning dignified his return; no order patterned, as perhaps it might have, past and present; no sense was made of anything" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 191). This episode seems to adhere to Levinas' epiphanic moments of gnosis since the face is a form of signification, the face "opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation" (201).

This scene represents the turning point of Lucy's quest. In the wake of his father's death, Lucy's story becomes a tale of bright existence, a mythical account where light and darkness blend. Lucy accepts her past and begins her journey towards redemption, culminating in her decision to visit Horahan at the mental asylum where he has eventually been interned. For seventeen years, in spite of Henry and Bridget's disagreement and the local gossip in Enniseala, Lucy regularly visits the man who had tried to set Lahardane on fire, until his death. They play "snaked and ladders," a board game that allegorically stands as a metaphor for the fortunes and misfortunes of human condition, the ladders that take us up rapidly and the snakes that pull us down. Thus, Trevor portrays with poignancy the ups and downs of life, turning Lucy's story into myth that transgress the barriers of time and guilt.

The allegoric imagery of Renaissance art and hagiography is crucial to *The Story of Lucy Gault* and, more broadly, to Trevor's narrative style (see McAlindon "William Trevor and the Saints;" Monaco "Between Hagiography and Insanity"). By resorting to narrative strategies that disarray the apparent realism of the novel, Trevor's narratives open to new meanings and promotes relationality. Rather than representing the unspeakability of trauma, Trevor presents the paradoxical productive effects of traumatic experiences, using allegoric images to illuminate the dark side of human mind. Lucy Gault stands amid these manifestations of grief, becoming the symbolic point where pain and trauma converge. As Tom Herron observes, it is no accident "that Lucy, whose name comes down to us, via the Latin *lucere* (to shine) and *lux* (light) and *lucidus* (clear) from the Greek feminine form of *leukos* (bright, shining, white), is so named" (163). To keep with hagiographic references, her name brings to mind Lucia of Syracuse, the Christian martyr protector of the sight. Thus, in *The Story of Lucy Gault*, the name itself is a poignant remainder of illuminating grace despite the darkness that surrounds the story of the heroine and of the other characters. In this respect, the name reveals the struggle to achieve empathy and solidarity. In order for connections to happen, we must allow ourselves to be seen, we must let the light in the cracks of our minds. As Brown argues, vulnerability is the most daring action in one's life and it is about showing and to be seen. Vulnerability, Brown writes, "isn't good or bad: It's not what we call a dark emotion, not is it always a light, positive experience. Vulnerability is the core of all emotions and feelings. To feel is to be vulnerable" (34). By sharing their inner selves and exposing their wounds, Lucy and the other characters strive for visibility. Thus, Lucy, as her name suggests, epitomises the luminous gifts of imperfection and fragility that can awaken her and the other characters to connections.

Coda: A story of self-begetting

We have seen that, unlike the physical journey undertaken by the male protagonists of the classical *Bildungsroman*, Lucy's psychological quest is predicated upon suffering and contemplation. Her relational ties with the other are established in the recognition of a common vulnerability. In *The Story of Lucy Gault*, exposure to vulnerability may be then seen in terms of dispossession, understood as a means to reject invisibility. As Jean-Michel Ganteau and Susana Onega state in *The Wounded Hero in Contemporary Fiction*, "the figures of the wound and the quest thematise such ethical issues as openness or exposure to the other" (13). The Lucy readers find by the end of the novel is a miracle, an uncanny and mythical figure in a country where mobile phones, the Euro, mass tourism and the Internet have appeared and global economy is thriving. In the local cafés where Lucy regularly has tea and a piece of cake, she is referred to as "the Protestant woman" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 209) or, as Lucy herself muses, "a relic, left over, respected for what she was" (209). In a country that has gone through major historical watersheds, the story of Lucy Gault "came to find a place among the stories of the Troubles that were told on the neighbourhoods" (70). Conversations in cafés and travellers' tales contribute to turn, with their telling and retelling, Lucy into a legend. As the wayward child grows up and becomes aware of her condition, new stories about the solitary Protestant woman are narrated in the area, these more recent versions less critical than the stories of the previous generation. Lucy herself, the narrator observes, "was aware that this opinion was as temporary as the one that anger and distaste had once created: the story noy yet passed into myth, and would be not cast in permanence until her life was over, until it was reflected in time's cold light" (138).

As Lee has emphasised, commenting on the title itself of Trevor's *Bildungsroman*, "'the story of' is a telling phrase for the title of this gravely beautiful, subtle and haunting Irish novel. It means not only what happens to Lucy Gault, but that what happened to her has become a story, first a local tale, told and retold, and then a legend" (n.p.). There seems to be a redemptive quality in Lucy's story which reflects its self-begetting nature. This self-reflexive orientation is evocative of Steven Kellman's "self-begetting novel," by which he means a work that appears to have been written by a character within that work. "Like an infinite recession of Chinese boxes," Kellman explains, "the self-begetting novel begins again where it ends" (Kellman, "The Fiction" 1245). Though he generally refers to first-person accounts, his model can however suit those narratives that double back on themselves, making the whole story a repeated narration of its protagonist. Here, as Kellman adds, a certain fusion of form and content emerges since we are confronted with both "process and product, quest and goal" (1246). Thus, a central concern in the fiction of self-begetting is the question of identity as the typical protagonist of a self-begetting novel is a solitary heroine or hero who ultimately tries to beget her/his own self and his/her own story. The issue of names as markers of identity are crucial in the self-begetting novel and this question is also thematised in *The Story of Lucy Gault* as suggested before. Whereas Trevor's heroine has a name and a surname, the manipulation of her identity is achieved by means of alter egos that allegorically surround Lucy, thereby underscoring the transformative and multi-faceted nature of Lucy's quest for an identity of her own. The tales embedded in the life story of Lucy Gault encapsulate different facets of Lucy's personality: the guilty child, the suffering abandoned heroine, the Protestant martyr, the stoic and determined woman, the compassionate old woman. The novel becomes a mirror text where we find duplications of the central character, thus metamorphosing self into myth.

"Only the myths would linger, the stories that were told" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 195). With this burden of cultural myth and the various *doppelgängers*, like the heroines of Lucy's favourite Victorian novels and the female martyrs, Lucy's identity is a palimpsest where various stories of abnegation and redemption converge. In the final moments of the novel, we find an old Lucy thinking about her childhood, her parents, Horahan, Bridget and Henry. The have all died and Lahardane, once a gothic house, will probably become a hotel when Lucy herself will die. And yet, in spite of the wounds, the permanent limping and the traumatic experiences, light is what readers can find by the end of the novel. Lucy's luminous radiation, a "flicker in the dark" (227), reminds us of the bright colours of Piero della Francesca's frescoes, a light out of darkness that impresses greatly:

> Her tranquillity is their astonishment. For that they come, to be amazed again that such peace is there: all they have heard, and still hear now, does not record it. Calamity shaped a life when, long ago, chance was so cruel. Calamity shapes the story that is told, and is the reason for its being: is what they know, besides, the gentle fruit of such misfortune's harvest? They like to think so: she has sensed it that they do. Their wonderment is in their gestures and in their presents, and gazing from their eyes. They did not witness for themselves, but others did, the journey made to bring redemption; they only wonder why it was made, so faithfully and for so long. Why was the past belittled? Where did mercy come from when there should have been none left? (224)

Peace and bewilderment are the notes on which Lucy' *Bildungsroman* ends. The two Catholic nuns that visit Lucy are stunned by the old woman's recollections, almost hostages to Lucy's tale of plights and pain. They wonder how calamity might have yielded such tranquillity. However, what the above-quoted passage also illustrates, is the self-begetting power of Lucy's excruciating experience. Calamity gave life and still continues to cast light on Lucy's story, being the reason of her journey towards redemption. Interestingly, the shift of the verbal tense from the past simple to the present simple ("shaped"/"shapes") is a narrative device that stretches the perpetual presence of the past. In the final chapter, Trevor employs the present simple, creating the uncanny effect of a disjointed temporality that makes Lucy's search for self-definition even more visible. This dialogue between past and present entails the blurred distinctions between fiction and self, what Kellman sees as "an urge toward immortality" (Kellman, "The Fiction" 1255). In this way, Trevor engages with the power of narrative art to play with time, plot and characterisation. The story precedes Lucy, her life told and retold over the years to people she does not know.

If the temporal markers that abound in the novel provide readers with a historical background and a timeline of the events, the elegiac language of loss, the gothic atmosphere, the allegory and the self-reflexive stance contribute to the complexity of Lucy's coming-of-age story. Sitting in her chair and glancing at the dusk that illuminates the sky, Lucy observes the fading day and "smiles all the way" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 227). Unlike the ending in Bowen's *The Last September* where the family estate is burned and destructed, Lucy's smile is a poignant reminder of life. In Trevor's world, care and mercy become the condition for the creation of a wounded subject who is yet aware of the compensative power of human connections and of the illuminating force of storytelling.

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